

CULTURAL STUDIES: RE-DEFINING ACADEMIC BOUNDARIES

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One of the major concerns established literary critics have repeatedly uttered is their fear to see, in a short period of time, how the time-honoured writers are wiped out from the English departments by non literary cultural representations. Harold Bloom already envisioned a dystopian panorama in which English departments would be transformed into “departments of ‘Cultural Studies’ where Batman comics, Mormon theme parks, television movies and rock will replace Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Wallace Stevens” (qtd. in Brooker 1). Yet, and in spite of Bloom’s complaints, Cultural Studies practically remain off limits and out of boundaries of the “too-canonically-oriented” English departments; a situation that is even more complex in universities from the non-English speaking countries (Cornut-Gentile 16), where, for the most part, culture is reduced to mere background information for the analysis of literature.

Whereas other disciplines from the linguistic and literary fields have quickly gained academic status, the teaching of culture does not possess “the general recognition as a discipline in its own right...” (Kerl 6). Perhaps the reason for this lack of academic significance is that Cultural Studies “occupies a somewhat amorphous space of diverse institutional practices that can hardly be said to have a common methodology, goal, or institutional site” (Miller 10). However, there are critics for whom the requirement of employing a specific methodology would contradict the very spirit of Cultural Studies, as this discipline -or adiscipline, interdiscipline, or even transdiscipline- obtains

everything it needs from many other fields, adopting them “to suit its own purposes” (Sardar and Van Loon 7). The result is a wide spectrum of materials and methods of analysis, a free circulation of thought usually engaged in re-defining the boundaries of the traditional and long-established university departments everywhere.

The eight seminars on “Culture and Power” celebrated so far in Spain have corroborated that an ample number of Iberian scholars are interested in reshaping the habitual thematic limits of the English departments. Positioned within the grounds of Cultural Studies, these seminars have exposed English Philology to unimagined (and sometimes even unsought) potentials widely beyond traditional literary and linguistic forms. This transgressive spirit, as one of the main aims of Cultural Studies, permeated the celebration of the Seventh International Seminar on Culture and Power, held at the University of Alcalá in October 2001 with the encompassing theme of (Mis)Representation in whichever cultural form. Most speakers in this seminar applied the concept of (mis)representation to cultural constructs -very close to Harold Bloom’s grievances- from music, media and visual arts in the English-speaking countries.

We live in a world where the media discourse surrounds us and implicates us completely. It is a world of rather complex interconnections with multiple messages, diverse discourses and uncountable formats. As cultural creations, these elements have enraptured scholars from Cultural Studies, who study how the making of a product or message, the product or message itself, the audience the product or message is addressed to, the technology employed in the building of the product or the message, and the final product or message convey different ways of domination and (mis)representation. Although accepted as natural by consumers or audiences, these representations are on many occasions professionally manipulated in order to retain, construct or demolish a certain social reality. This is an aspect that logically relates culture to power. Thus, it seemed relevant to devote a volume to forms of (mis)representation in cinema and television, the written press, performance arts, and some intertwined artistic fields, which constitute the four sections of this book:

- I. Cinema and Television
- II. The Written Press
- III. Music and the Visual Arts
- IV. Intersecting Fields

Each part is devoted to a wide range of topics approached with transdisciplinary methodologies and evaluated through intersecting (apparently different ontological and epistemological) domains. All contributors remind us that textual, musical and visual expressions are cultural manifestations embedded in the dispute between representing and misrepresenting the “other”. Those cultural constructs are sited in the terrain where the hegemonic discourse and the dominant ideology clash with the voices of the “different”, the “others”. Therefore, musical, media and visual artefacts have served the “official knowledge” to perpetuate (mis)representations of ethnicity, gender, class and ideology.

Section I, CINEMA AND TELEVISION, gathers four articles. John Storey presents the Vietnam War as a traumatic episode, even a syndrome, in the American mentality. The author discusses Hollywood movies about that war as encoders of a particular ideology articulated by the hegemonic power. At the same time, Storey goes into how these filmic (mis)representations of the Vietnam War helped President George Bush Sr. to construct his political discourse during the Gulf War by appealing to American’s cinematic memories. David Walton presents a theoretical essay in which he relates Baudrillard’s theories to the analysis of two films, *Toy Story* and *The Truman Show*. María do Rosário Duraó focuses on movie characters from the 80s and 90s whose schismatic personalities are forged by both the traditional representation of masculinity and the cultural and critical shifts that have subverted such a patriarchal image. Chantal Cornut-Gentile studies gender relations in British “sitcoms” also from the 80s and 90s. She concentrates on the magnification of gender stereotypes in *Absolutely Fabulous* and *Men Behaving Badly*, to conclude that these exaggerated (mis)representations serve to break the myths imposed upon men, women and the institution of the family.

In section II, THE WRITTEN PRESS, four scholars scrutinise the intersection between culture, power and (mis)representations in the written press. Gema S. Castillo delves into newspapers’ construction of gender through the analysis of the lexicon, transitivity choices and point of view in several newspapers articles, analysing how journalistic language reflects society’s hegemonic ideology. Gender is also the starting issue of Eduardo de Gregorio’s article on men’s magazine *Later*. For de Gregorio, through critical discourse analysis, it is plausible to state that the editors and contributors of this magazine reject the patriarchal construction of masculinity, and that,

instead, they tend to defend a more egalitarian relationship towards historically considered subordinated groups, specially women. Critical discourse analysis is also the methodology employed by Dagmar Scheu and Jorge Saura, who present in their study the (mis)use of power by British mass media, exerted in order to perpetuate the (mis)representations of ethnic minorities. María José Coperías and Josep Lluís Gómez draw upon the erroneous idea of globalization as a means to expand the interest of developed countries in Third World nations. Using the written press from several countries, they examine how news coming from the South tend to be misread by the North; how the South also misconstrue the information received from the North; and, finally, how the South completely ignores itself in its own mass media.

Section III, MUSIC AND VISUAL ARTS, addresses issues related to musical and visual artistic constructions. Elena Oliete analyses the diverse and ambivalent narratives that can be read in Michael Jackson's "Black or White" song and videoclip. Her view is that Jackson's world is full of contradictions and tensions, and that, in this specific song and clip, images and representations of concord among races are continuously demolished by sudden eruptions of violence and rage against white dominant norms. On the other hand, Ana Matamala argues that, although authentic and subversive in its origins, the Sex Pistols' discourse, performance and fashion were commodified and turned into consumption products by the dominant music industry. The non-conformist and rebellious image the group represented just responded to a money-making strategy. Semiotics and historical contextualisation constitute the basis of María José Simas evaluation of Robert Braithwaite Martineau's painting, *The Last Day in the Old Home*. According to Simas, this canvas plays an important function in the transmission and upholding of dominant (Victorian) ideology, thus authorising norms of conduct and representations that are beyond the painting itself.

The last section of the book, INTERSECTING FIELDS, centres upon forms of (mis)representations in different ontological realms that, nevertheless, crisscross, such as cinema and literature. Sara Martín deals with the representation of infants as monsters in novels and films of the second half of the 20th century. She believes that child images depicted in a number of cinematic and literary works correspond to adult fears towards parenthood, and not to the allegedly evil behaviour of children. Ana Moya employs postcolonial theory to evaluate the filmic adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* by Anthony Minghella, concluding that the director

(mis)represents the original message of the novel and turns it to the Eurocentric cultural centres. Carolina Fernández departs from postcolonial evaluations of the canonical work *Robinson Crusoe* to judge how the main character has been (mis)reconstructed and (mis)represented in contemporary films and novels. Miquel Berga's study of the "war within the war" on the leftist side of the Spanish Civil Confrontation lies at the heart of his comparison between George Orwell's work *Homage to Catalonia* and Ken Loach's film *Tierra y Libertad*. The author analyses the way both Orwell's and Loach's representations of the conflict share a similar political agenda, although both artistic manifestations end up serving completely different objectives. Rosa González explores the current interest of British population in everything coming from Ireland, including films, TV programmes, music and theatre. However, and despite the examples offered, Hibernianism is, according to the author, barely noticeable in the area of popular culture, where Irish representations are still rare and inadequate, for the most part. Finally, Álvaro Pina presents a largely theoretical essay, which considers the main connotations of the term "representation", as well as the relationship that this concept maintains with the notions of reality, meaning and power.

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Fernando Galván, Julio Cañero, José Santiago Fernández

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