

Ángeles de la Concha, coord. 2012 (2010): *El sustrato cultural de la violencia de género: Literatura, arte, cine y videojuegos*. Madrid: Síntesis. 324 pp. ISBN: 978-84-9756675-9/324.

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“No te saltes las señales. Elige vivir”. This is the slogan of the latest campaign launched by the Spanish Ministry of Public Health, Social Services and Equality (2011) to offer women the mechanisms to identify everyday behavioural patterns closely connected with gender violence. But, where should we be looking to identify these behaviours? *El sustrato cultural de la violencia de género*, originally published in 2010 and re-edited in 2012, provides a fruitful answer to this question, arguing that the signals of gender violence are continuously present in cultural representations.

This book stems from the North-American and British feminist trend of the 1970s that called for the demolition of the cultural structures that normalised the subordinate position of women in society. Following the mother figure of second-wave feminism, Simone de Beauvoir, Anglo-American feminists like Kate Millet, Eva Figes, Germaine Greer, Elaine Showalter, together with materialist feminists such as Shulamith Firestone, Sherry Ortner and Juliet Mitchell, denounced the relationships between men and women as being embedded in power structures that constructed gender on biological, economic and cultural grounds. Their renowned feminist manifestos, alongside post-feminist critical studies like *Writing on the Body* (Conboy et al. 1993), *Violence Against Women* (French et al. 1998), *Feminine Sentences* (Wolff 2008), have inspired the contributors to this volume, who, like their English-speaking predecessors, denounce the cultural contribution to gender inequality. The use of this common feminist background should be welcomed, as it provides the essays with a shared theoretical framework that strengthens the feminist analysis of the texts.

The reason for these Spanish critics to look to their English speaking predecessors can be linked to the fact that, although Spanish women also fought actively for their rights in the 1970s, the institutional support for the research on gender violence did not arrive until a decade later with the creation of El Instituto de la Mujer in 1983. However, it was not until the end of the 1990s that social awareness of the dangers of gender violence increased in Spain, and studies like *Chicos son, hombres serán* (Miedzian 1995) and *Violencia contra las mujeres* (Instituto de la Mujer 1999) inspired more recent works on these issues, such as *La lucha por la erradicación de la violencia de género* (Bengoechea 2007), *Estudios*

Interdisciplinares sobre Igualdad y Violencia de Género (Figueruelo 2008) and *Los géneros de la violencia* (Arisó and Mérida 2010). Continuing this line of action, *El sustrato cultural de la violencia de género* in fact goes a step further by deploying the tools provided by literary, film and cultural studies to unmask the patriarchal violence rooted in society. In keeping with this, de la Concha's collection can be seen as related to the compilation of essays *Violencias invisibles* (Martín-Lucas, 2010), which also sought to denounce symbolic violence through the analysis of cultural productions. In fact, I see a mutual dialogue between these books, as Martín-Lucas' work covers some cultural practices, such as music, comics and advertising, not addressed in *El sustrato cultural*, which in turn considers issues such as poetry, fiction, painting, film and electronic games, not covered in such detail in the previous study. Both collections testify to the fact that the cultural component of gender violence has become a topic of increasing critical concern and they point to future lines of research which should examine those cultural forms which have not yet been analysed in depth but which foster male aggressiveness against women.

The book starts with an introduction that sets the tone for the subsequent debates, where Ángeles de la Concha shows her expertise. Starting with a conceptualisation of gender violence, she states that “la violencia de género ha adoptado múltiples formas a lo largo de la historia. Unas son más visibles que otras, aunque, a menudo, las formas menos visibles han sido las más insidiosas por actuar bajo diversos ropajes que la han ocultado, arrojándola en discursos varios de índole científica, moral, psicológica o artística, activamente operantes en el seno de la cultura” (7). The main aim of this book, therefore, is to uncover the underlying cultural structures that have contributed to the maintenance of the violence practised upon women. Although there has been an increasing awareness of the dangers of gender violence, de la Concha believes that much more work needs to be done. She prepares the ground for the essays to follow by alluding to Pierre Bourdieu's theories on symbolic violence, defined as “violencia amortiguada, insensible, e invisible para sus propias víctimas, que se ejerce esencialmente a través de los caminos puramente simbólicos de la comunicación y del conocimiento o, más exactamente del desconocimiento, del reconocimiento o, en último término del sentimiento” (2000: 11-12).

As coordinator, de la Concha also highlights the multidisciplinary perspectives of the volume, one of the most positive aspects of the book, as it broadens the spectrum of the cultural artefacts to be taken into account when examining the sources of gender violence. Indeed it contributes to achieving the main goal of the book, helping readers to realise that every cultural form may hide signals that promote female subjugation. She also underlines the chronological criterion that structures the articles, a wise choice that creates a coherent structure and allows the readers to grasp the evolution from extreme female objectification to more realistic approaches in cultural representations of gender. Further, she justifies what could be interpreted as the main drawback of the book: the selection of a corpus formed mainly from British and North-American works. She anticipates the criticism which could be levied against the volume by claiming that the intended Spanish speaking readership should not consider this negative because, as the second wave of

feminism emerged in the USA and spread quickly to Britain in the 1970s, there is a more established feminist tradition in the English-speaking environment. Although I agree that this Anglocentric aspect might disengage the readership, who may not be so familiar with the field of English Studies, I also believe that the variety of the arguments of the texts presented help to demonstrate that gender violence is grounded in the majority of cultural representations prevalent in a nation at any one time, and probably more so in the globalised societies of the early twenty-first century. In fact, I would praise the fact that a Spanish publisher has judged this corpus, apparently more related to the field of English Studies, to be interesting to a wider audience, and in so doing highlighted the universal phenomenon of gender violence, occurring from classical to contemporary culture.

The first chapters address literary representations of gender violence. In 'El canon literario y sus efectos sobre la construcción cultural de la violencia de género: los casos de Chaucer y Shakespeare', Marta Cerezo Moreno underlines the role of canonical literature in the normalisation of gender violence. Her claim is that literature has usually contributed to naturalising the subjugation of the female sex to male dominance (19). In fact, this emphasis on the performative value of art is evident throughout the collection. Showing a thorough knowledge of classical texts, Cerezo Moreno problematises Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as examples of texts where any female challenge to patriarchal authority is doomed to failure. She also argues that the influence of classical myths can be observed in contemporary representations like Iciar Bollain's *Te doy mis ojos* (2003), a film that is also analysed in Chapter Nine. In Chapter Two, "Me poseyó un deseo salvaje": articulación de la violencia masculina de género en la novela inglesa del siglo XIX', Antonio Ballesteros González starts by contextualising nineteenth-century British society, whose social changes are depicted in the English novel of the time. He examines some of the male characters in these novels to prove that women always appear as the victims of patriarchal violence (51). Establishing the sentimental and the gothic novel as a precedent, Ballesteros analyses the most representative nineteenth-century English novels in order to show that the atmosphere of extreme male passions acts as a metaphor for the sexual repression of the time. Chapter Three, "Si las miradas matasen...": la perturbadora mirada del deseo en la poesía romántica', by Mercedes Bengoechea, is a noteworthy contribution to the book, unveiling the fact that classical love poetry supports patriarchal conceptions of love. Providing examples from the poems of a wide range of authors, from Francisco de Quevedo and Garcilaso de la Vega to Octavio Paz and Pablo Neruda, Bengoechea lists the main rhetorical devices present in this genre, like the fragmentation of the female body and male voyeurism. Also, she provides examples supported by pertinent theories like Barkly's and Lakoff and Johnson's notions on the sexual reification of women in literature. In contrast, she makes reference to female poets like Eavan Boland, Elizabeth Jennings, Clara Janés, Miriam Scott and contemporary male poets like Luis Javier Hidalgo and José Angel Valente who create images of sexual reciprocity between men and women to offer the optimistic conclusion that an egalitarian conception of love is possible. Juan Antonio Suárez, in Chapter Four,

‘La violencia en el campo queer’, analyses the representations of violence within queer relationships, motivated by the ‘new queer film.’ His examples, such as Gregg Araki’s *The Living End* (1992), Denis Cooper’s writing, Rick Castro’s visual art, Andy Warhol and other representatives of the 1960s, support his argument that many homosexual creative artists depict aggressiveness as a component of personal relationships. Within the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, according to which violence provides cohesion to the social order, Suárez wonders why this emphasis on violence is stronger in queer representations and concludes that queer sexuality actually acknowledges to a higher degree the violence underlying human relationships. He offers an innovative perspective on queer representation, highlighting its ethical dimension, which reminds us that any individual has the potential to be either aggressor or victim. Thus, if violence is considered an ingredient of sexuality, understanding the way it works might help to avoid its disastrous consequences. Next, in ‘En el umbral de una nueva poética: cambios en la representación literaria de la violencia de género’, Ángeles de la Concha frames her chapter within the field of trauma studies by relating the collective traumas produced during armed conflicts to the traumas suffered by women. Taking as an example Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy, she wisely relates the acknowledged collective traumas, those of soldiers after the First World War, to female suffering (Brown 1995; Root 1992). Endorsing the theories of Irigoyen (2005) and Bourdieu (1998), she examines certain novels that have represented the unspeakability of gender violence and trauma, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (Doyle 1996), *Rape. A Love Story* (Oates 2003), and *The Lovely Bones* (Sebold 2002), and rightly claims that works such as these should be read in relation to works by recent writers, Margaret Drabble, Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt, Margaret Atwood, Ruth Ozeki among them, who derogate female subjugation in their writings.

Following the well-structured pattern of the book, the next chapters examine the representation of gender violence in pictorial images and establish a coherent dialogue. In ‘La herida femenina: representaciones de la mujer en la historia de la pintura’, Amparo Serrano de Haro sets the scene for this section as it depicts the evolution from men painting women to the first women to create their own images. She traces some of the main stereotypes of male pictorial representations of women — “la mujer paisaje”, “la mujer bodegón o mujer comestible”, “la mujer víctima” (177-79)— and, as happens in Chapter Five, psychoanalysis is used to explain male pictorial supremacy, equating the symbolic power of the phallus to the paintbrush. Serrano argues that the Surrealist women painters of the 1930s and 1940s began their search for identity through art; however, it was not until the 1970s that female artists began to reclaim female sexuality. Praising works like Shirin Neshat’s *Speechless* (1996) and endorsing Bengoechea’s optimistic conclusions, Serrano concludes that contemporary representations of femaleness effectively challenge patriarchal violence. Next, in ‘Los espacios de feminidad y sus violencias: la ciudad y las mujeres en la pintura victoriana y moderna’, Teresa Gómez Reus focuses on the role of space in the construction of identity in Victorian pictorial discourses. Drawing on feminist theories that point to the different distribution of space according to gender and

class, she examines the Victorian ideology that related men to the public and women to the private spheres, arguing that the city was an immoral place for women. Nevertheless, the article addresses the first inclusions of acceptable women in the city life of London with the arrival in 1890 of a group of young female artists —principally Gwen John—who challenged these stereotypes by portraying the loneliness that characterised the life of female artists in their paintings. Following this, Pepa Feu's 'Anatomía de una represión: lo sobrenatural como rito de paso en la pintura y la escritura de mujeres' fuses interest in pictorial and literary representations of female submission by relating surrealist female painters with gothic women writers. In keeping with Serrano's earlier analysis, she argues that the surrealist female painters used the same archetypal traits as female Gothic writers, thus evidencing the existence of a female collective consciousness created out of the violence that characterised earlier representations of women. Offering the examples of Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington and Frida Kahlo, she points to some of the main motifs they depict (the heroine, the castle, the double, the archetype of the mother earth), tracing a movement in female literary and painted works towards the supernatural, a rite of passage looking for a distinctive female voice.

The last two chapters are also concerned with visual representations, but focus on films and videogames. Pilar Aguilar Carrasco's essay 'El cine, una mirada cómplice en la violencia contra las mujeres' studies the mechanisms by which spectators usually identify with the male gaze, reminding us of Laura Mulvey's classic analysis. This chapter will close the gap between the Spanish language readers and the texts analysed, as Aguilar uses many contemporary examples from the Spanish-speaking context to illustrate the objectified role of women. In her view, in many of these films gender violence is silenced, comically depicted or represented in an unrealistic idyllic way, as happens in León de Aranoa's *Barrio* (1998). Yet, she explains that films denouncing domestic violence only finally arrived in Spain at the end of the 1990s with *Solas* (Zambrano, 1999), *Amores que matan* and *Te doy mis ojos* (Bollaín, 2000, 2003), *Solo mía* (Balaguer 2001), and *El Bola* (Mañas, 2000). The piece ends with a claim for works that show women as they are in real life (274). Closing the collection, Eugenia López Muñoz's 'Sexismo, violencia y juegos electrónicos' criticises the sexist violence depicted in electronic games. This is one of the most original contributions to the volume as it fosters the idea that electronic games reproduce the same patriarchal discourse that prevails in other more extensively analysed cultural artefacts. Employing Galtung's violence triangle (1999), she concludes that the violence exerted through electronic games is structural, it deprives the individuals or groups of their basic rights, and the model of learning that such games offer is vicarious and social. Although works on this topic are scarce, she uses Enrique Javier Díez's study (2005) as a referent, and agrees with his conclusion that most electronic games reproduce sexist stereotypes. Finally, she points out that, even if it is hard to assess whether violent chauvinistic social behaviours inspire the creators of electronic games or whether the behaviours they depict increase sexist violence, it would be quite naïve to assume that electronic games only teach positive values.

All the chapters, therefore, meet the challenge of demonstrating that the ideological substratum of culture needs to be changed if we want to bring about an end to the violence that sustains it. *El sustrato cultural de la violencia de género* becomes, in this sense, compulsory reading both for scholars interested in gender violence and for a general readership. The reader familiar with the texts and with the theories used will feel closer to the analyses, but for those with only a superficial knowledge of the content, the volume will be a perfect introduction to cultural gender violence. This book joins a pioneering tendency in Spain that seems to be increasingly concerned with the way in which cultural practices support gender discrimination. I would like to finish by quoting Aguilar's enlightening words: "Es evidente que la existencia de relatos socialmente compartidos que formularan y respaldaran nuevas posibilidades de ser y estar en el mundo, contribuiría poderosamente a generar cambios positivos" (273). Reflections like this draw to a close a collection that succeeds in deciphering the patriarchal signals that sustain our cultural artefacts, opening the door on a possible new representation of gender—as outlined in Chapters Three, Five, Six and Nine—where both men and women find realistic models of representation in a society that needs to eradicate gender violence from its intricate roots.

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