

then one single theorist is selected and an account is given of one central concept she has formulated, and finally that concept is applied to one or two plays. Thus, chapter two moves from a survey of the rich field of feminist literary criticism, to J. Fetterley's «resisting reader», to an application of this concept to a reading of *The Iceman Cometh*; chapter three follows suit with feminist anthropology, G. Rubin's «traffic in women», *Death of a Salesman* and Heilman's *Another Part of the Forest* (1946); in chapter 4 Austin deals with feminist psychology and psychoanalysis, N. Chodorow's work on the mother-daughter bond, and Bowles's *In the Summer House* (1953); and in chapter 5, the reader finds the tools of feminist film theory, particularly L. Mulvey's concept of «woman as image, man as bearer of the look» applied to Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* and Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness*. Some of the analyses offer more insights than others, the use of film theory being particularly illuminating. All in all, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* is a solid introductory guide to the field of feminist dramatic criticism, and as such can be recommended to anyone interested in feminism, dramatic theory and American drama. To university teachers too: Austin not only brings to light the relationship between theory and the real world of dramatic productions, but also between theory and teaching by prompting the reader to use feminist theories in order to begin asking questions such as what are we teaching and why? What are the plays saying to the students about women? Are there any other possible messages? The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography which will be of use to any reader who wants to delve more deeply into the issues raised in it.

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JAMES ENGELL and DAVID PERKINS
 (eds). *Teaching Literature: What Is Needed Now*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988. 198 pages.

«In extending our invitation to contribute to this volume, we did not seek to represent only a particular point of view and neither did we especially attempt to represent all that are now active within the profession. The only criterion of this kind was that the younger as well as the older generations should be heard.» (p. v)

Engell and Perkins make it clear enough at the very beginning of the preface: heterogeneity is going to be one of the most recurrent features in this book, for it is descriptiveness—as opposed to prescriptiveness—that lies at its very core. Maybe the title might be said to be slightly over-ambitious: *Teaching Literature: What Is Needed Now* seems to point at a thorough piece of work dealing with all the major aspects in current Literature teaching, as well as providing an exhaustive representation of the major figures in this professional field. Neither one nor the other are entirely true: what we do have in our hands is a collection of strikingly personal essays which represent a wide range of often clearly opposed views on different aspects of the Literature issue. What we do not by any means have is a huge piece of work in which all current views and opinions are conscientiously represented. Nor is this the aim of the book.

Even though heterogeneity is the most outstanding aspect of the book, we should not overlook the work's extremely coherent organisation, which serves its purpose in allowing us to have access to an acceptable wide range of topics: we begin by a brief, though at the same time serious outline of the main difficulties experienced by freshmen students at the very beginning of their academic life when encountering poetical texts and having to express their views about them. The

second section, «Interpreting Interpreters» deals with what is going to become one of the major issues in the book, even if in a somewhat unpremeditated way: the question of Deconstructionism and Interpretation, and how they are to be reconciled with the needs and aims of a Literature class. This is followed by «Women, Teaching, History» which, as the title clearly states, combines such closely related aspects as Women's Studies and the historical evolution of views in this area. The fourth section, «Retrospect and Prospect,» concerns itself with the influence of the past heritage on the present teaching of Literature, focusing on the role played by Rhetoric in the Literature classroom on the one hand and some of the identity problems which have to be faced by University professors on the other. The fifth section, «Practices and Theories,» also engages itself with another of the main tenets of this work, that is, the role played by Critical Theory in the classroom and how this theoretical approach is to be necessarily reconciled with the more practical one. The last section of the book, «Reading and Writing: In the Academy and Beyond,» goes over the writing question; to a great extent, it can be said to complement the former, since it also concerns itself with the inter-relationships that should exist between Critical Theory and written practice.

Whilst organisational coherence is evident enough, I somehow feel more reluctant to apply this judgement to the suitability of some of the topics dealt with in the book. One misses, for instance, a more general, less overspecialized article dealing with the current situation of Women's Studies which contemplates not only their undoubtedly beneficial influence on the renewal of Literature syllabi, but also what other aspects may need some improvement. By this, I am not implying that Barbara Johnson and Deborah Epstein Nord fail in their attempt to deal with this question; quite

on the contrary: both of them manage to write touchingly personal essays which successfully relate Deconstructionism and History to Feminism.

Barbara Johnson's succinct-yet at the same time intense and revealing- article, expresses her deep concern with the negative influence that current Deconstructionist impersonalization may have on future Feminist discourse, basing the whole topic on her own experience with some specific texts. Deborah Epstein Nord also makes use of two texts, in this case Victorian, to point at the influence that the positioning of texts within their respective literary and historical contexts may have on the students' subsequent interpretation of them. It is possibly because of the fact that she is referring to a more distant point in time that Nord's article achieves an even higher degree of personalization by coming to acknowledge students as part of an ever-changing process of interpretation which is strongly dependent on the socio-historical background.

Side by side with such currently poignant controversies, we can also find articles directed at far more traditional matters like the teaching of Shakespeare, for instance. Robert N. Watson's extensive article provides, if not a radically innovative, at least a reasonably updated approach to the whole question, an approach which advocates a «humanization» of the Shakespearean figure and which clearly goes against the tide in contradicting such currently acknowledged statements as «the death of the author». But there is also another aspect which makes Watson's article quite an innovative one; even after admitting that Shakespeare was unique among the rest of us, he also points at the necessity of seeing the man existing beyond the words written on the paper, which in turn leads him to advocate the establishment of a sort of complicity between the students and the man/playwright by identifying the feelings and situations which appear in

his plays with the vicissitudes that have to be faced by current students.

This innovative quality can be appreciated not only in Shakespeare, but also in several other, rather distant areas of teaching; such is the case, for example, with J. Hillis Miller's article which, among other aspects, deals with the need to break with the strict and traditional pigeonholing of Literature into arbitrary, excessively clear-cut periods and genres. By pointing at the problems of interpretation which different texts may provide, Miller draws quite a convincing picture in favor of new syllabi which focus on these problems rather than on a certain historical period or genre. At the same time, he also points at the need to design courses which include new literary forms in their source languages in order to highlight the importance of these hermeneutical problems.

Miller's article is also interesting in that it points at one obvious and widely acknowledged source of conflict within the field of Literature teaching, namely that of the growing interest in such disciplines as Rhetoric or composition to the detriment of the traditional teaching of the subject. Miller is clearly in favour of expository writing as an essential part of Literature, but he advocates the need to teach these skills in close connection with theory, in what he calls «integrally-developed programs». This is also the case with Helen Vendler's article, «What We Have Loved» which, among other things, proposes to focus syllabi on the thematic and/or stylistic links between different texts and authors, claiming that this will give students the possibility to have access to a much wider range of authors and that this «personalization» will in turn encourage them to express their own views.

This view is going to be further reinforced by Richard Marius' article, which pinpoints exactly the same problem; after lucidly depicting current students of literature as a group which has not developed

an ability to recognize arguments within literary texts, he also admits that the current teaching system does not help much to solve the problem, since it places an unfeasible demand on students, namely that of producing a critical essay on a primary literary text without being trained to do so. It is this contradiction which leads him to propose the teaching of Literature and expository writing in fully integrated syllabi, thus coming to agree with Miller, even if this is done by placing a stronger emphasis on the question of writing. Marius' article is probably one of the most illustrative ones in the whole book, for it points at a problem that we, teachers, have often been concerned with, yet at the same time a question which we have not always been able to solve properly.

The question of personal interpretation is also dealt with by Gregory Nagy's «Teaching the Ordeal of Reading», a charmingly personal article which successfully relates Greek literary terminology (Nagy is Professor of Classical Greek and of Comparative Literature) to the question of reading, which he conceives as an active and personal process of interpretation, in which both the teacher and the student are involved, rather than as a passive process of material absorption. Even if somewhat critical at some stages, the article is really interesting in that it manages to relate the ancient Greek concept of the «ideal audience» to current Literature classrooms, apart from highlighting one of the main problems that is likely to affect these groups: that of the concentration of materials which threatens to turn Literature into a «high-priced commodity that some dare to represent as «education»» (p. 167).

But not only do we encounter these general wide topics. Some of the authors of these articles definitely engage themselves with what is or has been their personal experience in the field of teaching and try to apply it to the Literature area.

Such is the case, for example, with Judith Shklar's «Why Teach Political Theory?» This article is interesting for a number of reasons; first, it highlights the advantages of teaching this subject in combination with Literature, for it increases the students' eagerness to express their views and encourages controversy and discussion. Secondly, it focuses on the highly current issue of research vs. teaching.

After pointing out the need for flexible teachers who, instead of becoming gurus, have access to a wide range of political views, she goes on to emphasize that certain University professionals tend to despise teaching in favour of research, something which, I would dare say, is not only applicable to the U.S.A. but world-wide. Whilst her statement that «there is no proof (...) that (...) these people actually produce better work or even publish more than those who quietly teach in classes and in writings» (p. 160) may hardly be subject to refutation, it is no less true that the whole portrait she paints might appear to be slightly characteresque and one-sided on some other occasions, as when she says that «teaching is openly looked down upon and despised in a manner not unlike the disdain that the hereditary nobility of Europe used to feel for manual labor and trade.» (p. 159).

Feminism, Shakespeare, newly-focused syllabi, the combination of Political Theory and Literature and the integrated teaching of Literature and expository writing are, no doubt, major issues which recur throughout the book. But it is probably the problem of interpretation, most often related to Deconstructionism, that seems to lie at the core of most of these articles, no matter whether this is done in a more or less explicit way.

Let us start by pointing out that the Deconstructionist controversy as presented in the book is both poignant and illustrative, for it clearly reflects what Engell and Perkins refer to as «the intellectual

character of our age» (p. viii). This should be enough to make it clear that we are not likely to end up with a more precise idea of what the advantages and drawbacks of Deconstructionism are by the time we finish reading this book. However, since every single author makes use of the term in a totally personal way, we might conclude that the manifold nature of Deconstructionism allows room for a wide range of applications, whilst showing its self-undermining nature in being regarded as unsuitable for certain teaching situations.

The second section of the book, «Interpreting Interpreters» presents the seed of this controversy in two articles which, as we are going to see, are opposed only to a certain extent. Harry Levin's «The Crisis of Interpretation» provides quite an exhaustive analysis of what the current situation is. He admits that Derrida's Deconstructionist's Theory will draw more attention to the meaningfulness of the reader's viewpoint, something which he himself acknowledges as intrinsically positive. However, he definitely opposes the ideas of «the death of the novel» and «the death of the author» by pointing out that biographical interpretation is gaining ground at present, which shows how the author's role is once again coming to be regarded as an essential one. As a conclusion, Levin finishes off by admitting that interpretation should undergo a certain process of renewal, yet he also sees the need for it to remain in a reasonably stable position. New critical interpretations will always be welcome, for they will enlarge the perspectives of criticism without displacing previous critical trends. On the whole Levin's article presents a rather remarkably one-sided perspective at some stages, yet at the same time it is capable of acknowledging some of the positive aspects of current critical theories. It is because of this that it becomes quite a lucid and reliable account of the whole question.

Nathan A. Scott, Jr.'s article, «On the Teaching of Literature in an Age of Carnival,» cannot be said to contradict bluntly what Levin has previously stated. It is well true that Scott primarily focuses on «the irreducible plurality of discourse» and sees the need to make students realize that «*nothing* is accorded a privileged status and *everything* is relativized» (p. 53). However, it is no less true that Levin also sees the meaning of the text as being heavily dependent on the reader's personal interpretation of it (provided this reader seeks a didactic model of interpretation, of course). As for Scott, he does not dismiss traditional approaches to Literature; quite on the contrary, he points out that Deconstructionism might be unsuitable on certain occasions. At the same time, he pinpoints some of the potential advantages of traditional approaches to Literature, admitting that they may be useful in the initial stages of study because they encourage the development of a number of analytical techniques. But Scott goes one step further in regarding this only as the beginning of a long and complex process which is to enable students to «read the words on the page» (p. 61) whilst consenting to be «read by» (p. 62) at the same time.

David Perkins displays a similar position in his article «Taking Stock after Thirty Years,» in which he assesses his own personal experience as a teacher. Perkins' article is interesting particularly because it looks at the question from the professional's viewpoint, thus adding some perspective to other essays which concern themselves primarily with the problems that have to be faced by students. Whilst pointing at the need for the presence of systematic and exhaustive procedures in the analysis of literary texts, he also admits that an emotive response on the part of the teacher is essential as well, thus seeking to reconcile both the traditional and the more personal, non-dogmatic approaches.

Richard Marius also makes use of the question of interpretation in his article, connecting it with the suitability of literary criticism. Even though this issue is but briefly dealt with in the essay, Marius' position is plain enough; some forms of extreme Structuralist Criticism are simply unsuitable for freshmen English courses because of the cryptographical nature of their texts. According to Marius, «many of these critics have composed a jargon that (...) imposes on its users the illusion of clarity and precision while in fact leading them to confusion and opacity» (p. 184). It would hardly be fair to say that his indictment is directed towards every single manifestation of Structuralism. Rather, he seems to seize his opportunity to point at the degenerative process that some of Derrida's American disciples seem to have fallen into.

But the question of Deconstructionism can be said to lie at the core of almost all of the remaining articles as well. We have already seen how Helen Veldler and J. Hillis Müller advocate freedom of interpretation and the abandonment of pigeonholed Literature syllabi in their respective articles. Keats' «negative capability,» entailing ambiguity and uncertainty, is also an issue in several of them (take, for instance, Nathan A. Scott). Deconstructionism is, therefore, much more than a controversial issue here.

James Engell's article, «Eroding the Conditions for Literary Study» serves as a lucid conclusion pulling together most of the major topics raised throughout the book. Even if it is true that his account is largely based on the problems faced by current American University students, it is no less true that we will not find it difficult to connect most of these situations to our own teaching system, for most of them are intrinsically related to contemporary, massively bureaucratized societies. In this way, Engell points at the need for privacy to enjoy Literature and to plunge into it, just in the same way as Hugh Kenner and

Helen Vendler had advocated in their respective articles; he also stands for a more rational scheduling which does not turn students into passive Literature-devourers, but, rather, a system which allows their minds to form themselves (precisely what Gregory Nagy claims in his article). At the same time, he strives to make it clear that these conditions should by no means involve a disconnection between University and the real world, thus echoing Judith Shklar's article on the need to teach Political Theory to allow students to be able to think in an intelligent and constructive way.

Heterogeneity, controversy and denseness are, then, the most outstanding features which we will encounter in this book. But, even if this is true, we can also see how the articles coincide in presenting exceedingly personal, non-patronising views and approaches of teachers and lecturers who have also enjoyed a remarkable experience in the field of research. Even though we might argue that their views must be necessarily biased by what they have gone through in their classrooms, it is no less true that this book should be acknowledged as nothing more (and nothing less) than a colleague's well-meant explanations of his or her own methods and their degree of success or failure. In this sense, any professional, no matter whether he or she is experienced or still young, will be able to find a reflection of some of his/her questions and difficulties and, hopefully, an answer to some of them by means of an active process of reading which will also have a remarkably strong component of self-introspection. After all, as T.S. Eliot once said, «It is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we from time to time change our way of being wrong».

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ITALO CALVINO. *Por qué Leer los Clásicos*. Translated by Aurora Bernárdez. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1992. 278 pages.

At first sight, it may seem strange to review the Spanish translation of an Italian book in an English Department journal. This book, however, deserves inclusion here, not only because of the comments on English authors it contains, but because its theme is interesting to those interested in literature in general. As the title makes clear, it focuses on literary classics, a concept that has played an important role in literary theory and teaching and that is now being questioned. The fact that the author is a well-known writer of fiction, and one that has thought a lot about literature and experimented with it in his work, gives a special interest to his point of view and ideas about the topic.

Por qué Leer los Clásicos consists of more than thirty short essays written mostly in the 70s and early 80s, although a few come from the 50s and 60s, first published in book form in 1991, after Calvino's death. This book puts together pieces on writers and books considered «classics», preceded by the title essay, an attempt to define what a classic is. It also includes an index and a list of the books commented that are available in Spanish.

Calvino does not offer one definition of a classic but fourteen. He explores the different aspects that determine our ascription of a work to this category. These definitions do not come from literary history, but from a direct relationship between reader and text: «*Tu clásico es aquel que no puede serte indiferente y que te sirve para definirte a ti mismo en relación y quizás en contraste con él*» (p.17). So classics are books —ancient and modern— not only read but re-read, that always offer something new to the reader and at the same time are related —one way or