

There is wide evidence that shows the validity of this work, such as the translation of *juez instructor* as *examining magistrate*, the accuracy of which is similar to that of the versions offered by lawyers and experts in Legal English and Legal Spanish, or the translation of *hardware* and *software* for *soporte físico* and *soporte lógico*, respectively, in line with the proposal of the Spanish Real Academia de la Lengua. Nevertheless, the authors do not want to be excessively prudish, and are willing to offer alternative spellings in Spanish, such as *euskera/eusquera*, which might probably displease Spanish purists, but most certainly will prevent a great deal of perplexity among English-speaking readers of Spanish contemporary newspapers.

Finally, an analysis of a dictionary as a working instrument must necessarily mention its presentation. This work has a handy, resistant format, which enables learners to use it in the classroom, thus avoiding the burden of larger volumes, which leads to have a more reduced version for frequent use and a more detailed one for written translation and homework. The same can be said about the pocket edition. All these features result in two useful, complete and accurate dictionaries, which can be perfectly used as an alternative to the most frequent works we all have in mind.

Miguel Ángel Campos Pardillos

***La presencia ausente: perspectivas interdisciplinarias de la posmodernidad.* Ed. Román Álvarez Rodríguez. Cáceres: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Extremadura, 1994, 192 pp.**

It might seem that postmodernism is on the wane, or at least that it has lost some of its initial seductive force, replaced by a—very postmodern—sense of indefiniteness and disenchantment, the feeling that the absence of secure positions will not, unfortunately, lead to any confident procedure. While that is so, one may ask, to what extent are those theories one could tentatively ascribe to this movement still valid? A rapid glance shows that many instances of “postmodern thought” do still have appeal and practical use, and remain undeterred by their secular theoretical opponents. And all the more so at a time when the term “postmodernism” has become almost worn out.

This collection of essays by leading scholars and artists aims at a reassessment of the undeniable achievements of what is, despite the trivialization of some of its philosophical stances, still a far-reaching, interdisciplinary movement. So the book contributes to a rehabilitation of postmodernism approaching the great variety of what could be termed “postmodern attitudes,” and pointing to the relevance of some of its perspectives in order to come to terms with the future. As Román Álvarez, editor of the work, rightly points out, postmodernism is far from the usual academic climbing on the bandwagon, it “does not amount to a mere fashion, a mere word devoid of meaning that one is bound to use at random; it is much more than a movement invented by scholars in order to write about and make their livelihood from it. Postmodernism is a meditation on the society we live in, an attitude (or, rather, several attitudes), variegated ways of living that coexist, or should coexist, in peace.”

Thus, the book reviewed discusses the relevance of postmodernism in several areas of contention. It also sets forth several strategies to deal with the deadlock which postmodernist thinkers and their contenders seem to have reached. Through essays on postmodernist fiction, feminist literature and criticism, philosophy and sociology, the challenge of *fin-de-siècle* postmodernism is approached with insight and an uncommon accessibility. The first two contributions are signed by two leading theorists. The essay “La posmodernidad de la ciencia: contra algunos dogmas del nuevo relativismo cultural” by Christopher Norris, professor at the University of Wales, Cardiff, and author of several studies on Derrida and poststructuralism, assesses current relativist—“postmodern”—trends in the philosophy of science, a rather thorny subject. His contribution is a call for caution in the face of sceptical positions on the question of scientific value; in a rather unfashionable move, Norris posits a revision of discredited concepts such as “truth,” “progress” or “rationality,” as a necessary securing of the ground for an eventual sorting out of the relativist *impasse*.

Also relevant is the essay by Michel Maffessoli, a well-known name among sociologists and readers acquainted with cultural theory. His article, “El ritmo del barroco posmoderno,” proposes a reading of certain present-day cultural icons that could be considered, in his view, as signs of the times. As an example, Maffessoli offers an analysis of the social meaning of the *walkman*.

Any brief survey of the development of contemporary criticism of value, representation, and the historical subject, makes it clear that there are several opposing fronts. Some of them are well known, such as the criticism coming from neo-conservative, Marxist or feminist quarters. Yet the relationship between antagonistic positions is often complex, and their different viewpoints are not so clear-cut. Feminism, for example, is by no means a homogeneous adversary of postmodernism. There are several points of contact, and some feminist theorists apply to themselves the epithet “post-structuralist” or even “postmodern.” The contribution by Rosa María Rodríguez places feminism in the context of the modernist tradition that goes back to the Enlightenment, and then in the broader context of a (*transmodern*) culture that cannot ignore the development of postmodern thought as a questioning of the bases of modernity. Her approach is challenging and thought-provoking; weighing up the pros and cons of affirming woman’s identity is just the starting point of a broad agenda that should be given the utmost consideration.

For their part, Esther Sánchez-Pardo, Francisco Collado, Allan Lloyd Smith and Manuel Brito deal with postmodern literature; Esther Sánchez from the point of view of formalist developments in recent feminist and marginal literatures in the U.S., with a section devoted to experimental fiction (*cyberpunk* fiction and hypertexts); Francisco Collado and Manuel Brito focusing on similarities and differences in the transition from modernist to postmodern narrative and poetry, and Allan Lloyd Smith contributing with an essay on Donald Barthelme.

It is uncommon to read contributions by plastic artists, and this adds to the value of the contributions by Juan Luis Moraza, a leading Spanish sculptor, and Chema Cobo, one of the most representative Spanish painters. The former is deeply concerned with the conscience of the complexity of the world that permeates contemporary thinking as shown

in art. In a similar, but aphoristic and poetic way, Chema Cobo offers us a delightful array of reflections on art, language, culture and life, while África Vidal closes the volume with a witty, scrupulous and at times mordant glossary of common postmodern terms.

The result is an engaging volume that will be of interest to readers in the fields of English philology, sociology, philosophy and art. The updated bibliography (816 entries), compiled by África Vidal and Román Álvarez, is one of the most complete bibliographies on postmodernism and related subjects to date.

Ovidio Carbonell

**M. Carmen África Vidal Claramonte. *Futuro anterior: reflexiones filológicas sobre el fin de siglo*. Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1994, 157 pp.**

One may think of the paradoxical implications of this suggestive title, *Futuro anterior*, as regards Spanish verbal inflexion (*pretérito imperfecto* also lends itself to fruitful combinations), or one could turn to the no less paradoxical speculations of Derrida's theory on the certain *past* quality of both present and future, and the relationship between past and future that, precisely, shape a rather inexistent present. Nevertheless, the feeling of a future that *happened before* bears the Nietzschean tinge of recurrence, as well as the postmodern yield to exhaustion. Everything has already been said; cynicism and a playful curiosity should replace any search for essences or transcendence. The Holy Grail at the turn of the millennium is found empty; its existence as a commodifiable artifact is all that remains.

Far from indulging herself in yet another circular piece of speculation, África Vidal embarks on a journey across some of the most relevant areas of contention in contemporary cultural debates. The first chapter evokes a *post* which is at the same time a beginning and an end. It is time to recapitulate what it is that we are left with, now that the clamour of postmodern speculation has somewhat faded. While postmodernism championed a fondness for narcissistic contemplation and homogeneity, it is also true that this attitude has favoured a climate of tolerance as yet unknown, though clearly insufficient. Certain trends of postmodern thought find it inappropriate, or even impossible, to pursue a political course of action.

What, then, is to be done? Is it possible to write history, deal with distinct identities, even follow a concrete educational programme? *Futuro anterior* searches for answers to these questions. It is, above all, a book about the teaching of literature as well as how to teach students to read the world around. If postmodernism left many questions unanswered, it is from the mechanisms of postmodern thought and its critics that a proper course of action could arise. Therefore, the first chapter is an assessment of those postmodern characteristics that have proved to be most influential or beneficial, as well as an appraisal of some of its most acute criticisms. The second chapter comes to grips with the reality of teaching after postmodernism: the encounter of opposing, even conflicting attitudes within academic institutions, and the possibility of achieving a critical and fruitful rather than destructive thinking.