



José Francisco Fernández and Alejandra Moreno Álvarez (Eds.). 2014. *A Rich Field Full of Pleasant Surprises. Essays on Contemporary Literature in Honour of Professor Socorro Suárez Lafuente*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 177 pp. ISBN: 1443859494.

PALOMA FRESNO-CALLEJA  
Universidad de las Islas Baleares

This volume is a compilation of essays by twelve scholars based on various Spanish universities and institutions who initiated their research careers under the supervision of Professor Suárez Lafuente, to whom the volume is dedicated. The thematic and theoretical interconnections between these essays become the defining feature of a compilation which also attests to the “variety and abundance of [Professor Suárez Lafuente’s] work,” as remarked in the preface by Professor Carrera, Suárez Lafuente’s colleague from the University of Oviedo. Each chapter thus showcases the diverse thematic and disciplinary interests of their authors, with her former PhD students paying homage to Professor Suárez Lafuente’s inspiration and guidance through very different theoretical and textual paths.

The chapters move swiftly across different geographical, generic and disciplinary boundaries, converging nevertheless in their common reflection on contemporary identity debates, with a special focus on gender and postcolonial issues, two of the fields in which Professor Suárez Lafuente has worked more intensely, as evident in her vast record of publications. Most of these analyses are applied to contemporary Anglophone literatures, although some of the chapters divert from the scope of the literary –delving on film, television, music or the visual arts– or even expand the focus outside the boundary of English Studies, in which most of the contributors develop their professional activity. The title thus aptly reveals the textual and contextual richness of the collection and the diversity of theoretical foundations and fields that inform it: postcolonial, gender, cultural and media studies, among others.

The volume opens with “Still Postcolonial but Treading the Global Path” by Jesús Varela Zapata, a comprehensive and soundly documented overview of current debates concerning the interactions of the global and the postcolonial, and a reflection of how both

postcolonial critics and writers negotiate their position in the global world. The following chapters flesh out some of these debates by focusing, precisely, on bodily issues in the works of specific Anglophone authors. Alejandra Moreno Álvarez's chapter on the work of Rohinton Mistry and V. S. Naipaul analyses diasporic subjects "in transit," focusing on bodily functions as an alternative logos through which these characters come to terms with the dislocating experience of migration. A similar emphasis on the body, this time in connection to sexual identity and transgender performativity, can be found in Irene Pérez Fernández's chapter "Re/Articulating Identity in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*," where she analyses the character of Joss Moody and his permanent struggles to renegotiate his identity as a Black Scottish fe/male. Moving from literature to television, Carolina Fernández Rodríguez offers a lucid and original discussion of contemporary Latino identities in the US in "Representing 'Latinidades' in the Global Village: The Case of Dora the Explorer." Fernández reviews the appraisal of this figure as both a positive role model which transgresses gender and ethnic stereotypes but also its appropriation as an object of consumption which may end up perpetuating homogenising or negative views of the migrant other. Most of these chapters constitute original approaches to their respective topics, proving the ground-breaking nature of the research supervised by Professor Suárez Lafuente during her long academic trajectory. More specifically, they can be taken as a significant if only brief sample of the recent work conducted by scholars in the field of Postcolonial Studies in Spanish Universities, and more to the point with regards to this particular collection, by those who started their research career or currently teach at the University of Oviedo, which has historically had a pioneer role in the institutionalisation of Postcolonial Studies in our country.

Professor Suárez Lafuente has played a foundational role in this task, as well as in the development and consolidation of Women's Studies through her involvement in both the Erasmus Mundus MA programme and the PhD programme in Gender and Diversity at the University of Oviedo. Gender, in fact, vertebrates several chapters of the volume, being these not strictly confined to literary analysis or to the Anglophone context, which attests to the interdisciplinary nature of Gender Studies and the ability of Professor Suárez Lafuente to undertake research and supervision in various fields. M<sup>a</sup> Carmen Gómez González authors a chapter on the works of Emily Dickinson and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, focusing on the literary symbols through which these authors express their feelings and emotions and reject traditional repressive views on their female condition. Moving from 19<sup>th</sup> century literature to contemporary film, M<sup>a</sup> Carmen Rodríguez Fernández's "Under the Skin they Live in: Gendered Conflicts in Contemporary European Films" explores works by Benito Zambrano, Jasmila Zbanic and Nadine Labaki as tools to rearticulate eroded female identities in contexts determined by gender violence, war or confinement. A more theoretical take on these issues is offered in the essay "May the Priest be Shaken" by Susana Carro Fernández, an overview of the use and representation of the disciplined, tortured, or punished female body in foundational patriarchal texts and the response to these constructions in the writings of

Simone de Beauvoir and Hélène Cixous or the works of visual artist Nancy Spero. Carro's essay gains relevance in the context of the collection when read in conjunction with Delfina P. Rodríguez's comprehensive analysis of the figure of Salome –“How to get Ahead: Visions of Salome in Pop Music”– which departs from the Biblical figure and moves on to consider well-known literary characters, eventually concluding with more transgressive “singings” (108) of this figure by contemporary pop artists.

In conjunction with the gender transgressions outlined in the aforementioned chapters, two authors consider genre issues, by focusing on popular romantic novels and crime fiction and recovering their importance as tools of intervention into gender and ethnic debates. María Teresa González's chapter on romance writer Corín Tellado constitutes a useful overview of her popular fiction, which the author reads as illustration of the condition of Spanish women in the second half of the twentieth century and reflection of the gradual changes affecting the lives of these women, seen in the “plethora of tiny details taken from reality” (142) employed by Tellado in her novels. Similarly, Marta Sofía Lopez's insightful chapter on the crime fiction of Mike Phillips, often neglected by the critics, reconsiders critical perceptions of his novels as devoid of ideology or politics to demonstrate how the author “has consistently used his detective stories to bring to the forefront issues related to racism, black identities and (party) politics” (143), eventually engaging in his more recent works in the reflection of the identity complexities of contemporary Europe.

Rich as the field has so far proved in themes and theories, the aforementioned connections between the chapters should have perhaps prompted the editors to consider organising the material of the collection into separate sections. Although the sequence chosen to present the chapters may be said to implicitly point out those parallelisms, more explicit divisions would have set some of the chapters into a more distinct frame, revealing what appears to be the evident focus of the volume on contemporary gender and postcolonial debates. Two chapters in particular –by Jose Francisco Fernández and Margarita Blanco Hölsher– could have been placed in a miscellanea section. Fernández's interesting study offers an overview on the Art Council Writers' Tours of 1969 and their impact on writers like Margaret Drabble, Nell Dunn or Iris Murdoch. The author describes the particularities of these tours and highlights their importance during “a period still untainted by media-hype and marketing strategies, when writers allowed themselves to be exposed to the general public without safety nets and at a time when culture was considered not only a source of enjoyment but also a service to others” (36). Margarita Blanco's informative “Remembering the GDR in the Fiction of Unified Germany” offers an approach to contemporary German novels dealing with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the German Democratic Republic. Blanco argues that the differing perspectives through which the five authors discussed in the chapter look back to these events contributes to the compilation of a set of collective memories essential to articulate a common national identity in contemporary Germany. Although the focus of this last chapter seemingly takes us into an altogether different field, this particular

contribution by another disciple of Professor Suarez Lafuente illustrates her academic work also in the field of European literatures and cinema and, more specifically, in German literature.

The volume is overall carefully edited, although there are a few editorial inconsistencies, such as the translation of English quotations into Spanish in only one of the chapters, or the choice by only one of the authors to include a “Secondary Sources” as well as a “Works Cited” section. Likewise, the focus of some of the chapters on film or television is not accurately reflected in the title which refers specifically to “contemporary literature.” Most importantly, considering that this is a volume intended as homage to Professor Suárez Lafuente, it would have been interesting to have each of the chapters preceded by a brief note in which the authors explained her role and influence on the development of their specific research interests or the thematic scope of these particular chapters. In like manner, only one of the authors acknowledges Professor Suárez Lafuente’s previous research on the topics under discussion; this is particularly striking, given her vast record of publication on some of the authors and subjects dealt with in several of the chapters. Despite these minor details, the contributions gathered in the volume become a diverse, valuable and original addition by a number of Spanish academics to recent scholarship in diverse theoretical and cultural fields, truly constituting “a rich field full of pleasant surprises.”