

# Recent literary theory and criticism in Spanish Anglistics: some observations on its institutional context and practices

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Received January 2002

## Abstract

This paper addresses the institutional context and academic practices related to the production and use of literary theory and criticism in the Spanish universities, with a special focus on the role of theory in Spanish Anglistics in recent years. The paper assesses interdisciplinary communication, the impact of new theoretical paradigms (feminism, postcolonial Studies, etc.) in a specifically Spanish setting, and the disciplinary transformations and new publishing opportunities associated to the new media ecology. Close attention is paid to issues of cultural colonization, disciplinary marginality and the contextual roots of academic praxis.

**Key words:** Literary Theory, academic institutions, Spain.

Bernard Weinberg's *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy* was published in 1962, before the paper flood of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had made it abundantly clear that the title belongs to our own age with greater justice. The 'Age of Literary Theory' would anyway be a more characteristic title for the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But soft – the 21<sup>st</sup> century has just begun, and the rhythm of production of 'secondary literature' is far from decreasing. The increase is both absolute and relative: an increase in the protagonism and visibility of theory within a field (literary criticism) which has itself expanded enormously.

Besides, to literary theory proper we should add theoretically-aware criticism. The ages of naive impressionism and of positivist historicism are (generally speaking) behind us; methodological grounding, or at least a coherent disciplinary context, is now considered essential for an academic paper. Nowadays a typical critical paper examines an author, a work, a problem in the light of a critical approach or issue, and refers to a bibliography of previous writings on the theoretical approach as well as on the specific object of study. Literary criticism and theory have become more distinct activities, developing into distinct academic disciplines and courses. Specialised journals and book series appear as the disciplines develop.<sup>1</sup>

1. Witness for instance, in Spain, the well-known critical series *Crítica y Estudios Literarios* pub-

The number of academics who write criticism and theory as part of their professional activities has increased in Spain as in the West generally — only more so within the discipline of Anglistics; the number of scholars working in the field of English studies has multiplied in recent decades, in a proportion beyond that of any other humanistic discipline. To this we have to add the increasing number of conferences, seminars, academic societies and journals which ensure that any potentially publishable paper, and some unpublishable ones, will indeed be published. The personal computer revolution from the mid-eighties on has added more straw to a camel's back which still seems to hold good. Computers have contributed to keeping the difference between vanity publications and works whose value is guaranteed by critical filters (a serious publishing house or university press) as blurred as it has probably always been... This line of reasoning should be supplemented with the observation that grants by the universities, the local authorities' cultural departments and institutes, the Ministry/ies of Education and Culture in their diverse avatars, all contribute to the proliferation of subsidized academic criticism. Subsidization, while it is necessary to promote cultural activity, may give rise to a variety of evils: irrelevance, methodological faddism, political opportunism, a lack of any credible contact with the reading public, obscurity.

In the minds of many people, critical theory is notoriously associated to meaningless jargon. Meaninglessness can be a real issue on occasion: I suppose many Spanish Anglists could think of at least one case they would rather not name in case the jargon does make sense beyond them after all — shades of the Emperor's new clothes! Usually, though, obscurity and 'jargon' are merely a matter of finding the right register and context; anybody can make Derrida sound like an idiot by quoting him in the wrong context, but that proves nothing — only that Derrida is not for just anybody anywhere. We must learn (and teach how) to grasp difficulty on its own terms, and also to displace, translate and paraphrase it into more readily usable terms in a different context.

Another of the dangers of theory was sufficiently experienced during the structuralist/formalist wave of criticism. Methodological rigour and single-mindedness may lead to a peculiar combination of insight and blindness — a grain of insight gained with a world of blindness to anything that lies beyond the scope of your system. A method which is too totalizing may become totalitarian, and act as a pair of blinkers on the critic's perception. Theory must not be consumed frozen into a solid system; it is more productive and amus-

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lished by Cátedra from the eighties on, and then more recently the *metacritical* series *Teoría Crítica y Literatura Comparada* issued in the nineties by Síntesis under the editorship of Miguel Ángel Garrido Gallardo; or the translations of influential foreign articles in the series *Bibliotheca Philologica-Lecturas* (Arco Libros). The first journals devoted primarily to literary theory and criticism (rather than philology or literature in general) appeared in the nineties — e.g. *Tropelías* from the University of Zaragoza, and especially *Teoría/Crítica*, edited by Pedro Aullón de Haro and Francisco Chico Rico at the University of Alicante.

ing when it is kept circulating in a variety of eclectic and unforeseen combinations, when the critic's peripheral vision dictates some of the association of ideas and critical applications which in turn feed back onto theoretical writing. The critic/theorist is always a *bricoleur*, or had better be, lest she should become an earnest mechanic. Fortunately, theory-production does not seem to take as yet a route towards strict formalization and specialization into isolated and only marginally interacting contexts.<sup>2</sup>

A recurrent vice of theory/ists, then, is that they focus on the grain of truth which they invariably provide, but are often unable to prevent it from magnifying out of all proportion: the proper limits of their application are not well specified by theories. Such has been the cause of many theory wars- e.g. the 'death of the author' may seem to open a wholly new panorama for criticism, until we realize that for many purposes the author must be resurrected, or the corpse must be renamed. As far as critical wars and passions are concerned, the Spanish academy is certainly more boring than the American or even the British one. Conflicts reach us second-hand, muffled: the more visible theorists here are on the whole more ponderate, less radical, less theoretically adventurous. New critical movements have achieved in Spain a more eclectic coexistence (and occasionally a fruitful interaction) with older approaches, such as comparative literature, philology, ethical/humanist criticism, rhetoric or literary history.

This consideration may take us to a different critical danger, or defect: 'friendly criticism', or simply explaining 'what is there', is widespread in Spain. Perhaps basically because of our humanist tradition, many readers tend to assume that literature teaches, that reading is intrinsically good for you, and that criticism is a handmaid to literature, as Pope would have it, simply an instrument to extract what was always already there in the first place. Friendly criticism has its own uses and virtues, but it is not really criticism proper, or fully-fledged criticism – popular mythology gets it at least partly right here, since the archetypal critic is not the author's friend or follower. Besides, friendly criticism can be insidious in its own proper fashion, when it assumes the guise of a radical or ideologically-aware reading – which commonly happens when the work under study is a 'politically correct' one, since the critic acquires an undeserved aura of critical awareness, riding on the wake of the work as it were. Foreign philologists are perhaps especially given to friendly criticism or uncritical criticism, since their cultural role as mediators is already fulfilled to some extent in merely divulging or making accessible the foreign area's cultural production.

So, let me just note my own bias in favour of 'unfriendly criticism', the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' or 'resisting reading', which differentiates the crit-

2. Think of linguistics, where, although I may be offering a cautionary caricature, relevance theory does not seem to appeal in any way to generativists, and where cognitivists and functionalists work on issues strictly delimited by the theory and often ignore any source older than ten years.

ic's position vis à vis the text, and makes us see in the text things which were not there to begin with. Oscar Wilde's 'criticism as art' may be another avenue to criticism proper, which is, like other literary modes, a kind of writing. Just as the critical method does not include a user's guide, but needs to be contextualized from the outside, the literary work does not include a user's guide either. It carries (in part) its own context along, but not *ours*, and it is always the critic's task to specify what is *relevant* to say about the work here and now. So we have come full circle to irrelevance as a chronic critical illness.

Another professional ailment of critics and theorists is the 'anxiety of theory:' theory (especially the cascade of theories we have waded into of late) produces the uneasy feeling that one is beyond oneself and has lost one's footing, that one's naive practices, thoughts, etc. can be theorized and have probably been theorized already in some book we have not read yet – the bibliographical ocean cannot be sounded in any humanly credible proportion, and yet we must assume an air of knowledgeability, while feeling guilty that we know so many theorists only second-hand (and not feeling guilty about the ones we have not even heard of). To many a theorist the 'anxiety of theory' is a spur to produce yet more theory, which is fine since that is what theorists are for.

The net result of this hermeneutic cycle or vicious spiral is a wealth of LT material associated to all disciplines of knowledge, with roots and shoots extending into theoretical studies in psychology, political theory, ethics, cognitive science, history, sociology, linguistics, communication theory, anthropology, semiotics, aesthetics, hermeneutics, computer science, etc. Such material cannot be known, let alone read, by any one scholar in any but the tiniest proportion. One of the silliest questions Scholar A can ask of Scholar B, especially if Scholar B is an 'atheorist', is 'have you read so-and-so?' (so-and-so being a seemingly essential theoretical contribution to the approach Scholar B is supposed to be undertaking). Invariably, Scholar B has never read 'the original', although s/he might be familiar with some of its ideas secondhand. Practice can always be theorized, but for most purposes it seems to get along quite happily with theory at a second remove, which incidentally leaves us time to read other things as well.

Critical anxiety is especially severe in the case of academics working on foreign languages. For better or worse, we tend to think that the 'real thing' in the area is being written elsewhere, and therefore we don't read each other much. We tend to be practical: think of your allotted time on earth, of the shelf of books you can afford to read per year (although to be fair we might have to add a row of bookcases with books one has to *use*) – would you rather include there a few classics, and then Bloom, Gilbert and Gubar, Culler, Greenblatt, Derrida, Belsey – or a gaggle of 'López' and 'Garcías'? Pride of place, I can guarantee, will be given to the classics living and dead, and foreign. In spite of our considerable anxiety of theory, we Spaniards have produced little influential theory – at bird's eye view, we play in a minor league. There are, of course, many suggestive, insightful and well-written works,

but no Frye, no Barthes or Foucault; no Cybertheory and no Polysystems theory are born here and then exported abroad. And not just in Anglistics, but in the wider Spanish-speaking context either, which would mean that Spanish Anglistics live in a backwater within a backwater were it not that Spanish Anglists and Americanists largely ignore Hispanicist theorists, and get repaid in kind – so these backwaters are rather like oil and water. We even manage to ignore ourselves! But this is nothing new. Ten years ago, a note by Enrique Bernárdez offered a tentative survey of the impact of Spanish Anglistics on Spanish Anglistics, based on the number of citations. I will recall here some of his observations, loosely paraphrased and italicised, with my own superimposed.

- *Most research in Spanish Anglistics is done in the field of literature.* In the last ten years research in linguistics has increased proportionally, especially in the fields of pragmatics, applied linguistics, language teaching and lexicology. But most research is still done in literature. (A rough indication: in the proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of AEDEAN (Lleida, 1998) published in 2000 there are 35 papers on English language/linguistics and 57 on literature/film studies/cultural studies). On these, two significant facts:
  - a) There were only four papers in the literary theory panel – and, note well, a plenary lecture on theory (the other was on linguistics).
  - b) Most papers on literature were theory-informed, that is, they approach their subject from the perspective of an applied theoretical issue.
- (Bernárdez) *Spanish researchers don't quote other Spanish researchers.* Reference to the work of colleagues working in Spain is minimal, and most references to Spanish researchers are to colleagues working in other areas (Philosophy, Linguistics, Spanish Literature, etc.). In my experience, there is not much reason to modify these conclusions ten years later. Most work by Spanish researchers remains unread and unused; a lecture in a conference, even in a small one, probably reaches a wider audience than most Spanish publications (especially collective publications).
- *A survey on the impact of Spanish Anglistics on Spanish Anglistics must be conducted.* Sadly enough, this has not been done. Perhaps the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies, AEDEAN, should subsidize such a survey. (A significant development in the Anglistics of the nineties was AEDEAN's becoming a member of the newly-created European Society for the Study of English, ESSE, which has shown some interest in the promotion of 'local' work in Anglistics through its annotated bibliography, ABES, and through the recently published history of English Studies in Europe).<sup>3</sup>

3. See Balz Engler and Renate Haas (2000).

- (Bernárdez, expressing his worst apprehensions:) *We are not much interested in the work of our colleagues... [Perhaps] Spanish Anglists do not write much interesting research... or (a lesser evil) we have some reservations about quoting Spanish colleagues* (inverted chauvinism being perhaps relevant in this respect, as well as the desire to show that we keep abreast of what is being written elsewhere). Incidentally, *foreign critics do not quote Spanish Anglists, either.*

Even though this note by Bernárdez was widely commented among colleagues, I do not think this invalidates his conclusions, which were all the more disquieting because they were offered as hypotheses or (rhetorical?) questions.

One new circumstance is that foreign publications by Spanish Anglists (an article in a well-known British, American or European journal, a chapter in an international collective publication, a book by a well-known foreign publisher) have become more frequent during the nineties – so that now we can read foreign publications and still be reading our colleagues. But publishing abroad is still considered to be no mean feat. In the field of theory and criticism, the very best publishers (in Britain, Oxford UP, Cambridge UP, Routledge, Macmillan/Palgrave, or the university presses of Harvard, Yale, Indiana, Chicago, Johns Hopkins and California in the USA) are by-and-large off-limits to Spanish theorists and critics. Someone might retort: ‘OK, but that is not the Spaniards’ natural outlet; conversely, Harold Bloom doesn’t send his manuscripts to the Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de \*\*\*’, does he?’ Well, no, he doesn’t, and he wouldn’t care to. Incidentally, Spanish university presses have an awful distribution, and the chances that any one (recent) title may be found on the shelves of a bookstore, even in specialized ones, is practically nil. Some positive steps have been taken in information and distribution, such as the periodical catalogue *Univespaña* (and such web pages as [http://www.universia.es/contenidos/bibliotecas/Bibliotecas\\_editoriales.html](http://www.universia.es/contenidos/bibliotecas/Bibliotecas_editoriales.html) and <http://www.puvill.com>), but much work remains to be done in this area; fortunately the Internet is allowing much faster access to personalized information.<sup>4</sup>

These considerations apply to all humanistic disciplines. In philologies other than Spanish there is, moreover, a peculiar problem associated with the language one writes in. Most Anglists write both in English and in Spanish, depending on the intended audience of their papers (though they do not always follow a coherent policy). There used to be a certain anxiety, when the discipline was a beginner, and one perhaps still present in beginners, that since

4. Scholars wishing to keep abreast of Spanish publications would do well to contact Pórtico ([portico@zaragoza.net](mailto:portico@zaragoza.net)) to receive their periodical catalogue (*Pórtico semanal*, series *Teoría y crítica literaria*, available in print and electronic versions which lists Spanish as well as international publications). The best online resource is the Spanish ISBN database <http://www.mcu.es/bases/spa/isbn/ISBN.html>

an international publication is rated more highly than a Spanish one, and an international publication is by definition (?) written in English, one should write as much as possible in English, even in Spanish publications, which would thus acquire an international veneer. As shown by the '(?)' in my previous sentence, there has been in recent years a greater pride taken in the international potential of Spanish.<sup>5</sup> The language issue has some unexpected paradoxes. Much high-quality work in Anglistics in Spain tends to be written in English to ensure it a greater access to foreign Anglists, wishful thinking most of the time, although fair enough in principle. But then most of the best Spanish publishers, certainly all non-academic ones, *won't publish work in English*. So criticism in English, whether good or bad, is restricted to academic circles, nay, to specialised publications such as philological journals,<sup>6</sup> since university presses rarely publish works written in English in their regular series (never say never – though this may be changing, too). Needless to say, the output of the Spanish university presses, whether in Spanish or English, is all but invisible to foreign Anglists.

Academic *samizdat* usually takes the shape of collective publications in the shape of proceedings, camouflaged/edited proceedings in the shape of books, or publications such as *SEDERI* or *Culture and Power*, regular series of conference selected papers (nearly journals). Such works may vary greatly as to the academic quality of the contributions, the quality of the editing, and, sadly enough, as to the level of English proficiency in some of the most precarious conference proceedings (although the level of English proficiency in the discipline has improved overall, such carelessness may be a side-effect of the increasing competition among younger candidates for teaching assistantships or lectureships).

In sum, Spanish work in English had better be really good to attain prominence through a foreign press, or it will remain all the more invisible in its bid for visibility, because the channels for its mass distribution in Spain are comparatively inadequate. Popularizations and handbooks written in Spanish are really what most Spanish publishers are desirous to publish and what most academics are unwilling to write, much preferring (or so it seems) to till in peace their own recondite corner of the field.

Then there is also the issue of disciplinarity. In the Spanish university system, 'Teoría de la Literatura' is a distinct discipline in itself (as is the case with 'Translation', and unlike 'Phonetics' or 'American Literature'). In Spain this

5. Why now? Because more and more US citizens speak Spanish? Sheesh... Well, to be fair, let us keep in mind such facts as the creation of the Instituto Cervantes or the greater international prominence of Spain.
6. Let me cite in passing: *Atlantis*, *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*, *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, *BELLS*, *Miscelánea*, *Cuadernos de Filología Inglesa*, *Links & Letters*, *ES*, *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, *REDEN*, *SELIM*, as well as a few journals outside the area which accept contributions in English, such as *Epos*, *Teoría / Crítica*, *Tropelías*, *Analecta Malacitana*, *Cuadernos de Investigación Filológica*, etc.

area is peopled basically by Hispanists, and being comparatively small, it is often ascribed to departments of linguistics (linguistics having been too a 'natural' preserve for Hispanists) or Spanish literature. Which leaves us people doing literary theory in English, French, and other philology departments in an awkward position, there being no obvious academic justification to study Anglo-American literary theory (or Anglo-American linguistic theory, or Anglo-American physics, etc. for that matter, as we are told) while our colleagues in the Spanish departments sound less absurd – they do not sound as if they were studying and teaching a discipline tailored to specific national needs and context.

There *is* a certain sense in studying criticism and theory as an area-specific bias, though. It could be argued that this is always done as a matter of course: in Spanish departments the approaches, concepts and schools being studied are mediated by the Hispanic tradition and context. But the disciplinary frontiers make some sense after all: in Spanish (Linguistics, etc.) departments, theory is approached so to speak firsthand, with a freer focus on the theoretical needs of the discipline. A teacher of Theory in the department of English is bound to take a more culturally mediated or biased approach, since for her/him the relevant object of study is not simply theory as such, but theory as it is or has been used and experienced in the Anglophone context. This refraction need not be a deliberate decision on the part of the theorist, it may not even be present in each and every theorist, but there is an inbuilt institutional bias which favours that culture-specific approach.

Courses in theory and criticism taught under the aegis of the Spanish departments (usually concerned with theoretical definitions, literary periodization, generic conventions, authorship and reading, matters of structure and style) show marked differences in curricular design from those in English departments (where we find post-structuralism, cultural studies, deconstruction, feminism and gender studies, postcolonialism). There is also common ground (semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism...) but there are clear differences in bias. It is not merely a matter of Anglists being more up to date, as some Anglists would prefer to think. After all, the teacher and researcher in the field of English Philology in Spain is a cultural mediator, and not just a cultural mediator in the sense any researcher in the humanities is one – since the Spanish theorist will use American, German, French theories as well – but insofar as he mediates between the work which is dominant in a foreign cultural context (the English-speaking areas) and Spain.

To be sure, there are different ways of facing this situation in the area of Theory just as in Medieval Studies or in Phonetics, and we can find many examples of the two extremes: on the one hand, Scholar A, who writes all of his/her work in English, tries to publish in foreign journals, and behaves for all the world as if he or she were working in East Anglia or Georgia; and on the other hand Scholar B, who thinks of himself or herself as a cultural mediator or popularizer, publishes in Spanish, and if possible in popular periodicals or newspapers, or gives lectures in Spanish to an audience of



non-specialists. No doubt both perform a useful cultural function, and Scholar B (or 'any scholar when behaving as Scholar B', since these are ideal figures) probably engages in a livelier and more vital dialogue with the local context, e.g. with colleagues working on literary theory in the discipline of Spanish or French Philology. Indeed, in university lectures the use of English (as a non-native language) in class, while advisable in most respects, acts as a deterrent to student interaction, and who knows, but this may apply to academic conferences as well. Most participants in conferences in Anglistics in Spain do not seem terribly interested in dialogue, and anyway organizers usually do not allow time for discussion after a paper. Both are signs of a low level of vitality in the critical culture of our discipline, and of a low level of involvement with the cutting edge of cultural dynamics. Backwaters are not especially conducive to stimulating interaction.

Some roots extend far back. The discipline of Anglistics is still young in Spain; it grew enormously during the late eighties and nineties, and on average teachers are probably still in their thirties. The older generation (mostly in their fifties – there are very few retired Anglists as yet in Spain) had to educate itself in matters theoretical, since there was little room for them in the hastily patched-up (and heavily Hispanized) English degree courses they studied. A tradition of theory and criticism has been largely imported and improvised, and the costs are real though by no means always obvious.

Most of the best Spanish work on Theory, and a good deal of the best work on the critical culture of the Anglo-Saxon countries too, is done by scholars in Spanish-language departments (often, in the case of Anglo-American books, painstakingly grappling with a language in which they are not specialists and a literary tradition they are unfamiliar with – nobody is in an ideal position to undertake everything). Comparatively, people specialising in Theory within the field of English Philology are oddballs and often lack a clear outlet in teaching, since any course featuring the name 'theory' is likely to be claimed as its own by the traditionally powerful departments of Hispanic studies and linguistics. It can easily be argued, though, that theory courses *in English* are necessary for students in their final years, when they are more familiar with the literary background and more able to deal with matters of some theoretical complexity.

As a consequence, Anglists are unlikely to specialise coherently in the discipline of Theory, since from the moment they envisage it as an object of study rather than as an instrument of study they may be represented as trespassing the bounds of another discipline. But of course watertight disciplinary compartments in critical theory are an impossibility, and attempts to build them soon create interdisciplinary paradoxes (e.g. we can always specialise in critical theory as a genre within English literature).<sup>7</sup>

7. Therefore the bibliography on recent (1990-) literary theory in Spain I add lists works first published in Spain or by theorists working in Spain, primarily in the area of *Filología Inglesa* or relevant to theorists working in this area, that is, works written by Hispani-

As yet, there is no journal on Theory sponsored by an English department, and the chances of there ever being one seem slim, given the marginality of 'pure theory' in the discipline. AEDEAN organises a regular conference panel on literary theory (which I organized for a couple of years after Aránzazu Usandizaga, and has since been convened by Juan A. Suárez, Esther Sánchez-Pardo and now Manuel Barbeito) which is lively enough in its panel discussions, but the attendance is only middling and there are very few papers read. Note, anyway, that many applied theory papers are absorbed by other panels, such as the ones on Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Comparative Literature or Film Studies.

The big names in the criticism practised in Spanish Anglistics are recognizably those influential in the Anglo-American context: e.g. Eliot, Frye, Freud, Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Bakhtin, Jakobson, Benjamin, Jameson, Eagleton, Said, Greenblatt, Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Bloom, Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray, Baudrillard, Hutcheon. There are some absences (e.g. Leavis, Burke, or the Chicago Aristotelians, Booth excepted, have never been much of a phenomenon in Spanish Anglistics) and some special emphases (Genette, Bal perhaps). Theorists working in the areas of Hispanics or literary theory may contribute significantly to the reception of critical and theoretical work in English, but on the whole there is a greater influence coming from Europe, not only from France, but especially from Germany and Italy. Hispanists add, therefore, a distinctly European and structural-linguistic emphasis (Eco, Petöfi, Greimas, Jauss, Iser, Schmidt, Lotman, Segre, Todorov). Some of the most influential work in hermeneutics comes from Germany (and from Ricœur), but is more noticeable in the fields of philosophy and theological studies. There has also been a significant Bakhtinian wave of criticism during the eighties, though some of the best work in this line in English is still practically unknown in the Spanish context.<sup>8</sup> Black criticism and Postcolonialism, Gay and Lesbian Theory, New Historicism, are absent from the critical landscape in Hispanics; Cultural Studies, Marxism, Feminism and Deconstruction reached Spanish studies in the nineties as a moderate ripple, not as the tidal wave that washed away anglophone New Criticism and Myth Criticism fifteen years earlier.

The Spanish reaction to 'Theory' (to use the word in its quasi-moronic sense of 'poststructuralist textual analysis and ideological critique') looks rather more like the early British reaction, although in Spanish Hispanics the critical bulwark against Theory is perhaps stronger than it was at the time in

cists and Literary Theorists proper, as well as Anglists. The criteria for inclusion and prioritization are: centrality to the discipline of Theory, comprehensiveness, theoretical sophistication and relevance to present-day critical debates, originality, readability, influence, availability.

8. Gary Saul Morson's *Narrative and Freedom* is a book crying for translation. But so is Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, and a host of classics of contemporary criticism.

Britain, being made of an alloy of structuralism and *estilística* which has combined peacefully and seamlessly with the older rhetoric and the humanistic-historical approach to literature, and has ensured that the less questionable tenets of the theorists be assimilated without much fuss. In Britain, too, historicists and humanists were more fiercely antagonized by theorists than has been the case in Spain. American critical wars and canonades are contemplated from Spain with a skeptical and puzzled amusement, and on the whole Spaniards seem more prone to join the laughing side than any of the angry ones, although a measure of infection and rage can be detected among some Anglists, especially feminists and postcolonialists.

Anglists can be expected to import new methods and approaches from abroad: to some extent they have imported New Critical, structuralist and deconstructivist approaches to textual analysis, but the most visible addition to traditional literary history in the field of Anglistics are the feminist, Cultural Studies and postcolonialist approaches. Perhaps after all this is not surprising, since the basis of these approaches is an ethical, ideological and historical content, and in practising them it is easier to shy away from excessive analytic subtlety while still claiming that one's approach is theoretically grounded.

Postcolonial and multicultural studies have experienced an especially visible surge in English Studies. Practitioners of this approach to criticism in Spain are obviously politically correct and there is no questioning their good intentions. But the ideological relevance of this approach is somewhat at odds with its practice 'from a distance' in Spain, where it often becomes a slightly unreal activity whose dependence on the British and American context, and lack of immediate relevance to the Spanish context, is especially evident. Interest in Postcolonialism and multiculturalism needs no special justification in the contemporary world, and the Spanish academy may be reacting in part to the present wave of immigration. But no Spanish universities that I know of are experiencing a dramatic boost in Rumanian, Central African or Maghrebi studies. Certainly, our colleagues in the Spanish departments seem to move in an altogether different ideological atmosphere, which makes me suspect that the Postcolonial craze is itself a case of cultural colonialism – or perhaps better, a matter of cultural import/export relations. The import may be for the better, once these approaches attain a wider circulation outside Anglistic academic circles, even if it is only to the next-door Spanish department. Another question altogether, a serious one, too, from the theoretical viewpoint, is that the notions of aesthetic value, structural complexity, etc. associated with the formalist heritage seem to be simply ignored in much recent ideological criticism, rather than assimilated and transcended as one might wish them to be.

Feminist Studies seem to be faring slightly better in Spain, although there has been no spectacular overhaul of the academy here. Disciplinary frontiers are still noticeable: a Spanish academic is almost certain to be aware of feminist and gender issues if she (or even he) is an Anglist, and quite probably to be oblivious of the same if he (or even she) is a Hispanicist. One may wish

one was a feminist critic in a department of Hispanics, such is the amount and obviousness of the work remaining to be done. Another thing: Spanish students, whether male or female, Anglists or Hispanicists, do not respond to feminist criticism with the alacrity and the sense of personal involvement one noticed during the feminist critical revolution in America; dutiful attention and dutiful indifference are more likely responses here – but then they are the most likely responses by recent promotions of Spanish students to almost anything...

There may be many reasons for apathy, but I will concentrate on the most theory-specific ones. Irrelevance, once more. Let me echo Grice: *Be relevant*. Be context-specific. 'Filología Inglesa' is not Anglo-American 'English.' We are language teachers as well as philologists and cultural mediators, but sometimes we seem to forget that and we tend to act as simulacra of British and American scholars and departments (my own Department of English once seriously considered the suppression of ELT from the undergraduate curriculum). There is little theoretical reflection on cultural mediation as such, and on its consequences for the teaching of theory and other disciplines. Cultural mediation takes place, in effect, well or badly done, but not in full awareness. Also, our imported approach to theory, mediated theory, should be counteracted by more practical criticism. Theory should be approached not only as abstract knowledge, but as a discourse practice arising in specific contexts (e.g. in connection with teaching and learning a foreign language, in a changing curriculum and context for the discipline). A recent paper on the teaching of Theory in the *European English Messenger*<sup>9</sup> advocated a focus on theorizing, not on theory – although how to orchestrate live theorizing in class without charging through open doors is bound to be a perpetual challenge to the ingenuity of the teachers.

Further contextualization is necessary in yet another sense: a greater awareness of the specificity of the humanities and of textual studies in an age in which electronic texts have become pervasive. Most Anglists are doing what T.S. Kuhn would call 'ordinary science' while the very paradigm which has constituted the discipline of Literary Studies is experiencing a sudden transformation. For example, the internet is created, and what do philologists do about it? They fill the net with print, writings and bibliographical information. Perhaps a 'disciplinary revolution' in the humanities is not so spectacular as a scientific one; anyway, philologists do not seem overly alarmed by the digital word, since its common ground with older modes of writing (language, textual structures and rhetorical protocols) seems wide enough to provide a smooth transition. Links and Letters seem to combine rather well, and therefore the effects of the digital revolution on literary theory will presumably consist in yet more theory, rather than the end of all literature, as theory thrives on the interface of disciplines.

9. See Mikko Lehtonen (2001).

Still, little attention is devoted to the theoretical implications of electronic writing, and most scholars have explored only a fraction of the possibilities the simplest electronic tools, such as e-mail, provide them with. There is no doubt that the revolution in information technology will reshape the philologies' disciplinary structure. Already many practical computing skills are required even from humanistic scholars, and the trend can only grow. This does not mean that critical understanding, sensitivity to the meanings of words and to textual conventions, etc. will cease to be necessary achievements, but it does mean that scholars have to add cybercompetence to linguistic and literary competence. In the short and medium run, the consequences will be far-reaching for language learning and for literary theory. Digital literary forms are evolving just now, and they receive only the scantiest attention from academic humanists, falling as yet only under the label of 'popular culture.' But it is an emerging area just as interesting as any being massively studied by critics and theorists.<sup>10</sup>

Our discipline, 'Filología Inglesa', is ever striving for a definition of its identity – and its identity problems can only grow in the future (an intercultural and globally interactive future with English as a *lingua franca*). R.S. Crane's dream of interdisciplinary philological studies in which not merely theory, but also the history of theory, should play a central role, as a preparation for methodological awareness and critical pluralism, is still relevant. Perhaps his vision cannot be realized in the original terms, but it can nevertheless contribute to a redefinition of the discipline. The place which will be allotted to literary theory in Anglistics, if Anglistics is fated to survive as a consistent discipline, will keep forever changing. The theories themselves will keep changing, Postcolonialism evolving towards Socioecological Semiotics of Consciousness, Cyberdialogism, or whatever – literature itself will change beyond recognition, as it has always done. Everything flows, and to keep on being critical, Theory will flow on.

## Further reading

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10. Think for instance of curiosities like the self-erasing electronic novel by William Gibson, Dennis Ashbaugh and Kevin Begos Jr. *Agrippa: A Book of the Dead* (1992); of the hypertext Storyspace Cluster at Brown (<http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/-SSPCluster/Welcome.html>) – or consider current experiments in interactive communal writing, e.g. in <http://www.circulo.es>; of parodic Internet pages like the *Postmodernism Generator* (<http://www.elsewhere.org/cgi-bin/postmodern/>) or the institutional web page of the Aragon Institute of Technology (<http://www.ita-es.cloudmakers.org/AITToday.html>)... Electronic art exploits the potentialities intrinsic to the medium, such as hypertextuality, interactivity, or the notorious juxtaposition of rubbish and valuables yielded by web browsers.

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