

REVIEWS

Comparative Literature in Spain has traditionally been considered a pseudo-academic discipline in university circles, due above all to the kind of *positivist* studies that have been done until recent years. Fortunately something is changing and we are now witnessing a sort of watershed: the emergence of intertextual studies, that is to say, studies which are not just «catalogues of sources» but accurate proofs of the innate intertextual character of literature, either by direct or indirect influence of some authors and works on others.

Carmen Pérez Romero's *Ética y estética en las obras dramáticas de Pedro Salinas y T. S. Eliot* (Universidad de Extremadura, 1995) is a good example of the kind of studies that are giving prestige and academic status to Comparative Literature in Spain. The aim of her book is not to prove that Eliot read Salinas' books or viceversa (that is not relevant in this case) but to discover general and particular affinities between Salinas' and Eliot's dramatic productions, both on the philosophical and stylistic levels, regardless of whether they knew each other's work or not. What these affinities make clear is how easily cultural and literary intertexts are produced between diverse cultures.

T. S. Eliot and Pedro Salinas were acclaimed poets when they decided to take up writing theatre. In the case of Eliot, he considered drama as the best vehicle to convey poetry. That is why Pérez Romero begins her study by stating the fact that in both cases we are facing a peculiar kind of theatre characterized by the very lyrical language that pervades it. The poet, in both cases, suffocates the playwright. That is what makes their plays more suitable to be read rather than staged.

Perhaps due to the particular influence of Henri Bergson (Eliot and Salinas attended his lectures at La Sorbonne in Paris) and his personal conception of time and reality, works like *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *El director* (1936), *La fuente del Arcángel* (1946), and others have a very striking point in common: the presentation of a two-plane reality or, in other words, a mysterious plane which is simultaneous with the normal one. The first plane is visible and easily apprehensible by everybody; the second is invisible and ineffable and can only be fully understood by means of symbols and only by a few chosen people.

In this dual conception of reality, Salinas and Eliot draw a cast of characters with definite and precise functions. Pérez Romero, in one of the most relevant points in her book, makes a division in three groups: a) characters «in crisis»; b) characters «between two worlds»; c) transcendent characters. The first ones are represented, for instance, by the couples Juan / Juana in *El Director* and Edward / Lavinia in *The Cocktail Party*. The second group presents what the author calls «trinity of guardians»: the Director / the Waitress / the Bellboy in Salinas' play, and Reilly / Alex / Julia in Eliot's. Their function is to guide the characters of the third group to the transcendent plane of reality. A plane which is only reached by the Typist in *El Director* and Celia in *The Cocktail Party*.

The similarities between works go beyond this character classification, and, for instance, as Pérez Romero clearly shows, both Salinas and Eliot use a more prosaic language when they are describing the common, ordinary level of reality, and a much more poetic language, full of symbols and metaphors, when they make reference to the transcendent plane. It is in their interest in mysticism and the mystical language of such writers as St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa and others, that lies this use of poetry as the best and perhaps the only possible means of expressing the ineffable quality of that transcendent world which is only open to the elected like the Typist and Celia. The symbolism of certain recurrent words in Eliot (*know, understand, dark, sin, etc.*) and Salinas (*luz, oscuridad, espejo, ventanal, etc.*) is another important proof of a very marked stylistic affinity.

The relationship between Salinas and Eliot, as critics like Howard Young and J. M. Aguirre before and now Pérez Romero have shown, is not perhaps a direct relationship: there is no evidence at all to affirm that Eliot had read some of Salinas' works (e. g. *El Director*) when he wrote his. But what studies like this make clear is that this kind of literary and philosophic affinities are just part of a much more complex web of cultural relationships, which, in the case of Salinas and Eliot (and Unamuno, Maeterlinck, Pirandello, Priestley, and others) have to do with a kind of spiritual reaction against the rationalism of the first decades of the century.

In the late 20's and in the 30's there is in European Literature a raising interest in the transcendent and the religious, which is common to many countries in the Continent. As Pérez Romero states, the Existentialist Movement between the World Wars and the eagerness to rationalize ideas come to a turning point, especially from the 30's onwards. The change consists, in the 20th-century poet, in a kind of return to the mysterious from an ontological perspective. Against the materialist and rationalist tendency, there is a longing in certain writers for the mysterious, even divine element as a means of escape. It is precisely in 1930 when Eliot publishes *Ash-Wednesday*, the first real proof in his career of a change towards a more religious and transcendent conception of his work. The belief in Salinas and Eliot in a supernatural plane of reality and their claim to it is the best proof of this reaction.

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The «Taller de Estudios Norteamericanos» Collection, University of León, Spain.

This Collection presents a utopian project, ignoring any potential commercial success that some texts and authors, depending on momentary fashions, may enjoy. Here we find texts published that may have fallen forgotten, not because of the lack of

inherent interest, but because of the lack of demand, economically speaking. In this Collection are important texts of the North American culture set in their cultural, literary, social and political context.

The fact that the texts appear in a bilingual edition is outstanding as this implies that the translator has to take his or her work very seriously. No omissions and no mistakes can be made since the original text is placed alongside the translation. Furthermore, the fact that we find a bilingual edition may help other scholars and students, of all kind of fields, to approach American texts without knowing well the English language, or they can simply be used as a translation exercise.

The Collection is divided into four subjects, literature, history, socio-political, and miscellaneous texts, each subject represented under one color, blue, pink, green, and peach, respectively. In «Taller de estudios norteamericanos» we find: Raymond Chandler's *The Simple Art of Murder*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Giant Wisteria*; Gerald Vizenor's *Native American Indian Literature*; Thoreau's *Life Without Principle*; Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (a selection); Margaret Fuller's *The Great Lawsuit. Man Versus Men. Woman Versus Women*; Kouwenhoven's *What's 'American' about America*, Zora Neale Hurston's *My People! My People!*; Anderson & Elmer Rice *Texts about North American Theater*; Hawthorne's *Prefaces*; Lincoln Steffens' *The Shame of the Cities*; *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Declaration of Seneca Falls*; Emerson's *The American Scholar*; Henry James' *The Art of Fiction*; Sinclair Lewis' *The American Fear of Literature*; or Whitman's *A Backward Glance O'er Traveled Roads*; just to mention some. Coming up we will find texts of Jarena Lee, O'Neill & Thornton Wilder, John Winthrop, Sui Sin Far, Henry Adams, William Kennedy, John Smith, Edmund Wilson, M. Luther King, Langston Hughes, Nicola-Sacco & Vanzetti, and Mrs. Mary Rowlandson. The selection falls under the, both general and specific, label of 'American Studies' (not excluding Canada). The aim of the collection is to reflect the enormous wealth and heterogeneity of American culture in direct relation to its political, economic, literary, social, and ideological context through an introduction made by a specialist. The weight of the Collection lies, without doubt, in the texts themselves, not in the translation or the introduction, as these are only tools for a (hopefully) better understanding of the text. A significant detail is reflected in the design of the covers of the different volumes: only the name of the author and the title of the work appear on the cover. Those who wish to find out who translated the work or wrote the introduction must consult the first pages of the book. When one has read the text, one will discover to what point he or she agrees or disagrees with the introduction and decide whether it is adequate or not. With respect to the classroom use of the text this is very useful since these texts, in the light of their introductions, can provoke interesting debates.

Generally speaking the «Taller de Estudios Norteamericanos» publishes texts that deal with and question certain social, political, economic, political and historic aspects that affect not only the U.S.A. but any national or ethnic community. They are

therefore interesting for a very broad public, not only University, but also High School students. All in all, it is a rare Collection as it does not follow any monetary or ideological recommendations nor follow any strict frameworks, plans or tags when choosing the texts to be published. The selection of texts is based only on their significance in the North American culture, and is therefore of great interest for everyone that wants to approach any aspect of this country.

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Mellow, James R. *Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. 704 pp. \$30.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-395-37777-3.

The Hemingway industry produces, produces. Susan F. Beegel informs us that in 1991, the final year to be included in her recent and thorough bibliographic essay, over eighty articles and books on Hemingway were published, and this count must surely overlook some scholarship written abroad and not catalogued by the MLA. Pity the generalist, or even the modern Americanist (can that ever rarer species the educated general reader be invoked?), who cannot possibly keep tabs on such a list. Not even the specialist can read it all, and the shame of the daunting numbers is that they include some very worthy new work apt to get lost in the shuffle. Indeed, recent years have seen a major reorientation of Hemingway scholarship.

The 1980s were a revivifying decade for Hemingway criticism. The key factors were: (1) the opening of the Hemingway Room at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, (2) the publication of *The Garden of Eden*, (3) the publication of several new biographies, most notably Kenneth S. Lynn's. I say *most notably* not because Lynn's is the best of the lot—that honor should be reserved for Michael Reynolds's ongoing multi-volume work—but because, in spite of its weaknesses, Lynn's volume most nearly exemplifies the predominant orientation of recent Hemingway studies. His work, followed by that of Mark Spilka, emphasized Hemingway's «quarrel with androgyny,» indeed his self-quarrels about sexuality in its manifold guises, and his long-noted but never so exhaustively examined quarrels with his mother. Lamentably, Lynn's book proves to be relentlessly tendentious, downright untrustworthy in certain instances. It is marred by the careless interchange of biographical and fictional incident, always a tricky matter for biographers, but one where scrupulosity must reign.

Among Hemingway experts, Lynn was, from the first, viewed with skepticism, even disdain. Nevertheless, much Hemingway scholarship proceeded to explore the fields dear to Lynn. The tone of much new scholarship, its conclusions, its purposes,

often departed from Lynn's; its subject matter did not. Moreover, chit-chat in the faculty lounge and conversation at literary conferences make clear that among academics who are not Hemingway specialists, Lynn's impact has been significant. And those who teach Hemingway seminars will find that upper-level students are often much taken with his arguments. It might also be said that Lynn's book arrived at a ripe moment. Literature departments were overflowing with theory. Icon-busting in general was (and often still is) not only a la mode, but de rigueur, and the death of the author had already become an accepted idea in many a seminar room before the book's publication. Hemingway's repugnant qualities were already well known before Lynn, but he, more than anyone before him, set forth a version of the author as not only out of control in life, but also in literature. For Lynn, what is important in the stories springs from depths beyond Hemingway's ken, and seems never to be the product of conscious control or literary artistry.

For a proper recognition of these latter qualities does better by turning to Reynolds. The most deeply informed of all the major biographers, he does not, of course, turn a blind eye to Hemingway's failures and unattractiveness. Yet the baseline of his biography is not ignorance and self-deception, as in Lynn, but self-creation. Reynolds's pays particular attention to the larger historical context of the life and works. For him the most important shaping influences are not to be found in the depths of Hemingway's unconscious, but on the streets and in the churches and schools of Oak Park, on the battlefields and in the government chambers of Europe, in the cafes of Paris, on the bookshelves of the Finca Vigía, and in the newspaper headlines of the day.

Mark Spilka less sensationally, more thoughtfully, more meticulously mapped out (often to the point of tedium) the psychic terrain trampled on by Lynn. This terrain, little explored in the body of criticism prior to the late-eighties, previously invisible even to many experts, is most obviously visible in *The Garden of Eden*, even in the severely truncated edition delivered up to the public by Scribners. Of course to generalize about an amount of scholarship and criticism as large as that devoted to Hemingway is to invite one's readers to take exception, but I will risk observing that since *The Garden of Eden*, since the opening of the Hemingway Room, since Lynn, since Spilka, the dominant tendencies in Hemingway studies have been: (1) surging interest in the posthumous works, (2) textual studies of both regular and posthumous stories using the now readily available materials at the Kennedy Library, and especially (3) essays relating to gender and sexuality, which, taken as a whole, bury forever the cliché of Hemingway as pre-eminent male chauvinist, the hirsute man's man depicted in *Life* magazine photos. Hemingway as feminist punching bag has been replaced by a more complicated personality and a writer of fictions more sexually ramified than previous generations of readers had been able to grant. The commonplaces initiated by Hemingway's first critics—code heroes, wounded heroes, death seekers, nada defiers, etcetera—may still have validity, but they have little scholarly currency.

After such excitement as all this and after Michael Reynolds's deeply informed

and fluent volumes, what chance for James R. Mellow, Johnny come too lately? A good chance, one hopes, for Mellow is a broadly informed scholar who has done his particular academic chores in regards to Hemingway. He writes intelligently and honestly and has produced a book deserving of general and specialist reader alike. In many ways, his is a work of the middle ground. It is not as staid, not as official as Carlos Baker's benchmark volume, nor as insistently demythologizing as Lynn's. Hemingway warts and all is, and should be, the presentation of the life at this stage. Baker generally underplayed the wartiness of his subject. He liked to overlook some of the warts, powdered makeup over a few, and probably failed to see some private, hidden ones. Lynn became so fascinated with the warts that he gloried in their ugliness and came to forget the «and all» that presumably brought him to his subject in the first place. «Immortality means eternal trial,» Goethe tells Hemingway in Milan Kundera's novel of that name. «If it's eternal trial,» Hemingway responds, «there ought to be a decent judge. Not a narrow-minded schoolteacher with a rod in her hand.»

Mellow accepts the scholarly responsibility of elucidating those puzzling and unattractive features which play a shaping role in Hemingway's art or a defining role in his life. Yet his study also keeps steadily in mind that Hemingway, until old, sick, alcoholic and broken down was an enormous liver of life, a man of appetite and gusto. It is true that he could be a victim of himself, as all people are to greater and lesser degrees (even biographers, one suspects), but, he was also a strong man, a willful and imaginative author of his own life.

The reader of an artist's biography has a right to expect that its primary focus will be to elucidate the sources of renown. Mellow does his best to show why Hemingway was so influential, why he was a writer of both popular appeal and high brow acclaim, how he gained a worldwide readership and became the deserving recipient of a Nobel Prize. As the maxim has it, for those who followed in his fictional footsteps, half sweated hard to copy him, and the other half strove desperately not to. In the era of the pathography, in the era of the grudging, hostile, resolutely debunking literary life, it is pleasing to come across someone with the balance and judgement of Mellow.

A work of the middle ground. Carlos Baker's was a versionless version of Hemingway, a dutiful, effort-filled compilation of the works and days to which scholars will remain forever indebted. Kenneth Lynn proved unable to restrain his theses from turning into thesis-mongering.¹ Mellow's is rather a work of several central themes to which he returns periodically as warranted: Hemingway as charismatic companion, Hemingway as virulent friendship breaker; Hemingway as modernist, Hemingway as traditionalist; and, most centrally, Hemingway as desirous of a life with no consequences,

¹ Jeffrey Meyers, the first post-Baker exposé, gave us many lists, an inelegant, matter-of-fact chronology, by turns grudging and truly admiring, with many chapters fine for professorial cribbing, but not so charming as a narrative.

as the book's subtitle declares. As a young man intent on post-war European adventuring and upon forging a writing career, Hemingway viewed his wife's pregnancy with dismay. The consequences of fatherhood, he felt, would be the end of freedom, the end of work and play on his own unimpeded terms. That his over-thirty wife may have felt differently seems born out in the submerged yet evident frictions at the heart of such early stories as «Cat in the Rain,» «Out of Season,» and in his later tour-de-force «Hills Like White Elephants.» This is but one of several turning points in the life when consequences arose that complicated and restricted, but that could not be avoided.

From within the panoply of biographers, Mellow can lay claim to certain important niches. As a biographer of Gertrude Stein, it should come as no surprise that he has developed the fullest portrayal of the Hemingway-Stein relationship. Part mother-son, part teacher-pupil, part sage-disciple, perhaps part safe (because unfeasible) erotic attraction, the relationship ended in reciprocal acrimony, as many of Hemingway's relationships with other writers did. But during the exciting apprenticeship years in Paris, Stein was a powerful force in the maturing Hemingway's life, and Mellow does a fine job of helping us see just how. He is also particularly strong at delineating the importance of Ezra Pound in Hemingway's development. Even though his correspondence makes clear that early on he grasped Pound's impending insanity, Hemingway remained loyal and generous to the end, sending Pound a one thousand dollar check upon his release from St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Pound never cashed the check, which was meant to help him resettle in Italy, but instead framed it in commemoration of generosity and mindfulness.

A good biographer of the friendships, Mellow also reminds the reader of Hemingway's appeal to men, a facet of his personality which has been de-emphasized in recent years. Mellow re-emphasizes it, casting it in a more proper light than some earlier critics who saw Hemingway's male friendships in both life and fiction as invariably related to an intense chauvinism, even misogyny. For example, it is incredible, and really should always have been so, to read the stories in *Men Without Women*, all the time supposing that title to be meant as a straightforward prescription for the good life rather than as an ironic description of the painful and intricate man-woman stories it contains. As for Hemingway's attractiveness as a friend, Mellow notes it yet cannot explain it, as who could? One had to be there, no doubt. His charm and companionability, besides being a source of delight and adventure in his life, also had their usefulness for the young Hemingway, who was able to impress his literary elders and betters with very little more to offer them than his magnetism and promise. Sherwood Anderson, Pound and F. Scott Fitzgerald—each man already a success—promoted his career and cultivated his friendship without reservation, in Fitzgerald's case with assiduousness. For Anderson and Fitzgerald, the second thoughts would come later.

Mellow has also written by far the best account of Hemingway's relationships with his initial biographers, those who approached Hemingway himself in the forties and especially the fifties: Malcolm Cowley, Lillian Ross, Carlos Baker, Philip Young,

Charles Fenton, and Arthur Mizener (for his biography of Fitzgerald). Hemingway's reaction was one of simultaneous push and pull, a strange and shifting mixture of calculation and genuine ambivalence, helpfulness and deceit, hopefulness and disgust. Hemingway's declaration that a writer's life counted as next to nothing in comparison with his work was undoubtedly sincere, and so too were his fears of having any dirty linen on public display. No biographies of writers while they are alive, was his initial response to all inquiries, but this response always yielded significantly around the edges and gave way at the center on more than one occasion.

Did Hemingway relent for generous reasons, because several writers made clear to him that they truly needed the money or the career advancement that his permission and help would make possible? Did he take the pragmatist's approach and realize that biographies would be written willy-nilly and decide to play whatever role he could in their shaping? Was there a part of him unwilling to let his celebrity status wither on the vine? Was his desire for intellectual companionship and appreciation so great that he succumbed to flattering but serious appeals which spoke to him as an artist and not just as a celebrity? After all, he lived in Cuba, far removed from the literary circles he had moved in as a young man; many of his literary friends were dead, others lived far away or were emotionally alienated. The questions are rhetorical, of course, as each can be answered affirmatively, when applied to the appropriate would-be biographer. If we recognize that mere fame has undone many an artist who received far less attention than Hemingway, we may be less pleased to scoff at his contradictory responses to these men, for the question they were truly posing was how best to face up not just to fame, but to immortality.

But first must come the confrontation with mortality. Only the sourest ideologue could fail to be moved by the circumstances surrounding Hemingway's suicide, for that act remains his final testimony to his art. From a clinical perspective, Hemingway shared his father's propensity for depression, which was in turn passed on to at least one of his sons.² His health was a disaster, not least on account of his alcoholism. Yet, one understands that all might have been bearable had he still been able to write. Mellow gives the later years of his life somewhat short shrift in an otherwise long biography. The erstwhile disciplined wunderkind ended up as a writer who could not finish projects, whose work too often expanded uncontrollably, ridiculously. The writer who began his career honing vignettes and short stories made so terse as to achieve a simultaneous rock hardness and pregnancy, the writer who was known to count the words of his day's work with precise care, was no longer in control. At the very end, Hemingway wept to his physician that nothing would come anymore when he stood in front of his writing

² Biographers have catalogued the high incidence of depressive behavior in the Hemingway family, and there is some evidence that Hemingway was not merely depressive, but also had manic phases. On the very anniversary of Hemingway's suicide this summer, his granddaughter was found dead in her apartment. Her death has been ruled a suicide.

table. The final consequence could not be faced, the consequence of loving art, of putting final faith in the workshop of words. When the words ceased, so did the reason for life.

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Ibarrola, Aitor, ed. *Fiction and Ethnicity in Northamerica: Problems of History, Genre, and Assimilation*. Bilbao: Uncilla Press, 1995. Ptas. 2000, paperback. ISBN 84-605-3751-X.

In his introduction to this collection of essays on fiction and ethnicity, Ibarrola declares that its aim is twofold. On the one hand, «to encourage teachers and researchers to rethink their American literature programs in the light of the latest investigations in the field of minority literatures,» and on the other, «to elucidate the connections existing between ethnic fiction and . . . diverse branches of the humanities.»

The collection certainly fulfils those objectives. It is divided into three main sections, each dealing with one of the key issues announced in the subtitle (history, genre, and assimilation), which are then followed by a Part IV, loosely labeled «Two Interviews and a Lecture.» The criterion used by the editor to place an article in one such section or other is, despite Ibarrola's explanation, sometimes rather unclear, at least to me, since many of the questions raised in these essays overlap. This is, nevertheless, understandable, due to the very nature of the topic under discussion here. After all, what is at the heart of the collection is the notion of identity; it is unavoidable,

for instance, for a piece on autobiography and minority writing to touch on history (personal and/or collective) and on assimilation.

Fiction and Ethnicity in Northamerica is ambitious (but not excessively so) in its broad scope, with articles covering a wide range of authors and works. In its comprehensiveness, it recommends itself to anyone with an interest in American literature. I am especially glad to have found essays on Native, Chicano, and Jewish writing (by Sánchez-Pardo, Martín, Flys, and Alonso) balancing off the better known African American fiction (in articles by Benito, Manzanar, and Frías), and the nowadays-so-much-in-the-spotlight Chinese American authors (in a piece by Davis and partly in Ibarrola's, which covers three different ethnic writers). The interviews (especially a fascinating one by Carabí with Philippine-born novelist Jessica Hagedorn) and the lecture by López-Liquete and Vizenor do enrich the selection. What's more, I have found all the essays thorough and up-to-date, the authors showing their deep knowledge and understanding not only of the literary works they engage, but also of the theoretical implications that inform the writing and the reading of this fiction.

However, there are two aspects of the collection which, in my opinion, are at odds with the high standard set by the rest. One is the way the editor has chosen to bracket off the voices of these scholars. The central articles are written by Spanish scholars, people who, like Ibarrola himself, currently develop (and are well known for) their research on American literature in universities throughout our country. But the Preface and the Afterword differ. The collection opens with a piece written by Jean Carr, located even before Ibarrola's own introductory remarks, and closes with an essay by Carol E. Miller, both scholars working from American universities. Both essays are well chosen and indeed illuminating (Miller's more so), but that's not the point. My point is that this positioning betrays a certain uneasiness on the part of the editor about the nagging question of representation: can we (indeed, should we), who are worlds apart from them, speak for these ethnic writers? Aren't we appropriating their voices? Ibarrola clearly answers no in his Introduction; rightly, I believe, because that would mean taking an essentialist stance concerning race and ethnicity which we are at pains to disclaim. But the way he wraps up the discourse of Spanish critics with the (perhaps more authoritative?) discourse of American scholars unfortunately suggests a different thing.

The second point I would like to raise here concerns the conflation of U.S. and Canadian literature in the collection. Although the title *Fiction and Ethnicity in Northamerica* is probably meant to encompass both, and despite the fact that several Canadian writers are discussed alongside U.S. authors, no allowance is made for any differences in the material conditions (and the political agenda) of the country where they live and produce their work. The existence, for example, of a Ministry of Multiculturalism and a Multicultural Act in Canada are facts that cannot and should not be obviated. On the contrary, much is made throughout its pages of the American canon, American fiction, revising the literary history of the United States, etc. The

Canadian reference is omitted, or, at best, bracketed (e.g. in Carr's opening remarks on the subject). As a Northamericanist, that is, as someone with an interest in both U.S. and Canadian writing, I find this hard to swallow, and even harder to justify when the focus is on issues such as history and assimilation. IbarroIa is thus laying himself open to the accusation of assimilating Canadian writing to the U. S. canon, and no Canadianist would easily acquit him of the charge.

When all is said and done, and despite these two shortcomings, I still find *Fiction and Ethnicity in Northamerica* a valuable contribution to the field of race and ethnicity, and as such I would recommend it. The very taking up of the issues the collection means to address is a challenge that few dare take, much less successfully face.

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Constante González Groba. *El mundo novelesco de Carson McCullers: Soledad, amor e identidad*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade, Servicio de Publicacions e Intercambio Científico, 1994. ISBN 84-8121-167-2. 224 p.

While attempting to get acquainted with recent writings on Carson McCullers's work, it appeared to me that one of the main difficulties about any criticism of her novels must be to keep the character analysis they inevitably prompt within its right proportions. Critics, like readers, are either likely to concentrate on the «pathological» nature of her «freaks,» and to interpret their actions from a semi-clinical, semi-fascinated, semi-disgusted perspective, or conversely –but no less dangerously– to repeat in their reading the practice of the very projection of themselves onto others that Constante González Groba and other critics consider a recurrent theme in McCullers's works. The risk here is that of projecting dreams, anxieties and sympathies onto creatures that, by virtue of their very literary nature, are essentially constructions of words, and as hopeless and unresponsive as objects of affection as Singer or Williams can be to their adorers.

Of the two approaches just mentioned, in spite of its dangers, I find the second most profitable, and far more likely to lead to one of the ends that criticism should pursue: to read a text, in Emerson's phrase, according to the spirit in which it was written. It seems adequate to grant a measure of love, sympathy and understanding to characters who were originally conceived in that spirit, however enmeshed our appreciation may be with our own self-projections.

To me one of the most attractive things about González Groba's book is precisely the measure of understanding, affection and respect with which he approaches the characters on which his analysis will centre. However, as the suggestion that the merits of a work of literary criticism may be based on something close to a «Romantic»

approximation is likely to be taken as an insult, I hasten to add that these merits are by no means exclusively due to the power of sympathy.

The conjunction of elements that makes *El mundo novelesco de Carson McCullers* a thorough and valuable study can be shown by reference to its structure. The essay is divided into six extensive chapters. Five of these correspond to the author's five novels, while the first places McCullers and her work in their literary, historical and social context, as well as outlining some of her main themes. This chapter establishes a series of premises which act as effective controls on any excessively «Romantic» reading, first by situating McCullers in a specific time and place, as a writer influenced, in spite of her individualism, by the social and literary trends of her day, and secondly by framing the main preoccupations that surface in her novels within contemporary analyses of these preoccupations undertaken from philosophical and psychological standpoints, ranging from Lacanian theory to gender studies. The first of several significant quotations from McCullers's considerations about her own work, included in this chapter, also acts as a limit to character-interpretation, not only by making explicit her reasons for her choice of «misfit» characters, but by reminding the reader of the element of deliberate construction which underlies literary creation however personal and «autobiographical.»

This framework of historical, philosophical, psychological and literary criticism is greatly expanded and deepened as it is applied to the analysis of each individual novel. The choice of this particular organization makes a certain degree of repetition inevitable, and in fact this is one of the few weaknesses of the work. Another minor defect in structure is the fact that the essay finishes rather abruptly, with an extremely brief overview of McCullers's evolution compressed into the last heading of the chapter dealing with *Clock without Hands*. It is true, however, that a broad perspective is given by the continuous crossreferences to other novels that occur almost constantly in the treatment of each.

In fact, the chapters dealing with individual novels begin by setting each work in its context within McCullers's development and concentrate on formal issues such as structure and narrative voice, as well as outlining the main themes that will be examined in detail through the subsequent headings devoted to particular characters. As to the analysis of the characters themselves, it is sustained not only on a close and perceptive examination of the primary texts—although careful reading and careful writing are strong points in González Groba's book—but also on an informed and complex use of the variety of critical sources outlined above. A specially successful example of this is the way in which, in his analysis of Carson McCullers's adolescent female characters—partly based on an acute sensitiveness to the significance of the author's imagery—González Groba combines universalizing, mythical accounts of love, identity and initiation with the social-oriented, gender-specific awareness of feminist criticism. Besides, González Groba draws on a considerable amount of less accessible material from dissertations, articles, interviews and unpublished manuscripts from the Carson McCullers collection in the Humanities Research centre at the University of Texas.

The format chosen for the book, whereby much of this extensive bibliography appears in footnotes (apart from its final presentation as a list of Works Cited), ensures that the text can be read with ease and pleasure as a continuous essay, while providing plenty of clear and concrete references for specialist readers. For those interested in an in-depth study of Carson McCullers, González Groba's book will be a valuable acquisition; for those who have simply read and appreciated any her novels, *El mundo novelesco de Carson Mc Cullers* will have the virtue of deepening their insight and arousing their further curiosity about her writing and her world. And in my view, the fact that a critical essay or a lecture has the immediate effect of inciting the audience to look up more about the subject it deals with is a very significant measure of its success.

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Louise Erdrich. *The Bingo Palace*. New York: Harperperennial, 1995.
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In her latest novel *The Bingo Palace*, Louise Erdrich continues her depiction of the reservation life of Chippewa Indians. Her novel raises important questions concerning the contemporary situation of Native Americans: Is resistance and survival of Native American cultures possible or are Native Americans doomed to a life between two worlds, the Native and the Euro-American, that leaves them estranged from both cultures? How can Native Americans keep their traditions alive and improve their situation in society? Is bingo the key to survival as Gerald Vizenor envisions it? And what is the gamble?

In publishing *The Bingo Palace* in the beginning of 1994, Louise Erdrich has completed her quartet of novels that started with *Love Medicine* (1984), followed by *The Beet Queen* (1986) and *Tracks* (1989). Set in and around the Chippewa reservation in North Dakota, her fictional universe which in its epic scope is often compared to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha country, is inhabited by memorable Native Americans, non-Native Americans and mixed blood characters and families: the Nanapush's, Kashpaw's, Morrisey's, Lamartine's, Pillager's, whose intertwining past, present and future is the focus of her four novels.

Unlike other contemporary Native American authors, Louise Erdrich seems less occupied with the alienation and estrangement and the ultimate return to a traditional life-style that Native American characters have to face in e.g. *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch. Her novels, and even more so her newest one, are concerned with the resolution of the contradictions of contemporary Native American life and the survival of Indian cultures in the face of the hopelessness

of reservation life. Louise Erdrich's characters find a way out of the dilemma of living in two cultures by conquering modern life with humor, wit, and spiritual strength. Their in-between condition is in fact at the heart of modern Native social realities.

In *Love Medicine*, the young Chippewa Lipsha Morrisey is said to have the magic touch that in the course of the novel accidentally kills his grandfather. In contrast to the despair and poverty of life on the reservation, he and his cousin Albertine seem to be the hopes for the future and a better life for the younger generation of Chippewas. In *The Bingo Palace*, Lipsha is the central figure whose story is continued; Louise Erdrich had left him driving his «criminal» father Gerry over the Canadian border in his dead mother's car in *Love Medicine*. In *The Bingo Palace* his once-promising abilities - he did well in high school and scored high in the North Dakota college tests - have amounted to nothing and he proved «a waste, a load, one of those sad reservation statistics.» As he returns from Fargo to the reservation, he falls in love with Shawnee Ray who is engaged to his half uncle Lyman Lamartine, who is described by him as «an island of *have* in a sea of *have-nots*.»

Lipsha starts to work for Lyman's newest business, a bingo hall, and starts to play after his dead mother June has appeared to him and told him the winning numbers. This love triangle is played out before the ever-observing eyes of Lipsha's half-sister Zelda who is also Albertine's mother. Zelda is one of the strong female characters that Louise Erdrich describes with much sympathy and also a little irony. All her women characters in *The Bingo Palace*, even the dead June, promise and fulfill what Paula Gunn Allen has called «strong women make strong nations.»¹ It is basically the doings of her female characters that tie the loose ends of her story together and motivate the plot; her male characters are caught in the schemes and plans of the «oldtimers» Zelda, Marie Kashpaw and Lulu Lamartine. But there are losers and winners on both sides.

Lyman who embodies the shaman-entrepreneur, capitalist and politician runs the bingo palace for a noble cause because he wants to use the money for improving the schools, establish scholarships and do good things for the community while making a profit for himself. If Bingo guarantees the survival of Native American cultures then Lyman turns into the saviour of the Chippewa reservation. Louise Erdrich argues that one can and even has to combine the business ethic of capitalist USA in order to improve the living conditions of Native Americans. It seems the irony of history that the laws of the USA enable the reservations to make a profit exploiting the white man's disposition for gambling that in the end might guarantee survival, and might be the only hope, for the American Indians. Louise Erdrich has the courage to deal with that topic in her latest novel and offers a hopeful view on the future. Despite Lipsha's initial pessimism, «from day one, we're loaded down. History, personal politics, tangles

1. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 30.

bloodlines. We're too preoccupied with setting things right around us to get rich,» it is Lyman who does both things, and it is Lipsha's spiritualism that makes him a winner in the end, too. And Louise Erdrich would agree with Gerald Vizenor, yes, bingo is the key to survival. The gamble is survival, on an economical as well as cultural level. In addition, gambling serves as the central metaphor for Native-American and White relations insofar that it symbolizes a history of broken treaties, cheating, and losing one's possessions. Luck, and especially Lipsha's luck that is coming from his dead mother who tells him the lucky numbers, signifies the power of Native American life and culture. Bingo is the means to continue this life.

In portraying her characters in their traditional function as story-tellers, preservers and communicators of tribal memory she empowers the Native American community and its single members. But emphasizing the power of the collective in Native American tribes and traditional lives does not prevent Louise Erdrich from characterizing her main characters as highly individualized people. The apparent contradiction between communal and individual is not regarded as such in Native American life. Therefore the concepts of family, community, and tribe are the most important elements in Louise Erdrich's fiction. As Paula Gunn Allen has put it, «belonging is a basic assumption for traditional Indians.»² Lipsha, Lyman, Zelda, and their intertwining stories embody this concept of belonging and hope that leads to survival despite the hardships and desperation of reservation life. Her characters are «shown to be potentially coherent and dependent upon a continuing and coherent cultural identity»³ which the author provides in her novels.

In *The Bingo Palace* Louise Erdrich has skillfully developed her narrative technique and created a multiple voice narrative that is not limited to the first-person accounts of narrators but includes again an additional third-person perspective, and newly introduces the communal «we.» Both of which are alternating with Lipsha's first-person accounts. Lawrence Thornton has called this «the novel's chorus»⁴ and it works exceptionally well in her novel. In choosing to describe the events that take place from the inside and outside of her characters she has given her story more credibility and realistic verisimilitude. This structure allows her to explore a new way of storytelling and characterization. Not the subjective accounts of the single members of the reservation recount the story but telling about them gives it a quality of «recorded,» even orally recorded, history. Recounting the events from Lipsha's point of view, the «I,» the author chooses the present tense but turns the third-person accounts into the past, thus into the history and memory of the tribe. The «we» narrators frame her narrative

2. Allen, 125.

3. Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992) 19.

4. Lawrence Thornton, «Gambling With Their Heritage,» rev. of *The Bingo Palace*, by Louise Erdrich, *New York Times Book Review*, 16 Jan 1994: 7.

by being used in her first and last chapter, *The Message* and *Pillager Bones*. The collective «we» gives a voice to the community of inhabitants of the reservation. What sounds like gossip in the «we» and third-person narration is the way story-telling works in the Native American community. Bits and pieces have to be put together by the listeners, and in Erdrich's case by her readers, in order to understand the whole story. Perspectives change so that the reader has in fact an active role to play by assembling the fragments and different views into a complete picture. The key to traditional story-telling and Louise Erdrich's approach to novel writing is best understood in her own words from *The Bingo Palace*: «The story comes around, pushing at our brains, and soon we are trying to ravel back to the beginning, trying to put families into order and make sense of things. But we start with one person, and soon another and another follows, and still another, until we are lost in the connections.» Storytelling, as well as her own writing, leads back to community which adds to the strength and survival of traditional and modern Native American life.

In the beginning the author states explicitly what not only her characters have to do in the course of the novel but her readers as well: «We do know that no one gets wise enough to really understand the heart of another, though it is the task of our life to try.» *The Bingo Palace* succeeds well in increasing more understanding for its characters and Native American people. Louise Erdrich's new novel is in itself another vital document of the survival of Native American cultures.

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