

REVIEWS

A BRIGHT JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS. Santiago J. Henríquez, ed. *El viaje literario... y la cueva: imágenes de la memoria*. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2007.

Numerous monographies on travel literature have seen the light in the last few years. This is very probably due to the unstoppable process of globalization that today's world is going through, where travel has become a key tool for flooding ever-moving knowledge. It is not less certain, however, that one can also perceive a slight decrease in Spain's magnetic attraction to foreign travellers with literary intentions, which does not necessarily mean that there is not an abundance of books on English travel accounts in different regions of our country, including the Canary Islands. On the contrary: these accounts are still being written and studied with a constancy that makes one think of a fashion. The many literary analyses published nowadays on any aspect of travel literature of olden times do not stop reminding us that a travel account is by definition a portrait abounding in subjective accounts of a reality as narrated and described by the traveller-writer. Travellers and their travels fuse in loving embraces, engendering fruits embodied by their travel books, all personal and untransferable works, which, together with other examples of a given period, constitute the output that experts on the genre dedicate themselves to dissecting.

El viaje literario... y la cueva: imágenes de la memoria is indeed a most original book, albeit somewhat slippery when it comes to its analysis with our critical scalpel. This is due, among other reasons, to the fact that, as far as we know,

nothing similar has been published before by specialists on travel literature. Its singularity is attributable to its being a work that collects diverse travel experiences lived by foreigners—especially Britons, Germans, Irishmen, Americans and Canadians—that have moved at different times within two apparently completely incompatible worlds: the world of shadows, here represented by the literary figure of the cave, and that of the sunlight, with light and nature at their utmost splendour which we easily associate with the Canary Islands. Those like us who have already traversed and experienced and read more than a few travel accounts, are certainly accustomed to recreating and rejoicing in literary views of outshining brightness, landscapes of suns and moons of all possible shades, mountain ridges that deserve generous descriptions of blinding clarity; and, indeed, we are prepared to confirm that the Canary Islands have been privileged witnesses of the many travellers (and a similar number of female travellers) who have set foot on them and described them passionately; and a generous amount who have even decided to stay. But the cave as a literary issue has not been a frequent visitor to the literary criticism of travel literature. Many a book has indeed been written in Spanish on English-speaking travellers in the Canary Islands and their relations with the local inhabitants. The following come to our minds: *Viajeros ingleses en las Islas Canarias durante el siglo XIX* (1988, 2007), by José Luis García Pérez; *Canarias e Inglaterra en las Islas Canarias durante el siglo XIX* (1995), by F. Fernández-Amesto et al.; *La convivencia anglocanaria: estudio sociocultural y lingüístico (1880-1914)* (1995) and *Notas para una*



bibliografía inglesa sobre Canarias: primer repertorio bibliográfico y análisis de su estructura y contenido (2002), by María Isabel González Cruz; and *Viajeros victorianos en Canarias*, by Nicolás González Lemus (1998). As can be easily perceived, the 19th century is the glorious period of English travel and expatriate residence on the archipelago. And this very book could be one more in the long list of travel accounts on the Canary Islands—which in fact it is—if it were not for its original approach.

The book that we now have in our hands is, indeed, the polyhydric recreation of several journeys towards a world of darkness in a land where this fact is heightened all the more due to its well known luminosity. The journey to a cave is the literary embodiment of a lack of landscape, of a virtual total annulment of connivance with human beings from other galaxies and exoticisms. Even the sober blackness of its cover anticipates the protagonism of all things dark in the book. The title also reveals up to what degree its coordinator, Dr Santiago J. Henríquez, is perfectly aware of the readers' surprise when they delve into the pages of this work. The use of suspension points in the title gives him away.

Let us start from the beginning. *El viaje literario y... la cueva* was born from a seminar of lectures read by travel literature and speleology experts, coordinated by the aforementioned Professor Henríquez, from the English Department of the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: "El viaje literario y la cueva: imágenes de la memoria" was its name. The seminar took place during the second half of the year 2006 under the patronage of the Museum and Archaeological Park of the Cueva Pintada in Gáldar, an organism that belongs to the Regional Department of Culture and Historical Heritage of the "Cabildo" or Government of the Canary Islands. The cave/cavern/grotto/depth/catacomb/mine/abyss... which took the starring role in these lectures was in reality the literary sublimation of the famous and recently restored Cueva Pintada of Gáldar. The common element of the different chapters/lectures of the book/seminar is/was threefold: the cave as a topic in travel literature, the Canary Islands as a meeting place of past and present-day civilizations

and cultures (both for passing foreign travellers and residents), and images of memory. Each of the contributors writes about one or more of these issues.

Some of the book's contributors analyse the presence of a cave or equivalent in travel literature without considering the case of the Canaries. These are Patricia Almárcegi Elduayen, from the Universidad Internacional de Catalunya, who penned "Lo que la historia debe a la literatura de viajes: las catacumbas de Alejandría vistas por los viajeros europeos"; Irene Furlong (National University of Ireland, Maynooth), who is the authoress of "The Giant's Causeway: Mythical Cliffs and Caves of Finn MacCool"; Florence Gérard Lojacono (Université de Haute-Alsace, Mulhouse), who has written "La caverne: figure de l'architecture heureuse. Une lecture des robinonnades de Jules Verne et de Michel Tournier"; María Antonia López-Burgos del Barrio (Universidad de Granada), with her chapter on "Las cuevas de Granada en la literatura de viajeros británicos e irlandeses de otros tiempos"; Maureen Mulligan (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) and her "Troglydotes in Myth and Literature: the Image of the Cave"; and Rosa Elena Penna (Universidad Católica de Argentina), who has contributed with "Las cuevas de Barabar Marabar: realidad, ficción y simbolismos a través de *A Passage to India*". Curiously enough, all of them are women experts, which may point to a growing interest in the genre amongst women researchers. A special case is the chapter written by the speleologists Octavio Fernández Lorenzo and Antonio Javier González Díaz (from the Spanish Federation of Speleology), who have authored the chapter entitled "Mirando al abismo", which approaches the issue of a cave from a literary perspective blended with the point of view of two professional travellers-explorers of the underworld, a fact that grants their work a welcome touch of originality.

On the other hand, the journey to the Canary Islands (without a specific mention of the archipelago's caves or with only a mild presence of them) is the theme of two researchers who are deeply rooted on the land: Dr. Manuel Brito (Universidad de La Laguna) through his "Historia y logos en la memoria de los hombres:



Gloucester y las Islas Canarias”, and Dr. Bernd Dietz Guerrero (Universidad de Córdoba), former Professor at the Universidad de La Laguna until 1996 and the author of “La mirada del norte: escritores canadienses en Canarias”.

Finally, the third main block of chapters is made up by those written by Canarian authors, who combine the issue of the cave with its relevant presence on the islands. This is the case of Dr. Santiago J. Henríquez, who contributes with the Introduction and with “El viaje literario y... la cueva: actualidad de los textos y la crítica inglesa de viajes más recientes sobre el patrimonio histórico español y Canarias”; Dr. Isabel González Cruz (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), who is the authoress of “Cuevas y guanches en la bibliografía inglesa sobre Canarias”, and Dr. Marcos Sarmiento (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), who puts an end to the book with his chapter “Cuevas canarias en los textos de viajeros alemanes del siglo XIX”. The book also has a section dedicated to including the researchers’ brief cvs.

This is a book whose main merit is that it endeavours to cater for a wide variety of interests. The geographer will be able to traverse different landscapes, from the Canary Islands to Egypt, India, Northern Ireland, Britain or Spain. Readers with historical interests and mythologists will travel within diverse periods, covering Antiquity and the 20th century; and literary critics will follow suit through different types of texts written by travellers, novelists, poets and explorers-speleologists, as well as through different cosmological visions (those of the British, Irish, French, Canadians, Germans, etc). This is a book which brings together what the author of the Introduction termed as “the instrumentalization of the cave/journey binomial” (13). This is a

compulsory book in any travel expert’s library, especially for those interested in the darkest aspects of the travel genre. This is a book that transports us to a new and unique dimension: the literary journey to darkness versus luminosity, the Canary Islands versus the rest of the world, memory versus modernity.

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