
BOOK REVIEWS

Reviews

Antonio BALLESTEROS, Claude DUÉE (eds).
Cuatro lecciones sobre el cómic.
 Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2000.

The book edited by Ballesteros and Duée is a contribution to the study of comics both from a theoretical and from a practical point of view. It is divided in four chapters, the first one in French and the other three in Spanish.

Chapter one, by Pierre Janin, bears the title «La bande dessinée: est-elle un genre littéraire?» («Are comics a literary genre?»). Janin's starting point is his observation that for a long time the genre was regarded as a minor literary/artistic production by those who preferred other literary genres considered «nobler and older» (15). Surprisingly enough, Janin goes on to contend, «the victims of this situation were neither the comics themselves nor their readers, but those who tried to approach the phenomenon from an academic point of view» (15). The chapter is structured in clear-cut sections which make it easy to follow. First Janin tackles the question of definition, then he moves on to trace the origins of comics and cites Töpffer and Outcault as two standard names in the history of the genre. He then analyses the special relationship between image and text typical of comics and goes into detail about specific concepts such as «box», «comic strip» and «board», and their main features. Other elements such as «reading order» and «text» are also considered. Finally, Janin analyses the legal and eco-

nomical context in which comics are produced, paying special attention to the production in French. His conclusion is that the generic contours of comics are rather blurred and that it is difficult to anticipate the future of the genre, an issue which, according to him, concerns not only comics but all literary discourses.

Viviane Alary is the author of Chapter two, which bears the title: «La historieta en España: del presente al pasado». Alary places the birth of comics in Spain back in the eighteenth century and mentions Spanish names such as Mecachis and Apeles Mestre but recalls that some scholars contend comic strips were born in the United States in 1896. Alary contends that the development of comics is to be observed along with the development of newspapers and mass culture. She takes a survey of the history of comics in Spain and analyses the influence and typology of key examples like the characters in *TBO*, *Chicos*, *Mis Chicas*, *Mortadelo y Filemón*, *El Coyote*, *El Capitán Trueno* and *Diego Valor*. She also contends that the power of censorship in France and Spain, and the fact that comics were considered worthless, led to a separation between comics for adults, for youngsters, for boys and for girls, which, in turn, led to the creation of a specific market modelled following official tastes.

According to Alary, comics occupy a strategic place between high-brow and low-brow art and between literature and painting, as the latest trends show and the new dialogue between exhibition rooms and artists demonstrates. Finally, she concludes that, like in other fields of art, Spanish comics are evolving along a dual line: one which focuses on sales and entertainment, and a more restricted one which focuses on quality. For Alary, the latter often produces personal, sophisticated works deeply involved with the social and artistic debate of our times and should be regarded as equivalent to a literature of resistance.

Chapter three, «La Construcción del superhéroe en el cómic americano. Visiones de una épica (post)moderna: los orígenes de Marvel», is by Antonio Ballesteros González. It is certainly the most personal and comprehensive in the book. Ballesteros confesses at the beginning that his text is a tribute to the heroes and authors that at one point in his teens helped shape his personality. Likewise, he insists that comics and cinema are a symbiosis of art and literature developed in the 20th century which seem to hide the remains of a dying genre: the epic narrative. Ballesteros contends that the 20th century undermined the traditional elements of epic narratives which, in order to survive, had to emigrate to other territories generally associated with cinema or the media. In this sense, Ballesteros insists that the attitude of some critics, obsessed with the idea of establishing a canon within the genre, has not been particularly helpful either.

Despite the fact that the golden age of the superhero were the nineteen sixties, Ballesteros contends that the roots of the phenomenon should be looked for back in the nineteen thirties among the thousands of pulp magazines sold at the time. Born in 1938, Superman stands out as the first real superhero,

whose life and deeds inspired many other stories and characters. The outbreak of WWII meant a change in the interests of publishers. The postwar period saw the growth of another (anti)hero: the detective. The Cold War period and the Witchhunt made comics authors turn their attention to science fiction and horror until Fredric Wartham's work *Seduction of the innocent* (1954) convinced American authorities that comics were exerting a negative influence on American youth, which in turn led to the creation of the Comic Code Authority. By the nineteen sixties Marvel Comics was already filled with stories starred by leading superheroes such as Captain America and the Avengers. Ballesteros then observes in detail some of the best known stars in this universe: Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk, Thor, Dr. Strange, X-Men, Iron Man, Daredevil or the Silver Surfer, and concludes that superheroes have had a prominent role in twentieth century mythology.

The last chapter in the book, «Un paseo por el cómic francófono» is by Claude Duée. As the author explains at the beginning, it is an overall view of the history of comics in French which does not intend to delve into the sociological or semiologic depths of the genre. Duée maintains that comics in France and Belgium were not taken seriously and did not overcome the negative image they had until *Le Journal de Tintin* (1946) was published. However, censorship was maintained in France and Belgium well until the eighties, which in a way favoured the creation of stories with a more childish bias (i.e. *Asterix*). Duée closes her survey with a reference to the attitude towards the genre taken by the French authorities, certainly one of respect and protection.

Cuatro lecciones sobre el cómic has several advantages and one handicap. The book is illuminating, easy to read and

provides basic details about the comics tradition that those who are not familiar with the genre may find of interest. The book has many illustrations (black & white and colour) which help readers to recognise many of the characters dealt with throughout the text. Likewise, those who have been exposed to the genre as readers and/or scholars may discover a surprising wealth of detail. It cannot be said that this is a profound theoretical study of the genre (I suspect it was never meant to be) but it certainly shines out as a little jewel for those who, like me, have a tangential interest in the topic. Its only drawback is the

fact that one of the chapters is written in French. This is a serious handicap if the book is expected to reach readers from outside the area of Modern Languages. Considering that some of the authors are teaching in French universities (or are francophone), the translation of one chapter should not have been a problem. Other than this, the book is extremely attractive and deserves a place in libraries as a contribution to the study of a genre which characterised the 20th century.

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María José COPERÍAS (ed.)

Culture & Power V: Challenging discourses.

Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2000.

Cultural Studies is a wide-ranging discipline which brings together various areas of human knowledge within an extremely ample diameter of action. A priori disparate areas such as pragmatics, biology, anthropology, politics and literary theory, just to mention some, may converge in cultural studies in order to analyse human behaviour and its cultural manifestations. This confluence of the numerous subjects conforming cultural studies has its *raison d'être* in the attempt to understand what culture is, no matter how utopian the idea of achieving a universally agreed definition of this term may be.

Challenging discourses, fifth volume in the annual series *Culture & Power*, is a look into some of the most intriguing questions concerning the always misleading concept of culture. Among these are the difficulties to delimit this term socially, geographically, linguistically and even politically, the conflicts emerg-

ing due to cultural and ethnic differences – mainly based upon economics and class – gender, ideology and so on, and even the attempts at correcting popular misleading assumptions about the meaning of the term 'culture' itself. The volume is divided into three sections: *Challenges*, which puts some emphasis on education and class while paying attention to other subjects like ethnicity and different cultural modes, such as drug consumption; *Challenging Texts* where visual and auditory forms of communication, especially films and music, play a central role and *Challenging Identities*, which is centred upon the interrelation of different human groups while dealing with history and gender as well.

The need to redefine the meaning of 'culture' and some other taken-for-granted concepts such as progress, education and ethnicity is the basis of the first section of this collection. Exceptionally, the social standing of drugs as

well as the experimentation with them are the germane concerns of the introductory essay by Sadie Plant. This is a very readable and stimulating text which examines the attraction and effects of a journey into that quite often taboo world and effectively relates the experiences of such authors as De Quincey, Coleridge, Foucault and Michaux to their literary production. The «progress beneath which the powerful hide» is the starting point for the following article. In it, José Manuel Estévez Saá analyses John Berger's works and the way class conflicts are depicted in them as a reflection of the actual social situation. As for the role of education, this is taken into account by Salvador Faura and Barry Pennock Speck from different perspectives. On the one hand, Faura's text compares two models: informal education, which is said to fight against oppression, and traditional education, which promotes oppression by merely describing it. In his defence of informal education the author rescues the origins of postcolonial discourse, which, he argues, attempted to change the world's injustices as opposed to the immobilising situation third world elites appear to defend, and suggests taking up again that leftist attitude based on action, applying it as a pattern for education. On the other hand, Pennock's article inquires into the role of popular culture and education in our society by analysing Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*. Alvaro Pina's article provides a most clarifying introductory text to the world of cultural studies since it develops some of the implications derived from Raymond Williams' basic concepts of «long revolution» and «common culture», whose meanings and values are articulated by society as a whole, exposing William's defiance of the popularly widespread notion of culture. Attention should also be paid to Mike Pritchard's intelligent article on the now fully

acknowledged link between racism, Nazism, and the emergent 19th century biological research and hypotheses on craniology – phrenology – and physiognomy. As a matter of fact, the author proposes a new conceptualisation of ethnicity unlike its exclusionary conventional definition, where 'ethnic' pejoratively connotes the «homeland of the others». This is a fascinating article dealing with really current topics such as immigration and the different cultural confrontations individuals may undergo.

The central part of the text provides the reader with several writings which focus on the visual arts, dealing with the relationships between signifiers and meanings as well as with the often mistaken and even obliterated connotations of certain forms of expression. Of special interest are the three texts devoted to music: Mónica Calvo Pascual's article on Madonna's video *Express Yourself*, Anna Pairaló García on Sinéad O'Connor's song *Famine* and Sara Martín Alegre's on Marilyn Manson. Whereas García's text considers the way such a traumatic past event as the potato famine is understood and conveyed nowadays by such a controversial singer as O'Connor, Martín's essay is precisely centred on the controversy of another public figure. Indeed, her text constitutes a bold attempt to deconstruct one of the self-proclaimed antichrists of our time, analysing not only his public image but also the various reactions it provokes. As for Pascual's article, it provides an analysis of the non-verbal information conveyed through Madonna's video focusing on the image of woman as subject – not object – of discourse and even hinting at some (con)fusion of masculine and feminine stereotypes in it. The treatment of the female figure is also the centre of María Dolores Martínez Reventós's absorbing text. In it, the author elucidates the partiality of language as well as linguistic determin-

ism through the analysis of some revealing advertisements. Ultimately, the author demonstrates the way certain kinds of ads make products become sexualised and women objectified. But there are other forms of expressions which are dealt with in writings which are equally remarkable. A couple of instances are John Cunningham's essay which, taking some films located in the Arab world, shows the way this world continues to be mystified and represented as exotic and how its members have their own experiences marginalised, if expressed at all, in favour of the white Western viewpoint, and Jamie Fowlie's innovative hypertextual discussion on new forms of social interaction.

Last but not least, the final section of the volume is an assemblage of coherently related essays centred on the concepts of nation, identity, colonialism, historical knowledge, gender and genre and homophobia, primarily. Again new definitions need to be tackled here and, with this aim in mind, meaningful everyday examples are provided. Suffice it to point out Martin Montgomery's clever analysis of the way language can be, and actually is, manipulated for political purposes taking the example of a Scottish Nationalist Party campaign. The author succeeds in proving the way in which a certain combination of words and images contributes to giving an overall message of idealistic, and even pastoral, nationalism with which the audience may easily identify. Ultimately, Montgomery asserts the impossibility to positively affirm a nation – *we* – without negatively denoting another – *they*. A brilliant survey of the United States' recent history and past ideals of fraternity, contrasting with its

actual contemporary situation of internal colonialism, is what Julio Cañero Serrano's text offers to the reader. In this essay, which is incidentally complementary to the one written by Russell Dinapoli, where he undermines the presumed homogeneity in the country's social strata, the author crudely depicts U.S. Hispanophobia and denounces Hispano cultural genocide. Alongside these studies, the importance of authentic cultural voices is present in the revaluation Felicity Hand proposes of historical knowledge, claiming a necessary place for orality along with the conventional written sources. Likewise, María Isabel Santulària's and David Walton's discussions of femininity in the detective story and homophobic connotations and implications in T.V. programmes, respectively, are worth reading.

Challenging discourses is, in short, a compendium of ideas and proposals which has, on a popular level, the ability to broaden narrow minds and to break through prejudices and social constructs and barriers usually caused by ignorance. For we should not forget that these writings should, as a last resort, attract the interest of their object of study, in other words, the members of culture(s). And that is its general interest. On an academic level, the student and the non-specialist will definitely find their horizons widened with new fields to investigate and fascinating new links between different areas of study. *Challenging Discourses* certainly contributes to maintain the ongoing challenging discourse round culture.

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Kathleen FIRTH, Felicity HAND (eds).

India: Fifty years after independence – Images in literature, film and media.

Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2001.

India: Fifty years after independence celebrates the 50th anniversary of Indian independence, paying homage to this relevant event in 20th century history. The volume is also a positive result of the international conference organized in Barcelona, which wanted to honour the occasion and correspond to the celebrations of many people in the sub-continent and the diaspora. The book has come to light thanks to the solid work of its editors, Kathleen Firth and Felicity Hand, whose deep involvement in this academic journey can now bring to the reader the pleasures offered by a multicultural and widespread India revealing its wonders.

What is most remarkable and undoubtedly enriches the value of this work is that there is a great representation of writers of different origins and cultural backgrounds. The volume is structured in four thematic sections – *Female Voices*, *The Storytellers*, *Indians Abroad* and *India on the Move* – which are equally balanced with three chapters for each one of them. In the first essay and through some of the most influential texts written in the last fifty years, Murari Prasad reviews literary manifestations of feminism that reveal diverse ideologies on the issue of women's emancipation. Both regional Indian writers and women writers in English such as Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal or Shashi Deshpande present myriad feminist significations and alternative perspectives on life and society which have contributed to women's active engagement in society. These visions and images of Indian women are imbued with new resolutions and aspirations in the struggle towards gender equality and justice. Mary Condé con-

centrates on the conflictive relationship between Indian women writers with a privileged Westernized education and the creation of an idiosyncratic Indian literature in English. Her examination of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is an epitome that «breaks out of a regional identity» (26) presenting English as a cohesive binder which «addresses the lives of Indian women who are not part of any elite» (27). Elizabeth Russell looks into identity politics and location. She discusses that defining identities «implies 'to outline', 'to limit', 'to frame' ... all differential traits are ignored or rejected.» (37). Asian women have often suffered some kind of alienation and displacement owing to their cultural suspension and in-between homelands.

The second section, *The Storytellers*, opens with C.D. Narasimhaih's contribution, which explores the concept of a national literature for India. He claims the necessity for Indian writers to trace the enriching ancestral texts of the *Vedas*, the later epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the masterpieces of the classical age, whose philosophical wisdom faded into oblivion at the end of the first millenium after Christ, to forge a concept of national literature. This, however, does not exclude empirical Western influences. Narasimhaih acknowledges the truth in the *Rigveda* – «let great thoughts come from all directions» (49) – though he also fears that the Western vision of life can replace Indian values for the benefit of commodity and therefore undermine and damage a national literature. Depicting the Indo-British relationship and its ultimate focus of attention – the battle for independence, partition and

subsequent consequences – have been the main themes of many writers who wanted to pay tribute to history with their particular retellings and chronicles. Syd Harrex and Savita Goel's essays deal with some of those writers who have fictionalized the colonial and postcolonial period, capturing in their novels the Indian-English attitudes. Syd Harrex highlights the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan as distinctive pre-independence writers who attack the main sources of oppression, and establish the politics of morality and the foundations of Gandhism. Savita Goel analyses Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* discussing his depiction of the political and social imbalances of a postcolonial India. The setting corresponds to the time of emergency (1973-75) under Indira Gandhi's administration. Mistry's reality, Goel notes, foregrounds the abusive and violent politics of corruption and exploitation. However, as it is all a question of balance, the novel also narrates the growing bond of love and affection shared by his main characters from contrasting social backgrounds.

The third section of the book renders homage to all those citizens of the sub-continent who, for compelling reasons, embarked on a complex journey abroad undergoing alternating pressures produced by the interrelationship of external and internal circumstances. Kathleen Firth examines the work by the Indian-Canadian writer M.G. Vassanji whose personal displacement and relocation is also an ultimate concern of many other migrants. *No New Land* revives ideas and visions that the writer and his fellows, addressed as «new Canadians», experience in their encounter and confrontation with 'otherness' as well as their subsequent double alienation. Firth overlaps the significance of Canadian multiculturalism, which originally linked terms such as 'quaint' and

'folkloric' (83), or 'ethnic' and 'foreign' with Vassanji's ironic narrative that suggests that Canadian experience equals ghettoization. However, Firth concludes agreeing with Vassanji's hope for a new land without cultural stigmatization.

The complexity of terms like 'homeland', 'heritage' and 'hindrance' takes R.S. Ash's study backwards and forwards, as she reads these terms within the works of Indian diasporic female voices in Britain. What are, then, the notions that writers in the diaspora hold of India as homeland? What role do cultural hybridity and biculturalism play in their novels and how are first and second generation immigrants affected by them? What factors intervene in the process that provokes the modification of gender roles? Following a chronological evolution in the history of the successive generations of Asian immigrants, R.S. Ash provides responses to these questions that constitute underlying themes in the works of Asian women writers. Her essay intertwines with Felicity Hand's «Forget India, We're British!» and both together suggest that the stereotyped fixed image one has of British people of South Asian origin has always been in constant shift, modified and redefined by diverse cultural patterns, «evolving into a new kind of cultural identity, a synthesis» (119). Nowadays, Hand remarks, «Indianness has indeed become an essential part of contemporary Britain» (109). Her introductory historical account of the British Asian community is upheld by a close approach to Gurinder Chadha's film *Bhaji on the Beach* and Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

The closing section, *India on the Move*, opens with Somdatta Mandal's focussing on the relevance of Bengal's action against British imperialism in colonial times which is reflected in literature, especially in Bangla fiction. Mandal asserts that each individual writer such as Bankin or Tagore, among

many others, diffuses his own enlightening thoughts in which politics and philosophy converge. Thus, patriotism and spirituality are venerated by some writers; others like Tagore, Mandal argues, denote a more liberal milieu. Therefore, the political novel within Bangla literature manifests itself as a prior focus of attention from which different currents and moral urges originated in the long process towards Indian independence.

The last two essays by Daya Thussu and Sara Martín Alegre are dedicated to the media and the Western film industry that feeds on images of India in contemporary cinema. Thussu traces the rapid evolution of the media that as soon as it emerges develops a key role in the building of a national identity, forging a sense of Indianness which suffers alterations with the impact of privatisation and globalization. But whatever the damage any form of «cultural imperialism» might cause, the truth is that – as Thussu expresses – India has now her opportunity to convey a fair image of the country and culture to the rest of the world. This stands very far from the discredited vision of India portrayed by 1980s and 1990s films made by Western directors and analysed by

Martín Alegre. Her concern is that films such as *Passage to India*, *Gandhi*, *Heat and Dust* and *City of Joy*, promote «old and new stereotypes» and show a «monolithic reality», (157) «to perpetuate a sentimental, romanticised portrait of India that is blatantly colonialist» (152). Considering that India is the world's leading film factory, why are Indian films not distributed outside just like the Hollywood ones? What cultural mechanisms are at play to restrain their screening? Martín Alegre concludes with the optimistic expectation that Indian films will soon find a veritable place abroad that will brush off all the stereotyped, distorted image of the country.

The varied essays gathered in this volume are essential and challenging reading for both academics and students across the cultural sciences and humanities. The enriching insights and the wide-ranging perspective reveal the multicultural dimension of India, inspiring readers to explore themes further. Hopefully, this book will generate an even larger dialogue on the interrelation of cultures in the near future.

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Paula GARCÍA RAMÍREZ.

Introducción al estudio de la literatura africana en lengua inglesa.

Universidad de Jaén: Servicio de Publicaciones, 2000.

There are not many monographs on African literature in Spain, either in Spanish or any other peninsular language. Recently we saw in *Babelia-El País* (March 10th 2001) José María Ridao's review of the anthology by Donato Ndongo and Mbaré Ngom *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial*, which may

be expressive of the situation of the whole issue of African literature in Spain and, indeed, although to a considerably lesser extent, in Europe. If the small amount of African literature in Spanish is characterized by what the reviewer aptly calls «materia reservada», i.e., by the lack of interest on the part of the

old metropolis, what else can be said about a minimal general interest in African literature written in other languages (including French, English, and those in the vernacular) and responding to other cultural backgrounds? The Spanish interest in African literature in general is certainly scarce. Only about fifteen books, some of them sharing their African syllabus with Asia and the Caribbean region, are currently at hand today, most of them in university libraries. The situation changes quite considerably in Portugal, a much more productive country, if only because of its deep linguistic share in postcolonial Africa. But one suspects, after a brief survey of the Portuguese production concerning African literature, that outside the particular domain of literature in Portuguese, the situation is similar to Spain.

In this respect, the present book is an important contribution to the small corpus of three or four handbooks on African literature available in our country today.¹ It is perhaps one of the most exhaustive ones, and, although the title indicates «en lengua inglesa», it is the case that the author does not miss the opportunity to present, before going deeper into its main concern, the whole panorama of African literature in languages other than English. Thus, we can get a wide perspective of literature in French, Portuguese, Arabic, Afrikaans, Spanish, German and such vernacular languages as Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Swahili, Kikuyu, and so on. There is even attention paid to such literary possibilities as pidgins and creole. This is

definitely a strong aspect of the book: its author has not limited herself to a neat and uncomplicated survey of English literature in Africa, but she has also accompanied it with a very useful and informative account of the different literatures that are now developing and coexisting in the African continent.

The presentation and interpretation of the historical and socio-political context of the literary endeavour in Africa is of primary importance here. This very same context makes it necessary to touch on the vernacular languages if we are to fully understand African literature in English, an issue that displays many connections with the linguistic and socio-political problems such as decolonization, the difficult integration of tradition and modernity, the artificiality of the borders between states, ethnic fragmentation, the problems of African identity, etc. This again is an important contribution of this book and, to meet its demands, the author, as she herself declares, has opted for a historiographic approach since it favours a better understanding on the part of the readers, and since most of the African authors themselves have shown a special concern for the relationships between literature and history.

The book is thus divided into seven major chapters, the first of which is most appropriately devoted to the exposition of the main keys for the correct study of African literature. Here the essentials of the problems and the particular features mentioned above are dealt with at length, although they recur again and again when needed in the rest

1. The essential publications are: Janheinz Jahn (1971) *Las literaturas neoafricanas* Madrid: Guadarrama; Áfrico Amasik (1985) *La literatura africana hoy*. Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Benchomo; La Laguna: Centro de Estudios Africanos; Fahimeh Farsaie (1995) *Rostros de Europa: Autoras y autores de África y Asia*. Barcelona: Virus; José Luis Caramés Lage et al. (1997) *Literatura postcolonial en inglés: India, África y Caribe: teoría y práctica*. Oviedo: Universidad, Servicio de Publicaciones and Verónica Pereyra, Luis María Mora (1998) *Literaturas africanas: (de las sombras a la luz)*. Madrid: Mundo Negro.

of the book. In this connection, the second chapter is taken up by a general survey on African literature in languages other than English, even if again considerations about this topic abound all throughout the book when required by the expository plan of the author or the particular connections with the study of literature in English, which is indefatigably pursued throughout the remaining five chapters.

As the author considers that there are grounds to think of three main literary areas in African literature in English, chapters 3 to 7 are organized around these three main domains: West Africa, East Africa and South Africa, with two separate chapters to deal more specifically with Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa, within the groups of West Africa and South Africa respectively, on account of the enormous weight of these two countries in the cultivation of African literatures in English. No doubt, this general layout facilitates the better understanding of a highly involved and complicated situation, in line with the introductory character of the book. Contiguities and discontinuities are appropriately underlined when necessary in such a way that the general mapping out is qualified with the attention paid to particular features arising here and there. In addition to the historiographic approach the author has most frequently opted for the presentation of the extensive list of works and authors through genre classification, which, if risking a fall into reiterative inclusion of the same author in different categories, has the advantage of providing a clear and orderly presentation very suitable for consultation.

The treatment of the different geographic areas mentioned above is balanced in relation to their relative importance in the field of literature in English. Chapter 3, devoted to Nigeria, is the longest, followed in length by

chapter 4, devoted to the rest of the West African area, and by the chapter dealing with the South African Republic. This is a consequence of the primary importance of the West African region, and within that region, of Nigeria, the most densely populated country in Africa and the one with an important emergent literature in English, hand in hand with the consolidated literature in English of the South African Republic. In East Africa English has lost ground, due to the growing cultivation of native languages (mainly Swahili) on account of a nationalistic reaction against colonialism. Other countries only marginally connected with English are included here, namely Cameroon and Somalia, but the opportunity is taken to present a brief account of the literary situation in other languages.

The monograph pays attention to the particular conditions of the book trade and editorial industry in Africa, as in the case of the *Onitsha Market Pamphlets* in Nigeria (80-83), or the so-called *Blay's novelettes* in Ghana (135-36), or their subservience to the Western World mass media, together with the biographical relationship of many African authors with Europe or the USA because they have fixed their residence there either permanently or for a long time. This is the case, among many, of Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri, the *Black Victorians*, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, Lenrie Peters, Tijan M. Sallah, William Boyd, Peter Nazareth, Nuruddin Faran, etc. All this bears witness to the dependence of the African authors on Europe or America for the world distribution of their books.

The final bibliography is extensive enough and includes most of the items in English published during the late 1980s and 1990s in the domain of African criticism, which shows the wealth of what is now offered to the Spanish reader.

Although it is difficult to give in only 240 pages a full account of the rich emergent literature of a whole continent with comments, assessments, and samples of the work being dealt with, which the author tries to do wherever she can, the present book is too factual perhaps and exhibits a certain cursory character throughout. The present reviewer would have appreciated that, in the balance between presentation of mere facts and the rendering of personal judgement, the author had chosen to deal more at length with the latter, enriching her contribution with that personal touch that makes even a handbook the author's own. We know, however, that then the book would be longer, built on a different basis, and probably it would not fulfil its main aim as an introductory handbook for the Spanish public. Yet the few samples of poetry or narrative very sparsely included in the book indicate that, if they had been resorted to in a more assiduous way, the book would have gained in appeal to the reader and in liveliness.

Another necessary thing that one misses in this book, especially as it is

conceived as a general but detailed survey of the literature of a whole continent, would be a final index of names and titles. This is something almost compulsory in the English scholarly tradition and, it goes without saying, something extremely useful for consultation. Although still rare in the Spanish tradition, it is a feature that should be imported from the Anglo-Saxon world.

Otherwise, the book is extremely useful and through it the Spanish student of African literature can be introduced to the great (and not so great) names of the African literary canon in English (Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri, Amos Tutuola, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, etc.) and their interrelationship with a whole world of men and women, ideas and events in ferment now in that continent which, paraphrasing what has been often said about women's literature, is truly the lost continent of world literature.

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Manuel AGUIRRE, Roberta QUANCE, Philip SUTTON.

Margins and thresholds: An inquiry into the concept of liminality in text studies

Madrid: The Gateway Press, 2000.

Liminality is not a new concept, but the truth is that in the field of English studies in Spain it has not been really discovered, used and developed until recent times. The series proposed and started with this monograph written by Manuel Aguirre, Roberta Quance and Philip Sutton, *Studies in Liminality and Literature*, comes to inaugurate a fruitful, open path for research. Though the

notion of liminality has already been introduced in guides such as Jeremy Hawthorn's (2000) *A Glossary of contemporary literary theory* (London: Arnold), Irena Makaryk's (ed.) (1993) *Encyclopedia of contemporary literary theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), and also in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's (1998) *Key concepts in post-colonial studies* (Lon-

don/New York: Routledge), among others, none of them – except for Makaryk – has accounted for the anthropological origin of the term and the basic bibliography related to it. Thus the work under review here is much more appreciated precisely because it really echoes the genesis of the concept.

In general terms, the goal of the *SLL* (*Studies in Liminality and Literature*) is theoretical and analytical, and it is basically concerned with the «poetics of the threshold». This first volume considers the rich possibilities offered by the concept of liminality, and strives, on the whole, to elaborate and offer a working theory for the study of texts. It seems appropriate to remember that the concept originally comes from Arnold van Gennep's studies on the rites of passage. In *Les Rites de Passage*, Van Gennep (1909) analyzed and synthesized the whole realm of ritual, and discerned three phases nearly universal: a) *séparation* or preliminal rites, b) *marge* or liminal (threshold) rites, and c) *agrégation* or postliminal incorporation rites. Anthropologist Victor Turner built on his predecessor's insights to make a veritable specialty of liminality, mainly in his *The Ritual Process* (1969).¹ For Turner, and this is important for the later developments of the concept, liminality is not a thin line but an expanded zone. The idea of liminality passed easily into literary study, and it has been used to explore indeterminate liminal states in a wide range of literatures and literary periods. All in all, literary applications of liminality blossomed in the later 1980s, showing its usefulness. On a theoretical level, the recent, compelling account on this issue in Aguirre, Quance and Sutton (2000) should be

put forward as a significant contribution.

In chapter 1, the main idea from which the book starts is that the concept and theory of liminality offers a way to go beyond the debate focused on the polarized opposition between *centre* and *margin*; thus, they start offering a careful distinction between *marginality* and *liminality*, proposing the advantage of the latter. Even though the metaphor of the margin has worked well, it is time to assume that it holds a rather closed binary system that confronts centre with margin in a sort of blind alley. Unlike margin and marginality, *limen* and liminality infer an open and plural system, an active dynamism and mediation, a place of transition and transformation, a possibility to negotiate. Due to the fact that the ideas presented in the first chapter pervade the whole study, it might be interesting to quote and point out the following descriptive definitions:

A *limen* is a threshold between two spaces. If a border is viewed as the line, imaginary or real, which separates these two spaces, then the threshold is the opening which permits passages from one space to the other (6).

[...] by «liminal» we will understand texts or representations generated between two or more discourses, a transition area between two or more universes which thereby shares in two or more poetics. In a second sense, we will also apply the term «liminal» to texts, genres or representations centred around the notion of the threshold, or whose fundamental theme is the idea of a crossover, a transgression or an entry into the Other (9).

Afterwards, three areas are selected for the application of the theory: genre, symbol and structure. Thus, an addi-

1. There is a Spanish translation: Victor W. Turner (1969) *El proceso ritual. Estructura y antiestructura*. Beatriz García Ríos (rev. trans.) Madrid: Taurus, 1988. Van Gennep's original study, *Les rites de passage* (1909), is also available in English: *The rites of passage*. Monika B. Vizedom & Gabrielle L. Caffee (trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

tional strength of this study lies in the fact that the authors do not only pose theoretical and conceptual contentions in an abstract manner, but really put them into practice, critically applying their hypothesis and showing open avenues for future studies.

Therefore, in chapter 2, the authors direct a formal gaze on popular fiction genres, considered to be located in a threshold area between literature and folklore. Usually, the popular is defined by its separation from the accepted literary canon. However, there is literature that contains characteristics of the popular, facets of folklore: genres such as Gothic and horror novels and stories, detective fiction, the thriller and spy-novel, slave narratives, science-fiction, pulps, Westerns, among other forms most times pejoratively named as, for instance, 'mass culture' or 'paraliterature.' In different degrees and at diverse levels, these genres share features of both systems and poetics: literature and folklore. They belong to a liminal intersystemic area of flux where clear-cut categorizations make no sense. At the same time, postmodernism is also considered as an example of literary liminality, between canonical literature and popular texts (themselves liminal between literature and folklore). Questioning traditional boundaries, postmodernist fiction stands in a liminal area featured by the interplay between the accepted canon and its many others.

In chapter 3 the focus is on symbol, specifically on the figure of woman in myth but also in modern culture and cultural criticism, as being traditionally placed on the passage gateway between culture and nature. So, it seems more appropriate to use the concept of *liminality* instead of that of *marginality* to describe women's position and its symbolic representation, mainly in mythological thought.

In chapter 4, and in order to look at the issue of liminality in the structural

area, the subject is the popular liminal genre of the rock narrative. Because the goal is to investigate liminality as an attribute and function, the focus is placed not only at the level of narrative, but also regarding the structure of a rock concert performance and the consumption of the narrative by social groups, all of which is shown to be shaped with generic liminal attributes which provide this narrative with an archetypal quality.

Finally, chapter 5 poses the main conclusions and possible expansions of this monograph, from the constituent distinction between marginality and liminality. The margin, the exclusion, is necessary to the very identity of any canon, and the threshold, as a contact zone between any two systems, helps the understanding of both. With Aguirre, Quance and Sutton (2000: 69), it is important to conclude that liminality is a functional rather than a categorial concept, depending on various factors, such as culture, moment or viewpoint. The study of thresholds, formal, symbolic, structural, thematic, narrative, ideological, linguistic, cultural, in written, oral, iconographic or performative forms, reveals itself as a useful theoretical and analytical strategy.

Seen in this light, it is easy to imagine the several applications it could produce, dealing with texts and representations traditionally considered as borderline regarding the established literary canon, created from a space in-between, from a fractured liminal location of various structures, forms and voices. In this way, liminality chiefly claims that it would be better to read against the grain of the rhetoric of binarism, going beyond polarizations, looking from the bridge. In a time when it is already assumed that cultural purity does not exist, this study displays a true reassessment of the creative potentialities of liminal zones. Crossing, boundary and threshold markers are highly significant in this interstitial space,

and are also extremely useful to locate and apprehend the text regarding the representation of worldviews in interactional context, in search of dialogue.

All in all, I honestly consider it necessary to value the relevance and possibilities offered by the concept of liminality at the present time of literary studies, engaged in a rich interdisciplinary relationship with cultural studies, comparative literature, translation studies and discourse analysis, among others, without forgetting the growth of interest in thresholds and boundaries,

associated especially with genre studies, postcolonialisms and gender studies. Reading this book, liminality, which could be related to other useful cultural bridging conceptualizations such as Homi Bhabha's 'third space' or Gloria Andalzúa's 'borderland/*frontera*', is presented in an intensive and accurate way, from a conscious picture of its possibilities, from a concise and potential apéritif that conveys a very good taste.

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Anabel BORJA ALBI.

El texto jurídico inglés y su traducción al español.
Barcelona: Ariel, Lenguas Modernas, 2000.

*Legal equivalence is not possible;
legal translation is.*

Anabel Borja

In less than one year of existence, Dr. Borja's book has become one of the most used and useful references in legal translation teaching and practice. It could not be otherwise. Its author's professional profile, her research, and also the remarkable time translation studies is going through have all contributed to the quality of this work, a first step in a series of specialised studies in translation that Ariel has set up to publish.

This book comes into being in the era of the specialised translation. For centuries, the translation of literature, or even of poetry alone, has been the only concern of translation theory. Whereas this area of studies continues to be the most prestigious in an academic milieu, the professional market has been pushing for some decades for the specialised areas to find a place in this

context. Works like the one by Dr. Borja's echo this reality and become a most valuable resource for scientific, technical, economic, or legal translators.

The book aims at studying the legal translation between two major languages: English and Spanish. Following a bottom-up perspective, it covers three areas, which lead to an increasingly deeper view of legal translation as a professional, discourse activity. Thus, the author covers in her research legal language and texts, legal translation itself, and the legal translator.

The first block, which comprises chapters one to five, is a survey of traditional and recent studies of English legal language from a discourse analysis point of view. This part leads to the definition of the features of English legal language as a textual phenomenon. In chapter one, the author suggests a functional definition of 'legal language' as that language which is used in the communication between, from, or directed to public authorities, as well as that used

between individuals in activities which may have legal consequences (such as agreements or wills). Next a historical framework is offered (chapter 2) which supports the functional view of legal language and allows the author to trace back the features of English legal language as described in chapter 3.

In chapter 4, we are gently driven from a microlinguistic analysis into a textual perspective where text and context are seen as interwoven. Here we can appreciate the influence of the discourse analysis trend in translation studies where theorists such as Hatim & Mason (1990) plead for a three-layered textual analysis, where pragmatic, semiotic, and communicative features are taken into account. Anabel Borja applies this framework to legal texts and text types and the result is a sound reflection into the use of English legal language as seen in real texts, and the context where it develops.

The author offers in chapter 5 her own classification of legal texts, focusing on text type relationships between both source and target culture. In establishing her criterion, she surveys typologies based on the branches of the law, the function of texts, or the communicative situation. However, the classification produced in this book sets off, for example, a sales agreement and an act regulating the sale of goods, whereas this act would be under the same category as an act to regulate the relationships between landlord and tenant. The final taxonomy is reached inductively and takes in the way in which primary users (such as lawyers or judges) organize their own textual knowledge. In presenting her classification, we are offered a wide view of legal texts in the Spanish and the English culture, which includes the description of the communicative situation, the purpose the users pursue in choosing one text or the other, and an overview of the textual features of some documents.

Such a classification is planned to lead to the establishing of relationships between source culture (that is English) and target culture (Spanish) text types. Therefore it is a useful reference for the identification of parallel texts (e.g. a 'judgment' and a 'sentencia'), a tool with which a translator is able to compare for example source and target terminology and phraseology, or also text type conventions.

In the next chapter – 6 – Dr. Borja defines what legal translation is and discusses the confusion of this with official translation. Most illustratively, one example tells us that whereas an official translation may be needed for a love letter to be presented in court, legal translation would be restricted to law-related texts. In her definition of legal translation, the author stresses the fact that it is not restricted to one mode (written texts), but it also includes audiovisual translation and interpreting (oral texts). The last pages in this chapter are a very useful survey of a wide range of articles dealing with legal translation, distinguishing different groups of concerns for researchers of legal translation.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the profession of legal translators. This is a sound description of the actual profile of translators and interpreters faced with legal translations to be consumed in Spain and of the legal framework in which they work. The author shows a deep view of this professional activity in tackling the concept of 'equivalence in translation' in chapter 8. Conceptual density and lack of equivalence between legal systems are difficulties facing the translator who, even under these circumstances, finds an equivalence in translation. The strategies translators apply in finding the solution depend, as the author tells us, on their customer and the function of their translation. These remarks are illustrated with real examples and some concluding guidelines for legal translation.

In chapter 9, the book deals with the sources of documentation legal translators have at their disposal. The author offers a general view of existing resources and stresses the importance of the knowledge acquired through practice and which can take a material shape and be systematically filed by translators themselves for future use. This chapter ends by giving a great deal of useful references which include electronic data bases, web sites, and newsgroups.

In her epilogue, the author sketches some future perspectives for research in the field of legal translation. She particularly focuses on the usefulness of corpus linguistics, empirical studies of translation practice, and the developing of software which takes advantage of the recurring phraseology and structures of legal text types. Finally, we have a generous catalogue of literature on this subject and

also a very generous list of reference works for the practice of legal translation between English and Spanish.

All in all, the book under review here is a very generous work where a professional and researcher lets the general public into some of the magic formulae otherwise reserved to those who dare to undertake this complex branch of translation. The author's final wish, stated in the epilogue, for the legal translator to lead a better life, is undoubtedly a guiding principle for her research, and hers is a very remarkable contribution to that cause.

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Mireia LLINÀS,
Petites paraules. ¿D'on surt la gramàtica?
Barcelona: Empúries, 2001.

Petites paraules. ¿D'on surt la gramàtica? is a comprehensive overview of the basic concepts and corollaries of Generative grammar, a theoretical framework first proposed by Noam Chomsky which attempts to approach language scientifically by formulating and checking hypotheses, by predicting what language will allow and what it will not. This theory basically seeks to explain (i) adult grammatical knowledge from a global point of view, that is, including all languages in the world, and (ii) how language is acquired and develops in the human mind assuming that humans are genetically endowed to acquire an adult grammar.

The book is divided into five main chapters which, in turn, are further subdivided into more specific sections headed by an explanatory title. A great deal of useful examples are included throughout the text in order to clarify theoretical issues, as well as to lead the reader to think about his or her own linguistic knowledge. An analytic index of relevant concepts is included at the end, so that the book can be used for quick consultation.

Simplicity (but not shallowness) is a key word to define the book: the author tries to move away from specialised jargon when possible, offering plain definitions and explanations whenever a tech-

nical word cannot be avoided. This way, anyone interested in language, but not necessarily a philologist or a linguist, can follow and enjoy the reading.

As Llinàs establishes in chapter 1, the aim of the book is to explain what Generative grammar is about and how it accounts for our linguistic knowledge in an understandable way. Two basic ideas have to be taken into account by the reader to grasp the essence of Generative grammar: (i) grammar is the basis of linguistic knowledge and (ii) it is innate, inherent to human beings.

In chapter 2, the author addresses some of the central issues that shape Generative grammar, such as the idea that we are biologically prepared to learn any language in the world, since we are born with an internalised Universal Grammar. According to Generative theory, Universal Grammar consists of a series of principles and parameters. Principles are shared by all languages in the world, whereas parameters are responsible for linguistic diversity, since each language chooses its particular set. Therefore, all human beings have an innate knowledge of a set of grammatical operations which allow us to build up sentences and account for linguistic creativity, that is, the capacity of all individuals to create and interpret new sentences without having heard them before. However, grammatical operations function together with words, which are stored in the lexicon along with their phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic properties. Grammar, which is one of the cognitive systems of the mind, is made up of different kinds of knowledge such as phonology, morphology and syntax, among others. Among these, syntax is considered to be the core of grammar, since other kinds of linguistic knowledge such as morphology depend on it. Moreover, it is responsible for the structure of language, which, in turn, constrains grammatical operations.

Chapter 3 deals with syntax, structure-dependence and the limits of language. Through a series of examples of both possible and impossible sentences, Llinàs makes the reader aware of the fact that there are certain restrictions on language: some constructions are not allowed by syntactic structure. The limits of language, then, are to be found by means of linguistic experiments, that is, by judging what sentences are possible in language and which ones are not. In order to illustrate that grammatical operations are constrained by syntactic structures, the author comments on (i) the relationship between pronouns and their reference and (ii) the existence of certain domains where certain grammatical operations are not allowed.

In this chapter, the notion of functional categories such as Determiner and Complementizer as opposed to lexical categories such as Noun and Verb is introduced. Functional categories are extremely relevant in Generative grammar: they contain grammatical information, which is essential for the good formation of sentences, and are responsible for linguistic variation across languages. The author also deals with traces, an example of empty categories, which are one of the main contributions of Generative grammar to linguistics. Traces, which are invisible and empty of phonological content, signal the syntactic position of those elements that have moved away from their original position.

In chapter 4, Llinàs concentrates on the process of language acquisition, which constitutes an important piece of evidence in favour of the existence of Universal Grammar. The logical problem of acquisition (Plato's problem) refers to the fact that children acquire a great deal of linguistic knowledge that cannot be found in the input they receive. According to Chomsky, this is a piece of evidence for claiming that human beings are by nature endowed

with Universal Grammar, an innate language acquisition device which is activated by linguistic input and which ensures that any child under normal circumstances will end up acquiring a language.

Moreover, the process of acquisition is basically similar across languages and from child to child, as the author illustrates with examples of her two daughters' linguistic productions. The same non-adult grammatical constructions were produced by both of the author's daughters at about the same age. Very interestingly, Llinàs points out that some practices which are common among parents, such as correcting children and talking to them in a simplified way, are of little use, since the child goes through a series of stages necessarily, as the process of acquisition is guided. Again, she uses some fun examples of her own children's linguistic productions to illustrate the point.

The author also comments on the fact that children's constructions cannot be regarded as mistakes, since they have

a particular grammar at each stage of acquisition, which means that, at each stage, they have a given set of grammatical operations which can result in a group of possible constructions. Therefore, children systematically produce constructions that might be different from adult grammar, but that are allowed by the set of grammar operations that build up their grammar at the particular stage of the process of acquisition they are in.

In the last chapter, which constitutes a very good summary of the book, the author makes some final remarks on the purpose of Generative grammar and its main contributions to syntactic theory and linguistics in general. On the whole, the book reads easily and provides the reader with a clear picture of a theoretical framework that could have appeared to be nearly esoteric if it were not explained in such plain and accessible language.

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