

# the grove

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# **The Grove**

## Working Papers on English Studies

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**THE GROVE,  
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## FOREWORD

Dear reader:

These are happy times for *The Grove*, as we have reached our fifteenth issue with the same strength and illusion, and considerably more experience, than we had in 1996. During all these years various scholars (almost a hundred) from all over the world have trusted us to make their research or literary production visible, and we thank them for that. Also, a good number of readers have approached this journal for insights, information, inspiration or –oddly enough!- leisure, and we also express our deepest gratitude to them all. We only hope we are able to maintain, or improve, the high standards of quality they all deserve. As always, the continuing effort of our referees, editorial board, assistants (special thanks go to Luisa Palacios Maroto), the Universidad de Jaén Research Group HUM 0271 and the Caja Rural (an institution that co-sponsors the journal) will be central to this goal: to advance and promote the knowledge of the *cultures* (literatures, linguistics, music, painting, history, both canonical and popular) of the English speaking communities around the world, with a view to the relations with our own –Spanish and Andalusian- culture.

The wind of change is blowing through *The Grove*. For the present issue (#15) we have introduced a significant number of modifications in the journal that will bring it closer to the general trend in English studies worldwide: we have adopted the MLA style for the journal with the intention of making it easier for contributors and readers, as the MLA style is predominant in our area of interest; we have introduced abstracts and key-words in Spanish (abstracts only appeared before in English), in line with our nature as a Spanish journal with an international dimension. Here we would like to give special thanks to José Ruiz Mas for his translations into Spanish; and finally we now make

explicit both the dates of reception and acceptance, so that contributors have a clear estimate of how long it takes for us to arrive at a decision. For this issue, through our literary contributions we wanted to pay homage to translation: Sheri Spaine Long's translation into English of a short story by Guinean writer Francisco Zamora Lobo, and Luciano García's translations into Spanish of two Shakespearean sonnets are two magnificent examples of the superb qualities of literary translation by philologists.

Eroulla Demetriou  
Jesús López-Peláez Casellas  
Editors



# MONSTROSITY AS AN IMAGINATIVE EXTENSION OF HUMAN NATURE: THE POETRY OF SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

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## **Abstract**

Monsters as products of the human mind are inherent in poetical discourses because they indicate an extension of reality and experience. In the extreme they open the gate to the other, the opposite of what we imagine, or they even lead us into the realm of the unconscious, the potential of our dreams and sexual desires. In their critique of the Enlightenment the Romantic poets were fascinated by superstition and myth-making. When criticizing contemporary society they also resorted to satire, parody and utopian writing. Among others William Blake attacked the industrial system as well as English empiricism. Prometheus as in P.B. Shelley became the favourite model for protagonists in conflict with a despotic, cruel, and monstrous god. These poets testify to the Romantic revival of the interest in heroes and energetic individuals. Samuel Taylor Coleridge defends the employment of the preternatural and supernatural as symbols of psychic and spiritual forces. His poetry like "Christabel", "The Pains of Sleep" or "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" are convincing examples of his belief in the extension of the poetic imagination by depicting nightmarish experiences and monstrous apparitions. Above all, the last one can be regarded as a poem about poetry propounding many poetological issues such as the relationship between reality and language. It also stands for the Romantic poet as a visionary prophet.

**Key-words:** monstrosity, monsters, poetic imagination, otherness, subversion, masculinity, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, psychoanalysis,

gender studies, New Historicism, emancipation, Enlightenment, Age of Reason, Victorianism, Gothic tales, Romanticism, William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometheus, Faust, Satan, Empiricism, poetological function.

## **Resumen**

Los monstruos como productos de la mente humana son inherentes a los discursos poéticos debido a que señalan una extensión de la realidad y la experiencia. Por un lado abren la puerta a lo extraño, lo contrario de lo que imaginamos, o incluso nos transportan al reino del inconsciente, el potencial de nuestros sueños y los deseos sexuales. En sus críticas a la Ilustración, los poetas románticos se mostraron fascinados por la superstición y la creación del mito. Cuando criticaban a la sociedad contemporánea también recurrieron a la sátira, la parodia y la escritura utópica. Entre otros William Blake atacó al sistema industrial tanto como al empirismo inglés. Prometeo en P. B. Shelley se convirtió en el modelo preferido de protagonista en conflicto con un dios tiránico, cruel y monstruoso. Estos poetas demuestran el resurgimiento del interés por los héroes y los individuos llenos de vitalidad entre los románticos. Samuel Taylor Coleridge defiende el empleo de lo preternatural y lo supernatural como representaciones de las fuerzas psíquicas y espirituales. Sus poemas, tales como “Christabel”, “The Pains of Sleep” o “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, son ejemplos convincentes de su creencia en la extensión de la imaginación poética mediante la descripción de experiencias de pesadillas y apariciones de monstruos. Sobre todo éste último puede considerarse un poema representativo de la poesía que trae a la luz numerosas cuestiones poetológicas tales como la relación entre realidad y lenguaje. También presenta al poeta romántico como profeta visionario.

**Palabras clave:** monstruosidad, monstruos, imaginación poética, otredad, subversión, masculinidad, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, psicoanálisis, estudios de género, Nuevo Historicismo, emancipación, Ilustración, la Edad de la Razón, Victorianismo, relatos góticos, Romanticismo, William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometeo, Fausto, Satán, Empirismo, función poetológica

## 1. General Functions of Monsters

Monsters are products of the human mind. As imaginary characters in stories or as vehicles in metaphors, they signify something strange and indeterminate and classify as mysterious, uncanny, curious, or marvellous.

Monsters not only represent strange phenomena in the environment but also the strangeness of human beings and groups. The self and the group he or she belongs to define themselves through defining another. The other can be constructed and treated as a partner and friend, a rival and enemy, or as a monster. Giants and dragons may serve as examples. Both kinds of monster, to mention only one of their functions for the time being, are central characters in stories that test a male hero and thus indirectly propagate definitions of masculinity. In such stories, whose as yet unbroken popularity is demonstrated by contemporary computer games, dragons are symbols of power and authority. Guarding a treasure or watching over a virgin, they try to prevent the male protagonist from “realizing his rich potential” or his “sexual wishes” (Röhrich 1980:787-819 and 2000:183-214). Killing the dragon, like defeating the giant, indicates that the protagonist has triumphed over the old repressive order (or, sometimes, chaos) and truly becomes a male hero, ready to assume power and marry the princess.

In the terms of J. J. Cohen, the monster “dwells at the gates of difference” and polices the border between inside and outside, known and unknown (3-25, 7). What this implies depends on the historical situation and the form and mode of representation. We are inclined at this point of our argument to perceive that there are two general functions that result from the monster’s character as a liminal figure. As a guardian of the gate, a monster may warn of crossing the threshold or the border and breaking norms and taboos. It may provoke conservative reactions and deepen respect for the given order. By opening the gate and invading the known world a monster may invite its audience to move, at least imaginatively, into another world and tempt it to forget norms and taboos, or enjoy the fantastic world with a mixture of fear and pleasure.

This second subversive function of monsters has fascinated various recent schools of literary criticism, psychoanalytic approaches, gender studies, New Historicism, and post-colonial theory. Sharing an

emancipatory orientation, these schools like to critique and undermine power discourses and the hegemony of certain groups and seek to rehabilitate what is suppressed or marginalized, thus demanding toleration of deviant behaviour and equal rights for minorities. In the light of these aims monsters receive attention, not as creepy or comic mass-produced commodities of the entertainment industry, but as characters that illustrate the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion; they underline the constitution of the self, the group, the nation, patriarchy, etc.

By highlighting what is forbidden and tabooed, monsters direct attention to alternative modes of behaviour and thus signify resistance or emancipation. They function as “secondary bodies through which the possibilities of other genders, other sexual practices, and other social customs can be explored” (Cohen 18). If so, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* should be read not only as a warning against immoral behaviour, but also, maybe even chiefly, as a critique of Victorian prudishness and hypocrisy (Brennan 97-112). This and other examples notwithstanding, many monsters in modern literature, films, and other media are chiefly intended to stabilize the self, the group, the nation, etc and erect a barrier of prejudices intended to exclude and imprison the other. Like the fantastic in general, monsters, then, cannot be pinned down as vehicles of subversion, deconstruction, and emancipation.

Monsters are creations of our minds and ask us why we have constructed them and what we need them for. Jeffrey J. Cohen gives us the answer to this moving and pervasive question:

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not only just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge - and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. (Cohen 20)

## **2. Monsters in the Romantic Imagination**

The pre-Romantic and Romantic discourse on imagination and superstition emerged from the Enlightenment context and

skepticism. The Romantic poets hesitated to dismiss magical thought as irrational. Instead, they were fascinated by superstitions and the literary possibilities they opened up, last but not least by their value in Romantic myth-making. In their critique of the Enlightenment and contemporary society the Romantics adopted a variety of stances. They posed, for instance, as rebels and outsiders. This allowed them to attack the establishment by drawing on traditional stories and shifting the blame from the outcast to the representative of order. Another stance the Romantics liked to take was that of the prophet denouncing the present age, pleading for a return to traditional values, or uttering apocalyptic warnings. In this role the Romantics resorted to biblical imagery and texts like the Books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and the Revelation.

A third critical stance towards the Age of Reason and contemporary society was that of the satirist and utopian writer. As such, the Romantics participated in the debate on the French Revolution and the political discussion during the restoration period. Occasionally they parodied the arguments and monster imagery which conservative critics such as Edmund Burke had used before. Whatever stance the writers chose, their distance, if not their alienation, from contemporary thought and society encouraged them to employ monsters of various kinds in their polemics and revise or subvert conventional positions. They thus hoped to uncover the unreason in reason and call the established political and social order into question.

William Blake, among others, associated reason with the birth of monsters. In the mythic reading of English history one of the critical concerns was the philosophers that had helped to shape eighteenth century thought and modern science. In *Jerusalem* he asserts:

I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe  
And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire  
Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton. black (sic!) the cloth  
In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation; cruel Works  
Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic  
Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which  
Wheel within Wheel freedom revolve in harmony & peace. (15:14-20)

Blake here criticizes the industrial system as well as English empiricism and its “dead, mechanistic universe.” For him, Bacon, Newton, and Locke form an “unholy triumvirate”:

They emerge as the myth character in *Jerusalem*, the three-headed monster pictured in plate 50 who functions as a rationalistic Cerberus in the epic poem and illustrations. They appear individually as oppressive characters under their own name or as Urizen, Albion's Spectre or the fallen Sons of Albion, the archetypal characters of Blake's myth who spout empirical doctrines. They also combine to keep Albion from inspiration in *Milton* and to oppress humanity in *Jerusalem* in the compulsive wheels originating from the Universities of Europe.... (Doskow 53-72, 55)

Blake is not only critical of the dominant philosophy of his time but also of one of the consequences, natural religion. Since Blake believes, "Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him," he is an enemy of religious orthodoxy (664) as well as of existing social institutions and power structures. His idea of order is epitomized by the slogan, "One King, one God, one Law" (70, 72). This "unholy trinity", Horst Meller argues (280-309), is responsible for the negative state of society which Blake depicts in his poem "London". The same trinity is evoked in Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819) to account for the Peterloo Massacre, the violent repression of a political demonstration. In his satire Shelley creates a monster called Anarchy to suggest that anarchy underlies the so-called order maintained by the monarchy, the church, and the legal system.

Prometheus was the favourite model for protagonists in conflict with a despotic, cruel, and monstrous god (Lewis, 35-38, 83). Largely ignoring negative versions of the Promethean myth, the Romantics saw the Titan as a rebel against Zeus' tyranny and the benefactor of mankind. Blake placed his hopes for political liberation and social emancipation on Promethean figures, for instance in *America* and other epics and Shelley in the play *Prometheus Unbound*. Correspondingly, the Romantics alternately glorified Satan as a proud outcast of the Enlightenment, a rebel against God and other Authorities, a victim figure like Prometheus, who had experienced injustice, or as a character mirroring the writers' own sense of isolation and defeat.

The devil also played a role in contemporary versions of the pact-with-the-devil story, in particular the Faust legend. Beckford's *Vathek*, Lewis's *The Monk*, Byron's *Manfred*, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and other works demonstrate that Faust and other characters who deal closely with the devil appealed to the Romantics as overreachers. These

figures attempt to transcend human limitations and attain special knowledge and power. Their success expresses the Romantic revolt against the human condition and their hope for change, their failures represent their despair and misery.

In summary, the popularity of such figures as Faust, Satan, and Prometheus testifies to the Romantic revival of the interest in heroes and energetic individuals, who have a special standing in society and whose character and aspirations determine their fate. To create such heroes meant re-interpreting and transvaluing characters from literary, mythic, and biblical traditions; it also meant finding interesting and powerful adversaries for them, if not gods and tyrants, then powerful spirits, devils, and monsters.

### **3. Dreams and Nightmares in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Poetry**

Coleridge did not believe in ghosts and devils, but he justified their use in literature as poetic and dramatic devices that assist, introducing the "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." (*Biographia Literaria*, 169) Moreover he defended the employment of the preternatural and supernatural as symbols of psychic or spiritual forces. "Christabel" is steeped in medieval romance, Gothic fiction, popular superstition, and various traditions concerning evil women.<sup>1</sup> In the opening section of the poem, young Christabel, a Baron's daughter, leaves her castle in the middle of the night to pray in the wood for the "weal of her lover that's far away" (l.30). She had dreamt of the man the night before and is apparently driven by restlessness and desire. While praying by a huge oak-tree, she suddenly hears someone moaning on the other side of the tree and discovers a beautiful, richly dressed lady, who calls herself Geraldine and claims that she has been abducted by five knights. Innocent Christabel invites her to seek refuge in the castle. In order not to awaken the Baron they go stealthily to Christabel's room. On the way the stranger's behaviour - she has to be carried across the threshold, for instance -, the old mastiff bitch's hostile reactions to her, and some other occurrences establish an uncanny atmosphere. This atmosphere is strengthened by the events in Christabel's bedroom. Geraldine, who is alternately weak and strong, kind and threatening, at one point seems to speak to Christabel's dead mother and then send her away, claiming the young woman for herself.

When she unrobes, Christabel is shocked at what she sees, “her bosom and half her side-/ A sight to dream of, not to tell!” (ll.252f.). Geraldine reacts with a stricken look, but then lies down by Christabel’s side and takes her into her arms. She comforts her, but also binds her to silence: “In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,/Which is lord of thy utterance [...]” (ll. 267f.).

In the second part of the poem the story is taken up again the next morning. Christabel wakes up in the belief that she has sinned and, later, recalls the terrible sight from the night before. When her father welcomes Geraldine as the daughter of a former friend and enemy, Christabel wishes to warn him. The spell she is under prevents this, however. When it is lifted, her warning comes too late: the Baron turns away from her to Geraldine and leads the latter forth, perhaps to marry her.

Though Coleridge added a few lines later on, he was never able to complete the poem. Hence many readings of the poem are speculative. It remains open whether Christabel is initiated into adult sexual life, whether Geraldine represents the evil mother, Christabel’s sexual rival, her lesbian partner, or her double, or whether the strange woman and Christabel will eventually be saved. As problematic as such psychosexual readings of the characters are those biographical interpretations which detect Coleridge’s strained relationship with his mother in the poem (Durham 169-93). Not only the poem’s fragmentary character stands in the way of interpretation, but also Coleridge’s treatment of superstition and the woman-as-monster theme. Source studies suggest that the poem is a *mélange* of heterogeneous traditions (Watson 159-200). Some superstitious notions link Geraldine to the vampire, others to lamias and fairies, still others to demons and devilish temptresses.

Though Coleridge failed to complete the poem, he published it in 1816 together with “The Pains of Sleep”. It is tempting to see both poems as companion pieces. “The Pains of Sleep” does not say much about the dream content. Rather, it outlines the dream’s nightmarish horrors and confusions in general, stressing the speaker’s mixture of desire and loathing and his vague sense of guilt:

Desire with loathing strangely mixed  
On wild or hateful objects fixed.  
Fantastic passions! Maddening brawl!



And shame and terror over all!  
 Deeds to be hid which were not hid,  
 Which all confused I could not know  
 Whether I suffered, or I did:  
 For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe,  
 My own or others still the same  
 Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame. (ll. 23-32)

In addition, “The Pains of Sleep” depicts the emotions of the dreamer after waking up and later: his child-like weeping, his attempts to allay his anguish, moralize his experience, and forget the “unfathomable hell within” (l.46) by reminding himself of the values of love and ordinary waking life.

#### **4. The Supernatural as Menace in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”**

A special case in question is Coleridge’s narrative poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. In Part IV of this famous poem, Coleridge depicts the protagonist’s depression, despair, and agony (Harding 334-42). After Death has taken the lives of the crew members, Life-in-Death begins “her work” on the Mariner (gloss to ll. 224f.).<sup>2</sup> The Mariner feels “all alone” on “a wide wide sea” (ll. 236f.), deserted by his comrades, the saints or, according to the 1798 version of the poem, Jesus Christ. He finds both the sea and the ship’s deck rotting and is full of disgust with himself and the “thousand slimy things” (l. 242) that live on it. He feels threatened by his surroundings, entertains suicidal wishes and yearns to join the “beautiful” dead (l. 230). Then he looks to Heaven for support, but a “wicked whisper” makes his “heart as dry as dust” (ll. 250ff.) and prevents him from praying. Consequently, the sky and the sea seem to lie “like a load” (1798: l. 253) on him. What is even more horrible is the fact that the dead men’s eyes continue to curse him. At the nadir of his adventurous voyage, then, the Mariner has become alienated from his fellowmen, the natural environment, his faith, and himself. The “Night-Mair LIFE-IN-Death”, who “thicks man’s blood with cold” (ll. 193f.), has ‘rimed’ him. Hence he is held in psychological prison for at least seven days and nights.

To some extent Coleridge leaves it open whether the supernatural represents an objective external reality in the world of the poem or has

to be seen as a projection of the Mariner's psychic and mental state. This problem has been discussed succinctly by Jerome McGann (135-72).<sup>3</sup> By archaizing the text and choosing a Catholic from the early age of discovery as his protagonist, Coleridge encourages the enlightened reader to regard such supernatural phenomena as the spectre-bark, Death, and Life-in-Death as expressions of the Mariner's delusions. This hypothesis is in keeping with the *Biographia Literaria* definition of Coleridge's contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*:

[...] it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (168f)

Coleridge assumes that his readers are aware of "the superstitious character of his primitive (mainly pagan and Roman Catholic) materials" and will therefore interpret them as the reflections of the Mariner's subjective reality (McGann 169). On the other hand, Coleridge was, as McGann argues, also a post- and anti-Enlightenment author, a Romantic symbolist. Thus he asks his readers to disbelieve in the phenomenal reality of the supernatural creatures and yet suspend this disbelief. McGann concludes, "What may be seen as 'delusion' in one point of view may be usefully regarded as a spiritual truth in another. Meaning replaces event, and word replaces fact as the real gives way to the symbolic" (171).

Invited to interpret the poem symbolically, the reader is also faced with the problem of determining whether the supernatural elements garnered from different sources retain some of their old meanings or acquire new and additional meanings in the poem. For instance, the Mariner's glittering eye may be identified as an evil eye that exercises a negative influence on other people. Perhaps, however, the eye does not merely echo a folkloristic superstition but is at the same time also a sign of demonic possession or madness, a symbol of the storyteller's inspiration and his power of the listener.

Another case in point is the albatross whose death plunges the Mariner into misery. Identifying different sources, critics have offered biographical, moral, religious, psychoanalytic, new-historical and deconstructivist readings, amongst others. The albatross has been

called an innocent victim, a symbol of physical and transcendental life, the representative of the natural order or of God's creation, the Dove of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, the source of kindness, an embodiment of the blacks transported in slave ships to America, the poet's mother or father, a vengeful and evil bird, and a mark of Cain as the corpse hung around the Mariner's neck, etc. (Whalley 160-83)

### 5. Monstrosity in "The Rime"

In geographical terms "The Rime" deals with a voyage of discovery, assuming that the Mariner and the crew are the first Europeans to round Cape Horn and to enter the Pacific (Wheeler 82-102). In Romantic terms the poem is a study in boundary-crossing and exploring an uncharted world beyond everyday reality, it is a "mental adventure" (Tillyard 71). The voyagers leave the port merrily, sail southward "with a good wind and fair weather" (gloss to ll. 15ff.) to the equator and then are driven by a strong storm to the South Pole. Approaching Cape Horn, they are faced with a hostile, terrifying, and somewhat uncanny environment:

And through the drifts the snowy clifts  
Did send a dismal sheen:  
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken -  
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,  
The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises in a swound. (ll. 55ff.)

This environment not only suggests danger but, on a second reading, also anticipates the Mariner's later punishment by 'riming'. Since the seamen have reached a foreign region where normal civilized life is not to be found, one might expect monsters to appear. Surprisingly, it is not a monster but the albatross that comes out of the fog. "The albatross is at first what the mariners make of it, the one vivid, recognizable object that is familiar to the crew in an increasingly unfamiliar seascape" (Magnuson ix). The sailors hail the bird "As if it had a Christian soul" (l. 65), feed it, and enjoy its company on the way north into the Pacific.

If anything, the albatross is the only native of the region whom the crew comes to know. Anyone who associates the voyage of the discovery with colonial expansion may remember reports on contacts between

Europeans and natives that began on a friendly basis and suddenly erupted into violence. Since the Mariner's killing of the albatross is gratuitous, one critic describes this act as "a symbolical rehearsal of the crux of colonial expansions" (Ebbatson 171-206).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, one may link some of the poem's elements - the fact that the other sailors at one point justify the killing, the description of the spectre-bark, and the 1798 characterization of Death - to slave ships and the public stand which Coleridge, like other Romantics, took against slavery (Ware 589-93). Both approaches do not bear close scrutiny, because the poem does not develop the political implications of the killing of the albatross.

It is more appropriate, therefore, to consider the general status of the theme of killing an animal in the sentimental and Romantic tradition. What Sterne treats comically in *Tristram Shandy*, Uncle Toby's belief that the world is large enough to hold him and a fly, is transformed by other writers into the seriously held principle "that the Universe is one loving whole" (Bostetter 113 and Morton 53-87). Thomson argues in *The Seasons*:

Oh, let not, aimed from some inhuman eye,  
The gun the music of the coming year  
Destroy, and harmless, unsuspecting harm,  
Lay the weak tribes, a miserable prey,  
In mingled murder fluttering on the Ground. (*Autumn*, ll. 983ff.)

Cowper asserts in *The Task*:

I would not enter on my list of friends  
(Tho' grac'd with polish'd manners and fine sense,  
Yet wanting sensibility) the man  
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm,  
...when, held within their proper bounds,  
And guiltless of offense, [creatures] range the air,  
Or take their pastime in the spacious field;  
There they are privileg'd; and he that hunts  
Or harms them there is guilty of a wrong,  
Disturbs th' economy of Nature's realm,  
Who, when she form'd, design'd them an abode. (6.560-563, 547-580)<sup>5</sup>

Wordsworth, who had heard about the killing of a black albatross in Shelvocke's *Voyage round the World by Way of the Great South Sea* (1726) and suggested the theme to Coleridge in the first place, echoes his eighteenth-century predecessors in "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree":

He who feels contempt  
For any living thing, has faculties  
Which he has never used. (ll.52ff.)

That Coleridge was familiar with the sentimental tradition in general is documented by poems such as “Death of a Starling” and “To a Young Ass. Its Mother Being Tethered Near It” (1794). He probably read that Captain Bligh and other victims of the Mutiny on the Bounty hunted albatrosses, their “companions in these inhospitable regions,” for food (Nelson 59-62, 60). When composing “The Rime,” Coleridge was probably fully aware of the fact that he was working within an important tradition, rather than taking up, as some modern critics believe, a trivial theme.

What is the nature of his contribution to this tradition? He depicts the Mariner’s violation of values advocated by his predecessors and contemporaries. So it is little wonder that Coleridge’s poem has been analyzed as a disruption of the Wordsworthian bond between man and the natural world (Bate 58f), or as a violation of the sacred union between man, nature, and God (Warren 374). But “The Rime” is more than a moral or religious illustration of the consequences of a crime against sacred principles; it is also a study in evil and a critique of the concept of an ordered universe informed by love.

Entering an alien world, the Mariner is attacked by monsters, but kills a harmless native bird and thus behaves monstrously himself. He cannot explain this act even to himself. Apparently, there is a potential for aggression and evil in him that is beyond his comprehension. This discovery causes him to fall into a deep depression and leads him to people the world with monsters and spirits. His depression symbolizes first of all his alienation from himself. Both the killing of the albatross and the wicked whisper that prevents him from praying prove that he is not under the control of his reason: overwhelmed by his sense of guilt, he feels physically and spiritually dried up and moves into a fantastic nightmarish world which seems inaccessible to reason and rational explanation.

In addition, the Mariner is also alienated from his fellowmen. Superstitious, the sailors regard the albatross first as a good omen and then as a bad one and condemn and justify the killing, accordingly. When the situation on board the ship deteriorates, the sailors give the Mariner

“evil looks” (l. 139) and hang the dead albatross around his neck. They make a scapegoat out of him. Even after their deaths, they still appear to persecute and curse the Mariner with their eyes. The Mariner thus becomes the other for the crew. The fact that he must carry the albatross around the neck is a shame-culture’s way of signaling his guilt. It is, however, also reminiscent of the public exhibition of monstrosities. All in all, the Mariner, through his act of killing, has entered a horrifying supernatural world that mirrors the inner world that was hidden from him before.

One can say in conclusion that the Mariner does not overcome his alienation from himself. He is a cursed, driven and restless man, who is not in control of himself and his traumatic past. Admittedly, the Mariner ends his story with a pious message about love. Yet it seems wrong to argue in that way:

For what has been revealed to him is the potential for love within himself and others; although the ultimate source of love is not himself, he has felt love spring up within him. His mission, then, will be to work out his salvation by sharing with others the love he has received. (Barth 67)

So, at the same time, “The Rime” highlights the Mariner’s aggressiveness and focuses attention on his depression, alienation, and obsessional storytelling.

## 6. Poetological Conclusions

Since the Mariner is an effective storyteller, he has often been compared to a prophet. Concomitantly, the poem he appears in has been regarded as a poem about poetry propounding a number of poetological issues. It touches upon the relationship between reality and language and dramatizes the Mariner’s difficulties in expressing his experience and feelings. After the killing of the albatross, both the crew and he are rendered incapable of speaking:

And every tongue, through utter drought,  
Was withered at the root;  
We could not speak, no more than if  
We had been choak’d with soot. (ll. 135ff.)

In order to regain the power to speak, the Mariner adapts the technique used by Ulysses to make some of the shades in Hades speak:

he bites his arm and sucks his own blood. This scene strikes some readers as evidence for the Mariner's vampirism, but more likely it demonstrates that speech, i.e. art, and personal suffering are closely related. After sucking the blood, the Mariner can speak again. But the ship he hopefully announces to his fellow-mates is the horrifying spectre-bark that brings Death to the sailors and Life-in-Death to himself. In a poetological reading, Life-in-Death succeeds the albatross as a symbol of the creative imagination. Whereas the albatross inspired the men with hope and made them act as a community, Life-in-Death represents a creative imagination that has turned melancholic and demonic. To put this differently, the albatross is associated with the breaking of the ice, Life-in-Death with stagnation and dejection. As Robert Graves says in his book *The White Goddess* (433), Life-in-Death is considered to be a personification of the poetic muse, who can be beautiful, kind, and cruel. Therefore this muse takes possession of the Mariner and at the same time limits his gift of expression to the retelling of his singular experience.

In generalizing one might say that the Mariner stands for the Romantic poet as visionary and prophet who reveals a complex reality beyond the everyday world to his listeners. This assumption makes sense insofar as the Romantics, from Blake onwards, liked to portray themselves as seers and priests. We could therefore subscribe to the argument that the poem, though it is highly hybridized, is chiefly a product of the late 1790s and should be seen in the context of Coleridge's interests and preoccupations in that period.

"The Rime" expresses Coleridge's doubts and insecurities. As in "Christabel", the poet's divided mind is reflected in the ambivalent nature of almost every element in the poem. The Mariner is a fascinating but deranged storyteller, at once a human being and a representative of the other; he is both a victimizer and a victim. Life-in-Death is witch-like and punishes the Mariner, but she also saves him from death. The natural elements are friendly and inimical in turn. The world is inhabited by the water-snakes and the albatross which are perceived positively and negatively at different times. Reality appears to be governed at times by chance and in other passages by a providential power. Finally, the external action is perhaps only a mirror of the internal, subconscious life, for which two contrasting spontaneous reactions, aggression and love, are characteristic. From this perspective, the fact that the Mariner believes that he hears two voices debating his fate (ll. 402ff.),

a harsh and a gentle one, is emblematic of the poem. The harsher voice is predominant, but, arguably, not as powerful as critics following in Bostetter's footsteps have made it out to be (Bostetter 115).

In this essay it became manifest that Coleridge employs monstrous elements to articulate his sense of the duality and contrariness of life. Choosing a complex kind of narrative transmission, he historicizes the monstrous, as it were. The Mariner, as a representative of the early age of discovery, tries desperately to reconcile the monstrous world with the Christian background. The post-Reformation editor goes even further in the direction of moral and religious interpretation and weakens the power of the monstrous elements by stressing the Mariner's recovery and salvation. By contrast, the minstrel or frame-narrator shows how the Mariner's story unsettles and disillusiones the Wedding-Guest. He thus reinforces the tendency of the text as a whole to concentrate on the psychological effects of the encounter with the monstrous. This psychological dimension allows Coleridge to express some of his own preoccupations and anxieties as a Romantic writer through the Mariner's tale.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Christabel" and "The Pains of Sleep" are quoted from E.H. Coleridge, ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Oxford, 1968, I:213-236, 389-391.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Paul H. Fry, ed. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Boston, 1999:26-75.

<sup>3</sup> See also David Perkins "The Ancient Mariner and Its Interpreters: Some Versions of Coleridge", in: *MLQ*, 57 (1996), 425-48; Mary Lee Taylor Milton, *The Poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, 1935-1970*. New York, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also W. Empson, "The Ancient Mariner", in: *CQ*, 6(1964), 289-319; Patrick J. Keane, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics, The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe*. Columbia, Missouri, 1994.

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# JACKS IN THE BOXES: THE COMIC POTENTIAL OF THE CHEST SCENES IN BOCCACCIO, SHAKESPEARE, AND JOANOT MARTORELL

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## **Abstract**

Act II, Scene ii of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* presents a disturbing sequence in which the villain, Jachimo, emerges from a chest that has been smuggled into the bedroom of the unsuspecting Imogen. Although he does not touch her, his very presence is a violation, and he uses the opportunity to make notes about her person and her room, which he uses later to pretend that he has seduced her. Although this scene, like the similar episode in a tale from Boccaccio's *Decameron* on which it is based, does not initially seem likely to provoke laughter, a closer look reveals considerable comic potential. Another chest scene, in the Catalan romance *Tirant lo Blanc*, fully develops the humorous possibilities. In this paper, I analyze the three scenes, and reflect on how essentially the same material can be given a comic or a tragic twist.

**Key words:** *Tirant lo Blanc*, Boccaccio, *Decameron*, *Cymbeline*, Imogen, comic, comparative literature.

## **Resumen**

El acto II, escena ii de *Cymbeline* de Shakespeare presenta una perturbadora secuencia en la cual el antagonista, Jachimo, surge de un baúl que se ha introducido subrepticamente en el dormitorio de Imogen sin que ésta se diera cuenta. Aunque no la llega a tocar, su mera presencia es una trasgresión y aprovecha para tomar notas de su persona y su habitación, las cuales utilizará posteriormente para simular que la ha seducido. Aunque esta escena, al igual que ocurre en

un episodio similar de un cuento del *Decamerón* de Boccaccio en el que se basa, no parece en primera instancia tener la intención de provocar la carcajada, una mirada más intensa revela un considerable potencial cómico. Otra escena con baúl presente en el romance catalán *Tirant lo Blanc* desarrolla al máximo sus posibilidades humorísticas. En este artículo analizo las tres escenas y reflexiono sobre el hecho de que en esencia el mismo material pueda recibir un giro cómico o trágico.

**Palabras clave:** *Tirant lo Blanc*, Boccaccio, *Decamerón*, *Cymbeline*, Imogen, cómico, literatura comparada

Those familiar with Act II, scene ii of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* may be surprised at the suggestion that there could be any humor in it. Jachimo has had himself smuggled into Imogen's chamber, hidden in a chest; he creeps out while she is sleeping and prowls around, taking notes and leering at her. As Evelyn Gajowski makes clear in her fine essay on the play, the prevailing mood during this scene must be dread:

Jachimo's voyeuristic gaze and pornographic fantasy are framed by references to infamous acts of rape: Tarquin's rape of Lucrece and Tereus's rape of Philomela. Jachimo does not literally rape Imogen, of course. He does invade her bedchamber and he does violate the privacy of her body with his gaze, however... (95).<sup>1</sup>

This chest scene, like the similar one in Boccaccio's *Decameron* on which it is based, seems even more unlikely to make us laugh when we recall the background. In each case, the husband of the sleeping woman is largely responsible for her predicament, because he has made a wager on her chastity. Gajowski's comment on Posthumus Leonatus could be applied with equal justice to Bernabò in the Boccaccio story: "he is oblivious to how shameful it is to expose Imogen to the importunities of Jachimo" (93). In each case, the villain has given up hope of seducing the woman, and resorts to having himself smuggled into her room in a chest so that he can pretend to have conquered her, and win his infamous bet.

Once the villain is in the room, several things could happen, none of them good. He could rape her, with some chance of getting away with it. In Cervantes's *Exemplary Novels*, a respectable gentleman

recounts, with no apparent shame, how he managed a rape sixteen years earlier by telling the woman that she would do better to keep quiet and avoid any scandal (194). We eventually get to know the female protagonists, Zinevra in Boccaccio and Imogen in Shakespeare, well enough to understand that they would not be taken in by such a specious argument, but the tension of the scene as it unfolds is painful. In each case, the scene is part of a plot that turns out well, and thus fits the minimal definition of comedy, but at first glance neither seems in the least funny.

Nonetheless, Alexander Leggatt reports: “I have seen four productions of *Cymbeline*, and on each occasion Iachimo’s emergence from the trunk was greeted with laughter” (195). This could, of course, be a nervous reaction, and not express amusement at all. Leggatt offers two conjectures: “For a modern audience, he suggests a jack-in-the-box; for a Jacobean audience, he would probably have suggested a comically old-fashioned devil popping up through the trap door” (195). If Jachimo comes across as a jack-in-the-box, the audience may laugh almost as a reflex. There may be something inherently amusing about this mode of entrance: in the brilliant Cirque du Soleil show *Quidam*, for example, the clowns enter and exit through trap doors, and this always gets a hearty chuckle.<sup>2</sup>

All this has stimulated me to consider whether there may indeed be any humor in these fundamentally nasty scenes. After all, we can laugh at the most unexpected things: a knight having all four limbs cut off in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, or Hitler fantasizing about world domination in Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*. Adrian Kiernander has argued persuasively that even so tragic a play as *Othello* may be performed in large part as farce, and perhaps become more effective thereby (150-163). After close reading and rereading, I have come to believe that there is considerable humorous potential in the chest scene: potential that is untapped in Boccaccio, exploited subtly in Shakespeare, and fully developed in a hilarious episode in Joanot Martorell’s *Tirant lo Blanc* (ca.1490), one of the few romances of chivalry mentioned with approval in *Don Quixote*.<sup>3</sup>

In the ninth story of the second day of the *Decameron*, Elissa tells the story of Bernabò, whose macho pride drives him to bet that his wife Zinevra will not allow herself to be seduced by Ambrugiolo. When the

latter arrives in Genoa, his careful investigations persuade him that he has made a big mistake, and he never bothers to try to seduce Zinevra; in fact, he never once speaks with her. Instead, he bribes a woman to smuggle him into Zinevra's bedchamber, concealed in a chest. While she is sleeping, he sneaks out, collects a few trophies, makes some mental notes about the room and Zinevra's person, and climbs back into his box. For reasons never revealed, he spends two nights in the room before returning to Paris and duping the husband into believing that he has seduced Zinevra, using his trophies and remembered details to add credence to his invented sexual encounter.

Boccaccio's narrator does not invite us to laugh at this, but there are certainly some ludicrous aspects to the scene. The discrepancy between Ambruogiuolo's big talk and his performance would justify derision. After all his braggadocio, he cannot work up the nerve to speak with the woman, let alone try to seduce her. Even with the sinister opportunity provided by his dirty trick with the chest, he does nothing: in fact, he covers her up once he has seen the mole under her left breast: "chetamente la ricoperse, come che, così bella vedendola, in disidèro avesse di mettere in avventura la vita e coricarlesi allato." (174) ["he quietly covered her up, lest, seeing her so beautiful, he might feel the desire to put his life in danger and lie down by her side." (Translation mine.)] The exposure of the self-proclaimed stud as sexual coward could be hilarious, if the narrator chose to play up the comic angle. She does not.

On the other hand, she does relieve the tension generated by the menace of rape. This is accomplished in part by a simple and easily overlooked expedient; we are told that: "la donna ed una piccola fanciulla che con lei era dormivan forte." ["The lady and a little girl who was with her were sleeping soundly." (Translation mine.)] It is, of course, conceivable that a man could be so monstrous as to rape a woman despite the presence of a child, but rather unlikely. Zinevra and her little companion form a sort of Madonna and child tableau, well-adapted to calm down a more determined male than Ambruogiuolo. I would conjecture that if an author wished to treat the scene as comic, it would be necessary to dispel the fear of rape; the very relief might put readers in a frame of mind for humor.

We cannot do more than guess at whether Shakespeare intended or expected the audience to laugh when Jachimo emerged from the chest.



The visual nature of theater ensures that the villain's appearance will at least be startling, and the director and actor could easily make Jachimo into a risible, moustache-twirling figure of melodrama. I would argue that Jachimo must be funnier than his counterpart in Boccaccio, for these reasons. He has actually tried to seduce Imogen, and has failed miserably; perhaps we might feel less contempt for him than for Ambruogiuolo, but his discomfiture on stage exposes his shortcomings as a seducer to our ridicule. As he emerges from the chest, he is a nervous wreck, so frightened of Imogen that he is reluctant even to look at her. He scuttles about the chamber, taking notes—actually writing down details of the interior decoration. Now, we certainly do not want him to try anything with Imogen, but the spectacle of a man unable to do anything but scribble notes about the arras when he finds himself in a lady's bedchamber at night is ludicrous. The humor that we can imagine finding in the situation in Boccaccio comes through plainly in this stage enactment.

There is no small child in the bed to cramp Jachimo's style, but none is necessary. He struggles for a moment with desire: "That I might touch!/But kiss, one kiss! Rubies unparagon'd,/How dearly they do't!" [1531; Act II, scene ii, 16-18] But he is far too cowardly to steal a kiss, let alone commit rape, and he takes refuge in his chest with headlong eagerness:

I have enough;  
To th' trunk again, and shut the spring of it.  
Swift, swift, you dragons of the night, that dawning  
May bare the raven's eye! I lodge in fear;  
Though this a heavenly angel, hell is here. (l. 46-50)

Plainly, Jachimo's nerves would never permit him to spend a second night in the room.

The humorous impact of this scene depends largely on director and actor, of course, but Shakespeare has provided an excellent opportunity for laughter. Jachimo is less guarded than Ambruogiuolo: we hear all that is going through his mind, and watch him making a fool of himself. Any fear of rape is neutralized very early in the scene. If the audience knows that the villain must lose—must be utterly put to rout, in fact, and run away, exposed as the braggart and coward that he is—then the audience is free to laugh: not only at the sudden appearance of the Jachimo-in-the-box, but all the way through the scene.

The chest scene in *Tirant lo Blanc* differs in several significant ways from those in the *Decameron* and *Cymbeline*. There is no repugnant wager in the background; the man in the chest is Tirant himself, the ardent lover of Princess Carmesina; his motives, while hardly pure, are not despicable. He does not devise the stratagem himself; rather, throughout the episode he is a puppet under the control of Plaerdemavida, a lady-in-waiting who eagerly promotes his sexual union with the Princess, without any obvious motive. As the following analysis will show, Martorell treats the chest scene entirely as comedy. There is also a strong vein of pornography, but this dissolves into laughter as well.

Tirant gets off to a silly start by showing up at the bedchamber carrying a sword. He has no reason to apprehend violence, so he must be carrying the sword out of habit, oblivious to its grotesque inappropriateness. He must lose it at some point, for it is never mentioned again. The phallic suggestiveness of the sword is obvious; his loss of it may subtly correlate with his woeful failure to perform in the episode that ensues. Plaerdemavida leads him into the bathroom and makes him comfortable in a strategically-located linen chest, in which she has thoughtfully bored holes for ventilation. She ensures that Tirant will have a good view by raising the lid slightly, and arranging some linens to hide the opening. She then maneuvers the unsuspecting Princess into position, and holds a candle to provide illumination. Thus, as the Princess disrobes, Tirant gets a splendid show from his box seat. Plaerdemavida does her best to help matters along by commenting admiringly on the beauties of Carmesina's body, calling on Tirant, as if he were absent, to contemplate each perfect feature. She intensifies the effect by caressing and kissing Carmesina's hair, lips, breasts, stomach, thighs, and "lo secret." (479) As she moves down the Princess' body, she wails: "que si hom fos, ací volria finir los meus darrers dies!" (698) ["if I were a man this is where I would want to finish my days!" (479)] The show pleases the onlooker: "Tirant tot açò mirava, e prenia-hi lo major delit del món per la bona gràcia ab què Plaerdemavida ho raonava, e venien-li de grans temptacions de voler eixir de la caixa." (699) ["Tirant saw all this and took the greatest delight in the world in the amusing things that Plaerdemavida was saying, and he was sorely tempted to come out of the chest." (479)] As Catherine Soriano wryly observes: "el gran capitán, la ilustre figura

pública, es un acomplexado sexual, dominado por una líbido deficiente” (46) [“the great captain, the illustrious public figure, is a man with sexual complexes, dominated by a deficient libido.” (Translation mine.)]<sup>4</sup>

So far, Tirant has done nothing much to make himself overtly ridiculous—indeed, he has done almost nothing at all. The situation is droll, but could also be read for its sexual titillation. Both humor and eroticism are intensified in what follows. Innocent almost beyond belief—or perhaps not averse to indulging some mild lesbian tendencies—Carmesina invites Plaerdemavida to join her in the bath. Dedicated to the success of her plot, Plaerdemavida shows no reluctance to get naked, although she knows that Tirant is watching. She does take her chance to work on the Princess a little more, however. First she imposes a condition: “Que comporteu que Tirant estiga una hora en lo vostre llit, e que vós hi siau.” (699) [“That you allow Tirant to spend an hour together with you, in your bed” (479).] After the Princess dismisses this suggestion as if it were a joke, Plaerdemavida asks a bold question: “si Tirant una nit venia ací, que neguna de nosaltres no ho sabés, e el trobàsseu al vostre costat, què diríau?” (699) [“If Tirant comes here some night without any of us knowing it, and he makes his way to your side, what will you say to him?” (479).] The Princess gives just the answer that her scheming lady-in-waiting wants to hear: she replies that she would ask Tirant to leave, and, if he refused, keep quiet to avoid a scandal.

Carmesina’s answer dispels any anxiety we might feel as readers, because it amounts to an admission that she would not object too strenuously to having sex with Tirant. She does hope to hold him off for a while yet, and in fact the consummation does not take place for another three hundred pages or so. But Plaerdemavida has coaxed her into issuing what must be regarded as an open invitation to Tirant to proceed with confidence.

There has never been nearly as much dread in this scene as in the ones in Boccaccio and Shakespeare, because the man in the chest is not a villain, but rather the one man in all the world whom the Princess would not really mind having see her nude. Her acquiescence in Plaerdemavida’s fondling and talk of Tirant, and her answer to the direct question, dissipate any remnants of negative tension. The

pornographic nature of the scene changes soon after Plaerdemavida gets into the tub, when another woman, the Widow Reposada, enters the chamber and is invited to join in. This could make the tableau even more erotic, although Tirant presumably should have eyes only for the Princess; instead, it turns soft pornography into farce:

La Viuda se despullà tota nua e restà ab calces vermelles e al cap un capell de lli. E encara que ella tenia molt bella persona e ben disposta, emperò les calces vermelles e lo capell al cap la desfavoria tant que paria que fos un diable... (699)

[The widow took off her clothes and was completely naked except for a pair of red hose and a linen cap on her head. Even though she had a beautiful body and a comely manner, the red hose and the cap on her head made her ugly as the devil.] (479)

One can no longer imagine the luscious perfection of the female bodies in the bath: the red hose and the linen cap draw the mind's eye, replacing titillation with tittering.

After the bath and a light meal, the Widow leaves and the Princess gets into bed. Plaerdemavida retrieves Tirant from the chest and helps him to undress; he does keep his shirt on, apparently. She quickly notices that he is trembling all over, and teases him about being afraid of a single maiden. He admits that he would be more comfortable fighting two knights to the death. He goes on to suggest that he should stop, pretending to be motivated by concern for the Princess' honor rather than his own terror. Once again, we have the opportunity to laugh at a man who panics at the moment of truth. We do not dislike Tirant, although I would suggest that part of the humorous effect derives from our satisfaction at seeing this monotonously victorious knight prove that he can be engagingly human after all. We may not feel tempted to jeer at him, as we might have wanted to mock Ambruogiuolo and Jachimo, but we can certainly indulge in a few chuckles at Tirant's fear, or his deficient libido.

Plaerdemavida makes Tirant look even sillier by telling him off and then leaving him in the dark, helpless to do anything but wait and call in a low, plaintive voice for her to come back and rescue him. After letting him sweat—or rather, shiver—for half an hour, she relents, and gives him a pep talk, even citing the Psalms to support her assertion that he should proceed to business without further shilly-shallying. She then puts him into bed at Carmesina's

side, without waking either the Princess or the other maidens who are sleeping in the same chamber. Aware by now that Tirant needs extraordinary encouragement and practical assistance, she takes up a position behind the headboard, and guides his hands to Carmesina's erogenous zones. The Princess wakes up, partially, and grumbles at Plaerdemavida to let her sleep, under the mistaken impression that her lady-in-waiting is resuming the caresses from the disrobing scene. Plaerdemavida supplies a voice-over, developing the "if only Tirant were here" theme, and continues controlling the situation, signaling him to slow down or speed up by pressure on his head. This goes on for a full hour, with the Princess never quite waking up. Tirant looks more absurd with each passing minute. Plaerdemavida's dominance makes him a figure of fun, not a hero; it may not be too fanciful to point out that his high-sounding name could be read as "shooting blanks."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, recognizing that the Princess is sound asleep, and perhaps despairing that Tirant will ever show any initiative, Plaerdemavida indicates to him that he should go beyond foreplay. He does make a move, whereupon the Princess half-wakes and rebukes Plaerdemavida again: "¿Est tornada folla, que vols temptar lo que és contra tu natura?" (704 ["Have you gone crazy, trying to do something that is against your nature?" (483)] But at long last—her obliviousness is not the least funny aspect of this scene—she realizes that the person in her bed is not female, and she cries out. Plaerdemavida claps a hand over her mouth and explains in her ear why she should keep silent; Tirant chimes in with such eloquence as he can muster. Though not necessarily pleased, the Princess allows herself to be hushed.

It would have made little narrative sense for this ridiculous episode to conclude in sexual fulfillment; instead, it is ready to dissolve into slapstick and silliness. Carmesina's cries have awakened the Widow, whose own lust for Tirant and general jealousy have made her slumber unusually light.<sup>6</sup> She raises a fuss, and leads a bevy of nude and scantily-clad ladies-in-waiting to the room. Plaerdemavida, ever in charge, grabs Tirant by the hair and drags him back to the bathroom, where she has an escape route set up for just such a contingency. It should come as no surprise that Tirant manages to fall and break a leg; he is lucky to be found and rushed away secretly by friends of his.

Carmesina, meanwhile, explains her outcry with an excuse with which only a Princess could get away: “una gran rata saltà sobre lo meu llit e pujà’m sobre la cara, e espantà’m tan fort que haguí de cridar tan grans crits que fora estava de tot record...” (705) [“a huge rat jumped on my bed and ran across my face, scaring me so that I screamed as if I had lost my senses...” (484)]

Martorell has made the most of the comic potential of the chest scene. There is never much fear of rape, and he dispels what little there may be early on. The man in the chest is a hero, not a villain, but he is the sort of hero at whom it comes as a great relief to be able to laugh for a change. The presence of a witness—it might be more accurate to call her a puppeteer—defuses the erotic tension, and generates plenty of humor. No one is permanently harmed in this scene—unlike some darker moments later in the narrative—and readers are invited, even compelled to laugh at the preposterous situation and silly behavior of the characters.

No doubt some literary and dramatic situations are inevitably tragic in nature, and others comic. I would argue that the chest scene, like many others, is Protean. Let the lady wake up and provoke the intruder, or let an armed male relative enter, and there will be blood. Let the invading man keep his hands off, and settle for gathering material for a cruel deception, and the scene will be nerve-wracking, even though the story may eventually turn out all right. But handle the scene as Martorell has done—trade menace for amusement, turn the jack-in-the-box into a blithering bumbler, and replace an anonymous bribed servant with a diligent, bossy go-between, whose best efforts are frustrated by the sexual wimpiness of the man and the clueless somnolence of the woman, and the result is comic gold.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Citing Georgianna Ziegler, Gajowski points out that: “In early modern English drama, a woman’s bedchamber represents her ‘self’—both her physical body and her mental or spiritual nature.” Thus, even entering a woman’s bedroom against her will is a violation. See Ziegler, 87.

<sup>2</sup> I learned about Leggatt’s article during a very interesting presentation on *Cymbeline* by Amy Rodgers of the University of Michigan at SAMLA, November 2007; Rodgers

does not agree with Leggatt on this point, and mentions that in her experience no one laughs when Jachimo comes forth.

<sup>3</sup> The curate, among other enthusiastic comments, exclaims: "...por su estilo, es éste el mejor libro del mundo: aquí comen los caballeros y duermen y mueren en sus camas, y hacen testamento antes de su muerte, con estas cosas de que todos los demás libros deste género carecen" (I, 72). Cervantes praises the book for its realism; it seems probable that he also appreciated its humor.

<sup>4</sup> Soriano attributes this observation to Alan Yates, "*Tirant lo Blanc*: l'heroi ambigu," *L'Espill* 6/7 (1980):23-29.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Karen Taylor for this observation.

<sup>6</sup> Those same cries appear not to have roused the maidens sleeping in the chamber, but perhaps Martorell simply forgot they were there.

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# **SOME REFLECTIONS ON 35 YEARS OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN GRANADA**

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## **Abstract**

The following article consists of a series of reflections on 35 years of teaching English at the University of Granada. Informal in tone, it covers the writer's views on some aspects of this experience. Among the topics touched on are: questions regarding ELT methodology; Learning and Acquisition; materials and teacher training; English at the university and aspects of computer assisted language learning. At the end some questions which may be of interest to future teachers and planners are posed, concerning, for instance, the encouraging of more positive social attitudes towards the learning and use of English in Spain; the need for reliable public examinations; the future role of the teaching of literature in English at university level; the evaluation of the effectiveness of computer assisted language learning material.

**Key words:** university English studies; methodology; materials production; CALL

## **Resumen**

En el siguiente artículo se ofrece una serie de reflexiones surgidas de una experiencia de 35 años de enseñanza del inglés en la Universidad de Granada, España. El autor expresa sus puntos de vista sobre varios aspectos de tal experiencia. Entre los temas que se tratan se encuentran los de la metodología de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, el aprendizaje y la adquisición de idiomas; la producción de materiales didácticos y la formación del profesorado; el inglés en la universidad y

comentarios sobre el uso de las nuevas tecnologías en esa enseñanza. Finalmente se plantean algunas cuestiones que pueden ser de interés para la planificación futura de estos estudios – entre ellas la necesidad de contar con pruebas de acceso fiables; el futuro papel de la enseñanza de la literatura en inglés en la universidad, o la evaluación de la efectividad de las enseñanzas asistidas por ordenador.

**Palabras clave:** Estudios ingleses; metodología; materiales didácticos; enseñanza asistida por ordenador.

### **Preface.**

In April 2008 the Research Group HUM370 *Lingüística, Estilística y Didáctica del Inglés* (University of Granada) very kindly organized a lecture by Prof. H.G.Widdowson, of the University of Vienna, and a seminar, given jointly by Prof. Widdowson and myself, on the occasion of my retirement from the University of Granada. It was a great honour to have shared these sessions with such an eminent figure as Prof. Widdowson, and I am deeply grateful to my colleagues. What follows is an approximate “transcription” of what I said at the seminar, and consists simply of a series of reflections on things which have struck me during my years of work here. These will doubtless seem somewhat disjointed, and will certainly have lost some of their freshness in the shift from the spoken to the written mode, but I have tried to keep the colloquial tone present as much as reasonably possible. Anyway, for what they are worth, here are some of my thoughts.

### **Introduction**

Before I begin I should like to reiterate – in the more intimate context of this seminar - my most grateful thanks to the organizers, especially to Prof. Widdowson, and an emotional “thank you” to my colleagues who have had the kindness to come, especially those who have had to travel some distance – you, together with my students, have always been the centre of my academic life here. I can assure everyone that these sessions will always remain a stimulating and grateful memory.

The management – a term used in UK universities, but singularly inappropriate to the Spanish system, I fear! – has asked me to make some remarks on my teaching here over the last 35 years. I obviously can't do a complete summary: and it is not a question of trying to provide a “balanced” view - the positive aspects far outweigh the less positive – but rather simply of reflecting on some issues that have struck me over the years, and which may, or may not, provide food for thought. At the end I will pose some questions which might be worth considering (some of these will be reiterations of what I have said in my talk). Indeed, I may well raise more questions than I answer. Some of my inevitably general remarks will be about the university and some will refer to primary/secondary education, because of my teacher training experience. But I should insist that all are merely personal observations – offered in a relatively festive or celebratory spirit, not to be taken *too* seriously, please! - and I hope you will forgive me for, just this once, being *subjective*.

I'll organize these very brief remarks under five broad headings:

1. Methodology
2. Learning and Acquisition
3. Materials and Teacher Training
4. English at the University
5. CALL

## **I. Methodology**

I should insist again – given that some of the remarks I will make are critical in nature - that I have had a very good time here, the professional rewards and satisfactions have been very considerable and the potential is great. I've been able to do a variety of teaching: instrumental and practical English, uses and varieties of English, literary analysis, phonetics, a lot of teacher training, materials production... In fact, I have begun and ended with teaching practical English – ‘Prácticas de lengua inglesa’ to ‘Inglés instrumental’ – that is, I've come “full circle” as it were! And – but don't tell anyone! - I have even used recently some of the same materials as before, and they still work! – which is not insignificant. However, I certainly can't say that I can apply T S Eliot's conclusion to *Four Quartets* directly:

We shall not cease from exploration,  
 And the end of all our exploring  
 Will be to arrive where we started  
 And know the place for the first time. (Eliot, 1944)

In fact, far from “knowing”, there is a sense in which I’m not quite sure where practical English teaching fits in now, since the whole structure has changed. Should we be teaching an integrated skills course (if that is still possible with the time at our disposal) with strict level controls, or should we once and for all concentrate on a high-level academic English course, and “the devil take the hindmost”?

When I first arrived, I used *Practice and Progress* (Alexander, 1967), which I still think is one of the best EFL teaching books ever written: order, grading and flexibility. You will remember it is organized in four cyclical sections (2 pages each unit), with short and extremely *versatile* texts to be used in a variety of ways (those in each subsequent section being slightly longer), comprehension questions which can be done either orally or written, the main grammatical difficulties, vocabulary expansion, suggestions for written work. And the good thing was that it provided an “axis” from which you could branch out into all kinds of developments. This flexibility seems to me what was great about working with this kind of material. Hence my irritation at frequently reductive views of “structural language teaching” (see, e.g. Lavid, 2005:38):

Las nuevas tecnologías por sí solas no cambian los métodos tradicionales basados en la absorción pasiva de contenidos, el currículum cerrado, la memorización y el aprendizaje fuera de contexto. [...]

... [hay que] cultivar el deseo por aprender y crear, y no simplemente comunicar contenidos desconectados .....

But we should recall that Robert Lado, supposedly one of the arch-priests of the structural approach, in an article in *English Language Teaching* in 1960 (before he even published *Language Testing*) made the following comments: “To the question ‘What are we testing?’ we can answer ‘*Language in use*’.” And “What is meant by the speaking ability? The ability to go from meaning to the forms of the foreign language *in essentially communicative situations*.” (Lado, 1960: 155; my emphasis).

In fact I think that the “old” structural approach never *was* non-communicative. However, it *did* involve studying, and although this is obviously by no means the only way of learning vocabulary, I’m certainly

not going to throw away my old green school French vocabulary book, where the words were written in lists, with the English version opposite, you folded the pages down the middle in order to learn the words, you tested yourself, and then checked the answers. And you did this several times, marking with a tick all those words which were successfully remembered (I will come back to “learning” in a minute). Indeed, to introduce a second literary reference, there are times when I would like to reverse Dickens’s line in *Hard Times*. You will remember that when Mr Gradgrind (who wants only “facts!”) asks for a definition of a “horse”, the sensitive, imaginative girl Sissy Jupe, with whom we are intended to sympathize (and quite rightly, in Dickens’s context), is unable to answer; and the “mechanical” student Bitzer replies “*Horse. Quadruped. Graminivorous. Sheds coat in spring ...*” etc. Now, without meaning to be frivolous, there are times when I would like my students to have – as well as “imagination” - a greater command of the “facts” of the language – it would help a great deal. It’s interesting to notice, in this respect, how recent informed comments on CALL CD programs for the teaching and learning of foreign languages have once more emphasized the need for a certain amount of controlled practice (“drills!”) and the ways in which this can be incorporated into language syllabuses – see, for instance, the very interesting remarks by Graham Davies *et al* in the extended tutorial in using CALL at *ICT4LT*.<sup>1</sup>

This may also lead to a consideration of “national learning styles”. I suppose that like most native teachers I found it a bit difficult at first to adjust to a monolingual class, having had the extraordinary experience of teaching multilingual classes in the UK. But on the positive side one develops a sense of empathy, and respect for learning styles: they cannot be underestimated (especially now, when the tendency seems to be to assume uncritically that “Bologna” MUST be the same everywhere). At university level in Spain, for example, the importance of the formal lecture – or to use the much finer Spanish term “clase magistral” – not only as a content-giving but also as an *inspirational* act has always been appreciated, and it would be a tragedy if, amidst the many and necessary changes to be introduced, this were lost sight of.

Which brings me to the “Communicative” learning approach. There’s a sense, I feel, in which CLT perhaps came at the wrong time for Spain (when we were changing over to an obligatory under-16 system). It seems simply (?) that the conditions for implementing CLL were not there,

and that may be why it hasn't been properly assessed – a fundamental weakness in its continued application. English has had to fight, not only against an appallingly stultifying official policy of denying most of the public access to English (i.e. through showing “V.O.”, undubbed, films regularly), but also for a place in the “encyclopaedic” curriculum. This, on the other hand, has produced very good results in the past (and still does: Spanish engineers, doctors - and Applied Linguists! - are extremely well regarded outside Spain), and should be made the most of in the present situation, both methodologically and from the point of view of syllabus design (e.g. *Planes de Estudio*). I speak here also as one who, having gone through the extremely specialized UK university system – with all its advantages – deeply regrets not having participated too in a more broadly based degree course.

## II. Acquisition and Learning

I have seen a proliferation of Applied Linguistics congresses, Proceedings... etc., etc., over the past 35 years – and contributed to some! There have been advances, and in some ways it has been an exciting time to be involved in EFL. There's no question that these multiple productions testify to great academic interest in the field. However, there are some areas where I “hae ma doots”. As just one example, and to use my last literary cue, I have sometimes had something like the feeling Wordsworth had, as he says in *The Prelude*, when as a young boy he went rowing one night on Ullswater and there arose behind him as he rowed a great ominous black mass – a mountain – which loomed bigger and bigger until at last it really frightened him, and he turned tail and scurried back to the shore. Well, for me there arose ACQUISITION, and its interpretation here in Spain over the years. We moved from Ellis (1985) - 327 pages - to the great, looming Ellis (1994) - 824 pages! Now this is very unfair, and it may well be a question of personality. I am very much a ‘teacher-fronted teacher’ – and I would subscribe wholeheartedly to Prof. Widdowson's claim made in 2000 that “TESOL practitioners, I suggest, are, as individuals in the particular circumstances of their own classrooms, acting as artists in the exercise of their craft.” (Widdowson, 2000)

We are not talking here of the Romantic – or not only of the Romantic – artist: the essential term *craft* in this claim should be felt to

imply creative intelligence, hard graft, study, apprenticeship, practice, technical expertise and many other characteristics, all at the service of the production of the educational artefact, whether it manifest itself in the classroom, in the preparation and creation of materials, or in the sensitive, if rigorous, assessment of the learner's productive capacities.

I would be the first to admit that we have learnt a lot about learning (not so much about *studying*, though!), and have opened up several fields of research. A tremendous amount of energy has been devoted to the various facets of language acquisition, but I can't yet see the implications, or results, in our teaching practice and the students' final competences. I have the impression that in Spain (to generalise crudely) "acquisition" was taken on board too quickly, at the expense of learning. It's interesting to note, however, that in (yet another) very recent (2008) collection of articles on Applied Linguistics the editors in their Prologue to *25 years of applied linguistics* (AESLA 2008) have this to say:

"[...] El área de la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas [en la colección] destaca por el abundante número de las contribuciones seleccionadas. Además de los campos ya vetustos de 'enseñanza' y 'aprendizaje' (*la adquisición* de la lengua *materna* por una parte y *la enseñanza* de lenguas *extranjeras* por otra) ..." (Monroy and Sánchez, 2008; my emphasis)

Things have certainly changed!

### III. Materials production and teacher training

One of the things I've been fortunate enough to be able to do here is to write teaching materials, both at university and school levels. Maybe native speakers should be part-employed as materials writers? And I'm very glad to see some of my colleagues doing it. As far as the primary and secondary school situation is concerned, my getting involved with materials writing – with the inestimable stimulus and expertise of my friend and colleague Daniel Madrid – was, in part, an attempt at producing materials which would be relevant to the Andalusian educational situation, with a constant linguistic and cultural "toing and froing" between the two (inevitable) poles of the student's world: Spain/Spanish and the English-speaking world/English. It was also a reaction to the then fashionable glut of "blue skies" school textbooks coming

from the UK. Culture? The students must have got the impression from the glossy illustrations that the weather in Britain was nearly perfect, since it never rained in the book until lesson 12, where we had to teach “The Weather”!

I have always liked producing my own material. However, I am aware of the risk of editing one’s own materials for a specific context: they may well become too easy or too restricted. It is not easy, I think, to judge difficulties of level, and also to stop jumping on the methodological band-wagon. However, this is in part due to very wobbly assessment procedures. There is also the challenge, now, of preparing materials for the new tutorial/seminar classes supposedly to be introduced in the new university degree courses. What is going to be most interesting, of course, is the success or otherwise of materials taken or adapted from the Internet, etc. - I will return to this later.

One of the most satisfying periods of my work here has been the many years devoted to Teacher Training courses. Fundamentally because, when I was teaching them, we were operating within a relatively *stable* environment. “Filología Inglesa”, as it still is, has always been 90% an occupational course, with most of our students going on to teach in one context or another. Whether this will continue to be the case is an open question, given the new (obligatory) educational “Master”: it will be interesting to see where students who do NOT do the Master will “end up”. Or, more properly, my colleagues and the academic authorities will have to work out exactly what the final objectives of the 4-year first degree course are to be - *not* an enviable task!

#### **IV. English at the university – some more comments**

Although this is a commonplace, and I do not want to shift into the “moaning” mode, I cannot but comment briefly that one of the great disappointments of my time here has been the persistence of a totally inadequate system of selection of students for university studies in English, and I’m sorry to be leaving with this still unresolved. Even a modest attempt which we made some years ago, with the collaboration of a great number of secondary school teachers, intended to assess the feasibility of introducing a Listening Comprehension test into the school leaving examination, brought no results. There should clearly,



in my view, be a separate exam for those wishing to enter the Arts Faculty. That a more serious exam *can* be done is seen, for instance, in the Hungarian government's change of the final school examination in English, for *all* students, introduced in 2005, which includes reading, writing, grammar, listening and speaking components (see Csernoch and Korponayné Nagy, 2005).

Another, smaller, frustration is not having been able to introduce at least *one* subject on 'interlinguistic and intercultural mediation' (a.k.a. translation), where students would constantly have to operate in their two languages, into our Degree Course.

A third issue I would like to mention – and forgive me if I seem to be straying into areas which might be thought to be beyond my brief, but my basic training was in literature in a foreign language (in my case, German), and this training has been of enormous benefit to me in teaching English as a FL – is the most efficacious way of teaching literature in our speciality. Since we are no longer operating within the “encyclopaedic” system I have mentioned above, it seems to me that a chronological study of the literary “canon” is no longer a starter, and that it would help our students enormously – both in terms of developing reading skills and (vitaly) of *vocabulary expansion* if the literary part of the first two years of the degree course were devoted to modern and contemporary literature. This would contribute greatly to the integration of our studies which is so needed. In fact, if I may be so bold (or reckless!) I would actually argue for a very quick complete survey course (in Spanish), and then for *all* reading to be in 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literature texts. Thus the students would have considerable experience in practical literature skills, which would enable them to undertake the study of earlier periods in the postgraduate Master's course. I would also argue for an increased use of what has come to be termed “literature with a small *l*” (McRae, 1991).

A fourth, and final, reflection on English at university concerns English for Specific Purposes, an area which has been of special interest to Prof. Widdowson. During my time here, noble efforts have been made, in uncomfortable conditions, to provide ESP courses in several Faculties, and some of the teaching materials I mentioned above have been produced in this field, but it seems obvious that there has been, and is, no overall guiding plan. Which brings us, perhaps, to “*content teaching*”

(unfortunately, and in my view prematurely, advocated to some degree in the Andalusian authorities' "bilingual" programme in secondary education), which is already being introduced in some university studies. A fascinating, if extreme, view of future possibilities in this area is given in an article published in the *Guardian Weekly* in April 2005. In it the author claims that "...there is a risk that specialist English teachers [*at the university*] may be marginalised" (Graddol, 2005). He thinks that the trend is that students should not just become conversant in "general English", but should study (some of) their subjects in English. And he claims that more and more universities are becoming "corporatised", hence it is financially important for them to attract international students. (He also makes the now inevitable reference to the situation in Finland!). The author even sees things going on "until the teaching of English is focused entirely on young learners and remedial work for older students" (i.e. the teaching of general English would take place only in schools). This is a view reaching over greatly different university systems, of course, and we don't have to agree with all of it (and I return once more to the idea of "national learning styles"), but I think it would be short-sighted not to consider this a real possibility, with the implications it could have for the future of "English Studies".

## V. CALL

Finally, as I have intimated above, I'm sorry, in a way, to be missing out on future developments in CALL. Apart from the obvious advantages in studies of corpora, vocabulary instruction and in Data Driven Learning for materials elaboration, I would like to see exactly how the use of such things as Internet web quests develops in everyday teaching situations. For example I would be most interested to read of experimental research (some has been done), carried out with Spanish university learners of English as a foreign language, on the use and integration of the computer in our studies – in order to be able to give our students a pre-application course/introduction which would help them to use computers, e-mail and the Internet efficiently. I'm thinking of such specific topics as, for instance:

1. Reading in a FL on the computer. We know that reading on a computer can be about 25% slower than from paper. But what about these possible problems:

- What is the effect of **scrolling** (both vertically and horizontally) instead of turning a page: do FL learners find it difficult to remember information that has been scrolled off the screen?
- Does the existence of different **colour combinations** which users often find on web pages (e.g. green letters on a yellow background, instead of the traditional black on white) make comprehension more difficult?
- Coping with different sizes and varieties of **font** – or at least with a non-uniform font: to what extent does this impede or slow down reading input? Does it even affect the importance the reader gives to different items of the text, independently of their linguistic composition?
- To what extent is the learner able to **retain** FL text seen on a web page if he or she has to follow a **link** to another page?

2. Literature and culture: how will we develop the uses of such fantastic web sites as the one on Isaac Rosenberg (see the Virtual Seminars for Teaching Literature at [www.oucs.ox.ac.uk](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk) [accessed 29/05/08]).

3. Writing. We should maybe get evidence from our students on the efficacy of the use of e-mails in FL writing. There is some evidence from a class of U.S. university students learning Spanish as a foreign language. After comparing work written in e-mails with that done on paper, some of the most interesting results were that:

- a) the students **wrote more** per writing session than did the paper-and-pencil group;
- b) they asked **more questions**, that is, they used more interrogative forms;
- c) they used a greater variety of and **more language functions**; and
- d) they adopted a **more conversational tone** in their language (González Bueno, 1998).

4. Will we be able to develop a **methodology** for the use of the computer for foreign language learning, in order to save it from the fate of the language lab?

5. And finally, some general (and not original – see more in *ICT4LT*) questions on computer use that might be asked:

- Where might computers be most effective in FL learning? In what academic fields?
- In what way(s), precisely, could the use of computers improve our students' reading, writing, discourse – and thinking! – skills?
- What type of student might benefit most? And at what level?
- Exactly what type of computer applications would prove to be most effective, and for what content area?
- How can the usefulness of computer implication be most accurately assessed?

## VI. Some recapitulatory questions

And just to conclude this very fragmentary presentation of some “reflections” on 35 years' very enjoyable teaching experience here, some questions which may have to be answered over the coming years.

### “6 QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN SPAIN”:

1. Despite the growth in interest in EFL in Spain (for a positive view, see the article by Reichelt in *English Today*, July 2006), will we ever get an administration to implement instruments for more serious changes in social attitudes (e.g. undubbed films, instead of the present dubbed versions)?
2. Will reliable public exams ever be introduced? If not, is there much purpose in continuing “English studies”?
3. Will “English Studies” eventually be considered simply a “service industry” at university level? What are the real possibilities of content teaching?
4. Is there still a place for the study of English literature in an EFL university context in the traditional sense? Should we concentrate on “literature with a small ‘l’”?
5. Will there ever be real student responsibility (on which ECTS system depends)?
6. ICT: How much do we depend on the evaluation of the *effectiveness* of computer assisted language learning/multimedia material?

And “*That’s all, folks*”. Thank you very much.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT). Slough, Thames Valley University [Online]. Available from: [http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en\\_mod2-2.htm](http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod2-2.htm) [Accessed 25/05/2008].

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# THE MIND AND THE BODY IN THE LITERATURE OF WAR AND BACK TO PEACE

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## **Abstract**

This essay puts forward a hypothesis on the subject of alterity, war and literature. At the close, the hypothesis is illustrated by a brief examination of possibly the world's most famous twentieth-century novel: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). In order to present the ideas convincingly, an examination of three major ideas will be necessary. The first of these is Freud's account of *Unheimlichkeit*; the second is Gilbert's discussion of war and female libido, and the third is one articulated by myself and my colleague, Prof. Usandizaga, that the period of back to peace should be treated as a cultural category. I should emphasise at this point that what is suggested might be radical in some aspects but in fact what is occurring is simply a rearrangement of known facts in order to bring about a new understanding of parts of literary history. In other words, this essay represents an exercise in estrangement. This explains the choice of Orwell's text: we are perhaps so accustomed to its plot and ideas that we fail to see that its dystopic view of the world stems from a very simple idea: war overflows into peace in a fundamental but devastating way.

**Key words:** English literature, literary criticism, war, peace, gender, dystopia.

## **Resumen**

El presente artículo plantea una hipótesis acerca de la cuestión de la alteridad, la guerra y la literatura. En su parte final tal hipótesis queda explicada mediante un breve análisis de la que es probablemente la

novela más famosa del siglo veinte: *1984* (1949), de George Orwell. Con el propósito de presentar las ideas de manera convincente, se hace necesario un análisis de tres ideas esenciales. La primera se basa en el estudio que hace Freud de *Unheimlichkeit*; la segunda se apoya en el razonamiento que hace Gilbert de la guerra y la libido femenina, y la tercera es mía propia y de mi colega la profesora Usandizaga, que consiste en que el periodo de vuelta a la paz debería considerarse categoría cultural. Debería, llegado a este punto, insistir en que lo que aquí se sugiere pudiera ser considerado extremo en algunos aspectos; en realidad lo que está teniendo lugar es simplemente una redistribución de hechos conocidos con el propósito de dar pie a una nueva comprensión de las diferentes épocas de la historia literaria. Dicho de otra forma, este artículo pretende constituir un ejercicio de defamiliarización. Esto explica la elección del texto de Orwell: estamos quizás tan acostumbrados a su argumento e ideas que no llegamos a percibir que su visión distópica del mundo tiene su origen en una idea muy simple: la guerra se extiende sobre la paz de una manera fundamental pero a la vez devastadora.

**Palabras clave:** Literatura inglesa, crítica literaria, guerra, paz, género, distopia.

Before tackling Freud, a caveat about the definition of alterity has to be made. A brief glance at the OED informs us that the word itself dates back to at least 1642 when it had those same meanings that are current usage, namely, the state of being other, and, secondly, as a logical extension of the former, diversity. If we exist in any other form than the strictly rigid category of a self that is given rather than fashioned, then complications necessarily ensue. The word itself describes a phenomenon which in its post-religious, post-Darwinian, psychological model is most familiar to us in Stevenson's tale of Jekyll and Hyde. That said, the idea of a split personality is nothing new, indeed Stevenson's novelty stems not from his internalising the fight between good and evil in one tortured body and soul but from a different source altogether. Close attention to the text reveals that at the key moment of metamorphosis the narrator insists that alterity is binary because as yet nobody has the tools to formulate a more scientific distinction:



I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens. (84)

In other words, Stevenson is aware that a split personality is a comfortable division because its alterity is greatly limited. If the key to alterity is diversity, a split personality – or similar phraseology - fails to accurately describe that psychological uncertainty or even anarchy that such diversity produces.

The fluid nature of alterity has a considerable history. Clearly, the formalism of Shklovsky or Bakhtin are productive texts. Perhaps the problem of applying their theories to literary texts lies in their awareness of what fluidity actually means. In the case of the former, this stems from his interest in folk tales and orality, and in the latter, from the maligned term dialogism and its inherent instability. Both thinkers are, to use a political analogy, Trotskyists, aware that the moment Dostoevsky is conscious of the contrary nature of language we are set upon an incessant journey of toing and froing. We could similarly argue that such instability stems from the incessant contradictions that Friedrich Schlegel identifies as composite parts of Romantic irony. However, in the case of formalism, the reliance on intertextuality invites us to consider an ever recurring sequence of alterity which therefore has to take on a pattern of contiguity rather than being oppositional. That said, my hypothesis is that there are three basic axes of alterity. I would like to begin my exploration with Freud.

## I

The point of departure is his definition of *Unheimlichkeit* – the uncanny. The essay starts with a clear statement that his study centres on aesthetics and the use of language. For example, he states that “The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning ‘familiar’; ‘native,’ ‘belonging to the home’; and we are tempted to conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar”(154). Freud then goes on to argue

for something rather different. He states that although homely might be the first meaning, it has an additional significance, that which is kept from sight. He draws the conclusion that the term contains meanings which are apparently irreconcilable. His analysis of grim Germanic folktales and the importance of dolls which are neither alive nor completely inanimate underline the coexistence, the cohabitation of – what we thought to be – opposing forces. These horror tales, Jekyll and Hyde, our example here, work, that is they cause us to tremble with fear, because although we would like to exile alterity to another world, it is breathing into our ears whilst we sleep. Familiarity breeds dismay rather than contempt. The temptation that filmmakers seem unable to resist, to turn Stevenson’s character into a great hairy monster, is a move which Freud would judge as a purposeful attempt to ignore the uncomfortable truth that we are on intimate terms with the spirits that trouble us. In brief, alterity is a formulation of the war that goes on within each and every individual’s mind.

There are many literary representations of this; the closest to the Freudian model is, I would argue, Milton’s Eve, particularly at the moment when she dreams and wakes up in Books IV and V of *Paradise Lost*. Let us briefly comment on this episode: first, the dream itself:

So saying, on he led his radiant files,  
Dazzling the moon; these to the Bower direct  
In search of whom they sought. Him there they found  
Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve;  
Assaying by his devilish art to reach  
The organs of her fancy, and with them forge  
Illusions as he list, phantasms and dreams;  
Or if, inspiring venom, he might taint  
Th’animal spirits that from pure blood arise... (IV: 797-805)

Ithuriel and Zephon find Satan “squat like a toad” at Eve’s ear. Presumably, a toad is meant to suggest ugliness and poison which Eve’s pure blood has not yet heard of or imagined. However, the glory of Milton’s verse surely lies in his intuition that part of the Devil’s art (and perhaps Milton’s) is the awareness of the uncanny. On the one hand, we read a description of good and evil, of polar opposites, but on the other hand its very language suggests something different. How sexually uncanny is “the organs of her fancy” or “Th’ animal spirits that from pure blood arise”! However, although these lines could be used to argue for a female predisposition to sinfulness, they can also be used

to point out how humankind is tempted not by evil but by the uncanny, in other words, the uncanny forms the basis of temptation. This can be backed up by the way in which the exchange between angels and Satan which follows this passage emphasises how the angels are confused by Satan's protean nature. Moralists argue how he is reduced in size and in light, but the simpler and hopefully more convincing argument is that Milton's angels are unknowing victims of the power of the uncanny. Satan occupies some transitional state between greatness and a fall, yet the angels' awareness of his in-betweenness relies on a worldview that even in the brief passage of time after creation is conveyed to the readers as creaky.

A similar approach eases the reading of the equally problematic beginning of Book V.

“O sole in whom my thoughts find all repose,  
My glory, my perfection, glad I see  
 Thy face, and morn returned, for I this night –  
 Such night till this I never passed - have dreamed,  
 If dreamed, not as I oft am wont, of thee,  
 Works of day past, or morrow's next design,  
 But of offense and trouble, which my mind  
 Knew never till this irksome night. Methought  
 Close at mine ear one called me forth to walk  
 With gentle voice; I thought it thine. It said,  
 ‘Why sleepest thou Eve? Now is the pleasant time,  
 The cool, the silent, save where silence yields  
 To the night-warbling bird, that now awake  
 Tunes sweetest his love-labored song; now reigns  
 Full orb'd the Moon, and with more pleasing light  
 Shadowy sets off the face of things; in vain,  
 If none regard; heav'n wakes with all his eyes,  
Whom to behold but thee, Nature's desire,  
 In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment  
 Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze.’  
 I rose as at thy call, but found thee not...” (V: 28-48)

An emphasis on the contradictory nature of Eve's thoughts, on the possible mistrust of the imagination, on the way Satan's words, in true Bakhtinian style, become hers through indirect speech are all possibilities for enlightening the text. But so is the use of the uncanny. How clear our understanding of “Nature's desire” of “ravishment” of “beauty still to gaze” become once we accept that her vision of the world is not one

determined by Calvinist views of the female nor by a binary view of good and evil. Instead, it shows awareness that the human condition is fragile because full knowledge obliges us not to distance ourselves from threatening concepts but to accept the rationale of the uncanny.

A simple and more traditional explanation of Freud's thinking would have been to outline the shift in his later writings where he moves away from the individual psyche towards a concern for the more overtly social nature of humanity. At the risk of greatly oversimplifying a complex subject, this is evident in the titles of some of the later works, such as *Group Psychology* (1921) or *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930), and particularly in his brief exchange of correspondence with Einstein entitled "Why War?" (1932). Freud's growing disillusionment is manifest in his belief that Eros, the urge for reproduction and the continuance of humanity, is being replaced by Thanatos, the urge for destruction and the obliteration of the human race. It is as if his earlier work has been honed down and what we are left with is simply an unpleasant truth about the function of social life. Although his most famous treatises deal with general or gendered questions, dreams, the Oedipus complex, penis envy and so on, the focus of his attention is very much on the way that phenomena are identifiable in individual cases: Little Hans and Dora, for example. Yet surely the tension and controversy in much of his work stems from a methodological problem: to what extent are we right in translating the implications of individual cases into a theory of universal drives? In his later work, he is simply more specific, untroubled by that problem, and consequently borders fatalism.

If Freud is right, then literature, and more specifically the literature of war is one, if not the most important linguistic manifestation of Thanatos, bearing in mind always that Freud's theories are based on the observation and analysis of linguistic phenomena. We could start with a simple example, that of periodisation, which has always been inextricably linked with wars: Romanticism with Napoleon; modernism with World War I and postmodernism with World War II.

## II

I would like to analyse alterity in war literature, starting with one of the greatest poems of World War I, Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting."

It has received plenty of attention from the autobiographical school of reading as a prediction of Owen's futile death at almost the latest possible moment of the war, as well as from a political-cum-sociological reading. In the latter case, the poem apparently reflects the futility of national conflicts. But does that mean its conclusion makes a humanist appreciation centred on forgiveness and/or universal values feasible? Are we all equal in death? Or is that a forced reading? With my remarks on alterity in mind, hopefully something different emerges. The poem ends:

I am the enemy you killed, my friend,  
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned  
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
Let us sleep now<sup>1</sup>... (40-44)

Bleakness is there in the concluding need for rest. It may be "requiem" but there is little evidence that it will be "in pace" and perhaps there is more emphasis on oblivion; it is more agnostic than Christian. That said, what I believe we have here is a perfect example of the Freudian uncanny: a violent alteration between the homely and the unfamiliar. Only for this reason can the enemy be friend, in the same way that Jekyll can be Hyde. What the first person meets here is his other self. One clearly intends to kill, but whether the other is passive, wishes his own death or is not a very good soldier, amongst other things, is debatable. The point here is that even though it is understandable to use oppositional language, the physical representation of the two souls, ghost or spirits is literally, and never better said than that, contiguous, as "I" and "you" seemingly merge. Freud might also be responsible for our suspicion that Owen not only gives this passage a deeply homoerotic colouring but a distinctly sexual one: "through me as you jabbed". There is a whole school of study on this subject, though as George Walter points out in the introduction to his recent – 2004 – anthology of World War I poetry, the canonisation of Owen and Sassoon took place in the 1960s (xxviii). In other words, the futility school of thinking is a relatively recent development which has not met with universal acceptance; not everyone feels it represents the natural response to war.

It is most important to realise that twentieth-century poetry is distinctive precisely because of what Freudian angst reveals. Even though crises might be individually based, as stated above, as in this

highly individualistic poem, the twentieth century was one of collective madness. This can be illustrated by two examples. The historian Mark Mazower, entitles his study of twentieth-century European history *Dark Continent*, an exercise in estranging the title of Conrad's novella: the authentic heart of darkness is Europe. This was put very clearly in a relatively popular thriller I recently picked up in an airport: Christian Jungersen's *The Exception* (2006), centred on the lives of four individuals working in the Danish Centre of Genocide Studies: in a report, one of them writes:

For thousands of years genocides have been known to take place in just about every location on earth...In the course of the twentieth century, over 100 million people have died in genocides and wars. This is more than five times the number killed in this way during the nineteenth century. (290)

It is commonplace to argue that war condones what was previously taboo. Arguably the most graphic literary illustration would be Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965). Its hero kills in wartime and is a hero whereas in peacetime he murders his wife. There is nothing out of the ordinary here – in a work of fiction - but what Mailer does is parallel the post-war political career of his fictional hero with that of the recently assassinated Jack Kennedy. If we add to that the suggestive title, Mailer would place violence at the centre of any imperial adventure. In other words, he is striving to be more sophisticated and ambitious than the spate of post-Vietnam films which rarely move beyond trauma centred on the depersonalisation of idealistic young men.

That said, we should not lose sight that the structure of *Paradise Lost* juxtaposes a gender war and an all-out war between the armies of Heaven and Satan. It is interesting to speculate the relationship between the two: how they succeed and interweave with each other. As we have seen, Milton realises that sexuality and gender lie at the centre of war, which is one step away from the commonplace affirmation that war, by loosening and restructuring social bonds, intensifies all experience. World War I, both historically and in the history of literature is the most outstanding example. I will use, as a basis, Sandra Gilbert's controversial article "Soldier Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women and the Great War." As an epigraph, it has several brief citations, the most provocative of which is from the pen of the suffragette Christabel Pankhurst: "This great war...is Nature's vengeance – is God's vengeance

upon the people who held women in subjection, and by doing that have destroyed the perfect human balance” (422). Pankhurst is stridently militant: if you are a believer, it is God’s vengeance; if you are not, then it is Nature’s. In either case it is a punishment sent from the highest authority on the heads of wrongdoers. Again, one wonders whether Milton had similar thoughts in mind.

Gilbert’s article is justly famous for the way that it discusses not only the phenomenon of wars, literary, gender, military and propagandistic, but also what the consequences were. The starting point is that if Owen weakens the alterity of us and them, friends and enemy, what occurs when another alterity, home front against the Western front, men against women, undergoes the process of war? In her own words, “the effects of the Great War were in every case gender-specific problems” (423) to such an extent that one observer commented that in 1918 “England was a world of women - women in uniform” (425). “In uniform” might suggest many things, an additional attractiveness, a diminished attractiveness, but what it is surely significant in the word “uniform” is that women are in a position of authority, which begins within hierarchical institutions but spreads over into the world of gender roles and into sexuality. What is being suggested is that this domination of England by women is uniform, in the sense of complete. Leaving aside such considerations as the late Victorian New Woman, which numerically affects a minority, we are witnessing a radical societal change in perceptions of gender that affect huge chunks of the population. Thus there is a marked contrast between what Gilbert labels male sexual gloom and female sexual glee (426). War, then, arguably liberated many women but destroyed and entrapped many men. Thus we get to the point that I referred to earlier when Gilbert affirms that the war brought about “a release of female libidinal energies” (436). The war truly became a war about wars. Whereas the war brings liberation for some, it brings death to others. One consequence is that gender relationships become more embittered and strained than ever before. Resentment sets in when women hand out white feathers, and poets like Jessie Pope become arch-apologists for the war effort, as jingoistic as any living person can ever be. Thus the mother who iconically suckles her child turns into the monster who iconically sends her child off to the trenches to die. We are surely all aware of the dramatic poster “Women of Britain Say Go.” The home front might be the place soldiers seek to defend, but it becomes a realm

of safety and pleasurable excitement which is propped up primarily by male sacrifice. In a very logical chain of events, liberation leads to misogyny.

How is this apparent in the literature of the period and soon thereafter? I would emphasise a trope that frequently appears in canonical texts to underpin the new relationship between men and women: wounds. Perhaps the most blatant exposition is one of the twentieth century's most perverse novels, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), possibly the English equivalent to De Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782). It is certain that military uniforms appear in the novel, but the wars soldiers and nurses are engaged in are sexual; one twist after another reveals the disastrous relationships of two modern marriages. Their leisurely pace of life: their tours, their transatlantic journeys, the country house, all suggest that the aristocracy, moneyed or otherwise, European or American, is not only decadent but corrupt and self-destructive, all of which is probable, but its enigma lies in the use all four main protagonists make of sexuality as a commodity and weapon, confirming the radical switch in the sexual behaviour of men and women that lies at the centre of Gilbert's argument. Those not familiar with Ford's brilliance might see resemblances here with D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928); Lawrence's text is undoubtedly more open in its political agenda, contrasting as it does mines against a county house, but the other focus in this clearly post-war novel is gender and sexuality. The title itself is suggestive: it is her lover; that is her lover in as strident a fashion as Jane Eyre informs readers in chapter thirty-eight that "I married him." In other words, the female is the subject and the man, the object. The narrative makes it clear that Mellors is real sexuality, real passion, yet this has to be contrasted by another motif, that he is at her service, not simply in the hierarchical social world they inhabit. Her early encounters cloud this power relationship because she is unable to speak outside the limits of the language of romance. Thus, the central question is phrased so melodramatically: "And you don't really think that I wanted to make use of you, do you?" (184) By the time we reach the famous scene of nakedness and rain, she has acquired a different language and a more dominant position. The scene might seem absurd, but as a sexual fantasy it is the fulfilment of her desire. She takes the lead, he follows: "It was too much. He jumped out, naked and white, with a little



shiver, into the hard slanting rain” (230). Too much attention to the question of class, to the distinction between philosophy and the body might obscure the face that Mellors is there to serve, however much traditional alterity or roles would suggest the opposite. In other words, her financial dominance reinforces sexual dominance. As Gilbert points out, the effects of World War I are evidenced by the presence of wounds and “notorious heroines” (438). The literature of the time is peopled by the wounded, but this wound is often, as in the case of Lawrence’s moneyed men, emasculation, the inability to cope with the demands of the release of female libido. This is surely why he is so ambivalent a writer, appearing both conservative and liberal, pressing, it would seem, for more fluid class relations and keenly aware of what female liberation might lead to while seemingly resistant to what its results entail. Hence, the emphasis that Lady Chatterley’s power is based more on money than anything else, which is partly a let-out, allowing him to tackle head-on what Gilbert suggests without requiring full commitment.

It comes as no surprise that the crudeness of Hemingway provides the clearest manifestation of post-World War I wounding. I am not thinking necessarily of the Spanish, macho-obsessed Hemingway but Hemingway as the creator of Catherine Barkley. In a reversal of roles, the nurse, as well as administering to the sick, turns the hospital, sacrilegiously, into the ideal location for a sexual encounter. The nakedness of the language is striking:

Catherine sat in a chair by the bed. The door was open into the hall.  
The wildness was gone and I felt finer than I have ever felt.  
She asked, “Now do you believe I love you?”  
“Oh, you’re lovely,” I said, “You’ve got to stay. They can’t send you away. I’m crazy in love with you.”  
“We’ll have to be awfully careful. That was just madness. We can’t do that.”  
“We can at night.” (92)

The hallmark short sentences, the absence of subordination and the use of “can” and “can’t” pinpoint the obvious point that their sexual activity heals a wound – sexual desire – in a place where physical illness is attended to. Despite the appearance that male pleading wins over female resistance, the fact that he is prostrate in a hospital bed indicates that Catherine is really the person in charge who determines

when “madness” takes place. She is the person who has radically reoriented sexual behaviour; she decides what a bed may or may not be used for.

### III

The third axis of alterity which I would like to consider is that of war and peace, and more concretely, their assumed polarity. What we have argued in a volume of essays entitled *Back to Peace: Reconciliation and Retribution in the Postwar Period* is that the two opposing ideas – is there a better example of polarity than war and peace? - are closer than we might assume. The idea stems from an observation by the nineteenth century theoretician and chronicler of war, Carl von Clausewitz. His contribution to our understanding of conflict is to bring it into our everyday life. By this, I mean he does not envisage war as simply an external event taking place on a distant front. Clausewitz, writing in the time of Napoleon, forces us to grasp an essential fact: “We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means” (99). This statement seems chillingly contemporary if we glance at the world around us. Clausewitz does not see war, therefore, as an autonomous object - with a beginning, the declaration of war, and with an end, the signing of a peace treaty - but as something fluid, elastic, indefinite or whatever synonym we put in their place. In a binary relationship, war is the opposite of peace, but once we consider the Clausewitzian formula, once it is part of policy, it becomes by its very nature, ongoing. Thus, he argues that a defeat is often a preparatory exercise for the next war, and is therefore a defeat – or a victory – that is by its very nature ephemeral. (89) He predicts that sort of logic that is employed to explain events in the recent history of the Balkans, but Clausewitz is also proposing something more radical. He is not very far from a Freudian formulation: war and peace start off as being opposites but uncannily move towards one another. In addition, he might also intuit how important language is in impressing on people that war achieves positive results when this may not be case. By its very nature, war is, following Clausewitz and Freud, empty of that idealism, heroism and glamour with which states and their elites strive to imbue it. Once it is part of political life, this must be so.

It is undeniable that the concept of “postwar” is up-and-standing already. It suggests that a period of adjustment is always necessary for both soldiers and civilians to accustom themselves to the realities of a war-free, civil society. This period of adjustment is difficult and often traumatic, contrary to the image of the soldier arriving home, dumping his kit-bag and throwing himself into the arms of his loving wife while his bemused children look on in wonder. From our study, we have learnt that governments invested great time and energy in preparing both soldiers and civilians for the postwar period. From one iconic picture, we can move on to more troublesome images: the veteran who cannot adjust to civilian life or who cannot find a job; the couple whose sex-life becomes even more troublesome and traumatic than before as pre-war roles no longer apply; children who cannot recognise their father, but see him as an intruder, and so on. Lorna Sage’s successful autobiography *Bad Blood* (2001) provides one of the most vivid accounts of a “lost” father.

Our contribution to the debate is to suggest that this perception needs modification, as it is indeed a cultural category. The reason why this needs serious consideration is that if readjustment is slow to occur or is never reached, the lack of success is put down either to time or problematic circumstances that will eventually be overcome. The former suggests that for some people adjustment takes longer than for others, and the latter that in certain dramatic and exceptional cases, individuals never make it back to peace. The canonical primacy given to Sassoon and Graves are clear examples of how this is represented in literature. However, by briefly considering two different cases, we will gain further evidence that back to peace is an extremely tricky concept:

Yet we may accurately say that one of the foundational texts of Western culture, Homer’s *Odyssey*, is a story about the cultural, political and personal implications of returning to peace...[it] mythologizes the immensely difficult and dangerous adventure of returning to peace. Homer imagines for Ulysses, in his legitimate desire to recover his wife, his son and his estate, a return that implies all kinds of difficulties and which will lead to further fighting, this time of a domestic kind, against the pretenders. (Usandizaga and Monnickendam 2007: 3)

The frenzied killing of the pretenders in Book XXIII is in no way less violent than the Trojan War itself. It is more so, perhaps, because it has

brought the battlefield into the home. The strong parallel is reinforced by Athena's intervention when she links the cause of war: Helen in the earlier conflict, Penelope in the present one. Parallels are bound to suggest themselves in the formulaic language of death, "a mist fell over both his eyes", which is used on both fronts, and that all important feature of a battlefield, the wailing women. The weightiest thematic parallel is the constant overlapping of military campaigns and gender (Helen and Penelope). Neither can Penelope leap into Odysseus's arms, as the iconic return of the warrior image leads us to expect; this greatly perplexes Telemachus. As Book XXIII narrates, the return is fraught with tension; the epithet Odysseus applies to his wife is "a strange woman" (23: 166) because she will not share his bed. What is evident is that the combatant returns with great difficulty as his very identity is put into question: even his closest relations, his wife and father, have doubts as to who he really is. Consequently, Odysseus's return is the fundamental back to peace text for its insistence on the difficulties the combatant faces, evident in the way in which the final books of the epic contain adventures which are as fraught with danger as the earlier ones.

As the civilian becomes – numerically – the major victim of warfare in the twentieth century, the trauma of back to peace becomes a subject profoundly discussed by non-combatants. Arguably, the key figure here is Primo Levi. On the one hand, it is true that the extermination camp internee becomes the epitome of the horror of modern wars, whereas on the other hand, this key figure, it could be argued, describes an experience that is extreme. I do not find the second argument very helpful, in that the concentration camp is the prime example of the application of the industrial process to death, and is therefore a representative product of that modernity to which we all belong. Rather than get deeply involved in the debate about representation, I believe Levi's work is an essential part of back to peace for his lucid account of trauma; I would like to concentrate on two facets: his definition of his own situation, and the question of forgiveness, as recounted in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988).

The title suggests a simple distinction between those who were murdered – the drowned – and those who survived and were therefore saved. But Levi's troublesome logic leads him to conclude that "the worst survived, the selfish, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of the

‘grey zones’, the spies. It was not a certain rule...but it was, nevertheless, a rule” (63). The question of guilt runs through the whole book; here the focus is on the feeling of guilt shared by the survivors, hence the essay is entitled “Shame.” But even in this short extract, we can identify that guilt is enhanced precisely by the inability to make sense of the world. The book is marked by this constant switching of ideas, from one proposition to its opposite, leading inevitably to a movement away from any sense of certainty. Consequently, for example, he does not believe that his role can be that of a witness, as there would be no “proportion between the privilege [survival] and the outcome” (63). Of course, it is impossible to separate Levi’s words from his own suicide, unless it was predicted by his express belief that “suicide is an act of man and not of the animal” (57). It is therefore the saved who are also drowned in the end, as suffering prevents them from ever returning to peace.

That said, Levi has no doubts about another subject: that of the victim.

Here, as with other phenomena, we are dealing with a paradoxical analogy between victim and oppressor, and we are anxious to be clear: both are in the same trap, but it is the oppressor, and he alone, who has activated it, and if he suffers from this, it is right that he should suffer; and it is iniquitous that the victim should suffer from it as indeed he does suffer from it even at a distance of decades. (12)

It would seem irrefutable that Levi is horrified by political correctness when it accounts for violence by proposing that the aggressor is a victim of, say, childhood abuse or poverty. This might need reinforcing by paying attention to the trap. As a metaphor, it is not meant to communicate the fact that both oppressor and victim have fallen into the same trap, as this reduces the oppressor’s role as agent to almost zero. The metaphor comes clearly from hunting: the oppressor has set the trap and the innocent have been ensnared. Consequently, he makes the unequivocal statement that

the failure to divulge the truth about the Lagers represents one of the major collective crimes of the German people, and the most obvious demonstration of the cowardice to which Hitlerian terror had reduced them: a cowardice which became an integral part of mores. (4)

Not surprisingly, the translation of Levi’s texts into German resulted in some controversy in Germany itself, but Levi, in the conclusion,

reiterates his basic belief: torturers were, on the whole, average people, and that is the lesson of history.

If back to peace never brings peace to Levi and his fellow-survivors, one sentence from this book leads us on to another level of impossibility: “inside the Lager, on a smaller scale but with amplified characteristics, was reproduced the hierarchical structure of the totalitarian state, in which all power is invested from above” (31). Or, if we turn the sentence round, a totalitarian state is simply a huge extermination camp. A similar logic underlines the work of Solzhenitsyn, who applies the paradigm of a hospital ward to the Soviet Union in *Cancer Ward* (1968). If that is so, then the pioneering work on modern totalitarianism is *1984*. As I will argue, it is deeply informed by the logic of back to peace, as the following citations demonstrate.

At this moment, for example, in 1984 (if it was 1984), Oceania was at war with Eurasia and in alliance with Eastasia. In no public or private utterance was it ever admitted that the three powers had at any time been grouped along different lines. Actually, as Winston well knew, it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia and in alliance with Eurasia. But that was merely a piece of furtive knowledge which he happened to possess because his memory was not satisfactorily under control. Officially the change of partners had never happened. Oceania was at war with Eurasia: therefore Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia. The enemy of the moment always represented absolute evil, and it followed that any past or future agreement with him was impossible. (34)

The state satisfactory controls other minds by the use of propaganda messages on huge billboards. As Maureen Waller points out, during World War II, these were posted all over Britain, and no one could escape their gaze, even more pervasive and powerful than that of a possible literary predecessor, Dr. Eckelburg in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Orwell’s text might seem unconvincing, as it would suggest the huge majority of people are willingly ignorant of recent, catastrophic events. This was precisely the point Levi had tried to make; we have another example of collective cowardice. In addition, we should not forget that this passage clearly follows Clausewitz’s logic. Yet, the doubt surely remains: is it really convincing that friends can be enemies in such a short time without anyone batting an eyelid? In the first place, the logic of back to peace would suggest that peace does not necessarily bring immediate

peace, as the bomb incident in chapter eight of part one would suggest, highlighted by its use of a blitz scenario and language. Second, it is clear that words can easily slip into their opposite whether it is through the uncanny or political manoeuvring. A dictionary of military euphemisms which often suggest the opposite of what they mean would take a long time to compile only because it is continually expanding. What can be more contradictory than a phrase like “friendly fire”? Another which is losing most of its meaning is peace itself; this is easily proven by looking at a publication whose name was considered during the Cold War as meaning its opposite, *Pravda*. Russia’s military intervention in Georgia was based on the language of peace, we are told. In an article entitled “Russia: Again Savior of Peace and Life”, we read, “Tshinvali is reported to be short of medicine and water, while most of the city’s communication networks have been destroyed. Russian peacekeepers are assisting remaining residents” (nnp). In line with Orwell’s Big Brother, declarations by senior ministers and President Medvedev lend veracity to the article. In other words, reporting has one objective, put it an Orwellian epithet: Officialdom is Truth.

My final example would be the description of Julia’s body:

She stood looking at him for an instant, then felt at the zipper of her overalls. And, yes! it was almost as in his dream. Almost as swiftly as he had imagined it, she had torn her clothes off, and when she flung them aside it was with that same magnificent gesture by which a whole civilization seemed to be annihilated. Her body gleamed white in the sun. But for a moment he did not look at her body; his eyes were anchored by the freckled face with its faint, bold smile. He knelt down before her and took her hands in his

“Have you done this before?”

“Of course. Hundreds of times—well scores of times anyway.”

“With Party members?”

“Yes, always with Party members.”

“With members of the Inner Party?”

“Not with those swine, no.” (111)

One could never say that Orwell was good at writing about sexuality. It does seem clichéd at some moments: “Her body gleamed white in the sun,” at others, over the top: “it was with that same magnificent gesture by which a whole civilization seemed to be annihilated.” It also makes sense in that if the urban world is the dystopia, the utopia is, very much along Lawrentian lines, the English countryside, the Golden

Country, though prudishness will never let Orwell go much farther than this. Readers and critics often follow Winston's own line that it is unconvincing that a varicose-ridden pen-pusher is attractive to a sexually enchanting goddess, as this citation describes her. But Orwell is perhaps more aware of the nature of back to peace than some of his commentators. For example, if this dystopia is influenced by Zamyatin's *We* (1924), there is a marked difference in the description of sexuality. Zamyatin's downtrodden citizens have their sex-life regulated and rationed in their transparent buildings; we get no indication that much goes on outside those confines. However Orwell recognises that sexual Puritanism is a product of education, hence here he probably does follow Lawrence in his critical view of English social conduct, and therefore Julia's leading Winston fully obeys the logic of "Soldier's Heart." In *1984*, it is perhaps the only sphere of life which the Inner Party cannot fully control, hence Julia must be punished for making this evident to non-Inner Party members. There is no greater example of the dynamics of back to peace than this. In conclusion then, the distinction made between having sexual intercourse with Winston and not having sexual intercourse with the ruling elite shows that Orwell is extremely aware of the contiguity of war and gender. I think it would be fair to say that initially *1984* seems a long way from "Soldier's Heart" but its awareness of the inter-connectedness of war and gender is crystal clear. The diversity of literary texts we have discussed all point in that same direction.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A manuscript version has a slightly different line: "I was a German conscript and your friend"; the final version is therefore less based on the politics of nations and more dependent on wider concerns.

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# A ROMANCE OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: VICTORIA HISLOP'S *THE RETURN*, AND STRATEGIES OF IGNORANCE

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## **Abstract**

A discussion of *The Return* by Victoria Hislop, a romance fiction about the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), published in English in 2008. This novel is a researched fiction intended to bring a knowledge of the events of the Spanish Civil War to a large summer holiday readership. *The Return* is identified as an unstable text, rhetorically and narratively. The novel succeeds by dramatizing such little-known events as the “tragic exodus” from Málaga in 1937, and the imprisoning of Spanish exiles in south-western France in 1939. The novel fails in having a complex narrative structure that requires the readership to accept improbable lapses in knowledge of ordinary matters (such as the central character’s ignorance of her mother), or in instances where information is deliberately withheld, or research fails. These are the strategies of ignorance upon which the text relies in order to constitute itself both as a romantic fiction and as a source of knowledge about the civil war.

**Key words:** romantic fiction; Spanish Civil War; civil war in Granada; Málaga, Madrid, Bilbao; researched fiction; narrative; dance; salsa; flamenco; James Aldridge; best-seller; readership.

## **Resumen**

Se analiza *The Return*, de Victoria Hislop, novela sobre la Guerra Civil española (1936-39) publicada en inglés en 2008. Esta obra de ficción de investigación tiene el propósito de poner los acontecimientos que tuvieron lugar en la Guerra Civil española en conocimiento de un

amplio número de lectores que leen en sus vacaciones veraniegas. *The Return* se constituye en un texto inestable desde un punto de vista retórico y narrativo. La novela consigue con éxito dramatizar eventos poco conocidos tales como el “trágico éxodo” de Málaga en 1937 y el encarcelamiento de exiliados españoles en el suroeste de Francia en 1939. La novela fracasa sin embargo en aspectos tales como su compleja estructura narrativa, que obliga al lector a aceptar improbables lagunas de conocimiento de cuestiones de trámite (como que el personaje principal desconozca muchas cosas de su madre), o en ocasiones en que se oculta información deliberadamente, o en que no es eficaz la investigación realizada. Tales son las estrategias de ignorancia en las cuales se basa el texto a la hora de constituirse tanto en novela romántica como en fuente de conocimiento sobre la guerra civil.

**Palabras clave:** novela romántica, Guerra Civil española, Guerra Civil en Granada, Málaga, Madrid, Bilbao, ficción de investigación, narrativa, danza, salsa, flamenco, James Aldridge, éxito de ventas, lectorado.

## I

*The Return* is a romance by a British author whose first novel, *The Island*, has sold over a million copies in the United Kingdom. This, her second romance, is about the Spanish Civil War, and it will deliver to a huge readership in English all that they are likely to learn about the conflict of 1936-39. That is why I wish to discuss it here. *The Return* anticipates from its readership no knowledge whatever of political events during the 1930s, in either Europe or Spain. This is realistic, given the choices made by history teaching in the British system. More significantly, this fiction was begun from a position of ignorance on the author's part: Victoria Hislop admits, in an afterword to the novel, that when visiting Granada “I realised that the war must have been a cataclysmic event”, but one she had not known about: “It was puzzling to realise that I had visited Spain so many times and not been aware of it”.<sup>1</sup> She tells her readers that she began researching the novel in 2005, and “was told” (428) that there exist some fourteen thousand books on the war. *The Return* is a *researched* fiction, researched for the benefit of both its author and its readers. One benefit for the author is

that research establishes her authority by showing that this fiction is authentic.<sup>2</sup> However, *The Return* is also an “experienced” fiction, in the sense that it describes contemporary events, some of which were close to those experienced by the author, in particular her interest in salsa, and her visits to Granada and to the house of García Lorca. *The Return* is divided between the discoveries of research, which because “factual” are also limiting, and the chances and accidents of daily life, which are unpredictable and open.

*The Return* was published on 26 June 2008, and as I begin writing this discussion, the London *Sunday Times* newspaper records that the novel had sold 37.045 copies by 16 August, and has spent a period of eight weeks in the best-seller lists.<sup>3</sup> This suggests a possible sale of a quarter of a million in a year, though its planned publication in paperback on 16 April 2009 will no doubt cause a surge in sales. The date of publication is significant, because the novel is intended for a very specific audience: a summer readership that will take the book to read on holiday. This particular circumstance of consumption is widely recognised by the reviews, which consistently link the destructiveness of a distant civil war with “the beach” – where reading is assumed to take place – as when the literary editor of the upmarket and liberal *Independent* newspaper remarks that “Hislop deserves a medal for opening a breach into the holiday beach-bag”, whilst the reviewer in the *Scotsman* writes that though a leader in the “best holiday read” category, “the story will cast a shadow over the lighthearted atmosphere on the beaches of southern Spain”.<sup>4</sup>

This “summer” context may suggest that the text itself is trivial, but it is not, as these reviewers’ remarks indicate: the beach has been invaded by seriousness. Hislop’s seriousness is indicated by an “Author’s Note” dated June 2008 that celebrates the Law of Historical Memory and ends: “The ‘*pacto de olvido*’, the pact of forgetting, is finally being broken” (423). Here, the author is taking on a responsibility to be contemporary that is wholly admirable. Above all, the need to explain Spanish politics to an uninformed “beach” audience is what the novel primarily sets out to do: Part 2, the section describing the war, is two hundred and fifty pages long.

Victoria Hislop’s sentence about the *pacto de olvido* suggests that she holds political views sympathetic to the historical situation of the

Republic, as indeed she does: in the political discussion added to a special edition of the novel, from which I have already quoted, she writes that when her research revealed to her episodes and places evoking the “extreme cruelty” of Spanish Fascism, it followed that “I could not have adopted anything other than a ‘left-wing’ approach” (431) to the civil war. An attentive reader may pause over the words between quotation marks, since this highlighting indicates a certain self-consciousness about being politically on the left: one might infer that she is not herself “left-wing”, but that the attribute of left-wingness is out there, available as a resource to be adopted when historical research makes impossible any other interpretation. This suspicion is confirmed by an interview published in the London *Times* whose author suggests that from his knowledge of Victoria Hislop he understands what her political position might normally be:

Like her books, she bears aspects of the thinking person’s Middle England. Curious, tentative, bright, conservative with a middle-sized ‘c’, but pulled farther to the left than her natural inclination by the sympathies she developed for the Republican cause during her extensive research.<sup>5</sup>

The politics of *The Return* are to the left of their author’s personality, education, and class position because the truths about Spain uncovered by research triumph over her formation as a particular kind of Englishwoman. It must already be apparent that *The Return* will turn out to be a complex text: it is a paradoxical text, a beach-novel that has altered the politics of its author, containing revelations that may blight its readers’ lightheartedness on an Andalucian beach. It has unexpected characteristics for a romance, for it engages with the political and military brutalities of both the civil war and the fifteen years following. Yet it is a romantic novel before everything, and must tell a story of life and love. It begins conventionally by describing the life of a middle-class woman of thirty-five who works in public relations in London in 2001, but moves back in time to describe the lives of a family who own a café in Granada in the 1930s. This attempt to write about family life in another country in another time is unusual, and indeed risky, given Hislop’s lack of direct experience. The attempt to understand and represent Spanish family life is genuine, but the idea of Spain is undermined (as we shall see) by the requirements of a British idea of the components of “Spanishness”. Nevertheless, there

are complexities here that one would not ordinarily associate with the genre of the romantic novel as it is practised by Georgette Heyer, or Barbara Cartland.

Hislop herself tells us that it was a visit to García Lorca's summer home at the Huerta de San Vicente in Granada that was the "inspiration" for her novel. This experience led to "an almost obsessive interest" in the civil war.<sup>6</sup> Such self-characterizations ("my inspiration", "my obsession") are often used by the authors of popular fiction to legitimise an interest that the reader is being asked to share, and to purchase. This is a very different kind of discourse from Hislop's sober commentary on the Law of Historical Memory. We shall notice again the way in which this author adopts multiple discourses.

Hislop's research into the Spanish Civil War has produced a version of events that is reliable, and which may be trusted by readers new to the war. She tells us that she had already read Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and had seen Ken Loach's 1995 film *Land and Freedom*, though there is no indication that she has identified the differing political positions occupied by Hemingway and Loach, which are Communist and Trotskyist respectively.<sup>7</sup> New research meant reading Paul Preston, Hugh Thomas and Anthony Beevor, whilst she is aware of Spanish revisionist history, and specifies "most famously a man called Pío Moa, whose books are bestsellers", a naïve formulation that must refer primarily to *Los Mitos de la Guerra Civil* of 2003. Pío Moa's sanctimonious dedication to this work – "*A los jóvenes, que deben conocer la historia*" – has been unpersuasive in this case, for Hislop knew early on that "I was not going to be persuaded by the revisionists" (431). Research is supplemented – as it must be for the writer of romances – by personal experience. On a visit to see Franco's tomb under the basilica at El Valle de los Caídos:

I was really sickened by the sight of it and by the reverential atmosphere. I watched some nuns crossing themselves and wondered how they could have reconciled any of Franco's actions with their religious faith, and realised I would never begin to understand. (434)

We are being reassured that her "left-wing" position is the outcome of *feeling*, and not – we are to infer – political ideology.

This last is only one of a number of distinct discourses to accumulate around *The Return*, even before we consider the text itself. I have quoted

from a “placing” interview in the *Times* that mediates Hislop’s own discourse, and which takes the opportunity both to identify her personal conservatism, and to criticise the novel itself – the prose is described as “functional”, the heroine Sonia “a cipher”. Celebrity interviews such as this necessarily hand control to the interviewer, but a journalist with Hislop’s ready access to newspapers and magazines can publish articles wholly controlled by the author herself. For the Travel section of the *Daily Telegraph* she wrote “Granada: the city that inspired a bestseller”, where two separate discourses – of self-explanation, and self-publicity – are combined. Research and personal experience are again invoked as the route towards her unexceptionable political position on the civil war. She sentimentalizes the city (“The Moorish and the European jostle against each other in a pleasingly chaotic fashion”), yet settles upon current controversy about graffiti – specifically in her admiration for the work of El Niño de las Pinturas – without apparently recognising that she is intervening in a debate that is currently taking place within Granada itself. She asks herself if an elderly waiter she has seen will recognise himself as the original of one of her characters, Javier/Miguel. Casa Enrique, with its barrel outside, is revealed to be the original of the bar El Barril in the novel. Travel writing and publicity are skilfully linked here. These are examples of the meta-discourses that legitimate popular fiction, and without which they cannot succeed.

## II

What then, is the story, and who is it that returns to Spain, and why? A simplified account, which includes a spoiler, follows. Sonia, a Londoner in her mid-thirties goes to Granada to learn salsa. At a bar called El Barril she meets the elderly waiter, Miguel. He tells her the story of the lives of the Ramírez family, who owned the bar before, during, and after the civil war. It slowly emerges, through hundreds of pages, that Mercedes, one of the Ramírez family’s four children, was Sonia’s mother, known to her (in England) as Mary. Sonia goes back to London, leaves her husband, and returns to Granada to run the bar with Miguel who – it turns out – is really called Javier Miguel Montero. As Javier he was Mercedes’ lost lover of 1936. Sonia has returned to Granada, to her family home, to her mother’s great lost love – and to dance.

One of the novel’s peculiar omissions is immediately apparent: that although Sonia was sixteen when her mother died, she knew almost



nothing about her. The “reason” given is that Mercedes/Mary died from a lingering illness, multiple sclerosis, though it is not clear why this should preclude conversation. Sonia did not know that her mother came from Granada – indeed, seems scarcely aware that she was Spanish – and did not know (despite her own interest in salsa) that in England, as Mary, her mother was a brilliant and publicly successful dancer, who with her husband Jack won many competitions during the 1950s. Hers was evidently a most uncommunicative family. This improbability performs an important structural function, upon which much depends. Without it, there could be no narrative.

The novel itself begins in 2001, at a flamenco performance in Granada; but Chapter One is preceded by a “teaser” page dated “Granada, 1937”, which is – as the reader will discover – a long quotation from much later in the novel (212-13). Mercedes – the future Mary – has returned home late one evening to be reproached by her brother Antonio for reasons that are not clear: why is it that the worn and scuffed black shoes she holds in her hands should mean danger for someone? Whatever the cause, it is her passion: “I can’t stop. I can’t help myself” (1). *The Return* is the answer to that question: dance is Mercedes’ passion, and that is what she must do, even if the fascists who run the city object: dance is dangerous. And romantic fiction must always defer to passion and danger.

Sonia too has a passion, and she and her “wild child” friend Maggie have come to Granada to take dancing lessons: they begin with salsa (as Hislop herself did), but move on to the more serious flamenco.<sup>8</sup> The reader learns Sonia’s back story as she lies thoughtful in bed at the cheap Granada hotel: she works in public relations, and is married to James who works in a private bank in the City of London; the marriage is breaking down (he is an alcoholic), and Sonia has taken up dancing, which is why she is in Spain. The courtship and wedding is described, and we learn that only her father attended the ceremony, because her mother had died of multiple sclerosis years before (17-18). That her mother was Spanish is not mentioned.

Back in England, visiting her ageing father, Sonia discovers from him *for the first time* the story of her parents’ success as dancers in the 1950s. We are told “Sonia was amazed” (43) that she had previously known nothing of this part of her parents’ lives. Two pages later she is

again “amazed” (45) to have made this discovery – at the age of thirty-five. As she prepares to leave, her father shows her an old photograph of children outside a café that is “somewhere continental”, and explains that they are “Some of your mother’s family”. In the photograph, “Two of them [children] were sitting on top of a barrel and two others were leaning against it”. This is El Barril, evidently, and these are the four Ramírez children. At this point, Hislop contrives to keep Sonia in ignorance by the following strategy:

“Who are these children?” she asked.

“Some of your mother’s family”, he answered, not volunteering any further information.

It was time for Sonia to go. She and her father embraced. (45)

Sonia’s father may be taciturn, but he is unlikely to wilfully mislead his daughter. The photograph actually *shows* Sonia’s mother, as a child, in Granada, and it is not reasonable usage for him to speak as he does. If this is enough for Sonia, it is unlikely to satisfy a skilled reader of romance fiction. The author gives the story away a little later when Sonia, shown by her father photographs of her mother in Spain (the story is out by now), recalls a similar girl in photographs on the wall in El Barril. She undergoes another implausible thought-process: “It was a notion [that they are the same person] that Sonia knew she should dismiss as absurd but one she could not entirely put out of her mind” (99). It is not that Sonia, as a character, is incurious and repeatedly subject to amazement; rather, she has to be made incurious so that the reader can be given the opportunity to work out who Mercedes really is before Sonia does so. This is readerly pleasure (for the reader on the beach), and it takes precedence over narrative plausibility, in order that the story of the civil war may be told.

In Granada, Sonia meets Miguel (Javier) at El Barril in the Plaza Bib Rambla, and when he notices she is reading about García Lorca in her guidebook, they fall into conversation about the civil war. She estimates that he is aged over eighty (53), and notices that he has “No wife. No son to follow in his footsteps” (67). This proleptic irony will, like so much else, be explained by the narrative. Absence, ignorance, not-knowing, is essential to the novel’s execution.

Miguel answers Sonia’s questions about Lorca’s death, how the war began, and what were the consequences for the Ramírez family.

The story he tells – and his English is perfect, if accented – is nothing less than that of the entire Spanish Civil War. This is done through the Ramírez family, whose members spread out from Granada to every part of Spain where significant events in the war took place. The reader is taken to Málaga and up and across to Bilbao, and from besieged Madrid to the Battle of the Jarama in 1937 and of the Ebro in 1938, then to Barcelona, and – after Franco's victory – to the building of El Valle de los Caídos. The move from Sonia's narrow life in London to an expansive narrative of war has the effect of giving a high value to Spain's historical experience. Hislop recovers a forgotten history, writing from the position that her readership will be largely ignorant of the civil war, as she was herself. How does she do this?

### III

The romance novel requires family: Sonia's incomplete and restrained English family turns out to be part of the large and expressive Ramírez family from Granada. The family in Granada consists of the parents, Pablo and Concha, who own and run the café, and who die in 1945 and 1956 respectively (we see their gravestones [405], with dates given to guide the reader). There are four children. Antonio, the eldest, is a teacher and politically on the left; Ignacio is a bullfighter, and on the right; Emilio is a guitarist, and a homosexual; and Mercedes – the future Mary – is a dancer. This, then, is "Spain" in the 1930s, when every life-activity is always already known to embody an "English" view of what it is to be Spanish; but we should be careful not to mock this (mis)representation. *The Return* is a teaching novel (it is going to tell us about the civil war), and those who are to be taught require security, and so this readership is to be reassured by clichés of function. Bullfighting and flamenco act as a guarantee that this is Spain, though in reality it is "Spain", a limited idea of the country.

The eldest son, Antonio, sets off with two friends to fight with the Republican forces in Madrid and the Jarama. He is wounded at the Battle of the Ebro, convalesces in Barcelona, and in January 1939 takes part in the *exode* north into France. (Antonio is imprisoned on the beach at St Cyprien, and the harshness of the French reception of Spanish refugees is forcefully rendered: this may be new even for the well-informed.) Antonio unwisely returns to Spain and is sentenced

to thirty years' imprisonment, and taken to work on the Valley of the Fallen, where he dies of silicosis. His death is the climax of the novel's central section:

One day, an immense cross would soar one hundred and fifty metres into the sky on the mountain top, majestic, arrogant and victorious [...] and on some days its long shadow would touch the wooded place where Antonio's body lay in an unmarked grave. (363)

These events make up a possible and, within the conventions of romance fiction, a moving story. It suffers as a narrative strategy, however, because it wants to be inclusive as well as true. Antonio (who represents the radical schoolteacher tradition) takes a journey that is all too clearly intended to educate the readership about key moments in the war, Madrid, the Ebro, and Jarama in particular; yet to describe France, and the experience of building El Valle de los Caídos, are freshly informative strategies for British readers.

Ignacio represents the possibilities of machismo and aggression within the bullfighting tradition: "Ignacio's confrontation with the bull was as near perfection as a bullfight could be" (194), but he celebrates among "wealthy landowners and *aficionados*" who sing a jeering verse about Lorca:

Lovely Lorca, what a bore!  
NOW we bet your arse is sore!

These dangerous people are "thrilled with the double entendre" (195). This milieu is militantly anti-gay, and Ignacio remarks of his brother Emilio:

"You should have seen my brother when he heard about Lorca", said Ignacio laughingly to the group he was standing with. "Devastated!"  
"So he's a poofter [slang: *maricón*] too, is he?" said one of the more vulgar men [...] (195)

This conversation condemns Emilio. A month later he is arrested, without a warrant, at three o'clock in the morning. He is sentenced to thirty years, and is dead from actual or supposed tuberculosis within a few months. His arrest is followed immediately by the arrest of Pablo Ramírez, the father, for listening to a communist radio station (it is his wife Concha who listens – he takes the blame, and will return, but not until "a few months after" [351] Franco's victory in April 1939). Immediately after Pablo's

arrest, the narrative of Ignacio's imminent death begins. He is stabbed in the neck after leaving a bar, but this attack on the prominent matador is planned: "Those lefties had planned it all, he now realised", collapsed in a doorway. Hislop compares his death to that of the bulls he has himself killed, and his death is as certain as theirs: "He had been as trapped as a bull in a ring" (217). Ignacio's death also attracts an extraordinary image that is distinctly at odds with the expected mindset of this representative of "the thinking person's Middle England", as the *Times* characterised Hislop. Stabbed in the neck, Ignacio has bled to death:

Inside the church an effigy of Christ appeared to drip with blood through his neatly pierced side; outside, the life of a real man had ebbed swiftly away through a crude gash in his neck. (218)

No doubt the point is the contrasting qualities of the neat piercing and the crude gash, for otherwise it might appear that Hislop is comparing this fascist bullfighter to Christ. This is a striking example of the instability of political understanding in *The Return*, itself dependent upon an unstable rhetoric – here, one in pursuit of an inappropriate symbolism.

In any case, there is a crisis in the narrative. The father, Pablo, is imprisoned on page 209, Emilio's death occurs on page 211, and Ignacio's on page 217. At this juncture, *The Return* appears determined to eliminate most of its main characters, destroying the family upon whose representativeness the reader depends in order to understand "Spain". In fact Hislop is clearing out superfluous family members so that Mercedes may take centre stage and dance her way through the remainder of the novel. Yet the circumstances of imprisonment and death have been carefully researched, and one has at this point in the novel a sense of Granada as a community that is both oppressed and itself suffering serious internal conflict. Despite failing to describe adequately the defence of the Albaicín, Hislop gives particular substance to the military oppression, and the incident where soldiers come to the bar and turn on the radio to show that it is tuned to a communist station is one of the most effective scenes in the novel (206-8). Given such successes, the sudden flurry of imprisonment and death is both confusing and unintentionally comical, and undermines the reader's sense of the seriousness of what is occurring. The painful truths that Hislop's research has established deserve to be situated in a less improvised and ramshackle narrative than this.

Mercedes survives in order to fulfil her role as Sonia's mother. She is in love with Javier, who respects her; he has "bedded dozens of women" but "In spite of his gypsy blood, Javier knew where the boundaries lay" (152), as no doubt he should, since she is aged fifteen at the time. He plays guitar to her flamenco dancing, and when she is sixteen and "had become a young woman" (158) they perform together in Málaga, where

No one failed to appreciate the grace and energy of her dancing, the fineness of her hand movements, the love, the fear and the fury that she expressed through them all. (159)

As her reputation grows so does "her devotion to the *guitarrista*. Their love was absolutely mutual" (160), but there is no account here of any lovemaking, for the romance genre excludes such activities. All passion and sensuality has been transferred to the dance, where love, fear, and fury are to be found.

When the rising begins on 18 July, Hislop gives a closely-researched account of military and political events in the city, simplistically but effectively linked to the lives and deaths in the Ramírez family. Mercedes disappears from the story for over fifty pages while the deaths and departure of her brothers are contrived, and when she reappears, she and her grief-stricken mother Concha are running El Barril by themselves. January 1937 moves into February as Mercedes is shown spending a great deal of time brushing the floor of the café; but now she is thinking of Javier, who has "vanished" (223). Again Hislop withholds information: everyone in the family knows that he is in Málaga (235), but the reader is kept in the dark for a dozen pages. Mercedes leaves home suddenly (never to return), and now it becomes apparent why her departure has been delayed: Málaga has fallen, and as she approaches the city, she meets the *exode* coming towards her on its way to Almería. She is mystified:

Why were all these people on the road, on a chill February afternoon? And why were they so quiet? [...] It was as though a whole village full of families had decided to move house, all at once, and had piled themselves up with everything they owned: chairs, mattresses, pots, trunks, toys. [...] Once she was face to face with the people who led the way their silence was unnerving. No one seemed to speak. (237)

This is one of the most successful episodes in the novel. It is all the more significant in that although the "tragic exodus" from Málaga,

which began on 7 February, is known about – it is mentioned in all the histories – it is not part of the wider memory of the civil war; as Andrés Arenas and Enrique Girón have pointed out, it is much less well-known than the attack on Gernika. Most surprising of all, they say, is that even today it is little known in Málaga itself.<sup>9</sup> Hislop's dramatic twenty-page reconstruction serves her audience well in terms of confronting the *pacto de olvido*.

Hislop must now begin the process of getting Mercedes to England so that she can become Mary. Unable to reach Javier in Málaga, she heads for Bilbao, where he has an uncle. This improbable journey is achieved by performing flamenco in bars across Spain, first in Murcia, and then north and west into dangerous Nationalist territory, and finally into the Basque country.<sup>10</sup> In these chapters dance becomes more prominent, with technical accounts of performance and style integrated into a continuing political ambience:

The *tocaor* knew to relieve the atmosphere with the lighter mood of the *alegrías* and found his dancer more relaxed [...] The joy of this dance took everyone's mind away from shattered lives and burnt-out homes, from the images of corpses and the cruel faces of the people who had driven them out of their own city. (279)

Eventually her dancing itself takes on a political meaning, and she begins to embody the reality of Republican Spain:

The primitive power of her gestures reached out to the audience. There were mutterings of 'Olé' [...] The *guitarristas* [who earlier played closely together] may have made them forget, but Mercedes reminded them that their country was being torn apart. [...] Her final stamp, planted with a mighty "crack" on the wooden boards, was an unmistakable gesture of defiance. "We will not submit" it seemed to say and the audience erupted into applause. (299)

Flamenco here embodies a double political opposition: first to the "strict and sanctimonious" (291) Franco régime, which would ban dancing, to the divisions within Spain itself caused by the war. In the refusal to submit there is an echo of Dolores Ibárruri's "*No pasarán*", which Hislop has earlier quoted as part of the experience of Mercedes' brother Antonio in Madrid (265).

Javier's uncle is not to be found in Bilbao, however, and after a perfunctory search, Mercedes joins a new-found friend, Maria, who has four children whom she intends to put aboard the *Habana*, which

is taking refugees to England. Mercedes is unexpectedly asked to accompany them – the contrivance is palpable – and agrees. That is the last of Javier, and indeed the last she ever sees of Spain, as Miguel explains to Sonia: “What?” Sonia could not conceal her shock. ‘Ever?’” (312). Sonia’s capacity for amazement persists.

So too does *The Return*’s capacity for coincidence. At the very end of the central civil war section (Part 2), the narration explains with bland insouciance that Javier had been “picked up” (because a gypsy) when Málaga fell in February 1937, and had spent the entire war in prison. He and Antonio have been imprisoned in the same place for a year, and have nearly met “a hundred times”, except that “both had become so stooped that they rarely looked up” (360). Javier is on burial duty, and (unknown to himself) buries Antonio. The next day, Concha arrives to visit Antonio, Javier sees her by chance, takes her to the burial ground, and realises what he has done. As Concha leaves, he asks after Mercedes, but Concha knows only that she has not returned from her search for him. (The novel never asks why Mercedes has not used the telephone to contact her family.) With this implausible scenario, in which not-knowing again predominates, the most important part of the novel concludes.

#### IV

Novels in which the characters travel to important places so that history may be delineated are not uncommon. One example from the Second World War is *Of Many Men*, by the Australian writer James Aldridge, published in 1946. Wolfe, a journalist with astonishingly good contacts, travels the world of war in search of significant events:

Rommel attacked the thin Alamein Line, but the attack was too weak and Alamein held. Wolfe did not know if it would hold or not, but he went to Teheran because the Russians had given him a visa, and permission to go to Stalingrad. (141)

Such implausible moves happen often. Given its date of publication, this novel was evidently intended to be read as an overview of the conflict that would permit its readers to make sense, from a position on the left, of an intensely complex event of which any particular reader would have known only a very little. *The Return* works in the same way, sending its characters out across Spain in order to educate its readers about the entire war.



It is clear from the quotations I have given that the prose of *The Return* is far from lively: this is a prose of the surface, functional, occasionally evocative, and motivated by nothing but an earnest need to inform and to please. *Of Many Men* is also written in a prose of the surface, but one derived from early Hemingway, and so capable of carrying political meaning. Aldridge's meaning is, indeed, derived from the Spanish Civil War. It was widely argued at the time that the rebels' revolt would lead to a wider war; this novel says that this indeed happened, that the Second World War was already present in what began in Spain in 1936, and that a victory in 1945 that did not include Spain was no victory at all. On the novel's first page we read:

When Wolfe was in Spain, issues were clear because they were simplified by the war. You were on one side or the other. Not only in Spain, but inevitably in all political developments that were making Europe.

As Spain was defeated, his anger set hard and even. It also confined his outlook, so that all things that happened in Europe happened in relation to Spain. (5)

On the penultimate page, Wolfe is with his lover in 1945, and asks her:

“If Spain remains as it is, what have we fought the war for?”

“You're getting fanatical about Spain.”

“It isn't only Spain itself. This is the whole thing. This is the most critical moment. If we stop fighting now, anything can happen.”

“I've never seen you so worked up.” (206)

To prevent this defeat, Wolfe says he will set out, illegally, for Spain, presumably to attach himself to the guerrillas.<sup>11</sup> This politically-driven act – and we must recall that the date of publication is 1946 – is a strong version of the arguments about Spain's significance for the future of Europe that were made between 1936 and 1939. It is, perhaps, too strong, and Wolfe's sceptical lover Frances (sic) may have a point.

Nevertheless, there is more political passion, and more effective writing, in these short extracts from *Of Many Men* than there is in any dozen pages of *The Return*. Further, Aldridge's knowledge of warfare is detailed and accurate, whilst Hislop's research in this area has not been successful. Antonio's group of soldiers are never trained, individuals have no rank or function, and there are no officers. At the Battle of the Jarama, they are attacked by “several battalions of Nationalist soldiers”

(263). Does Hislop have any conception of how many men there would be in “several battalions”, and the likely consequences for Antonio and his friends? The strangest incident occurs when his childhood friend Salvador is killed. Known as “El Mudo”, he is a deaf-mute (and would never have fought); but Hislop specifies “certain advantages” when in battle: “He could hear neither the whine of bullets nor the screams of the wounded” – nor orders either, one presumes, let alone the “warning cry of a friend” (286). The reader assumes this cry comes from Antonio: but how do you warn somebody about an oncoming hail of bullets? The author sometimes succeeds in the civil aspects of civil war, but fails egregiously over its military aspects, and the consequence is to undermine the novel’s attempt to value the idea of “Spain”, because the preposterous unreality of the battle scenes demeans the experience of those who fought.

## V

Can *The Return* be excused its peculiar narrative contrivances because its overall intentions are benign? Can we agree that genre requirements may limit, legitimately, the possible meanings of a particular text? Is pleasing the reader a proper purpose for romance fictions? Let us suppose that the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, and read accordingly. The episodes where Antonio, Salvador and Francisco travel to war untrained can be read as meaning that it is more important that friends should do brave things together, than that what they do should be plausible: affection between lifelong friends is to be valued more than military accuracy. The target readership does the valuing, and it is towards them, and not towards readers of the contemporary literary novel, that *The Return* is directed. If it is the text’s business to please the readership, then that pleasure lies in realising fairly early on that Mercedes is Sonia’s mother, and in watching the novel contrive Sonia’s discovery of this fact in a way that will lead to her new life in Granada. The Javier/Miguel deception matters less than that he should teach Sonia about the war, and that it should be her mother’s lover who passes the bar on to her. It is the satisfying resolution that matters, not the plausibility of the narrative strategies by which it is reached. We can say that the sympathetic reader of this romance strikes a bargain with the author, and becomes willing to exchange

an implausible or contrived narrative for the pleasures of sentimental satisfaction and new knowledge. Once agreed, that bargain permits the author to speak of the civil war in many of its most brutal aspects. *The Return* is double. It has a convoluted “set-up” in which Sonia is unaware of facts about her family that any normally attentive person would know, whilst the narration frequently, and deliberately, deprives the reader of information. This is what I have called the “not-knowing” aspect of the novel. These strategies have a purpose, which is to teach the Spanish Civil War to a particular (a “beach”) audience, so that it should *know*. The outcome of an overheated narrative process is a plain tale of suffering and loss, mitigated by a final satisfaction, the coming together of Miguel (in his eighties), and Sonia (in her thirties). As she arrives at Granada airport, “Her footsteps were light. Her heart was dancing” (420).

As I complete this discussion, *The Return* is still in the best-seller lists, but its sales have dropped below two thousand copies a week, though overall sales approach 40.000. One can predict that, unlike its predecessor *The Island*, it will not sell a million copies. Perhaps this subject is a little too difficult after all, or perhaps the word of mouth about the novel is not good, and actual readers are not recommending it to their friends. If this is so, it will be because readers are more annoyed than pleased by the strategies of ignorance pursued by the novel, above all by the sustained implausibility of the Mercedes / Mary episodes. Romance fiction constructs its audience in the text, but when an audience recognizes that it is being invented as an incompetent readership, resistance is likely. Meanwhile, Victoria Hislop's website announces the many translations that are to be made, with publication in Brazil, Germany, Greece, Holland, Israel, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, and Sweden.<sup>12</sup> At this date, there is to be no translation into Spanish.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Victoria Hislop, “Spain's Civil War: A story of shame and secrecy” in *The Return* (London: Headline Review, 2008), p. 427. This essay appears only in copies sold by the bookseller chain Waterstone's. Further references to this and to *The Return* appear parenthetically in the text. *The Island* (2005) concerns a leper colony off Crete, shows significant medical research, and has a similar narrative structure to *The Return*.

<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion of researched fiction, see Alan Munton, *English Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Faber, 1981), pp. 10-12.

<sup>3</sup> “The Sunday Times Bestsellers”, *Sunday Times Culture*, 24 August 2008, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Boyd Tonkin, “Memories of the pain in Spain”, *The Independent, Arts and Books Review*, 4 July 2008, 20; Anon., *Scotsman*, quoted on the Victoria Hislop website: <http://www.victoriahislop.com/> (accessed 20 August 2008). Melissa Katsoulis, “Francoism framed by romance”, *Sunday Telegraph* 6 July 2008, gives a better context: “There continue to be some great novels about the Spanish Civil War – Bernardo Atxaga’s *The Accordionist’s Son* [2003, English trans. 2007] is a recent example – and although *The Return* is not one of them, it is an excellent beach read”. At <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2008/07/06/bohis106.xml> Accessed 20 August 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Franks, “Exclusive interview with Victoria Hislop”, 20 June 2008, *Timesonline* at [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/book\\_extracts/article4178817.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/book_extracts/article4178817.ece). Accessed 28 July 2007. “Middle-sized ‘c’” is a play on the phrase “small c conservatism”, that is, a personal conservatism of daily life and attitudes as distinct from “big C” politically-committed Conservatism, often defined as support for the Conservative Party. Hislop is neither big nor small “c”, and open to a leftwards move on a specific issue.

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Hislop, “Granada: The city that inspired a bestseller”, *Daily Telegraph* (London), 15 July 2008. At

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/spain/article> Accessed 28 July 2008. Note that the book is already a ‘bestseller’ only two weeks after publication.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion, see Alan Munton, “How Gender serves Trotskyism: the Spanish Civil War in Ken Loach’s *Land and Freedom*”, in *Gender and warfare in the twentieth century: Textual representations*, ed. Angela K. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 76-95.

<sup>8</sup> Latin American dance was culturally important in Britain in 2008. Grevel Lindop, *Travels on the Dance Floor: One man’s journey to the heart of Salsa* (London: André Deutsch, 2008), was published on 4 August 2008, and extracts were read as *Book of the Week* on Radio 4, 11-15 August. Mike Leigh’s film *Happy-Go-Lucky*, released in 2008, has scenes at a dance school of the kind Sonia would have attended; but the representation of the Spanish dance teacher is stereotypical. *Strictly Come Dancing* is a popular BBC1 television series, with a strong emphasis on Latin American dance, and began its sixth series in September 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Andrés Arenas and Enrique Girón, “The Tragic Exodus: Málaga, February 1937”, unpublished conference paper, “The Spanish Civil War: History, Memory, Representation”, Welsh Centre for International Affairs, 9-10 February 2008. I am grateful to the authors for letting me see a copy of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> The obvious point of reference is Carlos Saura’s film *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1990).

<sup>11</sup> For an account of the guerrilla resistance after 1945, see Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (2006; Phoenix, 2007), ch. 37. Guillermo del Toro’s film *El Laberinto del fauno* (*Pan’s Labyrinth*) (2006) continues the interest in post-civil war resistance.

<sup>12</sup> At <http://www.victoriahislop.com/return.html> Accessed 1 September 2008.

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# PROBLEMATIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF EXILE IN INDO-CANADIAN WOMEN WRITING

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## **Abstract**

This essay intends to depict hybridization in the new panorama of Indo-Canadian women writing (that is, writers of Indian, Sri-Lankan, Bangladeshi or Pakistani origins living –or publishing– in Canada because of exile, emigration or expatriation). Canonical and gender subversions can be observed through the analysis of texts that play with the notions of “hybrid”, by positing a continuous dialogism between the traditional categories of the canon and also by the intertextual questioning of story and literature. Short stories and poems by Himani Bannerji, Manjula Parakot, Meena Alexander, Anita Rau Badami, Ausma Zehanat Khan or Lakshmi Gill, among others, prove that the quest for self-identity is also a quest for a literary “home” in a virtual and/or real national space where one can live comfortably, forgetting thus the feelings of displacement in class, gender and race oriented environments.

**Key Words:** Indo-Canadian, Women Writing, Hybridization, Construction of Identity, Displacement, Class/Gender/Race.

## **Resumen**

Este ensayo pretende trazar la hibridación en el nuevo panorama de las escritoras de origen indostano (es decir, provenientes de India, Pakistán, Bangla-Desh o Sri-Lanka) que viven (o publican) actualmente en Canadá como emigrantes, exiliadas o expatriadas. A través del análisis de textos que juegan con las definiciones de “híbrido” pueden distinguirse las subversiones canónicas y genéricas que establecen un

continuo dialogismo entre las categorías tradicionales del canon y el cuestionamiento intertextual de los temas y de la literatura. Relatos y poemas de Himani Bannerji, Manjula Parakot, Meena Alexander, Anita Rau Badami, Ausma Zehanat Khan o Lakshmi Gill, entre otras, demuestran que la búsqueda de identidad propia es también la búsqueda de un “hogar” literario, de un espacio nacional (ya sea virtual o real) donde vivir en paz y olvidarse, de esta manera, de los sentimientos de dislocación que subyacen en entornos con un marcado sesgo de clase, género y raza.

**Palabras clave:** Escritoras indo-canadienses, hibridación, construcción de la identidad, dislocación, clase/género/raza.

Much has been said about the intimate relationship that exists between confessional literature or, so to say, the literature of one's vital experience on the one hand, and the creative power to narrate, on the other. Either acting as a cathartic force, or as an impulse to move forward in a difficult situation (as is the uprooting from the mother country and the later reinstalment in a new one), the truth is that in the works of exiled writers, the narration of the past becomes tantamount and serves as a target point to redirect one's own process of identification. This essay, thus, explores the new panorama of Indo-Canadian women writing (that is, writers of Indian, Sri-Lankan, Bangladeshi or Pakistani origins living in Canada because of exile, emigration or expatriation) as a mosaic of both canonical subversions and trans-gendered realities. These so-called autobiographical writings (or at times pseudo-biographical) present certain parallelisms and a homogeneous treatment of the retelling of displaced lives. Predictably, the tone used to narrate tends to become ironic and nostalgic at the same time<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, Arun Prabha Mukherjee's introduction to *Her Mother's Ashes and Other Stories by South Asian Women in Canada and the United States* (1994), edited by Nurjehan Aziz, after stating the distance that exists among writers coming from various origins: Tamil, Gujarati, Sikh, Parsi, Christian, Hindu or Muslim, to name but a few, recognizes the interrelation that also works between these seemingly detached writings: “despite our ethnic, religious, linguistic and national diversities, we *are* bound together by all kind of subtle



bonds” (x, Mukherjee’s italics). And she continues by describing a sort of Wittgensteinish “family resemblance” among them.

It is precisely that multiple identification asserted by Mukherjee that links them to other postcolonial groups, namely the Afro-Americans, the first peoples, or the Chicana writers for instance. In this sense, the Chicana author and theorist Bernice Zamora<sup>2</sup> explains (in her five-lined poem, “So Not to Be Mottled”) the appropriate condition of the transnational writer: “You insult me / When you say I’m / Schizophrenic. / My divisions are / Infinite” (78). Indeed, women writers of Indostani origins have to cope with a polysemic identity and construct homogeneity out of these paradoxical and sometimes contradictory selves. Furthermore, Himani Bannerji expresses that multiplicity in “The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Language and Experience” (*qtd* Mukherjee *xii*): “[the writer] finds herself caught up in a massive translation project of experiences, languages, cultures accents and nuances” in which the text is “a text with holes for the Western reader”. It is made up of “fragments of language, memories, textual allusions, cultural signs and symbols”. But, as Mukherjee wisely points out “people do not leave their histories and cultures behind when they migrate” (*xiii*). That is the reason for writing about the past and constantly comparing it to the present, using a sort of catalyst filter to interact between both cultures: the inbred and the received one.

In this sense, Himani Bannerji’s poem, “Some Kind of Weapon” (included in *Shakti’s Words*, edited by McGifford & Kearns in 1993) is a clear epitome of literature acting as a catharsis to rid oneself of existential doubts. An identity crisis serves only too well in this short work to emphasize the importance of self-analysis to lessen the insolent peeping look of the ‘Other’ that makes you feel uncomfortable, or even inferior; and, thus, comforted and consoled by this self-exploration, you can use “your life” as a kind of boomerang to hit “that which is destroying you”:

If you don’t want it / your life, that is, / don’t just bury it or leave it there / to wither (...) Take it into your hands / examine it carefully (...) some kind of weapon / simple, ancient, elemental / and then throw it, / strike at something, / that which is destroying you (9).

Carolyn Masel, in her chapter, “Late Landings. Reflections on Belatedness in Australian and Canadian Literatures”, which appears

in Jonathan White's *Recasting the World. Writing after Colonialism* (1993), offers another perspective of the plurality of dialogues which form a part of the political structure of the postcolonial countries, in this case referring to the Canadian and Australian panorama:

Furthermore, in both countries the cultural anxiety about one's relation to the land is heightened by the presence, or else the hauntings, of precolonial populations, whose closer daily contact with the landscape they inhabited has meant that they have been inscribed by their postcolonial successors as more authentic dwellers in the landscape. While the Noble Savage conception that informed earlier generations' views of aboriginal populations has largely disappeared, the anxiety it induced has not; indeed, it has been much exacerbated both by ecological concerns and by recent land claims and/or constitutional demands made by the First Peoples in Canada and the Koori (Aboriginals) in Australia, in the course of which very different conceptions of ownership of and relationship to the land enter the public arena. The problem for postcolonial writers is that the landscape has, in effect, been hierarchized, and that, collective postcolonial guilt aside, the place or places of authenticity are perceived to be debarred from postcolonials of nonaboriginal extraction. (162-163)

Thus, all kinds of semiotic disturbances break the cultural dialogue making this unequal communication impossible. Stereotypes and prejudices tend to fabricate another identity for the victims of that subjective power relationship, making the voices of these problematic identities sound inaudible to our postcolonial ears. They become instruments of deconstruction of the problematized identity, because colonization always tends to overshadow the importance of encounters with other cultures. Also, confrontation prevents dialogue and creates preconceived models of judgment. Multicultural coexistence is a difficult matter because it is based on the dominant roles of one culture upon another in a specific society. Graham Huggan explains how multiculturalism can become a mere polite alibi to perpetuate imperial inequality and power distortion, in "Exoticism, Ethnicity, and the Multicultural Fallacy" (included in "*New Exoticisms. Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*", edited by Isabel Santaolalla):

[...] the 'rainbow' visions of multiculturalism become a smokescreen that hides the continuing privilege of the dominant (white anglophone) culture. Multiculturalism, some argue further, works toward diffusing ethnic tensions by deflecting them on to

an 'aesthetics of diversity' with exchange-value on the market. At best, it might be said, this aestheticisation of ethnic difference glides over politics; at worst, it turns multiculturalism into a form of 'boutique xenophobia'. (92)<sup>3</sup>

A good example of this is Indian-born, US-citizenship-holder, Meena Alexander's poem, "Brown Skin What Mask?" (appearing in *Another Way to Dance. Contemporary Asian Poetry from Canada and the United States*, edited by Cyril Dabideen in 1996). A brief walk across New York produces a series of questions in the mind of the female Indian-New Yorker, who is hunted by difference in those multiracial streets:

Babel's township seeps into Central Park  
I hunch on a stone bench scraping nightingale-bulbuls  
cuckoo-koels, rose-gulabs off my face

(...)

Shall I be a hyphenated thing, Macaulay's Minutes  
and Melting Pot theories notwithstanding?

Shall I bruise my skin, burn up into  
She Who Is No Color whose longing is a crush  
of larks shivering without sound?

(...) shall I finger grief for luck  
work stares into the "bride is never naked" stuff? (1)

Those rhetorical questions are parallel to Lakhsmi Gill's poem, "Me" (also in *Shakti's...*), in which an Indian woman is pejoratively looked upon, animalized and anonymized by western men in the Canadian streets: "My black hair is a dark beast's mane / framing a face etched in rain / (I defy your expectation) (...) [rain] washes away the expression: / Aha! She's Asian! (.../...) Ha, Ha, the Oriental! / and the mind clicks in all / the notions of orientalesse..." (30). In both texts (with possible Saidian and Derridean readings), the urge to be individualized, to be given a definite personality apart from the cliché of the "oriental", or the "Asian", is fundamental. Parallel metaphors of the "bruising skin" (in Alexander's poem) and the "erasing rain" (in Gill's poem) assert the imperious necessity to blank out stereotypes and to get rid of imperialist Victorian archetypes of the oriental. The final price in achieving this will change "grief for luck" in a natural way, or in other words, will define Otherness other than difference and will appropriate diversity into something richer and positive.

At the same time, some critics tend to believe that personal testimony is often subjective, melancholic, and influenced by homesickness, in such a way that the narrative of these writers becomes undervalued in an inversely proportional way to the objectively technical and more academic western type narrative. They pejoratively dismiss the cathartic effects of this type of confessional literature that is imbued with the aforementioned ironic retelling of the past, and which often suffers from the creation of “imaginary homelands”, as Salman Rushdie would indeed say in his famous essay “The Indian Writer in England”:<sup>4</sup>

Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge –which gives rise to profound uncertainties— that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands. Indias of the mind. (Butcher 76)

The Identification process proves crucial here. As Madan Sarup points out in *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (1996), when we are born we do not possess any identity. Identity grows little by little, receiving daily feedback through our identification with others, inside a specific social environment. Sarup also asserts that “identity is always related to what one is not –the Other” (47) and that “all identities, whether based on class, ethnicity, religion or nation, are social constructions” (48). Both statements clearly show how interrelated individuation and socialization, in a close cultural circle, contribute to the formation of the personal self. Moreover, whenever we ask someone about his/her identity, a story comes out. Stories are told to others in the same way that we are told stories by them. In constructing our stories we are constructing our very identity, because the elements that appear in a story can be arranged in many different ways, according to our own focalization and cultural formation. It is our intellectual education and our everyday mimicry of life that conform our stories. So, the way in which we construct our stories tells us a lot about our likes, our feelings and our behaviour. Through the telling of these stories we try to reconcile our own bewilderment with outside reality, in a sort of *anagnorisis*, or revelation process. As Sarup continues,

it is in the construction of a narrative, the making and telling of a story, that we produce the self. The past does not exist except in the sense that we have to interpret past events and, in so doing, create history, identity and ourselves (46).

Sounding quite similar to Rushdie's hypotheses, what we really have here is nothing more, and nothing less, than the fictionalization of real lives, incidents and anecdotes, in the creation of a seemingly biographical written piece. Or, one could say, the finding of a literary "home" in a homeless and hostile world. Quite often, these stories are about our pasts, and sometimes there are gaps in them, not because of a lack of remembrance, but due to inner resistance. Sarup realizes that "when a person is telling us their story, we should be listening for its disparities and discrepancies, gaps and silences, anomalies and ambiguities, its restrictions and paradoxes", that is what the teller is doing with and through the story" (39).

A clear instance of this can be found in Manjula Parakot's "Stranger in a Chosen Land" (in *Green Snow*, edited by Stephen Gill in 1976), in which the juvenile decision to emigrate, longing for "greener pastures" ends with the protagonist dreaming of returning to the embellished native land and the personal sensation of being a bird of a different feather in the adoptive country: "Dreading the arid future / I thirsted for greener pastures / and found them / overseas / The Pampas and Savannahs are not forever (.../...) Now here / Land of Mine Own Choice / I am but / a stranger in this Chosen land." (61-62). The same situation happens in "Migratory Birds" by Surjeet Kalsey (*Shakti's...*). Here, using the appropriate metaphor of the migratory fowls, the emphasis is put on the feeling of being anchored in that new space with subtle bonds that avoid one being able to ever fly again:

We / the migratory birds / are here this season / thinking / we'll fly back to our home / for sure (...) and the flight begins to die slowly / in our wings. (.../...) ..The next season is never our own / and every season / makes mouths at us (40).

Feelings of displacement, of loneliness and estrangement form part of this literature of homesickness and nostalgia.

Evidently, all these subjective recreations are intentional. In this sense, Canadian novelist Jack Hodgins (interviewed by Geoffrey Hancock) allegedly opposes the "invented" world to the "created", saying

that “[I] oppose Reality with a capital ‘R’ to this imitation that we are too often contended with. The created rather than the invented world” (47)<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the distinction between trickery and reality, invention and creation in a postcolonial context is stressed. The re-vision of history recreates the process of colonization and reverberates in the historical consciousness of postcolonial Canadians. An imaginative rewriting of history tries to recuperate the gaps, the lost voices which imperialism has left behind. Because, as Arun Prabha Mukherjee, in *Oppositional Aesthetics. Readings from a Hyphenated Space* (1994) states, “writing is not just a matter of putting one’s thoughts on paper. Writing is also about social power. How I write depends a lot on who I write for” (xiii). It is true that “official” history has always been the history of the winners; losers not only lose their material goods but also the objective truth about what has happened to them, and the possibility to claim their intrinsic pride. Thus, the first attempt to regain this pride comes from the rewriting of history and the dignifying of past facts. As always, History omits from the entire “official” records what it does not want to hear. And frequently these omissions end in oblivion.

Writers of identity, hence, decide to adopt a very postcolonial position *avant la lettre*, in terms of ironic detachment and Bakhtinian carnivalesque criticism. They start conceiving the world as a dystopia, one that comes from a disengaged perspective and an ultimate devotion to their own experience of their country in past times. Thus, a desire is shown to decolonize the miserable condition of a place that has suffered from an inferiority complex, due to its subaltern condition as colonized, deprived and devoured by indigence and lack of pride. Paradoxically enough, this is also an aristocratic position, because it comes from the conscience of art as a personal choice that moves away from vulgarity, that separates the trivial from the transcendental, the everyday from the extraordinary. Furthermore, this stance transforms these confessional writers into special beings capable of manifesting contradictory ideas to gain the ultimate essence of their polysemic identities in their complex and plural settings. These writers occupy a so-called “hyphenated” no-man’s land that does not belong to any of both identities, which are so strikingly different. In this sense, the late Palestinian critic Edward Said proclaims in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) that

[...] no one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-points, which

if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental. (407-408)

He also wisely questions the condition of being exiled when going against the theories of power stated by Foucault (in *Reflections on Exile*) in that “Foucault seemed to have been confused between the power of institutions to subjugate individuals, and the fact that individual behaviour in society is frequently a matter of following rules and conventions” (241). Self-representation, moreover, acquires a primordial importance to reconstruct the split personality of the alienated being, and autobiographical confessional writing proves the elementary tool. It is a quest for a new identity, after losing the cultural and inbred models. There are, therefore, several things we should take into account in any study of identity: the importance of the past and everyone’s particular interpretation of it; the idea that identity is a construction, a process. However, there are also many other factors which cannot be overlooked: for instance, the fact that identity cannot be studied in an abstract context, but in a given space and time, as well as evident elements such as class, nation, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, history, to name but a few, which are directly connected with what we feel we are and how we are seen in society.

The short-story entitled “The Foreigners” by Anita Rau Badami (appearing in Nurjeehan Aziz’s *Her Mother’s Ashes 2*) is a clear example of these cultural layers and misunderstandings that lead to ultimate violence. A mere trivial anecdote unchains a series of coincidences that result in the tense, daily cohabitation in an Indian district where some Muslims had once lived peacefully. There is a triangle of power relationships which looks easy to define at first sight, but proves more complicated if one takes into account the subtleties of dominion in pyramidal structures. It is represented by a three-headed figure: English imperialism (Edith Johnson), the Hindu majority (Jayant Bhai’s son) and the Muslim minority (Mir Alam). A Hindi parade crossing Mir Alam’s street and surrounded by police protection due to the danger of terrorist attacks on the part of Islamic guerrillas, triggers the crisis. Ms. Johnson, fed up with Mr. Alam’s pigeons resting by her beloved window, uses firecrackers and bangers to frighten them while

the parade is passing by, and the noise produced is mistaken for a shooting and leads to Mir Alam being suspected of holding a terrorist gang inside his peaceful family home, despite his neighbours knowing him to be a quiet man, resulting in him being severely beaten and left in a pool of blood on the floor.

Wisely enough, the story evolves slowly and peacefully at the beginning, but with small details, it anticipates what is going to happen later. Little disagreements in a neighbour's yard seem to be nothing compared to the kindness and the long-lasting relationship between them. Some anecdotes happen to flow under the main plot, such as Edith Johnson's reason for staying with the Alam family instead of returning to England after the Partition and independence of India and Pakistan, in 1947. She owed much to that family of different race, class and religion, who had permitted her to stay in their home ever since her nursing of their now grown-up offspring. Mir Alam's wife also feeds her everyday with typical tasty Indian meals, without asking for economic compensation in return. What is more, they continue to respect her and call her "Ma'am", in spite of her economic decadence and dull unpromising future. But the pigeon incident ruins that delicate equilibrium of the power scale between the elderly English lady and the Indian Muslim man, with the remnants of British rules which differ little from today's situation. As the hatred for the pigeons continues to grow in Edith's heart, all the cultural differences appear to resurface: her British education, her aristocratic sense of life and beauty, which cannot stand a 'flock' of dirty pigeons ruining her sunset view from the balcony of Mir Alam's house.

Moreover, Mir Alam's attitude to life changes with the passing of time. He becomes a pigeon-fancier, in his solitary elder age, surrounded by that menacing political situation. It seems as if the summer open-air talks with the chairs outside the houses had come to an end because of the ever-increasing lack of confidence among the neighbourhood. Indeed, he becomes a pigeon breeder to find a certain warmth in those little creatures with pounding hearts, a certain activity in that social lethargy, a hobby-horse to fill up a vacuum. In a series of cause-and-effect events everyone comes nearer to reaching the final and saddest climax of the story.

Although playing a secondary role, probably worse than the physical punishment inflicted upon him, are the words uttered by Jayant Bhai's



son, when the pseudo-shooting begins. He, the son of a long-time friend, whom Mir Alam had held in his arms when he was a child, seemed now an absolute stranger to him: “Don’t you soil my father’s name by uttering it, old man,’ he shouted” (101). From that very moment, he was no more Mir Alam to them, he had become instead the “Mussulman”, the “circumcised bastard”, the “foe”, in one word, the ‘Other’. This process of estrangement and defamiliarization brings about a much more traumatic experience because it forms a part of a stage of mental dislocation, so widely analysed in postcolonial theory. In doing this, Mir Alam becomes de-individualized, stereotyped and labelled. According to Said’s theories (that started with 1978’s *Orientalism*), he becomes an anonymous being, losing his facial features, his name and attributes, in a kind of slavery which is stronger than slavery in chains. We have constructed an archetype based on our own racial prejudices, and this misguided identification leads to a social death of the victim who is suffering from it.

In the shooting incident, he is also shouted to “go back!” as if he had been once a foreigner, an alien, losing thus his identity of more than thirty years:<sup>6</sup>

“Go back where?” he wanted to ask. “Can one travel back in time or in history?” He was now too old to feel the fear that he had felt years ago when, as a child, he had heard the same cries tearing the air, felt the waves of rage which left in its wake the stench of blood and burnt flesh. (100)

Let us remember what has been said before about historical manipulation. The division of India, in 1947, brought about new frontiers and huge mass movements and deportations, many Hindus living in what is now Pakistan lost their native lands and their citizenship, and, parallel to this, many Muslims living in the new India had to migrate to Pakistan to survive. This double process of alienation and identification has tainted the life of that geopolitical part of the Asian continent ever since. It is living proof of the arbitrariness and capricious nature of historical and political borderlines. Mir Alam, in this case, is suddenly turned into a Pakistani alien living in a nationalistic India that is never going to belong to him again.

This is precisely the reason why this paragraph near the end of the work sounds so dramatic:

he tried to cling to rational thought, *to the familiar*. (...) I shouldn't have been so rude to her, poor lady, who else does she have in *this foreign land* but us? From the inside of his violated home he heard a long scream. Roshan, he thought dully, the pain of his eye clamouring against the nerve ends in his brain, what have they done to her? Mir Alam willed his tired old body to rise from the ground. (102, *my italics*)

Notice how both italicised phrases are key to understanding the final message of the story: “we can all be foreigners in our own lands”, given the appropriate conditions. The paradoxical chiasmus employed by Badami gives an ultimate slap in the face to the western readers of this literature: Mir Alam becomes defamiliarized by violence and hate, thus he is a foreigner in his own country, and Edith (the alien woman to be blamed for that tragic misunderstanding) has become familiarized, a part of the family; but, above all, they are all victims of the supra-structures, remnants of the old imperialist system. The thoughts of Alam, at the very beginning of the story, have become prophetic:

You live in a country all your life, six or seven generations of your family were born and died on this same soil and overnight some unscrupulous rascal decides that you are a foreigner, thought Mir Alam ruefully. Nobody had even heard of the wretched village till the politician rogue decided to stir up trouble. That seemed to be the favoured method of collecting votes these days. The old British tactic of divide and rule. (87)

A much more complicated text is Ausma Zehanat Khan's “Beloved” (also in *Her Mother's Ashes 2*). Conceived as an inner monologue, the discourse splits into several personae, to exemplify the fragmentary condition of the émigrés. On the eve of her wedding day, the Indian bride of an arranged marriage suffers from the splitting of self that accompanies a dislocated identity. She is debating between the duty to a husband imposed by the family and the desire for a western classmate with whom she is deeply in love. Therefore, she divides into two: the western Canadian and the obedient young Indian, not knowing how to unite these forces which are destroying her.

Many stories in *Her Mother's Ashes 1* can be seen as correlates of this one, especially “Free and Equal”, by Lalitha Gandbhir, about the dislocation feelings of a married Indian couple in America, and how the wife, Rani, having experienced gender inferiority in her native

land can cope more easily with racial inferiority in her new land. Meanwhile, her husband, Ramesh, an educated high-caste Hindi, all of a sudden loses class, gender and race, and traumatically experiences his new subaltern condition. Even after finding a good job in a business company, he continues to believe that it was given to him because they needed to employ a minority candidate. “You may have the job and the knowledge and the qualifications, but you are not free and equal” (74) utters his wife at the end of the story. “Why Am I Doing This?” by Hema Nair or “Bad Luck Woman” by Chitra Divakaruni also tell us about the mental consequences of living dislocated lives. In the first story, the protagonist suffers from kleptomania, a way to fulfil her empty, perfect, estranged and routine life with that little dose of adrenalin caused by doing forbidden things; in the second, cultural differences make Mrs. Ghosh, a poor and ugly Indian woman with a mole, who is said to be a bird of ill-omen, be seen either as a witch, if we take into account the superstition of more primitive cultures, or as a low-class and humble woman, if we consider her social extraction and her third world origin. The problem, as in “Beloved”, is that both these looks are inside Lila’s head, the protagonist of the story, who debates between them until the very end of the story. At first, Lila, a scientist, looked rational enough to turn to the logical explanation, but at the end, after a series of “fortuitous” disgraces, the atavistic and ancient superstitious temperament that we all carry within our genes, appears in her behaviour.

The complexity of these problematic identities has been the *leitmotif* of this essay. Either by trying to integrate in the new society with a so-called occidental disguise or by detaching themselves from it by keeping their exoticism intact, the truth is that the feeling that predominates is one of ambivalence and disorientation: like “homesickness at home”. However, de-hyphenated and plural in their unity, it is in the multiplicity of voices interacting in these prismic personalities that true identities can be found. With the appropriation of differences and the acceptance of one’s own hybridization, though appearing to be a hard task, a polychromatic gaze is finally achieved, and with it an open-minded approach to the ‘Other’. Ultimately, the only way for exiled transnational Indian women writers to find a room of their own, that is, an actual “home”, should be through an accurate reading of themselves and of their historical (re)presentations.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Linda Hutcheon has precisely studied this link between irony and the recreation of the past, that derives from the paradoxical status or imitation in terms of comparison between inbred and learned cultures. See, for instance, *A Theory of Parody* (1984), or *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Zamora is a teacher of Chicano and Native American literature at Santa Clara University, in the USA, where she also does research on Third World Women Writers living in America.

<sup>3</sup> Huggan echoes ideas of other critics, such as Segalen's "aesthetics of diversity" and Papaellinas' "boutique xenophobia" (Santaolalla, 91-96).

<sup>4</sup> These "imaginary homelands" are adorned with the "fabled splendour of the past", as if the good moments had won the battle over the bad ones, forgetting thus the causes and consequences that impelled exiled writers to abandon their native countries.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Hodgins is named here to illustrate the process of bicultural dialogue between the old and the new world, that is, how the real and the imaginary appear intertwined in the encounters between natives and colonizers. Many times this paradoxical encounter leads to magic realism and myth making because of the legendary condition of the contacts and the spatial temporal distance between them and our contemporary vision.

<sup>6</sup> This literary metaphor has been recurrently seen in stories about wars. For example, the same is seen to happen to Japanese émigrés living in the USA for decades, after the beginning of World War II, and the Jewish people in Germany, in Nazi times, or even the Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, some years ago. The metaphor of living in a battlefield for oppressed people is one of the strongest in exiled and expatriate literature. See the Chicana writer Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years*, where she refers to the condition of lesbian Chicana writers in their own environment.

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# DEVICES OF ESTRANGEMENT IN STOPPARD'S *TRAVESTIES*

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## **Abstract**

This paper proposes an analysis of Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties* in light of the concept of estrangement, developed by the Russian literary scholar Viktor Shklovsky. The first section of the essay will describe the three dominant elements in *Travesties*: foreign/estranged language, intertextuality, and theatricality. The second section will consider the juxtaposition of historical and fictional events as a key factor for estrangement, and it will also examine the presence of a character-narrator on stage, and the relation this characters bears to the estranging factors already mentioned.

**Key words:** Tom Stoppard; *Travesties*; Viktor Shklovsky; James Joyce; Oscar Wilde; estrangement; intertextuality; theatricality.

## **Resumen**

En este ensayo se propone un análisis de la obra *Travesties*, de Tom Stoppard, a partir del concepto de defamiliarización según fue desarrollado por el crítico literario ruso Viktor Sklovski. La primera sección del ensayo describe los tres elementos dominantes en *Travesties*: lenguaje foráneo/desautomatizado, intertextualidad y teatralidad. En la segunda sección se analiza la yuxtaposición de hechos históricos y ficticios como factor clave para la desautomatización, junto con la presencia del personaje-narrador en escena, y la relación que este personaje mantiene con los factores desautomatizadores ya mencionados.

**Palabras clave:** Tom Stoppard; *Travesties*; Viktor Sklovski; James Joyce; Oscar Wilde; desautomatización; intertextualidad; teatralidad.

## 1. Devices of Estrangement: A Renewed Apprehension of Art and Life

Estrangement is generally known as the English word for *ostranenie*, although it is also translated as defamiliarization or deautomatization. Shklovsky introduced this term in his 1917 essay “Art as Device,” although the first formulation took place three years before, in his pioneer pamphlet “The Resurrection of the Word.” In 1914, at the age of 17, Shklovsky initially coined his notion of art as a deautomatizing mechanism that ultimately drives the perceiver to a new apprehension of reality. In “The Resurrection of the Word,” Shklovsky uncovered the way in which linguistic and ideological automatisms condition our everyday perceptions:

We do not sense the familiar, we do not see it, but recognise it. We do not see the walls of our rooms, it is so hard for us to spot a misprint in a proof – particularly if it is written in a language well known to us, because we cannot make ourselves see and read through, and not ‘recognise’ the familiar word. (“Resurrection” 41-42)

Traditional accounts of deautomatization in the Anglo-Saxon world have frequently assimilated this concept to the idea of art for art’s sake (Jameson 50-75). The opposite is true. Shklovsky’s idea of estranged art can only be fully comprehended by connecting the realms of art and life, not by distancing them. Defamiliarizing devices challenge formulaic literature by impeding the automatic, uncritical access to the semantic content of a literary piece, thus forcing the reader to pay special attention to its texture. It can be said that estranging devices question the (supposed) transparency of the axis word-object. These devices slow down the average time of perception, thus making the reader/spectator not only reevaluate the work of art, but also the context surrounding it – and its correspondent ethical, social, and ideological ramifications.

Estrangement functions as a device that is primarily linguistic in its origin. About the deliberate strangeness of poetic (literary) language, Shklovsky noted: “The religious poetry of almost all peoples is written in just such a semi comprehensible language” (“Resurrection” 47). He mentioned the use of Latin in catholic rites, and Church-Slavonic in the orthodox liturgy, as instances of this phenomenon. In his “Art as Device,” Shklovsky coined the expression “device of defamiliarization” (*priem ostraneniya*), and made it clear that the main purpose of art is



to produce a new perception of reality. This is achieved by emphasizing the act of apprehension:

And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By “enstranging” [sic, “estranging”] objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious.” The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. *Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant.* (“Art as Device” 6, his italics).

When proclaiming that estrangement “can be found almost anywhere” (9), Shklovsky inaugurated the path for a new valuation of literature in ethic and aesthetic terms. As already stated, *Travesties* will be studied in terms of its estranging features. There are three dominant elements in the play: estranged language, intertextuality, and theatricality<sup>1</sup>. A close reading of the opening scene can help understand better how the first of these factors works. Action is settled in a library in Zurich, 1916, with the following characters on stage: Tristan Tzara, James Joyce, Lenin, and Gwen – the last being the only fictional character at that initial moment. Tzara pronounces the first words in the play:

Eel ate enormous appletzara  
key dairy chef's hat he'lllearn oomparah!  
Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east,  
noon avuncular ill day Clara! (18)

These meaningless words are read aloud by Tzara after he cuts a poem into pieces<sup>2</sup>. Tzara's chance poem constitutes a serious obstacle for the audience, for it blocks the expected access to conventional meaning. After this initial intervention, Cecily crosses the stage asking for silence (“Ssssssh!”), but nobody seems to care about her request. It is then when Joyce and Gwen start talking in very peculiar English – for Joyce is dictating chapter 14 of *Ulysses*. Their dialogue represents the first instance of intertextual reference in *Travesties*:

JOYCE (*dictating to GWEN*): Deshill holles eamus...  
GWEN (*writing*): Deshill holles eamus...  
JOYCE: Thrice.  
GWEN: Uh-hum.

JOYCE: Send us bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit.

GWEN: Send us bright one, light one, Horhon, quickening and wombfruit.

JOYCE: Thrice.

GWEN: Uh-hum.

JOYCE: Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!

GWEN: Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!

JOYCE: Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!

GWEN: Likewise thrice?

JOYCE: Uh-hum. (18)

There is no doubt that a device of estrangement has been set in motion. The scene continues, and Tzara replaces the paper in the hat in order to produce another of his chance poems. After asking for silence again, Cecily accidentally exchanges folders with Gwen. These folders, containing drafts of Lenin's essay and Joyce's novel respectively, will trigger a scene of major confusion at the end of the play. Dialogue resumes when Nadya enters the library and addresses Lenin in Russian. Again, the language is unintelligible for the average spectator. The situation is different for the reader, who has access to a partial English translation in the printed version of *Travesties*:

NADYA: Vylodya!

LENIN: Shto takoya? (*What is it?*)

NADYA: Bronski prishol. On s'kazal shto v'Peterburge revolutsia! (*Bronski came to the house. He says there's a revolution in St. Petersburg.*)

LENIN: Revolutsia! (19)

Although it is evident that the topic of conversation is the Soviet revolution, spectators cannot infer much sense from the dialogue. At this point of the play, it is difficult not to think about Shklovsky's words on estranged language in religious rituals. After the Lenins' dialogue, Joyce reads aloud some of his famous notes in scraps of papers: "More delectation...Aquinas tunbelly...Frate porcospino..."; "Und alle Schiffe brucken..."; "Entweder transubstantiality, oder consubstantitality, but in no way substantitality..." (19). At the same time he declaims these words, the Lenins resume their conversation:

LENIN: Otkuda on znayet? (*How does he know?*)

NADYA: Napisano v'Gazetakh. On govorit shto Tzar sobiraet'sia otrechsyia ot prestola! (*It's all in the papers. He says the Tsar is going to abdicate!*)

LENIN: Shtoty! (*No!*)  
 NADYA: Da! (*Yes!*)  
 LENIN: Eto v'gazetakh? (*Is that in the newspaper?*)  
 NADYA: Da – Da. Idiom damoi. On zhdyot. (*Yes – yes. Come on home. He's waiting.*)  
 LENIN: On tam? (*Is he there?*)  
 NADYA: Da! (*Yes!*)  
 LENIN: Gazetakh u nievo? (*He brought the paper?*)  
 NADYA: Da! (*Yes!*)  
 LENIN: Ty sama vidyela? (*You saw it yourself?*)  
 NADYA: Da, da, da! (*Yes, yes, yes!*) (20)

Lenin tells Nadya as she exits the stage: “Idyi nazad y skazhee y'moo shto ya prichazhoo. Tolka pasbyrayu svayi b'magi. (*Go home ahead of me. I will collect my papers and follow*)” (20). The question is: what is the sense underlying this apparently unintelligible scene? Stoppard has placed the audience on an unstable ground where average linguistic competence renders no meaning. Altogether, the dialogue in Russian, the Joycean annotations, and Tzara's surrealist poems, generate a scene dominated by a nonsensical lexicon. This introductory scene in *Travesties* bears a resemblance to the transrational language employed by the Futurist poets. Shklovsky said of their innovations: “This new language is incomprehensible, difficult, and cannot be read like the *Stock Exchange Bulletin*. It is not even like Russian, but we have become too used to setting up comprehensibility as a necessary requirement of poetic language” (“Resurrection” 46). Stoppard sacrifices net communication in order to achieve an ungrammatical language that radically questions the ontological stability of the play.

In addition to foreign/estranged language, I have defined intertextuality as the second prominent feature in *Travesties*. In fact, it is so to such a high degree that it becomes impossible to explain its plot without recalling its primary literary source, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In Wilde's play, the character of Jack pretends to have an irresponsible brother who is always getting into trouble, an excuse to sporadically leave his town for London. When Jack escapes to London, he enjoys a double personality under the fake name of Ernest. Curiously, Algernon, Jack's friend, only knows him as Ernest. Jack eventually falls in love with Gwendolen, who is Algernon's cousin, while Algernon courts Cecily, who is Jack's niece. And, in order to marry Cecily, Algernon pretends he is Jack's brother, i.e. the fictional

Ernest. This scheme of a typical comedy of errors provides the plot of *Travesties*, crystallized in the peripeties of the couples Carr/Gwen and Tzara/Cecily – note that female characters carry the original names of Wilde’s comedy.<sup>3</sup>

The source for a second literary subtext is Joyce’s *Ulysses*, specifically chapters 14 (“Oxen of the Sun”) and 17 (“Ithaca”). Even though its presence is not as relevant as in the case of *Earnest*, Joyce’s novel achieves a great degree of visibility at certain moments of *Travesties*. At the end of Act I, Stoppard parodies the catechism chapter of “Ithaca” by writing a long dialogue between Joyce and Tzara that extends for almost six pages (56-62). A third subtext to be mentioned is Shakespeare’s work, ranging from sonnet 18 –declaimed by one of the characters – to the inclusion of quotes from up to nine different sources<sup>4</sup> in a dialogue between Tzara and Gwen (54). To conclude, it can be said that, if Wilde’s *Earnest* semantically determined *Travesties*, the other two sources are relevant on a microstructural level.

Nonetheless, literary works are not the only intertexts embedded in Stoppard’s play. Lenin’s historic speeches constitute a second and equally powerful structuring factor. Stoppard also embeds some words attributed to the real Joyce, collected from Richard Ellmann’s famous biography. And there is no doubt that Tzara’s absurd speech on art constitutes a reformulation of the statements he actually made in the 1910s.

Besides estranged language and intertextual references, theatricality represents the third dominant element in the play<sup>5</sup>. This is because the theatrical condition of *Travesties* is constantly emphasized by the presence of numerous theatrical and paratheatrical genres. Some instances of these various genres are: the strip-tease, when Cecily climbs on the table as the song “The Stripper” is playing (78); the magic show, with Joyce as a magician that takes out a rabbit from his hat (63); and the parody of “high comedy” at the end of *Travesties*, when the two women discover the truth among “cries of recognition” (97). By embedding these short scenes, Stoppard emphasizes the conventional nature of his play, thus making the spectator aware of the theatrical/fictional condition of *Travesties*. Jossete Féral accurately defines the way theatricality is linked to a particular communication process:

To assert that theatricality is a communication process implies stressing the results of the “theatricalizing” process, whereby the artist uses rhetoric (signs, codes, conventions, processes) that are then identified by the spectator. This perspective calls for a critical and analytical dimension, a certain distance from the object analyzed, which allows the recognition of processes of ostension, foregrounding, etc. It recognizes that there is a gap between life and stage, between natural and theatricalized action. (8)

This “gap between life and stage” is evident in the acting style that Stoppard describes in his remarks. I can recall a scene in which Tzara, Joyce and Gwen start a discussion in a limerick form, “Irish nonsense” (33) that extends for more than three pages in the printed version. There is no doubt that the succession of short rejoinders, accompanied by rhyme and music, produces a highly theatricalized dialogue. And, as indicated before, the “cries of recognition” at the end of the play clearly reinforce the theatrical perception of the events. Yet *Travesties* also incorporates certain scenes that are based on opposite criteria. The beginning of act II provides a clear example of this tension between diverging aesthetics. It is at this moment when Cecily, after she appears on stage, breaks down the illusionistic distance between her and the audience. Stoppard remarks: “*Most of the light is on Cecily who stands patiently at the front of the stage, waiting for the last members of the audience to come in and sit down*” (66). This explicit appeal to the spectators takes place again when Nadya Lenin appears on the stage and interrupts the comedy of errors plot involving Carr, Cecily, and Gwen:

CARR: Oh, Cecily!

*(Her embrace drags him down out of sight behind her desk. He re-surfaces momentarily—)*

But, my dear Cecily, you don't mean that you couldn't love me if—  
—*and is dragged down again.*)

*(Nadya enters and comes down to address the audience, undramatically.)*

NADYA: From the moment news of the revolution came, Ilyich burned with eagerness to go to Russia... (79)

It is not a coincidence that Nadya “undramatically” addresses the audience. The interaction between highly theatricalized acting and political, “undramatic” speeches provokes a semantic tension that only the spectator is able to resolve. After reviewing the estranged language, the central role of intertextuality, and the (anti)theatricality in *Travesties*, I would like to proceed now to the second part of this

essay. These three features will be better understood in light of the relation between reality and fiction, which is precisely the topic to be studied in the next section.

## **2. Structural and Ontological Gaps: The Two Fictional Worlds in *Travesties***

The ontological configuration of *Travesties* crucially determines the estranged response of the perceiver. Stoppard's play is articulated on two different axes – one literary, the other historical. But, is it a piece of realistic fiction, sporadically ornamented with verbal virtuosity? Or, on the contrary, simply an absurd parody of Wilde's work? Stoppard juxtaposes fiction and reality in order to provoke a new ethical attitude towards the historical figure of Lenin, and, indirectly, the Soviet regime. It is essential to notice that, differently to parody, the playwright does not alter Lenin's actual words. Another aspect of interest is Stoppard's use of a narrator on stage, but in a different manner to the doctrinal narrator typically associated with Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. These two issues will be explored in the rest of the present essay.

The fictional world of *Travesties* becomes artistically motivated as a product of Old Carr's deceptive memory. A senile man, Old Carr explains in Act I that the events on stage are a product of his fallible memory:

My memoirs, is it, then? Life and times, friend of the famous. Memories of James Joyce. James Joyce As I Knew Him. The James Joyce I Knew. Through the Courts With James Joyce [...] What was he like, James Joyce, I am often asked. It is true that I knew him well at the height of his powers, his genius in full flood in the making of *Ulysses*... (22)

Lenin As I Knew Him. The Lenin I Knew. Halfway to the Finland Station with V. I. Lenin: A Sketch, I well remember the first time I met Lenin, or as he was known on his library ticket, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. (23)

Prior to this intervention, Stoppard has indicated in a stage direction: "*It is possible that CARR has been immobile on stage from the beginning, an old man remembering...*" (21). As a consequence of this, Carr remains on stage for the whole play, oscillating between an active agent and some sort of statuesque person that remains outside

the characters' fictional world. Thus, a constant shift takes place between human being and object. Jiří Veltruský accurately described this oscillation in dramatic scenes where the action is reduced to the "zero" level:

The action may fall to the "zero level," the figure then becomes a part of the set. Such human parts of the set are for instance soldiers flanking the entrance to a house. They serve to point out that the house is a barrack [...] Their reality is likewise depressed to the "zero level," since their constituent signs are limited to the minimum [...] It follows then that people in these roles can be replaced by lifeless dummies. Thus people as part of the set form the *transition between the sphere of man and the sphere of the object*. (86, author's italics)

Applying Veltruský's terminology, it can be said that the character of Old Carr constantly moves from man to object, and vice versa. And, as noted above, his memory flaws justify the regressions from the present to 1917, and also the absurd repetitions of dialogues. In Stoppard's words: "*the scene (and most of the play) is under the erratic control of Old Carr's memory, which is not notably reliable [...] One result is that the story (like a toy train perhaps) occasionally jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild*" (27). As Old Carr explains at the end of Act I:

Incidentally, you may or may not have noticed that I got my wires crossed a bit here and there, you know how it is when the old think-box gets stuck in a groove and before you know where you are you've jumped the points and suddenly you think, No, steady on, old chap... (64).

Besides Old Carr, there is a second type of dramatic narrator in *Travesties*. This narrator is a continuation of the messenger in classic Greek theatre, a figure narrating events inscribed in spaces outside the stage. Stoppard follows this tradition when Bennet, who works as Carr's servant in the British consulate, informs him about the Soviet revolution (29-32). An extreme dislocation of this device takes place at the beginning of Act II, when Cecily delivers a long lecture on the history of Marxism and Lenin's life. Interestingly enough, this scene has disturbed audience and critics since *Travesties* was first staged in 1974 – and published one year later. John Fleming, for instance, disapproves of the 1975 text because Act II "begins with Cecily's long monologue (a scene hard to justify as being part of Carr's memory), which provides an

overview of Marxist economic theory and Lenin's political development until he arrived in Zurich" (103-104). To support his claim, Fleming mentions a considerable number of walkouts in Broadway during the 1975-76 season. Fleming argues in favor of cutting the speech, something that Stoppard eventually did when he revised the printed version in 1993. Yet it is surprising, to say the least, to what extent Fleming insists on the necessity of integrating Cecily's lecture in Old Carr's memories. He also describes the whole Lenin section as a failure of the first version of *Travesties*:

Besides not integrating the Lenins into *Earnest*, the other structural flaw of the 1975 text is that while the play is supposed to take place in Carr's memory, the Lenin section seems to exist outside of it [...] Thus, at points during act 2 [of the 1993 version] the audience sees Carr paging through a book as they hear the Lenins speak, and this device is introduced by having the *mise-en-scène* mimic one of Lenin's public orations, but the words he speaks are a paraphrase of Algernon and Lady Bracknell (104-105).

It can be inferred from these words that Fleming conceives the duality fiction/reality in terms of "structural flaw." But, even though Stoppard introduced some changes in the second version, this highly acclaimed "integration" never took place in its totality. In addition, when praising the second version, Fleming forgets about Cecily's lecture, that continues to open Act II and, in consequence, still resists its conceptualization as a product of Old Carr's mind. In my view, this disjunction only confirms that Stoppard pursues estrangement by contrasting two worlds that are ontologically different, without subordinating Lenin's presence to Old Carr's mental universe. As Stoppard indicates in the "Acknowledgements" section: "Nearly everything spoken by Lenin and Nadezha Krupskaya herein comes from his Collected Writings and from her Memories of Lenin." (15). His assertion can also be put in relation to the authorial remarks before Lenin's speech in Act II:

*Everything black except a light on LENIN. He is bearded again. There is a much reproduced photograph of Lenin addressing the crowd in a public square in May 1920 [...] he stands as though leaning into a gale, his chin jutting, his hands gripping the edge of the rostrum which is waist-high, the right hand at the same time gripping a cloth cap...a justly famous image... (84)*

Stoppard's stage direction continues: "*It is structurally important to the Act that the following speech is delivered from the strongest possible*



*position with the most dramatic change of effect from the general stage appearance preceding it*" (85). If Stoppard produces a violent contrast between Lenin's plot and the rest of the play, it is precisely this tension between these fictional worlds that forces the reader/spectator to adopt an active attitude towards *Travesties*.

Before concluding this essay, I would like to expand my analysis of the figure of the stage narrator. It is crucial to keep in mind that, unlike explicitly political playwrights, Stoppard rejects doctrinal art. Beyond superficial similarities, the narrators in *Travesties* and those in Brecht's plays are considerably different. Brecht, the paradigmatic case of an engaged author, emphasized narration as a means of making the public aware of social and economical alienation<sup>6</sup>. Yet the fact that Stoppard rejects didacticism does not necessarily imply that *Travesties* should be understood as a mere joke, or a manifesto for disengaged art<sup>7</sup>. Thus, it is a big mistake to define Stoppard's poetics as a defense of art for art's sake, since by using the device of estrangement the author relates ethic and aesthetic worries. Vaclav Havel, a great friend of Stoppard and another playwright who opposed communism, also referred to defamiliarization as a key device due to the fact that the "real subject of defamiliarization is thus in the end the automatism of reality" (17). This claim can be easily put in relation to Stoppard's attitude toward politics in *Travesties*.

In conclusion, *Travesties* is far from constituting a politically noncommitted work of art. Contrary to the strategies used in doctrinal theatre, Stoppard demands a more active response from the audience. This essay has highlighted the function of three dominant factors: a foreign/estranged language, a strong intertextual component, and a clear emphasis on theatricality. By using these three elements in combination with a fictional world that comprises historical events, Stoppard significantly challenges our previous idea of a certain sociopolitical reality.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s and the 1930s, the idea of *dominant* constituted a central element in the poetics of Russian Formalism and the Prague School Structuralism. Against definitions of the artistic work in terms of harmonic arrangement of elements, the concept of

the dominant pointed towards a dynamic, unstable correlation of semantic forces. As Roman Jakobson stated in 1935: "The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure" (41).

<sup>2</sup> Yet these words are not totally meaningless. Phonetically transcribed, they resemble a limerick in French. This is Stoppard's back translation into English: There is a man called Tzara / Who of riches had an embarrassment. / He stays in Switzerland / Because he's an artist. / "We have nowhere else," he declared. (Stoppard qtd. Fleming 107).

<sup>3</sup> As secondary characters in *Travesties*, Joyce corresponds to Lady Bracknell in Wilde's play, and Bennet to Lane.

<sup>4</sup> After reading Shakespeare's sonnet, Tzara and Gwen start a dialogue made up of Shakespeare's speeches (54). Words from: *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Henry V*, *Henry IV* (Part One), *Othello*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and sonnet 32 (Whitaker 116).

<sup>5</sup> For a very well balanced discussion on theatricality and performance, see the monographic issue edited by Josette Féral: *SubStance*. Special Issue: Theatricality. Vol. 31, no. 2/3, Issue 98/99: (2002).

<sup>6</sup> This comparison becomes tremendously relevant when we realize that Brecht's poetics are associated with the English term 'estrangement,' thus being a synonymous with aesthetic/politic distancing. Nonetheless, the original term in German (*Verfremdung*), is merely variation of the Marxist concept of *Entfremdung* – economic alienation. Contrary to this ideological connotation, Shklovsky's defamiliarization describes perception of reality in a broader perspective, not limited by ideological or historical factors.

<sup>7</sup> Fleming summarizes the discussion between two characters, Cecily and Carr, in the following terms: "Here Carr is aligned with Joyce (and Stoppard) in an affirmation of art for art's sake and in opposition to utilitarian, sociopolitical art" (116).

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# EL QUIJOTE EN LA LITERATURA NORTEAMERICANA

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*Para Andrés Franco, in memoriam*

## **Abstract**

The influence of Don Quixote on many literary works of the English-speaking world constitutes an extremely significant field of study within present-day Cervantine criticism. This paper will analyse the presence of Cervantes' work in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lectures on Don Quixote* and Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*.

**Key words:** Don Quixote, Cervantes, comparative literature, Melville, Nabokov, Acker.

## **Resumen**

Las relaciones de Don Quijote con diversas obras literarias del ámbito anglosajón constituyen un ámbito de estudio de gran relevancia dentro de la crítica cervantista actual. En las siguientes líneas se estudiará la presencia de la obra de Cervantes en *Moby-Dick*, de Herman Melville, *Lectures on Don Quixote*, de Vladimir Nabokov, y *Don Quixote*, de Kathy Acker.

**Palabras clave:** Don Quijote, Cervantes, literatura comparada, Melville, Nabokov, Acker.

## Introducción

El insigne cervantista Juan Bautista Avalle Arce confesaba, en una conferencia pronunciada en el X Coloquio Cervantino de Guanajuato —y recogido ulteriormente en sus correspondientes actas o memorias—, no ser experto en literatura norteamericana (335). Tampoco lo soy yo, aunque sí creo poder reclamar cierta familiaridad con ella; lo grave es que en mi caso tampoco me atrevería a afirmar ser experto en la obra cervantina, pues sólo me considero lector del *Quijote*, si bien lector apasionado y feliz.

En su iluminador trabajo, Avalle Arce, además de estudiar la presencia del *Quijote* en *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, de Charles Dickens, *Madame Bovary*, de Flaubert, y *Crimen y castigo*, de Dostoievski, recalca en dos obras clave de la narrativa estadounidense, *Aventuras de Tom Sawyer* y *Aventuras de Huckleberry Finn*. Por mi parte, y consciente de que explorar a cabalidad un tema como el del *Quijote* en la literatura norteamericana en el tasado tiempo del que dispongo sería una empresa tan fútil como descabellada (quijotesca), me he de limitar en esta ocasión a rastrear, y aunque sea a vuelapluma, las huellas de la obra cumbre de Cervantes en textos tan variopintos como *Moby-Dick*, de Herman Melville, *Lectures on Don Quixote*, de Vladimir Nabokov, y *Don Quixote*, de Kathy Acker,<sup>1</sup> y aunque no estén todos los que son, aspiro al menos a que sean todos los que están.

Recuerdo con nostalgia aquellas tardes de verano de mi ya remota adolescencia tangerina en las que, retrepado en el cafetín de La Hafa, ante las aguas enfurruñadas del Estrecho de Gibraltar, surcado por delfines y algún que otro desnortado cachalote, leí por primera vez *Moby-Dick*, de Herman Melville. Por mor de mi exaltada imaginación (y quizá también por los efluvios del kif), el Estrecho se metamorfoseaba en un proceloso Mar del Sur y los pánfilos delfines semejaban poderosos cetáceos geiservomitantes. Por aquellos mismos años, la versión cinematográfica de *Moby-Dick*, realizada por John Huston, habría de rebautizarme al protagonista de la novela de Melville: desde ese momento, y ya para siempre, el capitán Ahab adquiriría la fisonomía de Gregory Peck. Peligros reduccionistas del cinema.

## Don Quijote, Ahab y el misterio del Mal

Como Mark Twain, Jack London y Robert Louis Stevenson, y también como Miguel de Cervantes, el neoyorkino Herman Melville (1819-1891)

vivió una vida aventurera.<sup>2</sup> La muerte de su padre, cuando Melville tenía sólo quince años de edad, lo sume en la pobreza, de la que intentará salir ejerciendo los oficios más variados: empleado de banco, obrero, maestro, grumete y marino. En 1841, Melville surcó el Pacífico en un barco ballenero. En las Islas Marquesas fue capturado por caníbales, pero no sólo sobrevivió a sus hambrunas sino que acabó conviviendo con ellos durante largos meses. En 1847 se asentó en Nueva York. Pasó después algún tiempo en Massachusetts, donde conoció a Nathaniel Hawthorne, cuya influencia fue decisiva en la redacción de *Moby-Dick*. Melville pasó los últimos treinta y cinco años de su vida como aduanero. (A veces he perseguido su triste sombra por los viejos muelles de Nueva York, por las callejuelas adoquinadas de Gansevoort, cerca del Hudson River). Herman Melville está enterrado en el Woodlawn Cemetery, de Nueva York, frente a un apacible estanque —¡ironías de la muerte!—, en cuyas orillas zancajean no ya rapaces gaviotas, albatros ni alcaravantes, sino sumisos cisnes, patos y gansos. En su epitafio se lee: “Death is only a launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshore” (“La Muerte es sólo un salto a la región de lo Desconocido; un primer saludo a las posibilidades de lo Remoto, de lo Salvaje, de lo Oceánico, de lo Infinito”).<sup>3</sup>

No me atrevería yo a afirmar que la vida de Cervantes y Herman Melville fueron paralelas, pero en algunos aspectos las similitudes de sus trayectorias vitales resultan sorprendentes: las peripecias marítimas de ambos, la captura en Argel y en las Islas Marquesas, el acoso de la pobreza, sus matrimonios sin amor, la muerte sin pena ni gloria. Pero ya lo dijo el mismo Melville, en *Moby-Dick*: “He who has never failed somewhere, that man can not be great. Failure is the true test of greatness” (990). (“Quien no ha fracasado nunca, no puede ser llamado grande. La verdadera prueba de grandeza es el fracaso.”)

Primero fue Nietzsche —nos recuerda Harold Bloom (1991)— quien proclamó la muerte de Dios; después vinieron los postmodernistas —Barthes, Foucault y sus compinches—, y proclamaron la muerte del autor (ix y ss.). Es cierto que el personaje literario suele ser una invención, y que como toda invención es producto de una invención previa; pero empeñarse en reducir el concepto de personaje a un simple signo escritural en el discurso me parece una idea no sólo mostrenca sino también estéril. Un personaje literario es ante todo portador de

una ética, de una conducta. La representación literaria del personaje es ya en sí un análisis del personaje, parte de todo un cuerpo literario, de una cultura. A personajes, y no a signos escriturales, habré, pues, de referirme.

En su *An Introduction to American Literature* (1973), Jorge Luis Borges señala que 1850-1855 fue uno de los períodos más significativos de las letras norteamericanas: en 1850 Hawthorne publica *The Scarlet Letter*, y Emerson, *Representative Men*; de 1854 es *Walden*, de Thoreau; y en 1855 publica Walt Whitman *Leaves of Grass*. *Moby-Dick*, de Herman Melville aparece en 1851. Jorge Luis Borges subraya la influencia de Carlyle y Shakespeare en *Moby-Dick*, pero Cervantes brilla por su ausencia (30 y ss.). Claro que eso no nos debe extrañar en un autor que, con algunas excepciones (Quevedo), no sentía gran aprecio por la literatura española. Ecos de Cervantes, pensara lo que pensara Borges, se perciben en la novela de Melville. Pero vayamos por partes.

*Moby-Dick* es ante todo una parábola sobre el misterio del Mal. La ballena blanca como una montaña de nieve simboliza la brutalidad de la existencia, la fuerza ciega y abrumadora de la naturaleza; Ahab, el antagonista, representa al ser humano, débil, en una lucha, como don Quijote, contra las fuerzas destructoras, no ya de la naturaleza sino de los hombres, porque, al fin y al cabo, estos son parte de la naturaleza. Ahab y don Quijote tienen como misión contrarrestar las embestidas del Mal. De no arremeter contra ellas, presienten que esas mismas fuerzas del Mal —ballena o gigantes— habrán de acabar absorbiéndolos, engulléndolos. Ni don Quijote ni el capitán Ahab podrán destruir el Mal; nobles son ambas actitudes, pero sus medios están abocados al fracaso. Ahora bien, aun cuando ni don Quijote ni Ahab triunfen sobre el Mal, sí lo consiguen Cervantes y Melville, pues sólo la obra de arte, aunque no sea más que una ilusión, nos ayuda a salir del caos que nos angustia. Tanto don Quijote como Ahab se dan cuenta de que la única forma de vencer al Mal es saliendo de su propio yo, entregándose a los demás, porque al fin y al cabo siempre cabe la esperanza de que nuestra lucha continúe y que no deje de haber hombres y mujeres con el valor de enfrentarse a la injusticia, a la rapacidad, a la violencia.

Si don Quijote se comportaba con una admirable cordura mientras no saliesen a relucir los malhadados libros de caballería, el capitán Ahab demostraba poseer un juicio más que certero en todo lo que no



lindase con la captura de Moby-Dick. Estamos ante dos monomanías, ante dos obsesiones devoradoras: en la novela de Melville, la obsesión de Ahab por capturar a la ballena, y en el *Quijote*, la obsesión del hidalgo manchego por la caballería andante, serán los desencadenantes y, a la postre, la causa de su destrucción. Si el dilema de Ahab reside en que se ciega ante todo lo que no sean sus propios pensamientos, obcecado con la captura y muerte de la ballena, es decir, del Mal, también don Quijote, emperrado en emular las hazañas de amadisés y belianises, se ciega ante todo lo que no pertenezca a su mundo caballeresco. Tanto Ahab como don Quijote sólo son capaces de ver el mundo cuando una fuerza extraña se les impone, ya sean cetáceos o aguerridos ejércitos (“If such a furious trope may stand, his special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon upon its own mad mark”, *Moby-Dick*, 990). En ambos psicomaníacos se da una insólita combinación de locura y razón. Cabría decir que ambos padecen de locura, pero de una locura controlada

La actitud desafiante de don Quijote y de Ahab se asemeja porque, al fin y al cabo, nada ni nadie les obligaba a que se lanzaran a empresas tan desquiciadas como peligrosas. Ambos, Ahab y don Quijote son productos del individualismo, pero de un individualismo devastador. Ambos son libres para escoger su propia destrucción; como consecuencia de esta voluntad de acción, sus reacciones normales ante el placer y el dolor se invierten: Ahab acepta la galerna con los brazos abiertos; Don Quijote acepta el reto de los molinos sin amedrentarse un ápice; el capitán Ahab habrá de sufrir la incordia de su tripulación, la amputación de una pierna en su lucha con la ballena, la muerte misma; don Quijote tendrá que soportar los palos de desalmados yangüeses y mozos de mulas, las burlas y mofas de duques y duquesas, para acabar muriendo, desengañado y contrito. El triunfo de Melville y el de Cervantes radican en haber logrado crear dos personajes, dos antihéroes, que encarnan a su vez el descalabro y la gloria.

Como el *Quijote*, *Moby-Dick* se presta a una doble lectura: la de una historia imaginaria y la de un relato puramente simbólico. En ambos, la realidad aparece de forma bipolar. Como Ahab, que para conocer la realidad ha de probarse a sí mismo “in a living act”, don Quijote decidirá abandonar la seguridad de su lugarejo manchego para lanzarse a una vida de acción y de peligro.

Tanto en el *Quijote* como en *Moby-Dick*, la vida consciente del hombre se revela como un palimpsesto que ocultara las ruinas de una felicidad por largo tiempo perdida. Don Quijote y Ahab parecen haber comprendido que el hombre no sólo está alienado de su propia y original soberanía, sino que ha olvidado su propia alienación. Ambos parecen haber descubierto que el hombre es un exiliado *a nativitate*. Si don Quijote añoraba aquella “dichosa edad y siglos dichosos a quien los antiguos pusieron nombre de dorados...” (292),<sup>4</sup> Ahab aspira a ser lo que había sido una vez: un gran marino, un verdadero capitán. Sus propósitos, pues, no parecen ser ya tan descabellados: responden a una visión simpatética de un pasado que, según ellos, fue mejor. Lo que sí es descabellado, paradójicamente, es que ambos quieran alcanzar sus fines en la realidad del mundo. Hasta en el lenguaje arcaizante de Ahab y don Quijote se cifran los signos de su propia fatalidad, porque ese lenguaje refleja una sintaxis vital obsoleta. Recordemos la famosa resolución de Ahab: “to dismember my dismemberer”; y “la razón de la sinrazón”, de don Quijote.

### **Vladimir Nabokov, sus *Lectures on Don Quixote* y el implacable dedo acusador del profesor Francisco Márquez Villanueva**

Hace algún tiempo, Francisco Márquez Villanueva, catedrático de Harvard y reconocido cervantista, publicó un artículo titulado “La lección del disparatario nabokoviano (Clare Quilty-Avellaneda)”. El puntilloso cervantista, indignado por lo que él califica de “fechoría crítica cometida por Vladimir Nabokov” (338), se lanza, con la mordacidad de un palique clariniano, a vapulear, a veces con razón y las más sin ella, al autor de *Lolita*. No es mi intención defender a Nabokov, porque ni Nabokov necesita de mi defensa ni en el fondo a nadie se le da un ardite, a la vista del enjundioso corpus narrativo nabokoviano—*Sebastian Knight, Invitation, Pale Fire, Pnin, The Gift, Ada*, etc.—, lo que diga o deje de decir Márquez Villanueva, por muy catedrático de Harvard y cervantista que sea.

Es bien sabido que el *Quijote* no se contaba entre las novelas favoritas de Nabokov, lo que no fue óbice para que el escritor rusonorteamericano la calificara —como así lo hizo en más de una ocasión— de “masterpiece”, de obra maestra. Márquez Villanueva comienza su artículo acotando una serie de datos sobre la estancia de Nabokov en Harvard. Se basa,

para ello, en *The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov*, de Andrew Field; y es una lástima, porque el libro de Field es más bien un revoltijo de vaguedades que un estudio crítico. Más le hubiese valido a Márquez Villanueva acudir, por ejemplo, al espléndido estudio de Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: the American Years*, donde se recoge con fidedigna exactitud aquella temporada de Nabokov en Harvard.

Vladimir Nabokov emigró a los Estados Unidos en 1940. De la Universidad de Cornell, en donde se le había contratado, pasó a la de Harvard para sustituir al profesor Harry Levin durante un semestre del año académico 1951-1952. En efecto —y como recuerda Fredson Bowers en su prefacio a *Lectures on Don Quixote* (1983), libro publicado póstumamente, y que recoge las seis conferencias que Nabokov pronunciara en Harvard sobre la obra de Cervantes—, a Nabokov se le había pedido que dictara dos cursos de literatura eslava —Dostoyesky, Tolstoy, Chejov, Mayakovsky, Pushkin— y uno, “Humanities II”, sobre la Novela (Bowers, vii y ss.). Márquez Villanueva nos asegura que aquel compromiso “no dejaba de ser para Nabokov muy peliagudo” (339), lo que me parece una exageración malintencionada, pues el mismo Levin le había advertido a Nabokov que a aquellos estudiantes les interesaba más acercarse a la literatura por lo que ésta podía reflejar de la realidad de la vida, que estudiarla como un objeto artístico. Nabokov, desde luego, no le hizo demasiado caso al profesor Levin (e hizo bien), y así, desde la primera clase, les previno a sus seiscientos estudiantes que se abstuvieran de reconciliar la ficción de los hechos con los hechos de la ficción (Boyd, 213). Ignoro cuál fue la reacción del harvardense alumnado.

Supone Márquez Villanueva —con alguna razón— que el problema de Nabokov radicaba en “la imposibilidad de consagrar todo su esfuerzo a la literatura rusa y tener que enseñar otras que conocía superficialmente o por cuyos autores y obras sentía verdadera fobia” (340). Pero, no olvidemos, a Nabokov se le había encomendado que enseñara una clase —y además, a alumnos no demasiado interesados en la materia—, y no que escribiera un tratado erudito sobre el *Quijote*. De todos modos, los textos de esas conferencias, publicadas, como ya he dicho, póstumamente, demuestran que Nabokov se preparó a conciencia, como muy pocos profesores suelen hacerlo.

Es cierto que a Nabokov (y no sólo a él) ciertas escenas del *Quijote* se le antojaban de una crueldad abominable e incluso gratuita (52); pero no

creo que esa reacción de Nabokov (tan natural, por otra parte) sea razón suficiente para que Márquez Villanueva lo acuse de cervantinóforo. Y aunque Nabokov hable de la Inquisición, del fanatismo estúpido de Felipe II y hasta de las corridas de toros, en un tono despectivo (y no sé qué otro tono merecen esas lacras de la historia española), la verdad es que a mí, que también he seguido con detenimiento los apuntes de Nabokov, no me parece que sea como para poner el grito en el cielo. Puntalicemos: lo que Nabokov detestaba era ese interés que parece tener Cervantes en hacer reír al lector con los dolores y humillaciones de don Quijote. ¿Por qué, si no, llegaría Nabokov a comparar al Quijote con Cristo?

Márquez Villanueva declara que Nabokov “no tuvo más remedio que hociocar y darse a un intenso trabajo para preparar las seis conferencias...” (340). Yo no sé si Nabokov ‘hocicó o no hocicó’, pero lo que sí me consta, pues para eso están ahí sus notas, es que no sólo releyó minuciosamente la novela de Cervantes sino que hizo de ella una sinopsis detallada, capítulo por capítulo.

Márquez Villanueva afirma olímpicamente, por si nos cupiese alguna duda, que los conocimientos de Nabokov sobre la lengua, la literatura y la historia españolas “eran virtualmente nulos” y que la preparación que había realizado para sus conferencias sobre Cervantes y el Quijote había sido “microscópica” (341). ¡Algo sabría Nabokov de nuestras letras, digo yo, pues no sólo de mariposas y mariposos vivía el hombre! Y si no sabía, algún esfuerzo hizo para subsanar ese desconocimiento. En sus apuntes de clase, saltan aquí y allá nombres como los de Aubrey F. G. Bell, Joseph Wood Krutch, Salvador de Madariaga, Paul Groussac, Rudolf Schevill, Alexander James Duffield, cervantistas y quijotófilos de pro. ¿Que el elenco resulta raquítico? Algo es algo. Nabokov demuestra estar también familiarizado con *Le Morte d'Arthur*, de Sir Thomas Malory, con el *Amadís de Gaula*. y otros libros de caballería. Sea como fuere, ¿no era más lógico, con el limitado tiempo del que disponía para sus clases, que Nabokov, en vez de ‘hocicar’ (como diría Márquez Villanueva, aficionado sin duda al esperpento) por las bibliotecas aiviliguenses, a la búsqueda de la erudición iluminadora, se dedicara a meditar y profundizar en el texto, en el libro mismo? ¿De qué le hubieran valido a un escritor de la talla de Nabokov las carcomidas muletas de los críticos para aquilatar el valor de una obra literaria? Y hablando de críticos: ¿a cuántos perspicaces exégetas de

la obra cervantina se les había ocurrido, como se le ocurrió a Nabokov, relacionar el *Quijote* con el *King Lear* de Shakespeare?

Márquez Villanueva nota que, en sus apuntes, Nabokov considera el *Quijote* como un tipo de ficción muy primitivo y a Cervantes como mero esclavo del género picaresco, siendo, por ende, indiferente a toda ideología, a toda suerte de males y problemas de su tiempo; por otra parte, su pleito con los libros de caballerías no pasa de ser “un simple ostentoso pretexto” (342). Pero esa no es toda la verdad, y ya se sabe, una verdad parcelada es una verdad a medias. Lo que escribe literalmente Nabokov es lo siguiente:

[*Don Quixote*] “is closely allied to the picaresque novel [...]. It is also significant that by selecting a bum for his hero, the author in times of political oppression when a moral message is enforced by the government or the church —it is significant that by making such a selection the author slyly sheds any dangerous responsibility for his hero’s social-religious-political background since the trap, the adventurer, the madman is fundamentally asocial and irresponsible. (11) (“El *Quijote* está vinculado íntimamente a la picaresca [...]. Es también significativo —y demuestra una gran sagacidad por su parte— que Cervantes, al escoger a un vagabundo como héroe de su novela, en una época de opresión política y eclesiástica, no se responsabiliza de la ideología socio-religiosa y política de don Quijote, puesto que el vagabundo, el aventurero, el loco, suelen ser marginados e irresponsables.”)

Ante la Segunda conferencia de Nabokov, Márquez Villanueva se escandaliza de que éste ponga “por los suelos a Sancho Panza”, a quien tilda de “payaso” (342). ¡Vaya por Dios! ¡Como si la figura del payaso sólo tuviese la misión de hacer reír! Al parecer, para el gentil catedrático, *Il Pagliaci* y los payasos de Fellini son deleznable. Pues sí, Nabokov llama “clown” a Sancho, lo que no le impide apreciar su astucia, su socarronería, su fidelidad, su nobleza, su amor por don Quijote y por su mujer e hijos: “This love for his master and his love for his gray are his most human traits” (21).

Y llegamos al “gran disparate nabokoviano”: ¿pero cómo se atreve Nabokov —se pregunta, horrorizado, Márquez Villanueva— a dudar de que el *Quijote* sea la mejor novela jamás escrita? Independientemente de que hablar de mejor o peor, tratándose de literatura, resulta siempre una apreciación un tanto burda —después de todo, no se trata de una carrera de caballos—, conviene que puntualicemos: no cabe duda que el

*Quijote* no era la obra favorita de Nabokov y que aunque apreciaba su grandeza, no creía que la cosa fuera para tanto. No obstante, Nabokov declaró en más de una ocasión que la creación de la figura de don Quijote, por parte de Cervantes, había sido una invención genial —“a stroke of genius”—. “¡Qué hermosa visión —exclama Nabokov, con una vehemencia que parece traicionar su tibia opinión de la novela— la del Caballero de la Triste Figura, cabalgando, en su famélico rocín, por el vasto horizonte de la literatura!” (“a gaunt giant on a lean nag”) (28).

Y por si eso no fuera bastante, he aquí las siguientes palabras de Nabokov, que constituyen, a mi juicio, todo un tributo al genio de Cervantes y a don Quijote como símbolo cultural:

Don Quixote has ridden for three hundred and fifty years through the jungles and tundras of human thought —and he has gained in vitality and stature. We do not laugh at him any longer. His blason is pity, his banner is beauty. He stands for everything that is gentle, forlorn, pure, unselfish, and gallant. (112) (“Don Quijote ha cabalgado durante trescientos cincuenta años por las junglas y tundras del pensamiento humano, y ha ido ganando en vitalidad y estatura. Ya no nos reímos de él. Su blasón es la piedad; su estandarte, la belleza. Don Quijote simboliza todo lo que hay de gentil, inocente, puro, generoso y galante en el ser humano.”)

A mí esa apreciación nabokoviana, y con la venia de Márquez Villanueva, de Harvard y la de todos los Pares de Francia, no me parece ni un disparate ni una “fechoría crítica” (338).

### **El Quijote femenino y pornográfico de Kathy Acker, alias Tarántula Negra**

Kathy Acker, alias Tarántula Negra, la novelista, cuentista, ensayista y guionista norteamericana, nacida en 1948 y fallecida hace cuatro años, es una de las escritoras más destacadas de la generación “punk”, aunque ya sea por su radical ideología feminista, por sus ideas ácratas, por su actitud desenfadada ante el sexo y/o por su escritura virulentamente iconoclasta no ha recibido la atención crítica que merece.<sup>5</sup> Asociada con la música del más duro rock-and-roll, la metaficción subversiva de Acker se caracteriza por una amalgama de violencia, obscenidades, secuencias autobiográficas del más crudo realismo, viñetas del horror urbano y descarados plagios. Su obra constituye todo un desafío a la moralidad convencional y a los modos tradicionales de expresión artística.

Bastan unos pocos datos biográficos para que entendamos el origen de esta actitud provocadora, subversiva, de Kathy Acker, el porqué de su furia, de su frustración, de su rechazo de la sociedad bienpensante y biensintiente norteamericana. Nacida en Nueva York, de padre desconocido, Kathy Acker se malcrió con su madre y padrastro. A pesar de haber tenido que sufrir penurias y humillaciones sin cuento, Acker asistió a las universidades de Brandeis y a la de California, en San Diego, de donde se graduó en 1968. Después de dos fracasos matrimoniales, Acker regresó a Nueva York en los años setenta, y tuvo que ganarse la vida como cabaretera y actriz en filmes pornográficos, mientras simultaneaba estas actividades un tanto heterodoxas con los estudios de Filología Clásica y Filosofía en la City University of New York, mi Universidad (aunque yo, para mi suerte o desgracia, no llegué a conocerla nunca). En 1972 publicó su primer libro, *Politics*, revoltillo de poesía y prosa, con una palmaria influencia de William Burroughs, el autor de *Naked Lunch* y *Queer*. Al año siguiente, y ya con el seudónimo o alias de Black Tarantula, Tarántula Negra, publicó *Life of the Black Tarantula* y *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*. A estas novelas, todavía primerizas, aunque reveladoras de una escritora de garra, siguieron *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac* (1974) y tres novelas cortas, publicadas en 1978: *Florida*, sátira del film *Key Largo*; *Kathy Goes to Haiti*, en la que se relata, con todo lujo de detalles pornográficos, la explotación sexual de una jovencita norteamericana en Haití; y *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec by Henri Toulouse Lautrec*, texto inclasificable, que remite a la obra fotográfica de la malograda Diane Arbus. En 1979 Kathy Acker ganó el Premio Pushcart por su libro *New York City in 1979*. A principios de los ochenta, se trasladó a Londres, donde siguió publicando ininterrumpidamente: *Great Expectations*, *Blood and Guts in High School*, *Don Quixote* (1986) y *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). Acker regresó a los Estados Unidos a comienzos de los noventa. Publicó *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), *Portrait of an Eye* (1992), *My Mother* (1993), y *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996). Además de promocionar el arte del culturismo y del tatuaje (de los que ella misma era vivo ejemplo), Acker fue profesora en el Instituto de Arte de San Francisco, en la Universidad de California y en la Universidad de Idaho. Poco antes de morir, Kathy Acker publicó una colección de ensayos, *Bodies of Work* (1997), y *Eurydice in the Underground* (1997), volumen de cuentos. A los cuarenta y ocho años, un cáncer segó su vida.

En la narrativa de Kathy Acker, caleidoscópica y autorreferencial, sin trama aparente, se suceden, a velocidad de vértigo, acrónica y ucrónicamente, las más variopintas, insólitas historias, que van desde esperpénticas fantasías personales, obsesionantes escenas de violación e incesto, con su buena dosis de violencia y sexo (delicia para psicopatólogos y masturbadores) hasta textos de variado pelaje, plagiados de Charles Dickens, Marcel Proust o el Marqués de Sade. Con la desatada furia de una ménade, Acker fustiga, swiftianamente, las costumbres mojigatas y opresoras de la clase media norteamericana, y denuncia la cultura falocéntrica y jerarquizante que impera en los predios del Tío Sam.

En *Empire of the Senseless* (ya con ciertos resabios quijotescos) se nos cuentan las aventuras y desventuras de la pícara Abhor, la protagonista, de raza indefinida y humanoide, y Thivai, su amigo y compinche, en busca de algo o alguien que sea capaz de liberarlos de un mundo convulsionado por la guerra y la revolución. En *In Memoriam to Identity* se nos presenta la vida del poeta Arthur Rimbaud a través de ejemplos de su poesía y fragmentos de su breve biografía, seguidos por las historias de dos heroínas, Airplane, víctima de violación y estrella de *striptease*, y Capitol, reina del porno y el sadomasoquismo.

En la última novela de Acker, *Pussy, King of the Pirates* —adaptación parcial de *La Isla del Tesoro*, de Stevenson, con alusiones a la *Historia de O* y al Teatro de la Crueldad de Antonin Artaud (y obvia influencia de *Ciudades de la noche roja*, de Burroughs), dos ex prostitutas organizan una banda de piratas femeninas y se lanzan en busca de un tesoro escondido en el seno de la sociedad matriarcal.

La crítica norteamericana —tan postmodernista ella—ha calificado el *Don Quixote*, de Kathy Acker, de “reinterpretación” de la novela de Cervantes. No sé si es que los críticos norteamericanos no han leído el *Quijote* o eso de la reinterpretación hay que entenderlo con una manga muy ancha. En la novela de Acker, seguimos el deambular, por Nueva York y Londres, de la protagonista: Don Quixote. Sí, he dicho la protagonista, porque en esta ocasión El Caballero de la Triste Figura se convertirá en La Amazonas de la Sexy Femosura; en otras palabras, que Don Quixote no es Don Quixote sino Doña Quixote. Claro que en inglés no se nota tanto el disparate (ya aparecerá por algún lado Márquez Villanueva, con su dedo acusador). Las aventuras de Doña



Quixote están salpicadas de encuentros psicosexuales, de surreales y no tan surreales abortos, de descomunales orgasmos clitóricos, vaginales y toxicofármicos. “¿Y Sancho, dónde se esconde el buen Sancho?” —se preguntarán ustedes, y con muchísima razón. Por desgracia, Saint Simeon, el fiel compañero de Doña Quixote, no es más que un perro, y un perro, aunque parlanchín, de lo más sato y desabrido. Si por lo menos a la Acker se le hubiera ocurrido llamarlo Sancho Punko o haber invitado a escena a Cipión y Berganza, otro gallo nos cantara. Sea como fuere, Doña Quixote y su perro, se lanzan al mundo para deshacer o desconstruir los entuertos de la sociedad patriarcal, culpable de este mundo deshumanizado y alienante.

En su *Don Quixote* —cuya vinculación a la obra de Cervantes resulta muy tenue, casi irreconocible— Acker yuxtapone a la voz de Cervantes las voces de Moravia, de Shaw, de Celine, aderezados con pasajes de Shakesperare, Brönte, Dante, historiadores, pornógrafos y críticos marxistas (que en poco se diferencian).

El Quijote de Acker es una mujer que, tras sufrir un sanguinario aborto, decide echarse a la calle en busca de un amor que la reconcilie con el mundo (9 y ss.). Tan pronto como Sancho Panza, es decir St. Simeon, es decir el perro sato, hace mutis al principio de la novela (se ve que esta Doña Quixote prefiere el soliloquio al diálogo), Doña Quixote se lanza en su búsqueda, porque el perro no es otro que St. Simeon, su fogoso amante, encaninado por algún nigromante de marras.

En la segunda sección de la novela, subtitulada “Other Texts”, la protagonista, sin voz y sin voto, se ve condenada (no sabemos muy bien por qué ni por quién) a leer textos de autores exclusivamente masculinos; los femeninos, entre los que se encuentran los suyos, le han sido terminantemente vedados.

En la tercera y última parte, Doña Quixote, habiendo recobrado la voz, viaja por la América de Nixon en busca de St. Simeon, discurso va, discurso viene, uno sobre política, otro sobre sexualidad, otro sobre drogas —¡Haz el amor y no la guerra!— pero con poco éxito, pues el país no está para discursitos anarcofeministas.

La novela termina en una visión desesperanzada: Doña Quixote sueña que Dios —Él o Ella misma— le niega toda posibilidad de encontrarle algún significado a la vida: “There are no more stories, no

more tracks, no more memories: there is you, knight. Since I am no more, forget Me. Forget morality. Forget about saving the world” (207). (“Se acabaron las historias, se acabaron los recuerdos: sólo quedas tú, caballero andante. Olvídame, porque no existo. Déjate de moralidades. Al mundo no hay quien lo salve.”).

## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup> Cito por las siguientes ediciones: *Moby-Dick*, de Herman Melville, The Library of America, New York, 1983; *Lectures on Don Quixote*, de Vladimir Nabokov, ed. de Fredson Bowers, San Diego, New York, London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983; *Don Quixote*, de Kathy Acker, Grove Press, New York, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Véase *Melville. A Biography*, de Edwin Haviland Miller, George Braziller, New York, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Todas las traducciones son mías.

<sup>4</sup> *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Aguilar, Madrid, 1968, Parte I, Cap. XI: 292.

<sup>5</sup> Sobre la novela que nos ocupa, yo destacaría los siguientes estudios: “The Quest for Love and the Writing of Female Desire in Kathy Acker’s *Don Quixote*”, de Richard Walsh, en *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* XXXII, Núm. 3 (Primavera 1991): 149-68; “A Conversation with Kathy Acker”, de Ellen Friedman, en *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9, Núm. 3 (Otoño 1989): 12-22; “Kathy Acker’s *Don Quixote*: Nomad Writing” de Douglas Shields Dix, en *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 9, Núm. 3 (Otoño 1989): 56-62.

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# LIBERALISM OPTIMISTIC AND IRONIC: WINIFRED HOLTBY AND SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

As a member of the liberal British intelligentsia in the era between the two world wars, Winifred Holtby participated in numerous public debates with her journalism and fiction, including controversies about imperialism and colonialism. After an extended visit to South Africa in 1926, Holtby wrote forward-thinking journalistic articles about racial equality that nonetheless suffered from the limits of liberal ideology. The idealistic positions she forged in her journalism were, however, sweepingly ironized in the novel she published in 1933, *Mandoa! Mandoa!*, set in a fictional nation in northern Africa, that tackles questions of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and class conflict in a comic form.

**Key words:** South Africa, Liberalism, Interwar Literature, Journalism, Racial Equality

## Resumen

En su condición de miembro del la *intelligentsia* liberal británica en la época comprendida entre las dos guerras mundiales, Winifred Holtby tomó parte en numerosos debates públicos por medio de su labor periodística y narrativa, entre las que se incluyen controversias relacionadas con el imperialismo y el colonialismo. Tras una prolongada visita a Sudáfrica en 1926 Holtby redactó previsoros artículos periodísticos sobre la igualdad de razas que hubieron de sufrir empero las limitaciones de la ideología liberal. Las posturas idealistas que fraguó en su periodismo fueron sin embargo en su

totalidad ridiculizadas en la novela que publicó en 1933, *Mandoa! Mandoa!*, ambientada en una nación ficticia del norte de África, que aborda temas tales como el colonialismo, el neocolonialismo y el conflicto de clases en tono cómico.

**Palabras clave:** Sudáfrica, liberalismo, literatura de entreguerras, periodismo, igualdad racial

Winifred Holtby was a dynamic writer and activist during her short life. (Born in 1898, she died of Bright's Disease in 1935). Like many of her contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, Naomi Mitchison, and Vera Brittain, she wrote significant amounts of journalism as well as fiction throughout her career. Holtby participated in numerous debates of the interwar period, partly through her engagement with the feminist weekly *Time and Tide*, as contributor for many years and as director during the late 1920s. In 1926 she expanded her range of interests by traveling to South Africa for five months to promote the ideals of the League of Nations Union. These ideals may be simplified as international cooperation to create a more peaceful world -- idealistic values that squared well with her liberal feminism and general political liberalism. Holtby became one of a relatively small group of Britons who represented Africa in the British imaginary in the interwar period while sustaining political involvement in the continent as well as scepticism about British imperial goals and methods.<sup>1</sup> As her friend and colleague Vera Brittain explained: "She went to preach the gospel of peace to white South Africa; she returned to plead, with passion and pertinacity, the cause of black South Africa to an indifferent England" (189). Her compassion and empathy for the Africans she met in 1926 led her to write forward-thinking journalistic articles about equality that nonetheless suffered from the limits of liberal ideology. The idealistic positions she forged in her journalism were, however, sweepingly ironized in the novel she published in 1933, *Mandoa! Mandoa!*, set in a fictional nation in northern Africa, that tackles questions of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and class conflict. As evidenced in both her journalism and this novel set in Africa, Holtby's liberal imagination constrained her sense of possible solutions to the problems she witnessed in South Africa.

When in Johannesburg, Holtby met representatives and supporters of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, the ICU, a general union that spoke for the rights of urban workers as well as rural tenants and peasants, "the one black movement [in this era] which was able simultaneously to develop some national organization and to secure... mass local support amongst disparate and divided communities" (Beinart 102). Holtby became involved at the height of the ICU's influence: "At its peak in 1927-1928 the ICU claimed more than 100,000 African members, a few thousand Coloureds, and some whites nationwide" (Beck 118). During the late 1920s, the ICU had a wider reach and a more extensive membership than the African National Congress. The ICU organized labor strikes in ports and industrial areas, but was also very active in rural areas "undergoing rapid transition toward capitalist agriculture," helping to organize resistance on the part of tenants "being evicted or squeezed for more work" (Beinart 105).<sup>2</sup> Holtby provided strong support for the ICU when she returned to England, helping to draft their constitution, drumming up endorsements from British labor leaders, gathering books for education campaigns, and contributing significant amounts of money from her own earnings to the cause. She pleaded the case for workers' rights and racial harmony through extensive journalistic pieces, published in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, the *Clarion*, the *New Leader*, *Time and Tide*, the newsletter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the *Manchester Guardian*, and *Foreign Affairs*, among other periodicals.<sup>3</sup> In addition, she published two novels related to African affairs, *The Land of Green Ginger* (1927) and *Mandoa! Mandoa!* (1933).

While Holtby saw her efforts on behalf of South African workers as her most important political commitment, that which would allow her to "repay [her] debt" for her privileged life (Shaw 169), her liberal positioning limited the claims she could make for a progressive solution to conflicts of race and class in Africa and in the U.K.<sup>4</sup> For example in an article published in the *Nation and Athenaeum* in 1929 ("Better and Brighter Natives" 23 November 1929) Holtby argued that "all that the African peoples really want or need is equality of status" with the white population, rather than any sort of privilege or dominance, or redress of historical grievances (qtd. in Berry & Bishop 185). She protested General Hertzog's policies of segregation, the results of which she

claimed, in remarkable understatement, would be “utterly unpleasant for the peoples on both sides of the separating barrier” (qtd. in B&B 187). Holtby acknowledged the unfairness of a situation in which the natives “hold less than a tenth as much land as the whites, though they are four times as numerous,” and in which “legal segregation means inequality before the law” (qtd. in B&B 187-88). But her final paragraph in this article reveals the limits of her alliance with the Africans on whose behalf she worked:

Quite apart from any concern for the honour of our imperial government, a concern which can be felt by the opponents as well as the supporters of imperialism, we dare not let the segregationists have their way. Their victory would mean the creation of a pool of cheap and helpless labour [...] It would mean protracted stagnation of the African market [...] It would mean the embitterment of more than fifty million people, who must inevitably one day learn how to use the weapons which civilization has forged and exact a terrible revenge [...] [W]e dare not face the consequences of an Africa enslaved. (189)

Holtby maintains a concern for the “honour of our imperial government” and the progress of capitalism, for despite her understanding of “equality,” “implicit in her programme [...] was a belief in the superiority of European culture,” although according to her biographer, Marion Shaw, “this did not mean that she believed in an inherent inferiority in the black races; the difference lay in the rate of development and in technological achievement” (Shaw 172-3). The fear of native uprisings was a common fear in imperial capitals in the 1920s and ‘30s, stimulated by Gandhi’s resistance movement in India as well as strikes and protests in Africa and throughout the colonized world. We find in her work deference to the “honour” due the “imperial government,” but also anti-imperialist rhetoric that grew out of her pacifist-leaning work for the League of Nations Union, to which she alludes in the following:

The day of imperialism is passed. I heard its curfew sound [...] on Armistice day. Imperialism is really nothing more than dynamic and aggressive nationality [...] What we want now is the transition to a still wider sphere of international co-operation, where empires don’t matter, and patriotism becomes parochial, and the service of mankind becomes the only consideration. (*Letters to a Friend* qtd. in Shaw 112)



Her optimistic liberalism, based in the discourse of equal rights, rational human cooperation, and progress, however, led Holtby to be susceptible to some of the “improving” rhetoric of the British imperialism she was otherwise dubious about, and led her to advocate a moderate stance among the African leaders she advised.

Holtby was introduced to members of the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union by the Johannesburg novelist Ethelreda Lewis, a conflicted figure who devoted much time, energy, and funds to helping the ICU, but who held the most stereotyped views of black Africans as an “infant race” “clamouring like children at the skirts of the white man” (qtd. in Wickins 104-105). Lewis was also an obsessive anti-Communist; the leader of the ICU, the volatile Clements Kadalie, explains in his memoirs that the “advice and help” he received from Lewis, Holtby, and several other “European women” led him “to adopt a middle course” (85), between the radical, “nationally minded” Garveyite position of some ICU members and the internationalist position of the Communist Party. A split that disbarred Communist Party members from the Union contributed to the factionalizing and eventual disintegration of the ICU.<sup>5</sup> The British advisers to the ICU came from the Independent Labour Party “rather than from the main Labour Party, which, like the British TUC [Trades Union Congress], was reluctant to offend the White labour movement in South Africa by what might be construed as intervention in its domestic affairs” (Wickins 105). Holtby, Arthur Creech-Jones (National Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union in the U.K.), and others advocated a moderate course, including making a suggestion “a little naively,” as one historian puts it--and I would add a bit too optimistically--that Kadalie and the ICU “keep out of politics,” “concentrate on industrial issues and[...] secure political reform by way of affiliation to the South African Labour Party” whose constituency was the white, English-speaking working class (Beinart 144) and therefore in most ways in competition rather than alliance with the ICU (Wickins 140).

Thanks to this moderate group in the U.K., an adviser was sent to work with the ICU, William Ballinger, whose salary was often paid by Holtby. Ballinger’s experiences in South Africa sparked his frustrations with a liberal outlook. As he wrote confidentially to Fenner Brockway about white liberals in South Africa:

they prate of 'conciliation,' 'No Strikes,' & 'Industrial action only.' They are well meaning sentimentalists but they cannot realise that there is a racial and an economic problem in Africa. That they as well as the Mineowner and the industrialist are living on the back of the Black Man does not enter into their calculations. They want to remove the Color Bar to give the Native a chance and get *Cheaper Labour*. (Qtd. in Wickins, 177.)

Ballinger did the best he could to keep the ICU functioning despite financial scandals and conflicts with Kadalie that created rifts in the increasingly troubled union, and despite his more radical analysis of the situation he witnessed than that of the liberals who employed him.

Holtby wrote of Kadalie in 1927: "The work which he is doing is of vital importance, not only to South Africa but to the civilized world. The problems of South Africa today will be the problems of the world tomorrow. By raising the standard of life for the workers in South Africa he is taking the first step toward securing that unity of race and colour which is a condition of true civilization" (qtd. in Kadalie 140). This at first glance seems like a ringing endorsement, but on re-reading, one wonders, what is the "unity of race and colour" to which she refers? Is she suggesting that a unity of workers across class and national boundaries will also permit a unity of the races? In her novel *Mandoa! Mandoa!* Holtby drew important connections between workers in Mandoa and those in England; for example, she fictionalized similarities between the system of slavery in Africa from which the British empire profited, despite its supposed abolition, and the alternative system of wage slavery in England where men on the dole were on the "Casualty Lists of peace," and working men were little better than starved (62). She claimed in a letter, "it is the standard of living & of civilization rather than the difference of race which separates people [...] the man living on the margin of subsistence is much the same whatever his race" (qtd. in Shaw 191). While this point of view helped her to imagine an international trade union movement that would address exploitation across national boundaries, it blurred her understanding of racial conflict. She seemed to believe that if equality of opportunity were offered, an individual could "rise above conditions of race, colour, class or sex" (Shaw 192). This emphasis on the individual, a foundational piece of liberal ideology, seemed to prevent Holtby from imagining, in this novel at least, the "unity of race and colour" that figures so vaguely in the projected, peaceful, civilized future of her journalism to overcome

the fear and inequality in the present moment that she describes. In fact, the optimistic liberalism of some of her journalism and private statements is deeply and quite thoroughly ironized in *Mandoa! Mandoa!*

This novel is her most extended narrative of Africa, subtitled “A Comedy of Irrelevance,” alluding both to its form, and also perhaps to the cynical conclusions it reaches, which ultimately seem somewhat “irrelevant” to or at odds with the political activities of her life as a journalist and activist. *Mandoa! Mandoa!* is the comic story of an imaginary country near Abyssinia and is “in a tradition of comic novels about cross-race conflict and misunderstanding” (Shaw 195)<sup>6</sup> that includes Forster’s *A Passage to India* and Evelyn Waugh’s *Black Mischief*, the latter published three months before Holtby’s novel and to which it is often compared (Kennard 113).<sup>7</sup> Although it is set in northeastern Africa, “It was the many years of work Holtby had given to the cause of black trade unionism in South Africa that informed the political consciousness of *Mandoa! Mandoa!* and provided the stereotypes for some of its characters. In return, some of the money earned from the novel was used to wipe out the debts of her Africa fund” (Kennard 114).

The novel moves back and forth between Mandoa, a fictional kingdom isolated in the mountains whose inhabitants are divided between traditionalists and those yearning for modernity, and England, where a new generation of neo-imperialists, disguised as the tourist industry, initiates its dirty work. The novel is long and sprawling; its tangled plot involves everyone from the Princess of Mandoa to a Conservative M.P., Maurice Durrant. The mode is relentless satire, the narrative voice that of an omniscient but amused cynic who seems to agree with the conclusion of one important character, Jean Stanbury, that “Our motives are never, I suppose, quite pure” (385). Despite its comic tone, the novel is a serious investigation of the methods via which a capitalist and neo-imperialist enterprise proceeds and the consequences of that enterprise on an African society in transition to modernity. The novel includes comic scenes of incongruous juxtapositions; for example the screening of Hollywood films such as *College Girls Must Love* and *Red Hot Momma* take place in an absurd “cinema” in the village where members of the audience barter for their entrance with beads, pumpkins, chickens and other valuables, and squat in the mud to view the film. Through such scenes Holtby probes the consequences

of an inevitable influx of technology into a traditional society. Talal, the primary Mandoan character, like the other inhabitants of this land of Ethiopian and Portuguese heritage, is excruciatingly bored with traditional village life; he yearns for

level pavements [...] hurrying traffic down the city streets, and high-piled buildings rising floor on floor, cranes swinging silently against the sky, steamships, electric lifts, smooth ordered days, commissions to Geneva, files of documents, little dinners in restaurants, padded chairs; these were the goal of any true man's longing. Had he not read it in the magazines? (13)

His desires complement the desire of Prince's Tours, Limited to create a new resort in the far reaches of this mountainous part of Africa, in Lolagoba, the capital of Mandoa.

The novel joins this plot of the creation of a tourist enterprise with several other plotlines, sometimes awkwardly, sometimes adroitly. Maurice Durrant, a junior director of Prince's Tours, Limited, as well as a newly elected Conservative and pro-Empire M.P. has a history of competition with his brother Bill Durrant, a talented ne'er-do-well whose nerves were shattered in World War I. Bill is also a Socialist and opposed to his brother's candidacy. The Durrants are family friends with Jean Stanbury, a modern, independent woman; her brother had been killed in the airplane crash that demolished Bill's nerves. Jean works as the assistant to the editor of a political weekly, *The Byeword*. The curmudgeonly editor of *The Byeword* attacks almost everyone in public life except the "fanatical" Arthur Rollett, a humanitarian gone haywire; the character of Rollett appears to be a half-respectful, half-bitter satire of types Holtby may have known in the League of Nations Union or other political organizations. Maurice Durrant milks his contacts in the British government to gain support for the profit-making enterprise of Prince's Tours in Mandoa, using the Foreign Office, the Air Ministry, and the Colonial Office to smooth the path of this project.<sup>8</sup> Durrant's manipulation of government is an astute revelation of the "revolving door" of government and industry in this interwar period. Maurice Durrant creates a position for his brother in the enterprise, sending him as a kind of reconnaissance scout to Mandoa.

While Bill Durrant lays the groundwork for Prince's Tours, Arthur Rollett stirs up trouble in England by writing articles accusing this company of collusion with slavery. He says:

Potentially, Mandoa is a rich country. Cotton—minerals—possibly tobacco and coffee in the highlands [...]. Ultimately it may become a useful market. But at the moment its wealth consists in manpower—arms, legs, heads, bodies. Slaves. Slaves and raided ivory. Mandoa as a country is wretchedly degradingly poor. But its nobles grow rich and fat on blood money, and Prince is out to profit from it. (115)

This publicity on such an ethical issue promises problems for Prince's Tours, and yet it continues its preparations for a great opening of Mandoa to Europeans. This inclusion of the use of the press for ethical and political purposes initiates what I see as a subplot of the liberalism in the novel: the use of the liberal institution of journalism to improve society. This too winds up being ironized in the novel.

Jean Stanbury, meanwhile, gets a job with the International Humanitarian Association and signs on to a fact-finding trip to Mandoa to discover whether Rollett's accusations have any merit. The novel presents this trip self-consciously as an adventure for Jean—she is aware that for all her liberal, humanitarian politics, she is more invigorated by the adventure of traveling than horrified by the slave culture of Mandoa. After many comic adventures and misadventures, including a kidnapping and the ignominious death of Rollett who has arrived in Mandoa on his own steam, the International Humanitarian Association issues a very mild report admitting that slavery is rampant in Mandoa, but that Prince's Tours cannot be directly implicated. The group concludes:

The agency had perforce made use of existing conditions, but it had paid the contractors who supplied its labour; it had made some effort to improve the lot of the labourers, and it was possible that, by bringing Mandoa into contact with civilizing influences, [Prince's Tours] might initiate the process of reform. (262)

This report has none of the force of Rollett's more incisive condemnation.

When they return to England, Maurice Durrant and Prince's Limited work hard to abolish slavery, but not from any humanitarian or ethical considerations, but because they want to undo any bad press they have received during the campaign. In the terms of the novel, they replace outright slavery with wage slavery. Bill explains to Talal how

British industrial work was carried on. The people were not slaves—but they were not free. They obeyed orders, ‘clocked in’ to factories, downed tools when the whistle blew, were bullied by foremen, and dismissed at the will of an employer. They [...] worked eight or nine hours a day to benefit shareholders they never saw, and to judge by their votes [...] accepted the system with complacency. (144)

Talal’s response to Bill’s description of industrial conditions in England is: “you are 100 percent slaves and also slave owners.” Prince’s, it is implied, uses its influence in Ethiopia to have that nation “refuse rights of transit through [its] territory to all slave-traders from Mandoa,” thus supposedly terminating the “iniquitous traffic which all civilised men were so anxious to prevent” (374). We are told, however, that the slave trader Ma’buta and other Mandoan nobles invited “recruiting agents from the Belgian Congo, Kenya, and South Africa” to enroll “contract labour for mines and roads and bridges” demanding “cash bonuses” for the privilege. *Mandoa! Mandoa!* presents unmistakable similarities between the exploitation of slaves and of modern workers. The novel concludes, then, in a manner deeply cynical novel about the supposed “progress” and civilizing influence of capitalism, and yet without offering any alternative. We never see, for example, any sign that the slaves or eventual exploited wage workers might rebel, or protest, or unionize, and in fact are portrayed as complacent, and even at points grateful for their submission. This is a startling representation and omission for a writer so deeply involved in labour organizing in South Africa. I agree with Killam that Holtby “points out social ills and evils but suggests no cures” (116).

In addition, the English plot of the novel ends, in typical comic mode, with a marriage—but of two unlikely partners: Maurice Durrant and Jean Stanbury. As unsatisfying as the political conclusions of the book is the consolidation of conservatism in this marriage. The humanitarian liberal marries the Conservative M.P.; the crusading independent woman who disdains domesticity after having nursed many younger brothers and sisters, ends the novel pregnant. While the book is a tissue of irony, this section of the ending is not particularly critiqued or self-reflexive. The reader is left with a rather general “Let’s all muddle through this the best we can” ideology, which in effect is an argument for the status quo. Jean thinks to herself “We must do what we can [...]. The world does not end tomorrow. Life goes on [...]. We’ve

got to go on” (385). She imagines herself continuing reform work as well as raising her child, and is sustained by the vision of “work which she saw stretching out before her down years of patient, fruitful effort” (385). In some sense the novel does equip her with the liberal values of individualism and self-sufficiency that make her a more suitable partner for Maurice than Bill:

She admired decision, strength, intelligence and their logical consequences—success. She could not help thinking that men and women brought their own failures upon themselves. If Bill had pulled himself together after the war, if he had returned to college and taken his degree, if he had really intended to succeed instead of drifting and finding excuses for himself, he need never have been dependent on his brother’s patronage. (73)

The values this character espouses at certain points, however, have a Bloomsbury ring to them, for example when she thinks: “The only really important virtue, she had decided, was benevolence, to wish well to the world, to love. All others, such as strength and power and cleverness, were nothing beside that” (242). The understanding that this kind of liberal belief in human potential was utterly ineffectual against the political turmoil of the interwar period contributed to Forster’s decision to make *A Passage to India* the last published novel of his lifetime. While Jean’s point of view is only that of a character, not the book as a whole, she accrues privilege with the focus upon her within the novel, and as a semi-autobiographical figure of the author. Her marriage to a Conservative M.P. is a retreat away from the idealistic values of her liberalism, and toward a more individualist and cynical notion of liberal reform.

The concluding scene of the novel takes place in Mandoa, with the optimism of Jean Stanbury clouded and ironized by the darkness of the political landscape. In a reference to fascism, Bill reflects:

People said that the fabric of civilization was crumbling, even in its oldest centres. The flood of barbarism might pour back across the world as it did in the dark ages [...]. Yet, while he stayed in [Mandoa], the [airplane] runway would be kept clear and who could tell what prophet of civilization might not one day descend on it? [...] It was little enough; but it was something. (392)

The main African character, Talal, declares that they will rebuild the burnt city of Lolagoba, and “we will make it better[...] We will make

it a great city” (393). Yet the comic form of this novel provides significant room for irony; the “prophet of civilization” on its way might be more of a monster than a savior, as in Yeats’s “The Second Coming,” and the “great city” may well be choked with “elevators and factories and electric cars” and starving people (393). The imperial project is ironized in this novel, but the liberal foundations on which much of it was based are not.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Another, for example, was Leonard Woolf, who did not have the familiarity with Africa through traveling that Holtby had, but who wrote *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920) and other works critical of British imperialism. He and Virginia published with their Hogarth Press William Ballinger's *Race and Economics in South Africa* in 1934.

<sup>2</sup> “Early successes [of the ICU] included a major strike of both African and coloured workers in Port Elizabeth in 1920. As so often in this period of Smuts’s premiership, the episode ended in tragedy; police fired upon the crowd, killing twenty-four [...] It also attracted a following in Umvoti district, Natal [...] Despite the highly dispersed rural workforce, wage claims were advanced by work stoppages. Violent incidents studded the conflict which exploded when gravestones were desecrated in Greytown’s white cemetery and the ICU offices were razed to the ground in response” (Beinart 100-101).

<sup>3</sup> See Handley-Taylor for a fuller bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> Shaw points out that Holtby was also “concerned with the fate of black people in Britain and in 1931 became a member of the executive committee of the Quaker-inspired Joint Council to Promote Understanding Between White and Coloured People in Great Britain whose objectives were to educate the British public in racial issues” (188-89).

<sup>5</sup> See Shaw 170-182 and Beck 118-119.

<sup>6</sup> See also Niven 212-214.

<sup>7</sup> For example: “Waugh, in *Black Mischief*, accepts the generally held beliefs about the backwardness and inferiority of Africans and therefore he lampoons those Europeans who treat Africans as civilized. Winifred Holtby, on the other hand, is less partial: both sides suffer under her attack for elements in each act stupidly and seek to inculcate and promulgate values which see a system of preferences built up, establishing a ruling class which dominates and suppresses the workers and achieves its wealth and position through their exploitation” (Killam 107).

<sup>8</sup> Maurice “needed the benevolence of the Foreign Office, to support him in encounters with the government of Mandoa; of the Air Ministry, to encourage trans-African transport; and of the Colonial Office which should be grateful for British enterprise so near Uganda” (79).

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*Book reviews*



**SARANGI, Jaydeep (ed.). *Raja Rao: The Master and His Moves*. Delhi: Authorspress, 2007. ISBN 81-7273-369-0. xiv + 218 pages.**

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Raja Rao (1908-2006) is no doubt one of the most representative writers of XXth century Indian literature. His works as a whole offer an exceptional chronicle of his country's complex history in the last decades, showing on the one hand all that is attractive about it and on the other, all that is contradictable. Just like Mulk R. Anand and R. K. Narayan, Rao forms part of the generation which lived through the last period of British rule and which reached its literary maturity in the years of decolonisation. It is a generation which has formed a link between the literature which emerged in the colonial period (with Chatterjee and Tagore as the key authors) and the wide group of writers born and bred in an independent India. These circumstances in themselves justify a positive response to the book in question, which brings together a selection of critical essays dedicated to Raja Rao's works. However, there is another reason which makes it doubly worthwhile. Although Rao has been a unanimously well-known and respected author in India for a very long time, it is also true that his works have been much less known in western climes. As far as I have been able to ascertain, at least in the last two decades, Rao appears to have been relegated to a secondary position in both editorial and academic terms. This is perhaps due, to some extent, to the brilliant inrush of other Indian narrators such as Rushdie, Seth, Roy and Mistry, among others. In any case, this very situation fully justifies why a call should be made to reclaim the quality and continuity of Rao's works, as well as his mastery over the young generations of novelists of his country. In my opinion, this book constitutes a relevant contribution in this respect.

The book, whose title transports us to one of the author's novels — *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (1988) —, is made up of 18 essays in total. As is made clear in the list of contributors which precedes them, the majority of scholars are of Indian root, although some reside in other countries, such as France, Italy, Oman and the United Kingdom. The work ends with a select bibliography (with primary and secondary references) and a theme index. In the opening preface, the editor makes a brief description of the vital and aesthetic circumstances which characterise Raja Rao's literary works. Sarangi highlights the fact that Rao offers an intense cultural syncretism between India and the West. This is not unusual among XXth century Indian intellectuals, but it probably is more manifestly revealing in Raja Rao's works. On the one hand, he was educated following the European canon and he travelled frequently through Europe and the United States. Furthermore, he knew and deeply admired the French language and civilization, a fact proved by his having finished his university studies at Montpellier and Paris, and by the fact that his novel *Le Comrade Kirillov* (1965) originally appeared in French (the English version was not published until 1976). Nevertheless, Rao is both an intensely and genuinely Indian author whose work is fully imbued in the traditional philosophy and the living conditions of his native country. His early period was deeply marked by Gandhi's thought (as is demonstrated in his first novel *Kanthapura*, 1938). The teachings of the Hindu guru Swami Atmananda played a significant role in the growing metaphysical tone which his mature works acquired. From a narrative point of view, Sarangi alludes to the similarities which Rao's narrative presents with the traditional Indian literary genres (especially with the Harikatha, an oral narrative genre). Indeed, this brief preface expertly brings to light several key issues to be developed in the different chapters of this volume. Finally, one must state that Sarangi's final words reveal that this book was initially conceived as a kind of 'homage while alive' to the author of *Kanthapura*. Unfortunately, this aim could not be fulfilled, as Rao died just a few months before reaching the ripe old age of 98, while the book was still being printed.

In the previous paragraph I mentioned Raja Rao's first novel, *Kanthapura*, which narrates the effects of Gandhi's nationalist thought in the heart of a small village in south India. It was no doubt a work of enormous transcendence at the time of its release, and

set the foundations upon which the literary prestige of this author rests. The importance of the above-mentioned novel is shown in the fact that half of the contributions of *Raja Rao: The Master and His Moves* are monographic studies of this novel. Some of these essays reflect upon this novel's compromise with the nationalist cause. For example, Komalesha's interesting article underlines how the content of *Kanthapura* is expressed as a claim to a *Pan-Indian* identity which aspires to appear in conjunction with sub-national identity markers, among which one finds the differences of caste and religion. Iyer's brief article highlights the extent to which Gandhi's civil disobedience movement marks the general tone of the novel, whereas Jha points out that the nationalist message of *Kanthapura* is not only of a political nature, but also includes a growing awareness on a social and religious plane. Gopichand, in turn, delves into the concept of *Indianness* from a linguistic and cultural perspective, restricting the term only to "the use of English language with distinctive Indian attributes" (p. 145).

A second group of articles dedicated to *Kanthapura* also allude to its ideological implications, but concentrate on the mechanisms through which Rao uncovers the structures of the powers that be in colonial India. In this way, Kumar emphasises how the denouncement of imperialism and of the cruelty of the caste system is still a widely prevailing issue even today. The chapter penned by both Kodhandaraman and Latha states that Rao's novel identifies a three-fold framework of oppression: colonial oppression, caste oppression and gender oppression. The authors concentrate mainly on the last two. Thus, as far as the oppression suffered by the lower caste (the Dalits) is concerned, the authors show how it was affected by the Christian missionary action (which at the time carried out an intense social and educational role among the untouchables). In contrast, the novel presents a genuinely Indian alternative, inspired by Gandhi's beliefs. This is an alternative that the authoresses view as insufficient, as Rao, a member of a higher caste (the Brahmins), accepts non-identity among different social strata. As for the oppression of women by men, Kodhandaraman and Latha focus their attention on one of the characters, Rangamma (a Brahmin childless widow), whose active role in the freedom movement synthesises, with an undoubted epic content, the Indian women's aspirations to justice and equality. Similarly, Himadri Roy analyses the role of femininity in the novel from a twofold perspective: on the one hand, the role of the woman as a

conveyor of vital values of the community. This is shown, for example, by the fact that Rao chooses a woman to be his narrator (Achakka, another widow), which is commonplace in the family transmission of oral tales. On the other hand, Roy observes another facet of the female idearium present in *Kanthapura*: her condition as a protective entity, depicted in the different goddesses which appear throughout the novel. (on womanhood in Rao, see Narayan 1986: 35-45).

A third group of chapters dedicated to *Kanthapura* share the common theme of one of the most characteristic features of Rao's narrative: the complex interaction established between myth and reality. In the first of this group, Patra reflects upon the contrast existing between Indian spiritualism and Western society's rationalism. Although apparently antagonistic elements, Rao manages to blend them into a harmonious and artistically convincing whole, thanks to the originality of his fictional form. Pandey, from a more speculative perspective, in my opinion, considers that Rao's use of mythical elements fulfils the purpose of dignifying the novel in order to put it on a par with the traditional epic genre known as Sthala Purana ('legendary history'). In this sense, he has no qualms about comparing Rao's contribution to English literature with that of Eliot or Joyce (see p. 92), who also employed mythical techniques with the idea of juxtaposing the past with the present. Pandey even comes to state that Rao's narrative constitutes a 'contemporary version' of the great epic poems belonging to classical Sanskrit literature. *Kanthapura*, thus, would be comparable to *Ramayana*, whilst *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) —the novel which consecrated Rao's international fame— would be brothered with *Mahabharata*. Among others, E.M. Forster claimed *Kanthapura* to be "the best Indian novel written in English" (see Walsh, 1990: 71).

Passing on to studies which are not dedicated specifically to *Kanthapura*, but to other works by Rao, it is significant to mention that two of these chapters take as a text reference *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965). This is one of Rao's mature works plagued with mystic and philosophical concerns, and which centres on the relationship between the Guru Govindan Nair and his disciple Ramakrishna Pai. Letizia Alternò, probably one of the main connoisseurs of Rao's works as she wrote her M.Phil thesis on this writer, uses this opportunity to reedit an article of hers published originally in 2002. In her opinion, this novel constitutes the culmination of Rao's search of self and spirituality



which he began in *Kanthapura* and continued in *The Serpent and the Rope*. In this instance, Alterno also identifies a direct link with classical Sanskrit literature, specifically with *Astavakragita*, a philosophical and didactic poem composed as a dialogue. Likewise, Arora delves into the strange symbolism present in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, through its connection with the Hindu philosophy present in the upanishadic texts. Without questioning the central role carried out by the two protagonists' relationship, Arora pays more attention to the narrative function which the female characters fulfil: Saroja (the wife of Pai) and Shanta (the young woman who Pai really loves and who personifies the ideal of womanhood). Rao's last novel, *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (1988), is the subject of a second chapter by Alterno (published, in this case, for the first time). Here she explores the role played in this novel by silence, a means through which the protagonist, Sivarama Sastri, reaches self-discovery. Her analyses of different passages of the book reveal that just like in many *Upanishads* and in *Bhagavad Gita*, silence (*Mauna* in Sanskrit) holds for Rao a transcendent value, a state of deep concentration which allows a bond to be established between the individual and the Absolute.

Raja Rao's literary prestige has been consolidated fundamentally in his novels, but despite this, one should not forget his unquestionable mastery as a writer of short stories. This facet of his is also under scrutiny in *Raja Rao: The Master and His Moves*. Lakshmanan studies Rao's narrative evolution by contrasting two of his short stories, written with a difference of thirty years: "The Cow of the Barricades" (1933) and "Nimka" (1963). Both tales have the figure of Gandhi as their common central reference. However, while the former is about his social and political commitment, the latter concentrates above all on his moral qualities: his asceticism and righteousness. One of Rao's last books, *On the Ganga Ghat* (1989), constitutes the subject matter of two articles. It is a difficult work to classify as it consists of several relatively independent stories whose common theme is their shared place of action, the holy city of Benares (*Varanasi*). Indeed, while Monti considers it a collection of short stories, Gaijan does not question its novelistic nature. In the opening essay of *Raja Rao: The Master and His Moves*, Monti tenders a number of interpretative clues originating from advaitic Hinduism, thanks to which *On the Ganga Ghat* (1993) can be construed as a multifaceted approach to the causes of evil, causes which,

in Rao's metaphysical universe, do not coincide with appearances or with the rationalist links between cause and effect. Similarly, Gaijan emphasises the ideological continuity of this book with all Hindu philosophical literature, and especially with the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Yet, having said this, from an aesthetic point of view it comes closer to the simple and popular types, such as the tales of the Purana genre.

Maya's chapter is the only one to study Rao's works from a holistic perspective, without limiting himself to analysing one concrete book. His aim is to highlight the fact that the apparent conflict between Indian and western culture is expressed in Rao's works in a form of dialectics between the reassertion of autochthonous values and the acknowledgment that contemporary history is advancing towards a context of cultural globalisation. According to Maya, this dialectics remains essentially constant throughout Rao's artistic and vital career even though the specific form of reassertion evolves from the social reflections of his first works to the mystics in his last works and includes the metaphysical sphere in his mature period.

Finally, I must add that some of the chapters included in this volume adopt a metaliterary stance and focus their attention on certain critical approaches towards Raja Rao's works. Arunachalam, on his part, offers a first tentative classification of the five different perspectives from which, he believes, this author's narrative works have been studied by critics up to now: historical-biographical, moral-philosophical, expository-paraphrasable, textual-linguistic, and comparative studies. Rather valuable seems the part in which he selects the most important research works on Raja Rao. Christopher Rollason —a scholar with a wide experience in postcolonial studies, and perhaps the best-known of all the contributors of this volume— offers a portrayal of the figure of David McCutcheon (1930-1972), who according to him, was one of the first and most lucid of the experts on Raja Rao's works.

After having briefly summarised the different chapters which constitute this volume edited by Sarangi, all that is left for me to insist upon is that this work deserves to be judged favourably. There is no doubt that it will become an obligatory reference for future studies on the figure of Raja Rao and generally on Indian literature written in English. True it is that not all the chapters offer the same degree of rigour and

quality, yet, in general terms, they all conform to the requested level of academic publications. If there is anything to criticise, this would be a few unfortunate decisions taken during the book's editing. For example, it is a pity that the different articles are not preceded by abstracts, which would no doubt have been of great use to the readers. Furthermore, the order of the chapters follows no identifiable criteria (being neither alphabetical nor thematic). In this review I have opted for a thematic classification and I believe that the book would have benefited from this form of sequencing. Ultimately, one cannot fail to mention the evident asymmetry of a wide number of studies dedicated to *Kanthapura*, and the lesser attention paid to Rao's other works. In fact, one of his most admired novels, *The Serpent and the Rope*, is merely the subject of a few marginal allusions. Weighing everything up, however, I can affirm that although these aspects contribute to a negative global appreciation of this volume, they do not blur its indisputable worth.

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**GABRIEL TEJADA MOLINA.** *Enfoque ecléctico y pautas del diseño curricular para la enseñanza del idioma oral: “Me First”*  
**Universidad de Jaén. 2007. ISBN: 9788484393764. 156 págs.**

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La necesidad de comunicarse con hablantes de otras lenguas es parte evidente del contexto de globalización progresiva en el que nos encontramos inmersos y contribuye con fuerza a fomentar el interés por la adquisición de lenguas. Por tanto, no es de extrañar que, en la actualidad, el campo del aprendizaje de idiomas sea uno de los que más atracción ejerce entre investigadores y profesionales de la enseñanza. En particular destacamos que a la importancia del inglés como lengua internacional, algo que simplemente nos limitamos a constatar, se une la circunstancia de que en el sistema educativo español su enseñanza es predominante. Este es el contexto global y específico en el que se ubica el interés que despierta un libro como el que reseñamos.

Su autor, el Profesor Gabriel Tejada Molina, ofrece en sus páginas una aproximación atractiva y realizable para la adquisición oral del inglés. Su amplia carrera docente e investigadora en los distintos niveles de la enseñanza, predominantemente en la Universidad, como maestro de maestros, avala las propuestas que presenta. Hay que señalar que no es éste su primer libro y además, como podrá comprobar el lector, que no se trata simplemente de una propuesta teórica, ya que en sus páginas abundan los supuestos concretos y ejemplos de cómo ponerlos en práctica.

El libro es fruto de diferentes aproximaciones y notables avances habidos en la educación en los últimos cincuenta años. A partir de los sesenta—años de revueltas políticas y culturales, de los movimientos “Beat”, “Hippie” y la contra-cultura—han sido numerosas las propuestas en el campo de la enseñanza. La “mass-culture”, caracterizada por el

consumismo y las teorías efímeras, permitió que se abrieran numerosas puertas a la experimentación y a la realización de atractivas iniciativas. En esas fechas comenzaron a aparecer volúmenes sobre enseñanza-aprendizaje en los que se exponían experiencias, entonces muy novedosas y sugestivas para aquellos que buscaban alternativas a la enseñanza tradicional.

Algunas fueron de carácter progresista, como la escuela de Summerhill, sita en los alrededores de Londres, en la que la meta era educar a los niños en libertad, y en la que temas considerados entonces tabú eran tratados abiertamente. En la misma línea están las propuestas de Ivan Illich de la educación sin escuelas, que fueron motivo de gran controversia en círculos especializados. En Noruega se pondría en marcha el instituto experimental de Oslo, que describe en su libro Mosse Jørgensen y, en Dinamarca, la escuela viajera, experiencias que tuvimos la oportunidad de conocer de forma directa. En ese contexto surgiría *El libro rojo del cole*, de contenido provocador y directo que durante años circuló de forma clandestina entre escolares y docentes en España. En Barcelona, a mediados de los setenta, tuvo lugar la experiencia de las escuelas en lucha y, en bachillerato, la autogestionaria del Patronat Ribas.

En Sudamérica, Paulo Freire abogaba por la educación como práctica de la libertad, que postulaba la aplicación de una pedagogía del oprimido como modelo de ruptura y de transformación total de la sociedad. Tampoco hay que olvidar los modelos de análisis marxistas aplicados a la educación, en los que se atacaba las superestructuras intelectuales y artísticas que habían ido perpetuándose en la educación de una generación a otra; modelos que partían de la crítica a la educación burguesa realizada por Marx y Engels. En esta línea aparecerían numerosos libros y ensayos formando parte de distintas colecciones especializadas. En el ámbito inglés destacan tanto los publicados en el entorno de la Open University, como los escritos por autores como Raymond Williams, Basil Bernstein, Madan Sarup y otros.

A partir de los setenta y ochenta, coexistiendo con las anteriores, otras tendencias igualmente novedosas fueron abriéndose paso en la enseñanza-aprendizaje de idiomas, entre las cuales destacan las de investigadores como Ellis, Corder, Krashen, y Brown y Yule. Se trata de autores que a lo largo de los años han ido realizando interesantes

propuestas pedagógicas, apoyándose en experiencias contrastadas, que han continuado aportando estudios sobre el tema, propuestas éstas que regularmente se exponen en foros nacionales e internacionales y que se aparecen publicadas en revistas y libros especializados. Estas fuentes son básicamente las que cita y maneja el Profesor Tejada, y es en esta línea que cabe destacar su labor investigadora y experimental de la que surge este libro.

El enfoque ecléctico elegido por el autor puede ser motivo de crítica por parte de algunos detractores más o menos puristas en cuestiones metodológicas, no obstante, en este contexto resulta muy útil e interesante ya que le permite retro-alimentarse y utilizar características provenientes de varios métodos para la enseñanza de idiomas y adecuarlos a su propio proyecto. Es un enfoque que agradecerán sin duda los lectores y los destinatarios específicos del libro, profesores de niños entre ocho y diez años de edad, cuya labor docente va dirigida a tercero y cuarto de primaria.

Una primera lectura puede dar la impresión de que estamos ante un libro-ensayo en el que su autor parece más preocupado por el contenido de lo que dice y de cómo lo dice, que ante un libro pensado para el docente real que debe poner en práctica su contenido. La preocupación del autor por avalar sus planteamientos con abundantes referencias a autores relevantes en ese campo le hace utilizar un tono y una terminología académica que puede resultar difícil a los no iniciados. Quizás hubiese sido deseable una aproximación más discursiva, menos esquemática, en la que algunos de los temas tratados se hubiesen desarrollado con una mayor generosidad.

Ese aparente minimalismo expositivo que formalmente aparece en el texto de forma explícita mediante párrafos cortos y densos en contenido, viene matizado por la aguda utilización de técnicas didácticas que ayudan a la comprensión y seguimiento de la línea argumental. Se trata de las variedades gráficas utilizadas, como el uso de diferente tipo de letras y de la negrita para resaltar palabras o los puntos más relevantes. Asimismo, hay que destacar los excelentes cuadros explicativos y la acertada utilización que hace de unos epígrafes clarificadores que facilitan que el lector sepa en cada momento el tema tratado y que pueda localizarlo y volver al mismo en cualquier momento de la lectura para resolver cualquier duda. Considerado en su conjunto,

la posible crítica de academicismo queda matizada y el resultado final del texto en su conjunto ofrece un balance positivo.

La lectura detenida de la Introducción es fundamental para comprender la línea metodológica seguida y obtener el máximo de provecho de los capítulos que le siguen. Destacamos los epígrafes 1.1 a 1.3, y las referencias a pie de página que se mantendrán a lo largo de todo el libro. La importancia que el autor concede a las destrezas orales y la comprensión auditiva (18, 33 y 116) le sitúan en una línea de investigación que ha adquirido gran relevancia dentro del campo de la adquisición de lenguas, y que tiene como referente la fonética. Al contrario que la fonética articulatoria, que es la que tradicionalmente se imparte en los currículos educativos universitarios, y la fonética acústica que, en su corta historia, a pesar de su especialización en los componentes físicos del habla, cuenta con un amplio número de estudios especializados, el componente auditivo ha sido menos estudiado, algo que en cierto modo lo hace más atractivo a investigadores y docentes.

Un aspecto que agradece el lector es el cuidado que se presta en esclarecer y definir la terminología utilizada en el texto, y que ayuda al lector no iniciado a moverse con soltura en el campo conceptual. Asimismo, las numerosas referencias a conocidos autores que avalan o han estudiado los temas pergeñados dan fuerza al texto. Cabe destacar también cómo los epígrafes más teóricos acaban siempre en conclusiones e implicaciones didácticas que se ilustran generosamente con cuadros y ejemplos fruto de la amplia experiencia y conocimiento de los temas demostrado por parte de su autor. No obstante, provoca un efecto negativo la decisión que los mismos aparezcan en la misma página ya que a veces provoca espacios en blanco que rompen con la estética de continuidad del texto, algo que podría haberse evitado adaptando los cuadros a los espacios que les corresponden, aunque tengan que aparecer en páginas diferentes.

Las referencias a autores y las notas a pie de página, tan frecuentes en ensayos académicos y artículos, suelen ser criticadas cuando aparecen en libros para un público más amplio, arguyéndose que entorpecen y hacen menos ágil la lectura. Sin embargo, su presencia en las páginas del libro que se reseña nos parece que merece una mención especial por su relevancia. Las ciento once notas a pie de página que aparecen repartidas entre la Introducción y los dos primeros capítulos son muy



recomendables y oportunas, algunas incluso podrían haber formado parte del texto principal. Su contenido no sólo avala lo expuesto a lo largo de sus páginas sino que abre a los lectores vías de ampliación e investigación sobre los temas que en ellas se apuntan. La información que ofrecen las notas y su correspondiente referencia bibliográfica las hacen muy útiles al investigador y al experto.

El último capítulo es todo un paradigma de lingüística aplicada, un campo muy familiar al Profesor Tejada, que con numerosos ejemplos pone en práctica el contenido teórico del libro. Destacan los procedimientos y la detallada descripción, en cinco estadios, que se ofrece en el apartado de la evaluación, tema que tantos problemas suele generar en la práctica docente. La conclusión final incide sobre temas ya expuestos, lo cual puede parecer recurrente y considerarse una desviación profesional, pero lo cierto es que esa medida didáctica facilita la labor de recapitulación a los lectores menos informados y es un apartado que se agradece. En cualquier caso, siguiendo su línea de concisión, el Profesor Gabriel Tejada le dedica cinco páginas, algo que puede saber a poco a algunos. Destacamos su aseveración de que “el planteamiento textual—partiendo del modo conversacional—y el discursivo contribuyen a resolver la problemática de enseñanza de idiomas” (140).

La bibliografía utilizada, que se ofrece en las catorce páginas finales, es amplia. Las dieciséis entradas correspondientes al autor avalan un trabajo intenso y continuado en el tema. En general predominan los volúmenes de relevantes autores que comenzaron a publicar en los ochenta. La bibliografía citada más actual, generalmente corresponde a ensayos y artículos realizados por profesorado de su entorno académico y educativo, y refuerza y pone en valor la vigencia y actualidad de sus fuentes.

El libro en su conjunto puede considerarse una reflexión personal consecuente con la trayectoria práctico-teórica del Profesor Tejada, algo que confirman las numerosas referencias a su propia bibliografía. A destacar una vez más los esquemas y cuadros de actividades que nos ofrece en los que se sintetiza y proponen pautas de explotación de los contenidos teóricos; alusión específica merece el que se ofrece sobre los antecedentes históricos de la enseñanza oral de idiomas (27). El Profesor Tejada ha pergeñado numerosas cuestiones que sugieren

futuras publicaciones tuyas o de otros expertos e investigadores de su entorno. Es un libro cuya lectura detenida recomendamos al profesorado de idiomas en general y a los docentes de primaria en particular por las numerosas sugerencias que se hacen y por las posibilidades que abre.

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**GARRIDO DOMÍNGUEZ, ANTONIO.** *Viajeros americanos en la Andalucía del XIX.* Ronda (Málaga): Editorial La Serranía, 2007. ISBN: 978-84-96607-29-3. 747 págs.

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Los españoles que nos dedicamos a estudiar los relatos de viajes por España hemos pecado, por lo general, de habernos interesado más por los viajeros británicos que por otros viajeros de habla inglesa, dejando a veces incluso apartados a un lado a los norteamericanos. Cierto es también que los viajeros norteamericanos durante el siglo XIX viajaron más por otros países europeos que por el nuestro; eso es incuestionable. Lo que cabe preguntarse es el porqué. Quizás hayan contribuido a ello factores como la lejanía física de los Estados Unidos de América respecto de nuestro país (acrecentada ésta por los escasos y paupérrimos enlaces con la Península); o quizás la preponderancia de las culturas británica o francesa en aquellos lares, que son las más admiradas de entre las europeas al otro lado del charco; o el prestigio artístico de Italia o Grecia; o quizás de todo un poco. A todo esto hemos de añadir el hecho de que durante el siglo XIX, con la excepción de los últimos años de la centuria en que los EEUU y España se retaron a muerte por el botín colonial de Cuba y Filipinas, los intereses políticos, económicos, comerciales o culturales entre España y los Estados Unidos no habían tenido excesivas ocasiones de encontrarse, ni para caminar en paralelo, ni para enfrentarse.

Si la cultura y la literatura española pintaban más bien poco en los EEUU durante esa centuria, tampoco la cultura y la literatura norteamericanas tuvieron una presencia espectacular entre nuestros intelectuales, tal y como demostró hace ya casi un siglo John de Lancey Ferguson en su conocida obra *American Literature in Spain* (1916, pero reeditada en 1966). Ferguson afirmaba que los EEUU, entre otras

potencias del momento, se habían interesado bien poco por la cultura española, de ahí que, por ejemplo, se califique la literatura española como la gran olvidada de las grandes literaturas europeas. Percibió Ferguson un leve interés entre el lectorado español por algunos autores norteamericanos a partir de 1830 gracias a cierta incipiente actividad traductora de obras de W. Irving, Fenimore Cooper, E. A. Poe, H. Melville, N. Hawthorne y W. Whitman, y en muchos casos –exceptuando a Irving–, pasados incluso por el filtro francés.

En lo que respecta a los viajeros norteamericanos por España, he de lamentar que los estudiosos españoles, ignoro si por razones lógicas de justa reciprocidad, hayamos dedicado un reducido número de monografías a ellos y a la imagen de las *cosas de España* que han transmitido en sus obras. Con la excepción de Pere Gifra-Adroher, autor de *Between History and Romance. Travel Writing on Spain in the Early Nineteenth Century United States* (2000), que se ha volcado de lleno en analizar la visión de España en múltiples facetas en los relatos escritos por norteamericanos, los demás hemos investigado y publicado hasta ahora casi exclusivamente sobre viajeros británicos. Algunos expertos en literatura de viajes por España, conscientes del olvido al que se ha venido condenando durante décadas a los viajeros norteamericanos y a sus relatos, han intentado satisfacer sus pruritos investigadores y conciencias intelectuales abriendo el abanico de obras y viajeros a los norteamericanos, y de paso a irlandeses, sudafricanos, australianos, neozelandeses, canadienses, etc., mediante los términos “angloparlantes”, “anglófonos”, “anglosajones” (con la evidente ambigüedad, cuando no imprecisión, que este último ejemplo conlleva). Y aún así, dentro de tales estudios “colectivos” de viajeros “de habla inglesa”, se siguen priorizando a los británicos por encima de todos los demás.

Toda esta introducción tiene como fin demostrar la valentía intelectual de la que ha hecho gala el Dr. Antonio Garrido Domínguez, una vez más, al dedicar monográficamente un extenso estudio de 747 páginas titulado *Viajeros americanos en la Andalucía del XIX* (2007) al viajero norteamericano. Ésta, su última obra hasta el momento, trata de abarcar con evidentes aspiraciones de exhaustividad al mayor número de viajeros estadounidenses posible. El autor comienza por ir más allá de los de siempre, que son los que todos conocemos: Ticknor, Mackenzie, Longfellow, Bayard Taylor y, sobre todo, Irving y su *The Alhambra*

(luego conocido como *Tales of the Alhambra*). El Dr. Garrido Domínguez abre por lo tanto, para beneficio de todos, nuevas rutas en el estudio del género de relatos de viajes. Ya lo había hecho en ocasiones distintas, descubriéndonos en su anterior obra *Viajeros del XIX cabalgan por la Serranía de Ronda. El Camino Inglés* (2006) el emocionante y arriesgado “Camino Inglés”, nombre dado a la ruta Gibraltar-Ronda-Málaga tan concurrida por los militares británicos apostados en el claustrofóbico Peñón; o recuperando para la comunidad de estudiosos de los viajes por España una obra poco conocida, *The Practical Working of the Church in Spain* (1851), del reverendo James Meyrick, que este rondeño de pro tradujo y prologó con maestría bajo el título de *Cartas desde Andalucía. Estancia en Málaga y viaje por Andalucía del reverendo James Meyrick (1849-1851)* (2000), entre otras notables contribuciones al género.

En *Viajeros americanos en la Andalucía del XIX* el autor ha recopilado los relatos de 59 viajeros norteamericanos de ambos sexos y de todas condiciones profesionales –periodistas, militares, escritores, filólogos y críticos literarios, diplomáticos, científicos, artistas, políticos, comerciantes, religiosos, misioneros, deportistas, abogados, visionarios, enfermos y convalecientes, aventureros, etc.– que pasaron con variado grado de intensidad por la Andalucía el siglo XIX en estancias que fluctuaron desde unos días a varios años. Una característica común entre ellos, rasgo por lo general válido para prácticamente todos los viajeros extranjeros por la España del siglo XIX independientemente de su origen nacional, es su alto poder económico, obligada condición para sufragar tanto los gastos de desplazamiento de Norteamérica a Europa (vía Liverpool; luego, de Inglaterra a España, por mar hacia el sur andaluz o por tierra cruzando Francia) como para cubrir los gastos del alojamiento y las comidas en una Andalucía aún escasamente preparada para asumir con comodidad la llegada de foráneos visitantes. La diferencia entre viajeros y viajeras de allende el Atlántico es abrumadoramente favorable hacia los hombres, pero las obras de las once norteamericanas que incluye el autor constituyen una nada despreciable contribución al género. Este relativo alto número de viajeros norteamericanos –hombres y mujeres– contribuye a quebrantar la creencia generalizada entre los estudiosos del género de que los anglófonos que visitaban nuestra región y nuestro país eran casi exclusivamente británicos. El Dr. Garrido Domínguez se ha encargado de demostrar fehacientemente que tal creencia no tiene fundamento.

Aparte del prólogo, justificación, agradecimientos e introducción, *Viajeros americanos en la Andalucía del XIX* consta de tres capítulos previos al corazón de la obra, a saber: “América descubre España”, “La mirada americana” y “Andalucía, tierra de promisión”. En el primero el autor resume en cuatro las vías por las que se desarrolla en los EEUU de la época un cierto interés por lo español: a) la directa, que llega desde la propia Península Ibérica; b) la que llega por medio de Méjico y otros países del hemisferio; c) la indirecta, que proviene de regiones que fueron antiguas colonias españolas; y d) la que proporcionó el comercio, sobre todo durante la guerra de la Independencia española, aunque ninguna terminó de ser tampoco especialmente significativa. Sigue diciendo el autor que el camino hacia Europa era en sí para los norteamericanos largo y costoso, mucho más si se decidía incluir a España en el trayecto. En “La mirada americana” se analizan las preocupaciones del viajero del otro lado del Atlántico, los temas tratados en sus obras, los distintos medios de transporte (diligencias, barcos de vapor y ferrocarril) y las distintas rutas empleadas en su periplo por tierras andaluzas, con especial incidencia en la de Sevilla-Cádiz por el Guadalquivir. También incluye el autor las opiniones más reveladoras de unos testigos de primera mano como fueron tales viajeros decimonónicos de la realidad española del momento, en asuntos como las fondas y ventas, la comida, vinos, diversiones (toros, folclore, ferias, teatro, celebraciones religiosas) así como descripciones de sus contactos, más imaginados que vividos, con los distintos personajes populares señeros de la España de la época (bandidos y contrabandistas sobre todo). Finalmente, en el breve capítulo “Andalucía, tierra de promisión”, el autor rondeño analiza la imagen que plasmaron en sus relatos de viajes de las mujeres y los hombres de la Andalucía decimonónica.

La parte central de la obra consiste en un extenso análisis de los datos bio-bibliográficos, pormenorizadamente investigados y recreados, de cada uno de los viajeros norteamericanos que se recorrieron las ciudades y pueblos andaluces de la época, en las que se incluye oportuna información sobre las circunstancias en que redactaron sus vivencias, circunstancias históricas si vinieran al caso, y sobre todo una breve recreación-resumen de los momentos estelares de la ruta realizada. El Dr. Garrido Domínguez agrupa los viajeros norteamericanos que nos visitaron durante el siglo XIX en los periodos históricos comúnmente aceptados por la historiografía española, tal como ya hiciera también

en *Viajeros del XIX cabalgan por la Serranía de Ronda. El Camino Inglés* (2006). Así, clasifica los cincuenta y nueve viajeros encontrados y analizados en Viajeros en la Guerra de la Independencia; reinado de Fernando VII; Isabel II; el Sexenio Revolucionario, y la Restauración. Dentro de cada época aparecen además ordenados por el año en que viajaron por tierras sureñas siguiendo el modelo de R. Foulché-Delbosc en su imprescindible *Bibliographie des voyages en Espagne et en Portugal* (1896 y 1991). El autor de la obra cita entre las fuentes consultadas la obra de H. F. Smith, *American Travelers Abroad* (1969), imprescindible bibliografía centrada en relatos de viajeros estadounidenses por todo el mundo, no solo por España y Portugal como hiciera la de Foulché-Delbosc.

Considero acertada la clasificación cronológica que hace el autor de los viajeros que visitan Andalucía. Es una postura disciplinada que el lector y el estudioso agradecen, pues se puede ir viendo cómo perciben los visitantes extranjeros los hitos principales de nuestro pasado en las coordenadas históricas que le corresponden. Se aprecia fácilmente que los norteamericanos aparecen por tierras hispanas en mayor número conforme avanza el siglo y se produce en nuestro país un lento pero inexorable avance a la modernidad que se traduce sobre todo en la mejora de los medios de transporte. Los viajeros, sin embargo, se afanan en buscar entre esos leves pasos hacia los avances tecnológicos del XX (representados sobre todo por el ferrocarril) los elementos de la España romántica, a su juicio, mejor cristalizados en Andalucía que en ninguna otra región de la piel de toro.

En el primer periodo analizado, la Guerra de la Independencia, el Dr. Garrido Domínguez cita a un único viajero, pero es uno de los más interesantes de los que recorrieron la Andalucía del siglo XIX. Se trata del polifacético Mordecai Manuel Noah, jefe de la policía de Nueva York y primer escritor judeo-norteamericano de importancia. Fue un visionario que soñó en crear un estado judío, Ararat, dentro de la metrópolis. Al ser nombrado cónsul de Túnez Noah quiso evitar pasar por dos países que odiaba: Gran Bretaña, a la sazón en guerra con EEUU, y España, país que había expulsado siglos atrás a los de su raza, entre ellos a sus propios antepasados sefardíes. Para su infortunio, fue capturado precisamente por los británicos y llevado además a España, donde pasó nueve meses, resultado de lo cual fue *Travels in England, France and Spain and the Barbary States in the Years 1813, 14 and*

15 (1819). Sus numerosos prejuicios anti-españoles le llevan a ser especialmente hiriente con la Iglesia Católica, pero al menos disfruta de su estancia en un Cádiz en plena euforia por la constitución de las Cortes. Cruales paradojas de la vida: el propio gobierno norteamericano terminó expulsándolo de su cargo de cónsul por su origen judío. El Dr. Garrido Domínguez había ya mostrado con anterioridad su interés por dicho autor, tal y como demuestra una ponencia que tuvo la suerte de escuchar, “La aventura andaluza de un judío americano: Mordecai Manuel Noah”, que luego apareció como capítulo en *Viajeros británicos, irlandeses y norteamericanos en España: escritores, pintores y músicos* (2005), editada por M<sup>a</sup> Antonia López-Burgos del Barrio y un servidor, donde ya anticipaba algunos datos que luego verían la luz en el libro que tenemos entre manos.

Durante el periodo del reinado de Fernando VII va creciendo el número de los norteamericanos que visitaron la región andaluza, en total once. Entre ellos se encuentran los obligados Ticknor, Slidell Mackenzie, Longfellow e Irving, analizados con el detalle que merecen, pero también otros menos conocidos como el aventurero capitán George Coggeshall; Caleb Cushing (futuro embajador en España) y su esposa Carolina E. Wilde Cushing, autora de un curioso epistolario a su padre; el anónimo autor de *Scenes in Spain* (1837); el cirujano y científico Gustavus Richard Brown Horner; el aventurero Captain James Riley y el erudito reverendo Walter Colton, todos ellos prácticamente desconocidos y en consecuencia apenas citados.

Igualmente hace el autor en el siguiente apartado, “Viajeros durante el reinado de Isabel II”, en el que incluye ya a diez y seis (tres mujeres). Diseciona las obras de los más conocidos (Severn Teackle Wallis, John Esaisas Warren, Bayard Taylor y William Cullen Bryant), pero también a los menos conocidos, inclusive a algún anónimo –con seguridad mujer. Los viajeros del periodo se caracterizan por pertenecer a un variado elenco de profesiones: un pastor protestante (Ch. Rockwell); un clérigo episcopal de Filadelfia en busca de la salud perdida (J. Alonzo Clark); un estadista y general del ejército (J. A. Dix); el misterioso J. B. Ireland, responsable y concienzudo escritor de cartas a su madre; el periodista Ch. W. March; el reverendo anabaptista J. O. Choules; la polifacética hija del gobernador de Florida Octavia Walton Le Vert; el brigadier general J. J. Pettigrew; el almirante confederado R. Semmes; una intrépida



Harriet Trowbridge Allen y un *self-made* hombre de negocios llamado S. Tousey.

El Sexenio Revolucionario sólo recibió la visita de seis viajeros, entre ellos ninguna mujer, de los cuales dos son bien conocidos: el editor, congresista y posterior embajador en Turquía Samuel Sullivan Cox y el prestigioso médico Henry Willis Baxley, paladín de los expatriados de salud precaria. Pero no lo son tanto los restantes: el periodista y ex-corresponsal de guerra J. H. Browne; el también periodista E. King, que logra entrevistar a Castelar; el millonario G. Buckham y el clérigo presbiteriano S. I. Prime.

El último periodo, el de la Restauración, ve la llegada de numerosísimos viajeros (diez y ocho) y viajeras (siete), la mayoría relativamente conocidos/as por los que nos dedicamos a esto (Day, Stoddard, Downes, Hale, Lathrop, Parsons Scott, Hopkinson Smith, Buckley, Sessions, Finck, Moulton, Lent, Workman, etc.), pero con alguna sorpresiva inclusión como las de Maturin Murria Ballou, Carolina (Earle) White o Mary F. Nixon-Roulet, quizás nunca citadas, que yo sepa, por ningún estudioso del género. Llama la atención la profusión de viajeros norteamericanos en una época, los últimos años de la centuria, en que las relaciones entre nuestro país y los EEUU no pasaban precisamente por sus mejores momentos. Resulta curioso que las mujeres viajeras de la época (Susan Hale, Louise Chandler Moulton, Carolina White, Fanny Bullock Workman, Mary F. Nixon-Roulet, Adelaida Susan Hall y Miriam Coles Harris) viajen entre 1889 y 1897 por una España que derrocha galantería: ningún habitante proyecta contra ellas los sentimientos anti-norteamericanos que la prensa española había fomentado en la población lectora del país.

La meritoria labor de desempolvamiento de obras poco conocidas de viajeros norteamericanos por rutas andaluzas-españolas realizada por el Dr. Garrido Domínguez queda pues fuera de toda duda y creo haberlo demostrado suficientemente. Pero hay otros aspectos nada desdeñables que se suman al alto valor académico y literario de la obra. Goza de una excelente factura, como ya no se suele ver hoy día en casi ningún libro que quiera conservar un precio asequible de venta al público, por lo que cabe felicitar a la Editorial La Serranía (de Ronda), que está demostrando una calidad excepcional en su labor editora y difusora de la cultura de nuestra región. Las erratas son prácticamente inexistentes. Sus ochenta y ocho ilustraciones y grabados de época en blanco y negro y a todo color, todas

ellas reproducidas con gran calidad, le aportan un sabor especial que enriquece la vista y el espíritu. El estilo suelto del Dr. Garrido Domínguez es ameno, nítido, con oportunas pinceladas de humor que en ocasiones se torna entrañable. El libro garantiza tanto una lectura agradable y gratificante para el profano como una excelente introducción al género para el que desea introducirse en las rutas de la literatura de viajes por España. Las traducciones de los textos citados, realizadas por el mismo autor, transpiran mimo, precisión y una gran riqueza de vocabulario. Lástima, sin embargo, que no aparezcan a pie de página los propios textos en sus versiones originales para su comparación o para beneficio intelectual del especialista. La obra cuenta asimismo con una completa Bibliografía General (en la que sin embargo se echa en falta una división clara entre obras primarias y secundarias, quizás debido sin embargo a que estas últimas son bastante escasas), un Índice de Ilustraciones, un Índice Alfabético de Viajeros y un Índice Toponímico y Onomástico que hacen del libro un cómodo instrumento de consulta para el experto.

Encuentro, sin embargo, que el título *Viajeros americanos en la Andalucía del XIX* no resulta afortunado. Considero que induce a ambigüedad. Me explico: al utilizar el término “americanos” el autor sugiere que en su libro se van a incluir también a los viajeros peruanos, argentinos, salvadoreños, mejicanos, canadienses y hasta a los haitianos si los hubiera, y no sólo a los estadounidenses. Quizás se deba a que el autor se ha dejado llevar por el imperialista término “American”, tan extendido hoy en día, por el cuál los habitantes de los EEUU se han apropiado nominalmente del continente. Quizás el más ajustado podría haber sido “estadounidenses” (mejor también que “norteamericanos”, pues este término incluiría a canadienses, y el libro no aporta ninguno). Pero esta nimiedad en referencia al nombre dado –“a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”– no empaña para nada el valor de la obra; si acaso todo lo contrario: la humaniza.

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## LITERARY CONTRIBUTION BY SHERI SPAINE LONG

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Introduction to translation “Poor Bea”

Originally from Equatorial Guinea, Francisco Zamora Lobocho (b. Malabo 1948) is a laudable prose and poetry writer who currently lives and writes in Madrid, Spain. Much of his writing is in the post-colonial tradition and explores issues of exiled African cultural identity in the Spanish capital. Zamora Lobocho has published several books and is a journalist. His first book is an essay on racism entitled *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca* (1994). The second is an evocative book of poems that fuses Zamora Lobocho’s African origin and his European expatriate reality entitled *Memoria de laberintos* (1999).

The short story “Bea” appears in its original Spanish version in *Antología de la literatura guineana*, edited by Donato Ndong-Bidyogo, Editora Nacional (Madrid 1984). Zamora Lobocho presents a harsh look at Madrid through the life of the female character, Bea, in the early nineteen eighties. Bea is a Senegalese immigrant to Madrid who faces the many challenges of assimilation and exile. She leads a difficult life in Madrid’s inhospitable environment. Her tragic story is told from the point of view of another African immigrant who is her former lover. The reader draws myriad conclusions about black female immigration to urban Spain while considering the rich fictional representation of Zamora Lobocho’s rapidly developing Madrid and the city’s protagonists. “Poor Bea” appears here for the first time in English translation.



## POOR BEA<sup>1</sup>

**Francisco Zamora Lobo**

*(Trans. Sheri Spaine Long)*

Poor Bea. I no longer even remember the contours of her face. There was a time when I could not take my eyes off the soft magical pout that perfected her lower lip, slightly prominent, and the tiny tongue peering through it, profoundly red.

This morning, when I heard the news at the Rubio, the weather outside was exactly like the day we met. By then, Madrid had already begun its unforgiveable road toward chaos. The birds, with their contaminated lungs, damaged by the lethal suffocation of exhaust fumes, evicted from the parks and the neighborhoods by an irrational army of ferocious bulldozers, cranes and backhoes, were beginning to undergo the same slow agony brought on by every onslaught of winter.

—Madrid is not a city for birds.

That phrase of hers, which I never understood in its entirety, now acquires its true meaning. I heard it for the first time on our third walk through Ventillas, when some children armed with slingshots and BB guns shot down a sparrow that ended up falling right at Bea's feet. I felt the chill run through that fragile body. It was a kind of warning, a premonition.

By that time, Bea was living only two metro stops up from me. She had just lost that mulatto child that cried only in the early morning and scarcely, if at all, did she remember his father—Barbas. Everything happened quickly between us, hastened by a minor struggle in which

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<sup>1</sup> This short story appears in Spanish in the volume: Donato Ndongo – Bidyogo, ed., "Bea." *Antología de la literatura guineana*. Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1984: 207-211.

neither of us lost anything more than a little modesty. And because it had been a while since we had both been feverishly looking for an attachment that could rid us of the loneliness of Africans lost in the big city, we signed a sort of pact that would insure coexisting in the kindest manner possible, since we intuited from the beginning that for us, normal cohabitation would be impossible. I left my boarding house, and she left the apartment that she shared with Mabel and Virtudes, and we took a room in a communal living space on Betanzos.

Now I see that Bea was no different than the birds. Born to enjoy the immensity of the forests and the bounty of the elements, she routinely began a sort of accelerated shrinking every time winter poked its ears through the gap around the door. And it was of no use smothering her in our only blankets, giving her rough massages with melodic hands, and forcing her to drink bucketfuls of tea with cognac. The thing had nothing to do with the cold that forcibly snuck its way in through the corners of that humid shamble of a flat. One time she trembled so violently underneath the bedclothes that there was no choice but to call a doctor, who, in spite of the tremendous zeal and interest that he invested in the case, was unable to explain Bea's illness and prescribed pills that didn't help her one bit. When I discovered that with the arrival of the first warmth all her ills evaporated as if by magic, I stopped worrying myself over that mysterious illness that kept her chained to the bed throughout the entire winter.

—In any case, were it to snow some day, not anyone nor anything would be able to stop me from running down to the street to play with the snow—, she was accustomed to saying resolutely. And many times, I would catch her with her nose stuck to the windowpane overlooking the avenue staring at the clouds in wait of that imaginary snowfall.

Right now I would be incapable of remembering precisely how much time we spent together. I do, however, remember that on one fine day all understanding beyond the light tussle of the organs became impossible, my notes and books ended up in the garbage bin and the people who frequented the Rubio became inured to our bitter disputes. It was precisely at that moment that destiny chose to bring things to a boil: Bea was pregnant.

After a few days of circling the issue, I decided to convince Bea that we should reinvent our lives, begin again, restructure our coexistence



and prepare a home fit for the needs of a child. But she refused to even hear mention of the idea.

—This city wasn't built for children or for birds—she said with finality, putting an end to the discussion.

What happened next, I can also not remember with precision. I think she called Mari, the model, and it was she who put her in touch with that quasi gypsy witch who in between ridicule and obscenities introduced a pin into the apex of her groin. Her heartrending wail and the diabolic laughter of that demonic matron stayed with me for a long time afterward. Not only that, to finance all that butchery, we had to sell the record player, all the things from Rochereau, Francó and what had up until then been my only indispensable luggage, my album of all of Bessie Smith's blues. It was like breaking with an entire era, or like saying goodbye to an old suit that had been a faithful companion during moments and scenes of transcendence. Yes, Bessie said goodbye and the farewell could not have been more in tune with that rainy day that seemed like it wanted to gather all the waters of the Mississippi and dump them on Betanzos Avenue, whose drains seemed powerless to absorb so much matted fluid, so much bile, so much black blood.

A long night, full of almost continual hemorrhaging and labored sobbing, put the final touches on the last day that, thanks to fear and uncertainty, we spent together. Bea, when she felt recovered, took her things and left.

—It always ends on the day when one must choose between birds or disaster— was the last thing she said to me as she closed the door.

It didn't take long for me to forget her since everything had ended long before we separated. But when my eyes caught sight of her paper butterflies, the philosophy books that she had deliberately left behind, or her careful arrangement of the furniture so that we could move comfortably throughout the room, I couldn't avoid thinking of her, remembering with every heartbeat how my memory was beginning to record gaps when I tried to sort certain details of our life together.

Once in a while news of her arrived through some friend that we had in common. That's how I learned that she had definitely dropped her studies, that she had met a tall, slim Andalusian named Pepe who made his living off of her. The Andalusian made her cruise the streets

of the Fleming district; later she moved on to the lavish parties of fickle young men and when her body asked it of her, she found time to titillate the Americans that frequented the S'tones.

Today is like the day we first met. Madrid continues its unforgiveable path toward disaster and each time fewer birds remain. I think within ten or twenty years not one single bird will remain on the branches of the sad trees of Madrid. It was Nona who told me the terrible news: a black American who Bea had met at the Brother Wolf, and with whom she had made a date to go to Torrejón, had severed — on a stop that he made on the road to Barajas— her lower lip with a knife, cut off her eyebrows, her ears and her nostrils and then tossed her in a ditch. Bea hadn't wanted to explain to anyone what had happened to make the American commit such savagery. She has had no other recourse but to pack her bags and return to Senegal. She prefers to be stoned as a prostitute, in keeping with the custom of her tribe, than to endure the wintry cold besieging her impossible face.

Now, that favorite phrase of hers that I never understood to its full extent, has kept me company all day, on the bus, on the metro, through the main thoroughfares, as I chatted with my friends, drank tea or watched a dog urinate against a streetlight, that is to say, while I participated in the ceremony of vertigo and vortex that the big city imprints on all of our movements, all of our gestures. Now I know why Madrid is not a city for birds.

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