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# Studies in Twentieth Century Literature

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## Book Reviews

Michael Bishop, ed. *Women's Poetry in France, 1965-1995: A Bilingual Anthology*. Winston Salem: Wake Forest UP, 1997. 392 pp.

This bilingual anthology of women poets of the twentieth century fills a great void in the studies of French women: a great silence, concerning both contemporary French poetic creation, and the production of poetry by women. In this volume, the voices of 28 women are released, spanning several generations of women. The poets were selected for their creativity; their individuality and the whole of the collection demonstrates a great diversity. It is thereby possible to read and to reread in it beautiful texts by Andrée Chedid, Marie-Claire Bancquart, Joyce Mansour, and Jacqueline Risset, as well as by poets less well known in the field of studies of French women, such as Claude de Burine, Jeanne Hyvrard, or Esther Tellerman. It's no surprise that texts by two novelists, Marie Redonnet (*La mort & cie*) and Marguerite Duras (*Césaire*), are also found there.

The succinct introduction by Michael Bishop places their contributions among the ranks of Marie de France, Marguerite de Navarre, Louise Labé, and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. The translations, faithful to the texts, speak eloquently of Michael Bishop's talent as a translator and of his profound knowledge of poetics. He also includes, at the end of the volume, an introduction to each poet through a short biographical sketch. This brief biographical note allows the reader to better situate the poet, while still permitting an open reading of the poems and their translations. For it is clear that Michael Bishop places the texts in the privileged position in the volume; on the page, the poems are autonomous. It is in this perspective that these women's poems are offered to the reader in all their materiality. That is precisely wherein lies the force of this anthology. For the first time, the

voices of women which are often ignored or which receive little attention are offered to be read and to be heard, some no doubt for the first time in the history of literature. This volume invites us to rewrite the history of poetry and that of the fundamental role that women play therein. Michael Bishop deliberately places women poets in the canon, and this process constitutes in a sense a second section of his previous critical work entitled *Contemporary French Women Poets* (Rodopi, 1995). Moreover, in this new work, the emphasis and the theoretical orientation are found in the ideas of *presence* and *experience*. This work situates itself at the heart of the discourse of contemporary poetry, while retaining the specificity of contemporary feminine production. Michael Bishop reminds us, then, that intertextual relationships are inherent to these texts, in which the problematics frequently relate to one another: "writing poetry as a woman today invariably involves reading the work of other contemporary women poets" (xvii). How can we thank an author of such an enterprise which addresses itself to a broad audience of researchers, teachers, students, and lovers of poetry?

Martine Antle

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Stanley Black. *Juan Goytisolo and the Poetics of Contagion: The Evolution of a Radical Aesthetic in the Later Novels*. Liverpool UP: Hispanic Studies TRAC (Textual Research and Criticism), 2001. Vol. 18. x + 261 pp.

As suggested by his title, Black's primary objective is to portray the "radical aesthetic"—metaphorically speaking, the "poetics of contagion"—that governs Juan Goytisolo's evolution, both as novelist and essayist, from *Señas de identidad* forward. The critic shows considerable skills of interpretation (the dense and descriptive interludes notwithstanding) as he develops a suggestive and contextualized portrait of the way in which Goytisolo's theory and praxis are intertwined. He does so as he emphasizes the correlations between Goytisolo's novels and essays on the one hand, from *Problemas de la novela* (1959) until *Cogitus interruptus* (1999), and, on the other, between Goytisolo and a wide range of contemporary theoreticians and philosophers, formalists, structuralists and post-structuralists, deconstructionists and

Benveniste, Barthes, Marcuse, Said, Eagleton, and Ong. Two threads that advance in tandem—"cual implicantes vides," as Goytisolo would have it—and that, as such, help to reveal the intimate dialogue that Goytisolo maintains, in the intimate confines of his textual abode, with himself and with his world: this is the chord that Black plays most and best.

Goytisolo's evolution, in and of itself, is the paramount theme here, a fact that is underscored by the essay's formal structure. Beyond the introduction ("Goytisolo and Literary Theory"), where Black outlines the bases for the "radical aesthetic" (the "poetics of contagion"), the critic proceeds to explain, in the four central chapters, how and to what degree *Señas de identidad* (1966), *Don Julián* (1970), *Juan sin Tierra* (1975) and *Makbara* (1980) may be considered "contagious," aesthetically speaking. Taken in succession, Black's interpretations suggest something of an ascending order insofar as he sets out to show how the aesthetic effects of Goytisolo's writing increase by degree and in stages. The reader comes to realize en route that Black's strategy is motivated, more or less implicitly, by the notion that the writer's ideology is projected—realized—through his aesthetics, that they (ideology and aesthetics) are two sides of the same coin, at least for an author such as Goytisolo, who has championed the cause of literature as an "act of dissension," writing (initially) and reading (subsequently) as profoundly emancipatory experiences.

These are, in short, the conceptual underpinnings (solid and timely) of a study that is configured as a quest for the answer to an essential question: how to reconcile Goytisolo's "shift to what might seem a highly aestheticist approach" during the postmodern phase of his literary production "with the social commitment that continues to lie at the center of the work" (6). To answer this question Black turns initially to the new sense of commitment Goytisolo expresses, during the formalist/structuralist phase of his development (example: *Señas de identidad*), with literary form and language per se. The confusion between "literary language and social discourse" that emerges during this phase of Goytisolo's thinking opens the doors, as Black claims, to the new levels of metafiction and the increasing emphasis on the performativity of literary discourse that predominate in *Don Julián* and *Juan sin Tierra*, attributes that announce, in turn, the discursive subversion (the Marquis de Sade's "crime perpétuel" announced in *Don Julián*'s epigraph) that Goytisolo seeks to effect, textually, on his reader. However, if the "contagious effect" of these works

is truly limited, as Black affirms, by the centralizing presence of the narrator-protagonist—"deprived of any direct effect on that reality but an essential area of contestation of the real . . . *Juan sin Tierra* fails to meet the radical standards it sets for itself" (153)—*Makbara* marks the spot and time in Goytisolo's fictional universe where (when) the novelist fully realizes his potential. A dynamically pluralistic text, engendered as it is by the centrifugal force of a voice that passes amongst different figures (from the angel to the pariah to the reader), *Makbara* transforms its readers into the direct "beneficiary" of the "redemptive potential" of the act of reading: all according to Goytisolo's utopic plan.

In the final analysis, Black narrates the story of a triumph achieved at long last, after years of searching and experimenting, when Goytisolo finally manages to close the gap between his own theory and practice. Black's essay has the appearance of a tribute or homage in this regard, an impression that is reinforced by his final chapter. The critic remains immersed in Goytisolo's own fictional universe to the very end as he reaffirms *Makbara's* primacy, in what reads like an afterword more than a conclusion, by showing how in his later novels (1982-1997) Goytisolo continues to apply the same formulas with the same effects. The essay therefore lacks a critical and dispassionate questioning of the novelist's standard in the face of the ongoing and extraordinarily complex debate over whether such literary praxes are *really* reconcilable within the realm of *social* commitment. To his credit, Black does address certain contradictions that are inherent in Goytisolo's fiction: the will to "orality," for instance, in *Juan sin tierra*, a novel that is, as Black admits, patently literate. Other tensions that may help us to see Goytisolo's "triumph" in more relative terms—between the social and psychological, the collective and the intimate—elude the author.

One must admire the depth of Black's and Goytisolo's shared faith. To be sure, the critic is consistent in his approach and true to his values and to the goals that he sets out for himself from the start. The story that unfolds pivots on moments of lucid and penetrating synthesis that, in the final analysis, make reading this essay a worthwhile endeavor and a provocative experience in the best sense.

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