

**David Walton 2008: *Introducing Cultural Studies. Learning through Practice.* London: Sage. 323pp. ISBN 978-1-4129-1895-4 (pbk)**

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David Walton's handbook is arguably the most notable cultural studies book to have come out of Spain since Felicity Hand and Chantal Cornut-Gentille's groundbreaking *Culture and Power* (1995). Walton's own contribution to that collection, 'From Donald Duck to the McDonaldization of Society: "Doing" Cultural Studies – a Heuristic, Involving a little Haberdashery' (in addition to his 'Cultural Studies: An Annotated Bibliography of Useful Sources' in the same volume), already displayed some of the basic ingredients (also present in Walton's other publications: 1998, 2002) for the new handbook: a creative approach to criticism, inspired by the heuristic as a device to think *with* ideas rather than just about ideas; a sense of fun, irony, and even "parody with a pedagogical point" (61); a love of puns as a means to redefine concepts (what Walton calls "puncpts" [300]), and a self-conscious care to keep the reader or/and student motivated. Produced by Sage, recently the publishers of a few important cultural studies text-books (e.g. Hall 1997; Tudor 1999; Couldry 2000; McRobbie 2005), the book makes amends for the comparative neglect of cultural studies in Iberian English studies (about which Cornut-Gentille and Hand have often complained), while it also bears witness to the productivity of cultural studies panels in AEDEAN conferences and the Culture and Power Seminar, with its own conferences and publications, which Walton himself has often presided over.

As the Introduction states, the book is written for those who "wish to *do* cultural studies for themselves (rather than just read about how others have done it)", imagining that many of its readers' first language may not be English, and using Britain as the main focal point (2). It is actually an example of classic British cultural studies, starting from Matthew Arnold and evolving all the way to Stuart Hall, with the assimilation of certain continental thinkers such as Adorno, Gramsci and Althusser, and then considering how the British feminist perspective, here embodied by Virginia Woolf, developed its own critique with relation to gender, and how such critique compares to the cultural studies of the subaltern practised by Hall and others, including (tangentially) post-colonialism. It does not attempt to be in any way exhaustive, as it shows a constant awareness of "what's been left out" (4, 283, 301), but, working towards "interpretive independence" (278), it aims to provide students with sufficient notional skills to start doing their own cultural criticism.

A learner-centred book like this must be immediately appealing, and Walton has contrived seductiveness through a varied layout including help files, notes on practice, oversimplification warnings, heuristic diagrams, illustrative comic drawings (by José María Campoy Ruiz), and imaginary critical dialogues. The page format offers generous margins for readers who (like myself) like to jot down their own responses. The

dramatisation of critical debates is at first sight its boldest feature. Some cultural studies books have integrated dialogue, usually in the form of actual interviews, in their discussion of various issues (Jordan and Weedon 1995; Morley and Chen 1996).

The dialogic form, even when it is fictional as in Walton's use of it, allows space for debate, dissent and uncertainty. In the first chapter, for example, we meet the ghost of Matthew Arnold in conversation with *Notlaw* (one of the anagrams of the author's name); in Chapter 5, E.P., a young man who is preparing for a cultural studies exam meets a friend with a prodigious memory whose name happens to be *Thompson* in London's Highgate Cemetery, where the latter lectures E.P. on E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, as they stroll near where Karl Marx is buried, and they eventually share a sandwich; in Chapter 11, adapting ideas from Louis Althusser, it is Hyde who introduces Jekyll to the notions of the invisible problematic, the symptomatic reading, and the meanings hidden under publicity icons such as the Marlboro Man and Nike sports wear. At one point Jekyll and Hyde are joined in the pub where they are talking by John Storey, Pierre Macherey, Judith Williamson and Catherine Belsey, who remind them that they also have something to say about the subject: thus the student is recommended further reading. However, every chapter, in addition to 'References', has a 'Further Reading' section which is a useful annotated bibliography.

In the last chapter no less than Plato butts in to claim credit for the use of dialogue as a way of communicating difficult ideas. As a character called *Tandow* (whom, to be honest, I have failed to identify) explains, "the dialogue, as Plato discovered, offers a very effective way of creating a dialectical approach to writing". Walton acknowledges another important model of "dialectical style" in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* in Chapter 12, 'Crying Woolf! Thinking with feminism', where he creates a feminist heuristic (242). The question of gender comes up gradually in previous chapters, particularly in Chapter 8 through Angela McRobbie's contribution to the Birmingham Centre's work on subcultures and the conspicuous marginality of women's roles in early cultural studies and in the film *Quadrophenia* (159-64).

The difficulty, as I see it, is when it comes to delimiting the feminist approach as a whole. The subject is broached cautiously, in a dialogue between George, Eliot (an allusion to the Victorian novelist's male pen-name) and the Author on the question of 'feminism', that is, on whether men writers can give voice to ideas developed within feminism (240). It then proceeds, very plausibly in my opinion, to debate why "Woolf merits a place in the pantheon of early British cultural critics" (241). Most interestingly, as in the case of the other early authors, some of Woolf's insights are applied to contemporary topics and theories which she could not have known herself (at least in their current form), such as semiotics. However, when other feminist writers like Simon, De Beauvoir, Elaine, Showalter, among others, along with morality play characters like *The Voice of Poverty* and *The Voice of Chastity*, begin to show up, the subject becomes somewhat muddled, and the student might feel overwhelmed. Many of the feminist characters (Julia, Kristeva, Hélène, Cixous, etc.) do not introduce their own ideas, but discuss those in *Three Guineas*, which might give the impression that feminist thought can be monolithically derived from Woolf's original thought. For instance, one might have expected De Beauvoir to have introduced the notion of the *Other* sex. The

names of feminists are simply dropped in for the student to find out more if they are interested, but as there is no annotated bibliography for them, it is hard to know where to start. The difficulty, in fact, is not in Walton's book, whose scope could not possibly accommodate the range and complexity of feminist criticism, or even its contribution to British cultural studies. That would take another volume.

The starting point for that other book on 'fewomenism' might consider why Stuart Hall felt displaced from the Birmingham Centre after the arrival of feminism (Hall 1996: 500), and Carolyn Steedman's (1986) critique of how classic British cultural studies failed to account for the experience of women's personalized landscapes. Walton nevertheless introduces the problematic as he refers to how 'Women Take Issue' (162-64) in the 1978 book of that title produced by the Women's Study Group at the Birmingham Centre. Moreover, it is beyond doubt that Woolf touched on many (though not all) of the topics that gender studies would confront decades after her death: it is hard not to be reminded of *A Room of One's Own* (1929) looking at Campoy Ruiz's illustration of the 'Tenny Booper' option "which only required a record player, a space on the wall for photos of pop idols and a few friends" (163), even if what Woolf wanted was much more than that.

One of the pleasant features of the book is its self-consciousness about the impossibility of embracing the wide field of cultural studies in a single introductory volume. The first illustration the reader comes across shows Walton himself looking slightly embarrassed as a young woman addresses him at a bookshop with the book in her hand and asks "What can I realistically expect from a careful reading of this book?" (3). The chapters on particular authors, if not totally replacing the reading of them, do work like individual critical introductions such as those often published in brief separate volumes, so that, taken together, the chapters make up a small reference library, even though the "oversimplification warnings" keep reminding the reader that we are "only scratching the surface" (192). The chapters on Thompson and Hoggart, for example, go into remarkable detail (e.g. about Hoggart's attention to language and Thompson's 'making' of history). Chapters also do more than introduce the main ideas of other books: heuristics invite students to look at ideas from inside by using them. In one of the most memorable passages, Theodor Adorno's critical method is adapted to a critique of "hip-hop as a product of the culture industry" (63-64), and then the author writes a rap where he puts himself "in the position of a rapper who tries to take up a critical but appreciative attitude towards the method we have been exploring" (65). Thus a theory which was devised in the 1940s is tested in its current application.

The book makes a very commendable effort to empathize with its younger readers. The actual difficulties of students are reflected humorously in Chapter 6, where Vidal finds himself in "the old story, exams are just round the corner and, erm, well, I'm not that well prepared and I missed most of the stuff on Raymond Williams" (112), so he calls his more studious sister Ladvi for help, who will provide him with a few tricks (including "another creative-critical technique" (112) to understand some of Williams' basic ideas. Some of us who are no longer (just) students but who have arrived quite recently in cultural studies (certainly after Williams' death) may be grateful for this user-friendly introduction to his large contribution to many aspects of cultural studies.

The main examples of analysis are film studies of *Quadrophenia* (Chapter 8) and *East is East* (Chapter 13), which can truly be said to be representative of the topics on which British cultural studies focus at two decisive moments in their development, i.e. the 1970s, with their earnest work on subcultures, and the 1990s and after, with their (often more self-reflective, even ironic) focus on gender and ethnicity. Both chapters complement the more theoretical ones, and include annotated filmographies for further practice. This focus on film distinguishes the book from the only other cultural studies handbook which it can really be compared with, i.e. Giles and Middleton's (1999). The latter offers a wider range of examples of cultural analysis, and its approach is as thoroughly practical and learner-centred as Walton's, but probably less inventive, and its chapters are arranged according to topics, so that the gradual development of cultural studies through key books and writers is less evident.

Not even Plato could deny Walton's creativity and his consciousness of method (14). The book is neatly structured, blending synchronic and diachronic approaches (289), despite not including Structuralism in its survey (301). In its chronological approach *Introducing Cultural Studies* coincides with Storey's useful *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (1993), a suitable feature for those of us teaching cultural studies under *History and Civilization* rubrics. While every chapter is synchronically aware of the relevance of, say, Adorno's analysis of jazz to hip-hop, T.S. Eliot's preoccupation with cultural fragmentation to the postmodern condition (41), or adapting Williams' keywords to new contexts (116-17), it is also diachronically sensitive to successive historical moments. Through Arnold and the Leavisites we catch glimpses of the emergence of democracy and mass culture; with the Frankfurt School, Hoggart and Williams, of reactions to it by the mid-twentieth century; with the Birmingham Centre on subcultures and *Quadrophenia* we are prompted to "think historically" of post-war Britain again (152-55), and the historical contexts of *East is East* return us to contemporary multicultural and multiethnic Britain (261-69). Thus the longer twentieth century is encompassed.

Every chapter is headed by clearly stated 'Main Learning Goals', showing a constant awareness of teaching in terms of developing students' critical competencies, which is a welcome feature in view of the new kinds of university curriculum. Yet it also enjoins John Frow's definition of cultural studies, if not as an "antidiscipline", as existing "in a state of productive uncertainty about its status as a discipline" (292, quoting from Frow 1995: 7). In other words, he would probably agree with Couldry that cultural studies is a subject with "at least a recognizable set of methodological debates" (2000: 8). Its boundaries are explored in various ways within the book, for example in the section called "A dialogue with the social sciences" (184-85). The complexity of cultural studies is made delightfully simple in the 'Conclusions and "Begin-Endings"' when it is compared to Gollum's multiple identities in *The Lord of the Rings* (290) and then to Shrek's attempt to explain to Donkey that ogres are multilayered like onions (294-95). This chapter includes an up-to-date list of journals and web pages, pointing to the sheer width of the field (306-07), and a brief annotated bibliography of studies with a social sciences approach to method (305), including the compilation recently edited by White and Schowch (2006).

Like the best cultural studies works, Walton's exhilarating book may leave the student wondering what cultural studies actually is, perhaps undecided about a final definition, but nonetheless confident enough to start practising it. It also leaves the reader wanting more like this, hoping for a sequel that would include the Structuralist and Postmodernist approaches which had to be omitted here (301). That Walton is already conversant with these approaches can be inferred even from this book, so it may just be a matter of time.

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