

Bullón-Fernández, María, ed. 2007: *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages. 12th-15th century. Cultural Literacy and Political Exchanges.* New York and Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan. xiv + 250pp. ISBN: 13: 978-1-4039-7224-8, ISBN-10: 1-4039-7224-9

Paloma Tejada Caller
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
ptejadac@filol.ucm.es

As an area of research, medievalism has seemed institutionally marginal, although we may now be attending a 'medievalist turn'. The essays in this volume examine the literary, historical, artistic and religious interactions between England and Christian Iberia from the twelfth to the fifteenth century.

The book is divided into 10 chapters, to which an extensive Bibliography, an Index and 6 figures are added. After Bullón's 'Not all roads lead to Rome', which serves as an introduction to the volume, Jennifer Goodman's 'Medieval England and Iberia: A Chivalric Relationship' explores the circulation of chivalric poems and narratives between England and Iberia and traces the most important exchanges among historical knights and royal family members before the rival empires of England, Spain and Portugal had actually emerged. In Chapter 2, 'British influence in Medieval Catalan Writing', Lluís Cabré reassesses the established English connection of *Tirant lo Blanc* and Martorell's command of English. For Cabré "the English connection of Tirant is evident: some of its roots in British writings are not" (40). In 'The Shrine as Mediator: England, Castile, and the Pilgrimage to Compostela' (Chapter 3), Ana Echevarría explores the importance of pilgrimage routes and their links to the political and economic interests of the countries involved. Rose Walker contributes chapter 4, 'Leonor of England and Eleanor of Castile: Anglo-Iberian Marriage and Cultural Exchange in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', where she compares two similar Anglo-Iberian marriages: that of Henry II's daughter, Leonor, to Alfonso VIII of Castile with that of Eleanor of Castile and Edward, Henry III's son. Cynthia L. Chamberlin's chapter 5 'A Castilian in King Edward's Court: The Career of Giles Despaigne, 1313-1327' investigates "the great regard Edward II had for his Castilian heritage and how he used the dynastic links ... to strengthen his position" (89). Chapter 6, 'Anglo-Portuguese Trade during the Reign of João I of Portugal, 1385-1433', by Jennifer C. Geouge, highlights "the problems encountered by merchants and the vicissitudes of [Anglo-Portuguese] trade relations during the reign of João I" (119). Joyce Coleman's 'Philippa of Lancaster, Queen of Portugal – and Patron of the Gower Translations?' argues that it was the Queen who promoted the Iberian translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In 'Os Doze de Inglaterra: A Romance of Anglo-Portuguese Relations in the Later Middle Ages?', Amelia P. Hutchinson adds to our understanding of the poem as a combination of oral traditions subjected to considerable literary treatment and establishes it as an icon of Anglo-Portuguese relations in the later Middle Ages. Last, in his 'Chaucer Translates the Matter of Spain' a witty and insightful R.F. Yeager complains about the

absence of recognized Spanish influences on Chaucer (189). Yeager defends the idea that there are abundant reasons to seriously consider the “Matter of Spain” in Chaucer studies and suggests that Chaucer’s first taste of Italian literature may quite likely have occurred in Iberia. (202).

After this brief description of the book’s contents, the most obvious finding to emerge from the project is that “the past is a different country” (Hartley 1953:1). It becomes clear that the inhabitants of the collectivity called Iberia and those of England did things differently from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. Not only are readers carried into a different historical, political and social setting, but also, and most importantly, they are encouraged to reflect seriously on conventional historiography.

In *England and Iberia* a politically, socially and identitarianly bizarre world is unveiled: one of dynastic warfare and royal marriages; of crusading and pilgrimage, of an unstable Roman Pontificate and schism. In such a world, Europe’s distribution of political and naval power greatly differed from today’s, treaties were constantly issued and reissued and trade took place within continental borders. On the horizon, France and the 100 Years’ War dominated the scene, severely influencing both Iberian dynastic conflicts and the habits and social lives of the European peoples.

However, acknowledging ‘the past is a different country’ does not only imply the recognition of a different state of things. The reader is invited to think about conventional historiographical practices. And this may be said to be the book’s major contribution.

Very often history and historiography have conditioned our twenty-first-century vantage point, limiting our view to the glory of successful structures, behind which interesting intermediate stages of development are hiding. These stages, though secondary and marginal to that ‘history of success’ (after Aarsleff’s [1983] *linguistic history of success*), remain perfectly stable and complex until they are superseded by others, and although essential to a proper understanding of reality, they can only be defined through dynamic reinterpretations of history. From our contemporary standpoint, the Middle Ages described in the volume under review should probably be thought of as marginal to the general course of history and to constitute a socio-political system which eventually failed. But as such, it must be reconstructed.

There is no doubt that development in an interdisciplinary area of studies has helped to write these unconventional histories. A stronger cultural receptivity towards the synchronic otherness of past societies has become central to the historical approach and particular attention is now being paid to what people said, did and wrote in their own historical context. Planned according to this well-established line of studies, *England and Iberia* surpasses nineteenth-century theoretical constructions and their closely related prejudices – some of them unfortunately still alive, as proved by Coleman’s complaint (157). Firstly, the book overcomes so-called evolutionism, prone to link temporality with linear sequence, to build the past from its outcomes and mechanically establish a direct relation between results and their causes. And secondly, it opts for the social side of history, where individuals, their points of view, their will and conscience are paramount. As a result, a more complex interpretation

of history emerges: a non-linear, dynamic representation of events, bringing to light peripheral themes and characters, rejecting essences and moving beyond fact. All this is found in *England and Iberia* as I shall attempt to sketch.

The non-linear nature of history is insistently confirmed by the description of a complex political situation defined by its inner dynamicity. England, Spain and Portugal do not stand out as the three isolated, full-fledged countries of our age. Contrarily, we attend a failed stage in which a changing collection of kingdoms (Portugal, Castile, León, Navarre, Aragon, Catalonia) interact with one another, somewhat apart from the territories in the south still held by the Moors. This unusual world is neatly described by Yeager (203-04).

In contemporary approaches to the past, social issues take precedence over political ones. In this respect, Bullón states that “English and Iberian people *who may or may not have had significant political power also engaged with each other* for religious, economic, intellectual and literary reasons” (7), and she adds that the authors set out “to examine the different ways in which peoples and nations interacted and influenced each other, *even when it seems that they did not*” (8, my italics). The purpose of fulfilling this goal yields the description of unexpected intermingling between peoples: Goodman brings to light English and Spanish chivalric exchanges; Yeager depicts the active living together of the English and the Spanish at John of Gaunt’s court; Coleman carefully evokes the interaction between the English and the Portuguese during the reign of João I. On an individual level, Cabré traces Joannot Martorell touring England, Yeager tracks Chaucer’s travels about Spain and Goodman describes Felip Boil and John Astley’s encounter in fifteenth-century England. Furthermore, contrary to naïve expectations, the Spaniards did not act in unison. In the late 1300s “Spanish knights (and kings) [were] fighting on both sides” of Iberian dynastic conflicts (19).

The social bias of historical studies often implies a focus on peripheral themes and characters, marginal to conventional histories. Consequently, special emphasis is given throughout the book to queens, to whom several chapters are devoted, such as Walker’s or, more ardently, Coleman’s. This author openly complains that up to now the historians’ emphasis has been on Gaunt. She credits Philippa with the initiative of having Gower’s work translated and comes to suggest that the rejection of her thesis might be due to a desire “to avoid having to acknowledge a female as instigator of an important literary event” (157). Borderline characters to the narration of the medieval course of events have also been yeomen and friars, to whom particular regard is also paid in the book. Chamberlin highlights the figure of Giles Despaigne, a yeoman in the service of Edward II and Cabré elaborates on the role played by Aragonese friars in the early Catalan reception of British works.

On the unnoticed margins of history lies also the Castilian court in exile. The reader is offered the description of John of Gaunt’s household centered at the Savoy as a cultural melting pot. Apparently, Gaunt and Constanza “promoted Spanish styles..., encouraged a number of Castilian-English marriages and formalized tutoring for native speakers of both languages” (193). This current finding will help to tie up loose ends and initiate new paths of research.

Not least surprising are Chaucer's wanderings as a tourist. Yeager traces the most revealing Spanish references in *The Canterbury Tales* and notes that the English author departed from his sources to identify the landmarks of Iberian geography, which suggests "familiarity born of remembrance" (197). The author encourages further research on *The House of Fame*, remarking that there are in it "allusions to things Spanish, characteristic not of a bibliophile but of a sharp-eyed tourist" (199).

Literary margins are also brought to the fore in most chapters. Let me simply draw attention to Cabré's pioneering research in notarial archives, Chamberlin's careful handling of records and letters, or Yeager's effort to rescue little-known books, such as Petrus Alfonsus' *Disciplina clericalis*, representative of "an especially Iberian subgenre of collected exempla in which the sources are openly Oriental", in order to speculate on Chaucer's involvement with Spanish literature (200-01).

Similarly, knowledge of language has been thought of as a key factor in the reconstruction of medieval exchanges. Cabré reassesses Martorell's command of English, stressing the fact that the Catalan writer transliterated toponyms and title names most exactly. Yeager, in turn, elaborates upon Chaucer's competence in Spanish. He suggests that he "may have picked some Spanish amidst the mercantile world of his boyhood and then added a bit to his knowledge while in the Peninsula", concluding that Chaucer's Spanish connections "at home are more extensive than is often thought" (194).

The emphasis laid on social and individual issues has increasingly forced historians to dive into emotions as necessary clues to understand reality. And this book does not ignore them. Thus, Chamberlin stresses Edward II's predilection for things and people associated with his mother, and his "quality of devoted loyalty to his personal friends" and subjects (90). Chamberlin's research on feelings allows her to partly explain Edward II's behaviour, as well as that of his yeoman's, Giles Despaigne.

Particularly relevant to the emotional side of history are perceptions of self – and other identity. In that respect, Bullón's volume contributes to a better understanding of stereotypes as changing patterns of *identification*. So, for the Spanish reader England will no longer be that nation of *bárbaros fieros*, disdained by Rubén Darío; or those isolationist, pragmatic people, of outlandish dress, occasional drunkards, pirates and aggressive, as built in the Spanish twenty-first-century popular imagination; or the utmost symbol of freedom and ideological tolerance, as conventionally held by nineteenth-century scholars (For a more detailed description, see Tejada [2005, 2006]). In the case of Portugal, the Spanish reader will overcome the stereotyped idea of their neighbours as sentimental and indecisive people, a 'country of poets' or of heroic explorers and cartographers. Correspondingly, the Portuguese will no longer see in the Spaniards the upstart and arrogant "big brother" (Berdichevsky 2007), proud and exalted, tragic and ardent. And as for the English, the Iberian people will no longer correspond to those rude, ignorant and ridiculously ceremonious folk. Spain and Portugal will not just represent places of extreme otherness, "cut loose from England" and rendered unimportant after the Industrial revolution (190).

Very much the contrary. Although we are told that the medieval two-way traffic of peoples resulted in stereotyped images (25),¹ new and surprisingly positive components are to be added to the current representation of the Other. A new image of collaboration between British and Iberian citizens emerges from the present study: “knights and aristocrats of the British Isles and Iberia built up a tradition of ...collaboration” (11). English and Scottish crusaders would fight Islamic opponents alongside Castilians and Portuguese (12-14), and Philip II supposedly tried to use tournaments to encourage friendships between the “white, pink and quarrelsome” English and his Spanish knights (22). Moreover, this research provides further details to our national portrayals. Medieval Iberia, associated with crusading, became appreciated as a place of opportunities; Britain was portrayed as “a kind of nursery or training ground for knights” (24), and English heroes were apparently most admired in the Middle Ages, according to fifteenth-century Iberian romances (23).

From a wider point of view, the articles in Bullón’s edited volume may be said to confirm a clear interest in the symbolic nature of events. History moves beyond fact. In this respect, the reader will discover that Gaunt’s carefully planned visit to Santiago turns symbolically important, since Santiago was “the figure chosen to ratify newly anointed kings” (56). Similarly, Coleman’s interpretation of Philippa’s policy of anglo-philia reveals the queen’s desire to promote a sense of Portuguese identity (149, 154). Symbolic power and wealth of earthly kingdoms serve as a base for Walker’s research. And it is also the symbolic power of a poem that is highlighted in *Os doze de Inglaterra*: the poem crystallizes an ideal moment of glory for Portugal (168), by portraying the Portuguese as superior to their English allies.

The determination to explore the symbolic meaning of events assists in our understanding of reality, as does the desire to unveil what is hiding behind mere fact. Bullón’s book makes us aware that things are not exactly what they seem. Its authors strive to explore the political and economic interests of the countries involved in pilgrimage routes (47, 48, 55); “national sanctuaries” after the ninth century were actually meant to legitimate emerging powerful monarchies (48); the visits to shrines “provided an excuse for exchanges that would never have been possible in the battlefield” (62) and the traditionally good relations in Anglo-Portuguese trade were but unstable, intriguing and turbulent at best (121).

What has been said up to now confirms that the book fulfills its first two aims: 1) ‘to turn the tide’ of the scanty information about England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, and 2) to prove that “[n]ations emerge out of complex processes of formation that are never pure” (7). However, one of the most important assets of Bullón’s collection of essays concerns the opening of new lines of research, planned as the book’s third aim (3). Between the lines, future researchers will find explicit mention of unexplored areas deserving scholarly attention. Cabré demands a stronger effort to unearth “the hidden background of Llul’s more popular writings” (31). He also invites researchers to carry out “a comprehensive study of schooling at the Faculty

¹ From that date, the Spanish saw the English as “different from all other nations” (15) and the English complained about the Spaniards’ lack of courtesy (16).

schools in the crown of Aragon” (31), to investigate the “involvement of England in the politics of the continent, in as much as it was reflected in literary works” (38), or even to carry out “an account of travels with no literary outcome... for a better understanding of Martorell’s stay in England” (38). Finally, he warns about the need to check Martorell’s first-hand acquaintance with English society by comparing his transliterated toponyms and title names against Middle English (46, note 83). Echevarría, in turn, notices that the connections to the inland route to Santiago have not been traced (49). She also encourages further study on Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath* to discover a possible relationship between the English textile sector and Santiago (54). Geouge complains that the role of Portugal in the late medieval period has been overlooked; that we still lack an adequate study of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance signed at the Treaty of Windsor (120) and that there is no adequate general text for the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century period available in English, or recent works on the reign of João I. (131). Last, but not least, Yeager advocates the rethinking of Chaucer’s work along the avenues suggested in his research (194).

It is encouraging to see that María Bullón and the contributors to the present volume have done a real service to the field of medieval studies and to the delicate flower that still constitutes Iberian cooperation and our European common heritage. Scholars and students interested in England and Iberia will want to read this carefully edited book,² full of questions, highly and attractively speculative, persuasive at times and honestly open to further discussion. Let me end this review by contributing two Spanish references that might enrich this lively dialogue. First, I would like to mention Emilio Lorenzo’s several lectures and articles on the Spanish translation of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (Lorenzo 1984, 1986, 1987). Secondly, Martín de Riquer’s lecture ‘Vida caballeresca en la España del siglo XV’ (Real Academia Española 1947) offers interesting comments on the wanderings of fifteenth century Spanish knights in English lands (Miguel d’Orís, Messire Francois l’Arragonois, Felip Boyl or Pedro Vázquez de Saavedra) that might prove illuminating.

Works Cited

- Aarsleff, Hans 1983: *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860*. London: Athlone P.
 Berdichevsky, Norman 2007: ‘The Iberian Case of Sibling Rivalry’ <<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-186435526.html>> (Accessed 3 September, 2009)
 Hartley, Lesley P. 1953: *The Go-Between*. London: Penguin Books.
 Lorenzo, Emilio 1984: ‘Una traducción histórica’. *ABC* 20 September: 3.
 ——— 1986: ‘Sobre las malas traducciones’. M. López Folgado, ed. *Actas de las jornadas de Traducción*. Ciudad Real: UCLM. 9-18.
 ——— 1987: ‘La primera traducción del inglés’. José Luis Chamosa González, Julio César Santoyo Mediavilla, Trinidad Guzmán and Rosa Rabadán Alvarez, eds. *Actas de las I Jornadas nacionales de historia de la traducción*. León: Servicio de Publicaciones. 354-66.

² With few misprints: *conuntries* (10); *Martí* de Riquer and *Martín* de Riquer (40)

- Real Academia Española 1947: *Discursos de recepción. Serie Segunda. 1881-1898*. Madrid: Gráficas Ultra.
- Tejada, Paloma 2005: 'English Consciousness in 19th c Spain'. Christopher Butler, ed. *The Dynamics of Language Use*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 369-92.
- 2006: 'La naturalización de lo ajeno'. Marta Carretero, Laura Hidalgo Downing, Julia Lavid, Elena Martínez Caro, JoAnne Neff, Soledad Pérez de Ayala and Esther Sánchez-Pardo, eds. *A Pleasure of Life in Words. A Festschrift for Angela Downing*. Madrid: Cersa. 155-84.

Received 16 november 2009

Accepted 8 march 2010

Paloma Tejada is currently Tenured Lecturer in the English Language and Linguistics Department of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where she obtained her PhD. Her research interests are: History of the English Language; Spanish Reception of Englishness, Culture, Language and Ideology, English-Spanish Contrastive Linguistics. Recent publications include 'La naturalización de lo ajeno. en Carretero, M. et al. eds. (2006). *A Pleasure of life in words. A Festschrift for Angela Downing*. Cersa. ISBN 846113485 0. (pp. 155-184), 'Construcciones cambiantes de la identidad ajena: hetero-imagen inglesa en la RAE.'. *III Congreso Internacional sobre Lengua y Sociedad*. En Blas Arroyo, J.L. et al. eds. 2008. *Discurso y sociedad II. Nuevas contribuciones al estudio de la lengua en un contexto social*. Castellón de la Plana: Universidad Jaime I. ISBN: 978- 84-8021-666-1, pp. 415-428.

Address: Departamento de Filología Inglesa I, Facultad de Filología Edificio A, Avda. Complutense s/n, 28040 Madrid, SPAIN. Tel.: 34 91 3945392. Fax: 34 91 39454 78