

RESEÑAS

Fisher, Harry. *Comrades: Tales of a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War*. Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

En Noviembre de 1996, el Ayuntamiento de Alcalá, la Universidad de Alcalá y el propio Centro de Estudios Norteamericanos organizaron un Homenaje en el Paraninfo de la Universidad a algunos de los Brigadistas Internacionales que vinieron a nuestro país invitados por el Parlamento español a recibir su prometida nacionalidad española. Harry Fisher, entonces con 83 años, era uno de los 73 brigadistas norteamericanos que acudieron a tal cita y así finaliza su libro, con un Epílogo, recordando la emoción de su vuelta a España y a los lugares donde combatió 60 años antes.

Su libro "Comrades" ("Camaradas"), publicado dos años después, en 1998, es una historia personal de los 19 meses pasados en España combatiendo en el Batallón Abraham Lincoln (Los "Lincolns", como continuamente se refiere el autor). De los 4000 voluntarios norteamericanos que vinieron a España a luchar con los "Leales" (como también se refiere, continuamente, el autor al Ejército de la República), aproximadamente un tercio murieron en España. Del resto, después de haber pasado muchos de ellos penurias durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial (Fisher participó como tripulante de un B-26) e incluso la persecución en su propio país durante los años 50 (el autor no pudo recuperar su pasaporte norteamericano desde que abandonó España, en Septiembre de 1938, hasta casi 30 años después), apenas quedan con vida actualmente unos 40.

A menudo, se dice que la historia la escriben los vencedores. Evidentemente, en cambio, la verdad no. En su libro, Harry Fisher cuenta humildemente su verdad, y la verdad de los que acudieron con generosidad a luchar en España contra el fascismo y contra el golpe militar producido en España en Julio de 1936.

En el prólogo del libro, escrito por Pete Seeger, se puede leer, de hecho, las siguientes curiosas palabras: "The Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a group of Americans who volunteered to fight fascism years before it was popular to do so." Igualmente, Fisher, en las primeras páginas del libro recuerda con dolor cuando la Administración Roosevelt calificó a la Brigada Lincoln como "antifascistas prematuros", así como los comentarios del Presidente Ronald Reagan relativos a que los voluntarios de la Brigada Lincoln habrían luchado en la guerra de España en el bando equivocado.

Harry Fisher nos cuenta desde el principio de su historia quiénes fueron los 4.000 norteamericanos antifascistas que vinieron a España a luchar contra Franco. Se trataba mayoritariamente de "leftists": comunistas, socialistas, sindicalistas, demócratas. Él, en particular, era en aquellos tiempos un joven sindicalista trabajador de uno de los grandes almacenes de la ciudad de Nueva York. Pero resulta muy interesante ir viendo en su libro la aparición de muchos jóvenes universitarios norteamericanos que decidieron enrolarse en aquella aventura en defensa de un pueblo español que les pillaba muy lejano. En ese sentido, el libro de Fisher es un libro de nombres y apellidos. Para un universitario, como el que esto escribe, causa emoción oír hablar de brigadistas como Bob Colodny, Ph. D. por la Universidad de California-Berkeley y posteriormente profesor de Historia en la Universidad de Pittsburgh, Paul MacEachron, estudiante de Oberlin College en Ohio y que

murió en la batalla de Teruel, Robert Merriman, profesor de Economía en Berkeley, que murió también en España o John Murra, estudiante de la Universidad de Chicago.

El libro es un recuento cronológico de los recuerdos y vivencias del autor desde su llegada a España, cruzando ilegalmente los Pirineos, a principios de 1937. Fisher participó en todas las batallas importantes que se libraron en nuestro país, hasta su marcha en 1938. De hecho, el Índice del libro presenta como capítulos los siguientes míticos nombres: Jarama, Brunete, Belchite, Teruel, El Ebro...Milagrosamente, Fisher nunca fue herido. Muchos de sus compañeros sí lo fueron y muchos, más de mil, murieron. Resulta particularmente desgarrador leer su narración de cómo muchos de sus amigos iban perdiendo la vida en España. Entre ellos, por ejemplo, el caso del Comandante Oliver Law, primer afro-americano al mando de americanos blancos (¡la segregación racial en el Ejército de EE.UU. duró hasta el año 1947!), quien perdió su vida mientras encabezaba el ataque de los "Lincolns" en el Cerro del Mosquito, cerca de Brunete, el 9 de Julio de 1937.

La lectura del libro, por tanto, resulta fundamental para entender las motivaciones y vivencias de aquellos "freedom fighters" que tan lejos de su país lucharon "prematuramente" contra el fascismo, así como, de paso, entender la situación de la España de aquella época.

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Kalfopoulou, Adrienne. *A Discussion of the Ideology of the American Dream in the Culture's Female Discourses: the Untidy House*. Women's Studies series 25. Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.

Adrienne Kalfopoulou's purpose in writing this book is to trace the evolution that, in the context of American ideology, American women writers and their characters have undergone from the 19th century until now. In order to do so, Kalfopoulou describes some of the strategies that these writers and their characters display for expressing their selves in a society dominated by patriarchy. The author explores a range of works written by women with the exception of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Here, the book by Hawthorne becomes the representative of the conventions of American ideology regarding women. Its protagonist, Hester Prynne, is the epitome of the American woman under the repression of Puritan America, and Kalfopoulou agrees with the recent view of critics such as Nina Baym, Amy S. Lang, or David Leverenz who have seen in her a tension that problematizes her meaning and that helps the author of this book to use it as the pivot around which to construct her thesis. Her discussion is then articulated through the use of the metaphor of American culture as a house where women are led into domesticity and finally, domesticated. This provokes the need to break away from the "house" in order to gain self-expression, and here is where the struggle begins.

Kalfopoulou begins her analysis establishing the ideological structure of American culture in its Puritan origins and contrasting it with the content of narratives of difference—those written by women and ethnic minorities—which have contested this cultural order. Following Derridean theories of *différance*, she explains how the repression of these narratives is what really empowers their subversive meaning. This sets out the tone for a discussion of the strategies that women writers, and specially those belonging to an ethnic minority, have used in order to liberate themselves from the oppression of "domesticity." Throughout her book, Kalfopoulou uses the metaphor of American culture as a cultural house within which women need to be kept in order to preserve the social structure. This is why references to the outside world, to wilderness, exuberant nature, chaos and disorder, that is, to undomesticated spaces, have traditionally been associated with unrestrained womanhood and all its perils. Hester Prynne, Hawthorne's heroine in *The Scarlet Letter*, serves as the model of the "fallen" woman for Puritan American ideology. She incarnates passion and uncontrolled desire and even after she has been condemned for adultery, she is still capable of expressing herself through the product of her art, a lavishly embroidered letter "A" which resists the oppression of her community. One may wonder the reason why Kalfopoulou decides to use Hawthorne's book, being a canonical work that has nothing to do with the rest of works she mentions in her study. However, the author's use of *The Scarlet Letter* is justified since Hester is not only the creation of a male author but also the victim of patriarchy. Precisely because of this, she becomes a meaningful point of departure from which the reader can apprehend what the gendered terms of cultural self-definition in Puritan American were and therefore, prove if the discordant voices of women authors have had an effect on it.

With Hester's reference at the core of her work, Kalfopoulou develops her thesis using a selection of works by American women writers—Gertrude Stein, Nella Larsen, Anzia Yeziarska, Zora Neale Hurston, Tillie Olsen, Grace Paley, Hisaye Yamamoto, Thalia Selz, Maxine Hong Kingston, Gayl Jones and Toni Morrison which, to my understanding,

though highlighting the importance of ethnic literature, fails to represent the whole spectrum of American diversity by forgetting about the significant production of Latino or Native American women writers. Sandra Cisneros comes to my mind as an excellent example of what I am saying and there are many more that could have been useful for the purpose of this study: Chicanas, as a matter of fact, have had to deal with a culture that is traditionally associated with male chauvinism, and their art is an obvious reaction to this. Nevertheless, Kalfopoulou manages to draw a consistent argumentation for her topic. She moves from the first attempts to empower a more positive vision of women by authors such as Margaret Fuller or Harriet Beecher Stowe in 19th century, to the enactment of women's difference outside of American cultural house by writers such as Marilynne Robinson and Toni Morrison in our times.

Kalfopoulou illuminates her readings with the literary apparatus of poststructuralists and French feminists. She follows Derrida as well as Kristeva and Irigaray, and uses Lacan's theory on language acquisition as the result of the loss of the mother's materiality or what is the same, the mother's body, to explain the process she is exploring. She illustrates that at first, during 19th century, American women writers do not make their characters speak for themselves. In fact, any attempt to rebel against the male order translates into death or madness of the female personage, and only those who devote their lives to their roles as wives and mothers are considered to be successful. They fulfill the "Cult of True Womanhood" formulated, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg acknowledges, by the 19th century bourgeois discourse (21). However, some years later, in the early 20th century, she posits that female protagonists suffer from a lack of mothers who can satisfy the Victorian model of communicators of conventional values and as a consequence, they become, in a way, emotional orphans. Interestingly, the first generation of immigrant writers who try to liberate themselves from their traditional Old World homes, look up to the father, as the one invested with power, for emotional nourishment though, they also realize they need to liberate themselves from them. However, they end up substituting their Old World fathers by those of the New World. In the process, these women who trusted the promise inherent to the discourse of the American dream, also discover that the ideological assumptions of what constitutes American identity does not respond to the needs of ethnic minorities. Their otherness is left unsaid. That is why, for example, in the case of Gertrude Stein's Melanctha from *Three Lives*, she is not capable of telling a story wholly, because women do not have a language of their own. Nonetheless, ethnic writers are significantly creative and find, in the language of their community, an instrument to speak their voice: Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, uses folk discourse, a form of speech that is unique to her group, and finds that her new tongue, unknown as it is for the dominant majority, becomes a powerful means of liberation.

Progressively, in the history of American literature, mothers start appearing as an articulation of otherness for their daughters although, with a hidden voice or text. If in the previous texts, maternal voices were either absent or appropriated by the patriarchal home, incapable of nurturing their daughter's desires, in texts such as "Seventeen Syllables" by Yamamoto, they reveal a life of their own. In this story, the mother, a Japanese woman, Tome Hayasi, truly expresses herself through her poetry as Ume Hanazono. The fact that she uncovers her secret identity to her daughter and that she also makes her recipient of her unfortunate love story with a married man back in Japan, provide her with a maternal story that nourishes her self-awareness. This is how a matrilineal paradigm is established in

which the daughters can start doing their own naming. As Kalfopoulou says in reference to *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston and *Corregidora* written by Gayl Jones:

The mothers in both narratives provide official texts of tragic selves victimized by racist and sexist stories while at the same time expressing parallel subtexts of women who have stories unappropriated by dominant cultural realities. What the daughters do is to use those subtexts, repressed, unconscious, unnamed to empower a stolen or violated body whose knowledge defines itself on its own terms. (108)

If language belongs to men, the body and its materiality belongs to women, says Kalfopoulou. The protagonists of the aforementioned texts realize that they do not need to participate of the symbolic order dominated by language and consequently by men, if they can use their art—writing or singing. However, their discourse of otherness is still born within a vulnerable though functioning patriarchal family structure whose authority is still the father/husband. In her search for a woman's voice, Kalfopoulou then finds the absolute dismantling of the father's house in two contemporary novels, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *Housekeeping* by Maryleen Robinson where "the house becomes an open, exposed arena where both psychological and social structures come apart"(129).

In these novels, both female protagonists, Sethe and Ruth, suffer from a tragic loss: Sethe kills her daughter Beloved to protect her from slavery and Ruth tries to stand the pain of her suicidal mother. Both refuse to let their pain go, they do not want to get rid of it, make peace with it, but instead have resolved to make it an integral part of their worlds. Their memory becomes articulated in what Foucault, as Kalfopoulou gathers, calls "heterotopic spaces," that is, spaces where linear notions of reality are challenged: Sethe's desire creates a zombie-like Beloved, her dead daughter, while Ruth lives in a world of ghosts where she identifies with her suicidal mother. This has the effect of subverting the patriarchal order represented in the house. As a matter of fact, the houses in both texts are penetrated by the outside world. A chaotic and growing nature invades them and transforms them into spaces that no longer respond to the dominant standards of domesticity.

Kalfopoulou identifies these women with materiality, with bodily functions. They remain preoedipal because they refuse to abandon their "lost loved ones" who cannot be conveyed in language. This is why they create new spaces and dissolve the house to make room for their "objects of desire." Nevertheless, in doing this, they run the "risk of dissolution in a preoedipal space of unstructured desire" (153). These characters long for a nurturing presence, one that recognizes and supports their identities. Kalfopoulou locates this nurturance in their companions, male characters, who after a time of troublesome relationship with the women they love reach a position of redefined manhood that allows them to become nurturers of their partners. In this case, a reversal of the traditional role of men takes place. However problematic or risky this assertion may be, for it could seem that Kalfopoulou is finally surrendering to the male order, it is perhaps one of the most interesting points she makes in her work. She finds, in characters such as Mutt in *Corregidora* and Paul D in *Beloved*, the possibility of transcending the traditional order, of erasing the limits between what is male and female and creating examples of men who are willing to contribute in a respectful way to the affirmation of women. As Kalfopoulou asserts, "(...) Mutt and Paul D adopt maternal stances which manage to literally 'hold' the many broken, wounded parts of their women's identities, thereby enabling them to consciously affirm the integrity of singular, if damaging experiences" (164).

Still there is an element in Kalfopoulou's book that remains unsatisfactory and this is her emphasis on the identification between woman and body, as well as instances such as nature or fluidity (water) that she makes correspond with femaleness. It is true that Kristeva uses the image of the female womb as a reference to what is female but she is not referring, as Moi explains, literally to the female organ but to what Plato called the *chora* or "an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible" (161). If Kalfopoulou wants to deconstruct American ideology's assumptions on women and uses precisely those terms that have contributed to her containment, even her recourse to a male stance of salvation becomes somehow problematic. Nonetheless, her attempt to contribute to a history of women's literature is valuable as a reflection on the strategies that women writers have used to question the establishment. She reviews the evolution of women's status in society as well as the history of American women literature and provides the reader with a rewarding conclusion that opens the path to further analysis on the means of future literary expression of women.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual-Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1988.

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