

**Manzanas, Ana M<sup>a</sup> and Jesús Benito 1999: *Narratives of Resistance: Literature and Ethnicity in the United States and the Caribbean*. Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha. 337 pp.**

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The volume *Narratives of Resistance: Literature and Ethnicity in the United States and the Caribbean* edited by Manzanas and Benito is undoubtedly an important contribution to the growing field of ethnic studies in Spain, with such valuable predecessors as Aitor Ibarrola's *Fiction and Ethnicity in North America* (1995) and Olga Barrios and Bernard Bell's *Contemporary Literature in the African Diaspora* (1997). This publication resulted partly from a 1997 international conference organized by the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha dedicated to the topic of ethnicity and literature, but other materials were later incorporated that enhanced the scope of the book. As a whole, the book sets out, as the editors explain, "to invite readers to further their rethinking of American and Caribbean literatures" (16), and this objective is clearly fulfilled and even surpassed by the extremely interesting and thought-provoking content of the twenty-three articles that compose the work.

This collection of articles is a direct heir to Paul Lauter's comparatist perspective in his seminal work *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1994) in a number of ways: firstly, because it responds to the redefinition of the American literary canon by placing canonical and non-canonical authors side by side; secondly, due to its deep investment in an effort "to reconnect literature and its study with the society and culture of which it is fundamentally a part" (Lauter xxxiii); third and very importantly, thanks to its representation of the wide variety of cultures that constitute the rich contemporary tapestry of American literature. Springing from diverse theoretical perspectives, it comes as no surprise that postcolonial and feminist approaches figure prominently, although not exclusively, in this work, as they adapt particularly well to the objectives of the collection. All these articles propound an enlightening discussion of the proposed authors and texts which intends to illuminate the different strategies instrumental in performing a twofold task: on one hand, the opposition and resistance to mainstream impositions and, on the other, the forging of alternative models for a new sense of representation of the ethnic self. In this sense, all the authors selected in the collection engage in a process of deconstruction of the traditional boundaries between the concepts of center and margins by consciously subverting their hierarchical order and by proposing fresh insights into the integrative and dialogic nature of literary texts. The volume offers

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thus a very updated rendering of problematic but very productive issues such as race and ethnicity constructs, silence and absence, cultural diversity, gender equality, racial discrimination, the rewritings of (hi)story, folk elements, linguistic subversion, to name a few. So a well-informed and contemporary range of concerns pervades the present volume.

Hence the two crucial ideas of resistance to the imposed tradition and creation of suitable alternatives serve the purpose of connecting the articles to one another and confers unity to the book as a whole. This sense of unity is also achieved by the circular structure given to the volume, which is preceded and concluded by one piece by Alfred Arteaga and a theoretical article by each of the editors. Then, the subsequent chapters focus on specific text(s) or author(s) that reveal and problematize the varied ways and manifold implications that arise from the analysis of the topics of resistance and creation in the selected areas and literatures under consideration in the volume, mainly Arab American, Latino, Asian American, Caribbean, Jewish American, and Native American.

As a theoretical framework, the two pieces by Alfred Arteaga "X Antecanto: The Xicano Sign" and "Poetics of Resistance" set the mood for the rest of the collection by bringing to the fore the hybrid sign X as a convenient metaphor for the entire volume. As Arteaga observes, "it is our mark, our cross, our X, our sign of never ceasing being born at the point of two arrows colliding, X" (25). It is precisely at the core of the hybrid self and the hybrid literature it produces where we can locate what Arteaga terms "a poetics of resistance" (334), which informs the different readings proposed by the articles in the collection. In one way or another, each of the articles tackles the issue of shaping that poetics of resistance in order to resist oppression and subjugation and to promote survival and celebration instead.

The critical stance of the collection is complemented by the two articles the editors author in the volume. Manzanás' call in "Ethnicity, *Mestizaje* and Writing" seems to find its most suitable response in Benito's conclusive essay. In Manzanás' piece the key terms of ethnicity and *mestizaje* are contextualized within the literary terrain. She discusses the impact of the making of American society according to certain factors such as race, gender and class, which obviously furthered the so-called "fear of creolization and hybridization" (28). She also analyzes the changing meanings of "race" and "ethnicity" throughout history in order to prove their social and cultural constructedness, despite the persistent presence of racial discrimination. These ideas lead her to assert the usefulness of the written word to both alienate the master discourse and to articulate a *mestiza* literature. As a complement to Manzanás' view the article by Benito, "The Poetics and Politics of Resistance", theorizes on the need of resistance from a historical standpoint. Starting from the origins of the colonial paradigm, Benito is able to offer a succinct yet illuminating journey into the relevance of the ideological and linguistic forces that shaped Western hegemony and its enforcement of voluntary submission, together with the different responses to it. Without forgetting any of the leading theorists of both colonial and postcolonial perspectives—Gramsci, Foucault, Braithwaite, Said, Césaire, Stuart Hall, Bhabha—, his impressive account aims at demonstrating the powerful influence of subversive hybridity and mimicry in literature as a privileged site for resistance.

Following the theoretical guidelines articulated by Arteaga, Manzanas and Benito, the opening essay "Arab American Poets: the Politics of Exclusion" by Nabil Alawi addresses the marginal position occupied by Arab American poets even within the multicultural trend in contemporary literary studies. Rethinking basic difficulties in the integration of Arab American literature in university syllabus, Alawi provides some crucial clues to understand the literary universe specifically depicted by Arab American poets accounting for their dilemma of assimilation and their nomadic quality. In so doing, the critic clearly links political and cultural issues as the main cause for their continuous exclusion. He relentlessly problematizes the relationships among such concepts, claiming for a rightful place for these poets in contemporary anthologies of American literature.

The three subsequent articles center on Asian American literature. Eulalia Piñero Gil's "Raising Voices, Writing Ethnicities: Asian American Poets and the (Re)construction of History" revises the traditional way of writing history and asserts the need to "reconstruct the immigrant memory of Asian Americans in the United States" (57). As Asian American poets have been unjustly ignored up to quite recently, Piñero argues for the central role of their poetic works in order to embrace their bicultural heritage and a sense of counterhistory. She examines the diverse ways in which Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Nelly Wong, Lawson Fusao Inada and John Yau achieve their purposes by fusing their personal stories with reimagining the historical past of their community. Writing poetry becomes for these writers an act of survival but also an act of resistance, enabling them to recover their past and their ethnic inheritance. Also focused on Asian American literature is Begoña Simal's "Chinese American Ethnogenesis: From Jade and Lotus Flowers to Chinatown, Cowboys, Bananas, and Monkeys". It provides a fresh interpretation of the double nature of ethnicity as a cultural construct following the Derridean principle of erasure. Within the framework of the different schools of thought on ethnicity, Simal refuses any essentialist understanding while denouncing everyday discriminatory practices. She then revises the very concept of Asian American literature by exposing the many gaps found in the earliest anthologies, especially its gender politics which excluded women writers. Finally, she chooses the work by acknowledged authors Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang to dismantle any preconceptions or stereotypes about Asian American writing, while proposing an alternative theory symbolized by the Monkey figure whereby ethnic subjects are marked by instability and undecidability. Lucía Mora's "La fuerza de lo femenino: entre la herencia cultural y la conciencia americana en *The Hundred Secret Senses* de Amy Tan" contributes to further destabilize the monolithic conception of Asian American literature by taking Tan's novel as a paradigm of the coalescence of ethnicity and gender. Myth and realism fuse in Kwan, the protagonist, who is able to transcend stereotypical representations in order to find her own sense of self, although Mora loses the opportunity to present a clearer opposition between Kwan and her sister Olivia.

The next section of seven articles is devoted to Caribbean literature analyzed from different perspectives, either general or based on specific authors and works. Paula Burnett's "'Where Else to Row, But Backward?' Addressing Caribbean Futures through Revisions of the Past" sets the bases for the rest of the section by brilliantly probing into the meanings of history, myth and resistance in the work of Naipaul,

Walcott, and Wilson Harris and three younger Guyanese writers: Pauline Melville, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar. By means of their "obsessive revisiting of the region's past" (92), Burnett captivates readers by tracing the diverse strategies employed by these authors in order to overcome that traumatic past in their fight for survival and for a better future. Juan A. Suárez in "Modernism, Caribbeanism, and Cultural Critique in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* (1938)" focuses on that paradigmatic work by Hurston to stress its discursive potentiality as a modernist anthropological landmark. Suárez' engaging reassessment of Hurston's work stresses its pan-African awareness and its defiance of conventional mimetic modes, which in fact questions received notions and hierarchies and emphasizes what Suárez calls "the arbitrariness and contingency of all cultural forms" (124), including folk practices. Therefore, these folk elements become reliable sources of resistance against totalizing narratives like classic ethnography.

Ileana Sanz' article entitled "Fiction Rewrites Caribbean History" also points in the direction of a necessary rethinking of the traditional meanings assigned to Caribbean history. Sanz aptly explores the intimate relationship between history and literature throughout time in order to overcome the contradictions between official and real history. She then centers on the work of three Caribbean women writers, Lorna Goodison, Honor Ford-Smith and Grace Nichols, and specifically on their fictional reconstruction of a historical figure: Nanny, a maroon woman who was a leader of rebel slaves. Sanz' stimulating account of the way these authors' fiction rewrites history helps to regard them as "contemporary griots" (141) that provide an alternative history of resistance. Fernando Galván makes a similar point in his suggestive article "Postmodern Views of the Caribbean", where he reexamines Antonio Benitez Rojo's theories as particularly suited to the Caribbean context. Galván contends with lucidity that Benitez Rojo's vision of the Caribbean as an island that repeats itself and its connection to Chaos paradigms can be successfully applied to other works not mentioned by Benitez Rojo, concretely Caryl Phillips' most recent novels.

The two following articles are devoted to Derek Walcott's poetics as an illustration of resistance. Keith Whitlock's "The Poetics of Derek Walcott as a Narrative of Resistance" pinpoints the attacks Walcott has been subject to on account of his alleged mixed ancestry and multiculturalism. The article starts with Nayantara Saghal's words that very appropriately remind the reader of the Eurocentric bias inherent to the postcolonial approach. It then proceeds to exemplify the way in which Walcott has excelled in appropriating a mixture of cultures as a means of resistance, but devotes too little space to providing more telling examples. Antonio Ballesteros' "The Chains of Literary History: Derek Walcott and Intertextuality" seems to stress rather the opposite feature of Walcott's poetics, namely self-division. However, as the article unfolds, its valuable comments and close reading of Walcott's poems insist on the importance of intertextuality in the discursive universe of the poet as a strategy that confirms resistance by opening up new venues for creation. Finally and also on the topic of poetry, Christine Harris revisits Louise Bennett's work in "A Tongue of Heritage: Creole and the Expression of Ethnic Identity in the Poetry of Louise Bennett". Harris' argument takes issue with Bennett's use of Creole as a means to resist standard English and its power structures. As Saghal would do in Ballesteros' account, Harris disproves of Edward

Kamau Braithwaite's concept of "Nation Language" and its distinction from Creole as "somewhat pedantic" (180). In her penetrating analysis of Bennett's poetry she underlines the way Bennett is able to validate her woman's voice and her Afro-caribbean identity by bridging the gap between the oral and literary traditions.

The next set of three articles undertake the task of mapping out strategies of resistance and creation in Latino writing, and especially in Latina writers. "Feminism on Stage: The Subversive Plays of Fornes, Moraga and Prida" by Barbara Oziebło inaugurates the section with an engaging analysis of the carnivalesque connotations embedded in these three authors' theatrical production. Bakhtin's theories prove very useful for Oziebło to present consistent evidence of the way in which these women authors consciously "subvert the theatrical experience from within" (188), both in content and structure. Influenced by the women's movement and Luis Valdez's "Teatro Campesino", the three of them manage to place women and women's concerns center-stage breaking the sanctioned theatrical norms and revealing a truly subversive intentionality. Another presentation of the same topic is that propitiated by Matías Barchino's "Identidad cultural e identidad en la autobiografía de Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican/ Cuando era puertorriqueña*". In this case, Barchino makes use of Santiago's two versions of her autobiography, in English and Spanish, to chart the ambiguity of a double self and the relevance of language to create and define identity. Santiago's self-reflexive act of double definition once more emphasizes hybridity, but perhaps Barchino fails short of providing clues into the resisting act this duplicity may entail. Much more pointed is Juan Antonio Perles Rochel's reading in "The Politics of Identity in Ana Castillo's *Sapogonia*". This perceptive analysis of Castillo's work attributes to a gender reason the scant critical attention paid to the novel and claims its feminist agenda. Perles throws light on the strategies deployed by Castillo to render the reader's identification difficult as a previous step in her deliberate deconstruction of normative definitions of both masculinity and femininity. Hence the author problematizes identity constructions warning the reader "to distrust any master narrative, eurocentric or Chicano nationalist, of identity search" (216), as Perles conveniently concludes.

The following cluster of articles interrogates the meanings ascribed to Jewishness and their relation to gender and search for identity in Jewish American literature. This is the alleged purpose of Luisa Juárez's "Is there a Jewish American Woman Writer? The Jewish American Narrative and the Mysteries of Canon Formation", where Juárez effectively dismantles the sexist bias underlying the traditional Jewish American canon and calls for a serious reevaluation of the role played by Jewish women writers in a wider definition of Jewishness. However, she could have offered a more detailed study of these women's works and what they entail for the formation of a more inclusive canon. In "'The Devil Wore a Skirt': The Ideology of the Anticomunist Witch-hunts in Tema Nason's *Ethel*", Juan Ignacio Guijarro takes the reader back to the claustrophobic decade of the fifties, and concretely to the so-called "Rosenberg case" and its fictional renderings. By focusing on a supposedly minor work, Tema Nason's *Ethel*, Guijarro underlines Nason's refusal to place the historical figure of Ethel in a marginal position. Guijarro's highly interesting and informative account of Nason's revisionist and oppositional perspective allows him to delve into the process of demonization and

otherness this figure underwent, especially due to her lack of adaptation to the concept of normative femininity of the fifties. Stanislav Kolar also returns to the past in his "Function of Recollections in Jewish-American Literature", although from a different standpoint. Claiming the essential role of recollections in Jewish American writing as a vehicle to search for identity, Kolar draws an interesting comparison between the use of the past in the immigrant generation and those born in America. Although he definitively makes his point asserting that "memory can be understood as a way of resistance to the forces leading to assimilation" (256), his analysis could have been enriched by discussing similarities and differences in depth.

Finally, the last three chapters evolve around the topic of canon formation, writing as resistance and hybridization processes in Native American literature from three different perspectives: firstly, Esther Álvarez's "Native American Women Speak: Autobiographies, Identities, and the (Author/ized) Ethnic Self" deals with the problematic issue of the politics of canon formation in female autobiographies and its relation to identity construction. Álvarez provides an intelligent analysis of the changes in these women's autobiographies that facilitate the construction of positive Native American models. Moreover, Álvarez argues, their privileged liminal status allows them to frankly reconceptualize themselves and the world surrounding them. Then, M<sup>a</sup> Esther Martínez in "El complejo destino de la condición del indio en *Love Medicine*, de Louise Erdrich" scrutinizes the concept of writing as resistance in Erdrich's emblematic novel. Erdrich presents characters who continuously negotiate between two seemingly opposite codes—Western and Native American—as an intrinsic characteristic of their marginal position. Martínez affirms Erdrich's investment in tradition as crucial to the survival and well-being of the entire tribe. Opposing this view, Aitor Ibarrola's "The Red and the Dark: Sherman Alexie's Indebtedness and Expansion of Black Racial Consciousness in *Reservation Blues*" emphasizes hybridization as a means to achieve a coherent sense of self and community. Ibarrola's rigorous and attractive account derives its strength from his accurate knowledge of the innovative devices Alexie avails himself of, mainly stemming from Native American and African American influences. He consistently and conveniently defends thus hybridization as an effective and useful instrument for resistance and creation.

All in all, the volume discussed here means a significant contribution and welcome addition to the growing field of ethnic studies in Spain but also abroad, due to its multilayered approach to very contemporary and controversial issues which will surely pave the way for future research and investigation into the nature of culturally constructed ethnic identities. Its lucid and captivating articles provide an impressive wide range of topics and motifs which will make this book a compulsory reference for those interested in multicultural literary endeavors.

## REFERENCES

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