

and children. Nevertheless, they do not rebel or protest against it and would rather choose self-sacrifice so that their familiar structure remains intact. The conflict between duty to the family and personal fulfilment will always resolve itself through self-sacrifice and submission to the patterns of society. The author does not intend to suggest any solutions. She prefers to act like a camera, recording emotions and situations with realism

and sensitivity. The picture shows the fact that tradition is deeply ingrained in society, and for those women who have a mind of their own and a clear perception of the disadvantages of their position, one way to come to terms with the surrounding reality is the acceptance of loneliness as a factual part of their existence.

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Florence STRATTON. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge, 1994. xviii + 200 pages.

African literature has only recently become a subject admitted to the field of literary studies in the Western academic world. Wole Soyinka, for instance, explains that when he was invited to give a series of lectures on African literature at Cambridge in the early seventies, his talks were fostered by the Department of Social Anthropology and not the English Department, which was quite skeptical of the idea of an African literature.¹ Such a concept has had to confront European ideology developed by colonialism which represented Africa as the dark continent, and its peoples as a mixture of mystery and danger. Fortunately, the increasing interest in the field of postcolonial studies since the late eighties has transformed such a misrecognition.

The book by Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, comes as a contribution to the critically informed research on African literature in English. Her study, moreover, is groundbreaking within the field since it attempts to work from the standpoint of «gender as a social and analytic category» (p.1). In fact, Stratton carries out a similar critical act to the one

that granted African literature the necessary prestige to be included in English departments' syllabi, only that now what is at stake is not the place of African literature within the field of literary studies but the «place of African women writers in African literatures» (p.1). Her arguments contend that women writers have been made invisible and that critical analyses of male works have remained impassive to the misrepresentation of femaleness. For her, it is clearly the case that «sexism has operated as a bias of exclusion in African literary criticism» (p. 4). To change this critical perspective is the main goal of her book and, in order to do so, Stratton carries out two kinds of critical analyses. In the first place, she reads the major canonical works by writers such as Achebe, Senghor, Soyinka and Ngugi, against traditional criticism, bringing to bear upon them feminist reading strategies. Second, her study focuses upon the narrative of four women writers: Grace Ogot, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba, claiming that their representations of African society revolve around the category of gender and, in this way, their litera-

1. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 1976): vii.

ture engages in a gender dialogue with their male peers. The last section of the book is allotted to analyze the latest works by male writers, such as Achebe and Ngugi, who have changed their previous sexist biases to incorporate new perspectives on gender.

In the introduction, Stratton also includes an overview on the effects of colonialism on gender division. Her contention is that imperialism transformed traditional female / male relations, imposing more restrictions upon women's lives. The endeavor to reconcile the discourses on postcolonialism and feminism has to take into account the perils of feminist universalistic claims which ignore africanness as a category of experience and, at the same time, postcolonial discourse has to overcome its gender blindness.

Stratton's rereading of male African literary tradition involves two chapters. The first one rewrites the title of Achebe's famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*, «How could things fall apart for whom they were not together?» The title of this section anticipates her contention that the representation of the African experience in Achebe's novel only considers the male population because women are represented as silent and subordinate subjects, devoid of all agency. Her other chapter, «The Mother Africa Trope», reads femininity as a reductive metaphor of Africa as the mother figure or the whore.

In contrast, women writers strive for different representations of African female experience. The title of the section «Room for Women» makes a clear reference to Virginia Woolf, who stands out as a milestone in feminist criticism. The project of Stratton, then, consists in rewriting postcolonial criticism from a feminist perspective and feminist criticism from a postcolonial one. Her assessments of women novelists must be seen within the classical feminist framework

of «gynocritics». Stratton looks at characters and situations to support her main argument: that womanhood is portrayed in Ogot, Nwapa, Emecheta and Ba's novels as an experience which needs to find its place within African society. Equally, femaleness is allowed subjectivity in a way that rewrites male narrative. Yet, in the same way that intertextuality is established as a feature between male and female authors, so it is between women writers themselves. Stratton believes that Nwapa and Emecheta establish a dialogue through their works; Nwapa's *Efuru* is an intertext for *The Joys of Motherhood* and Emecheta's novel likewise anticipates Nwapa's *One is Enough*.

Part III of the book, «Men Write Back», echoes the classical postcolonial study by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, and proves the possibility of an ongoing dialogue within the development of African literature. According to Stratton, Achebe and Ngugi have listened to their female travel partners and modified their views on female representations and such a major change involves the recognition of gender as an issue which concerns African identity: «For by writing back to women writers from their position as canonical authors, they transform the status of gender from that of a covert category to that of an officially recognized and important item on the agenda of African men's literature» (p. 170).

Stratton recontextualizes African literature to include feminist concerns. From a theoretical point of view, however, her reading strategies apply as a criterion to value the issue of realism. Her analysis of images of women in novels written by male authors identifies clearly the issue of representation as a cultural construction that participates of other cultural discourses. Nevertheless, when she turns to the fiction written by women, femaleness ceases to be representational and becomes «realistic» (p. 99).

In this way, her own critical perspective remains undiscriminating of the social and cultural forces at work in women's texts. Her eagerness to revalue women's literature obscures the fact that gender

can certainly be a conflictive arena for women and a place for negotiating identities.

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Cairns CRAIG. *Out of History*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996. 296 pages.

Cairns Craig, lecturer in English literature at the University of Edinburgh, has been general editor of the Aberdeen University Press *The History of Scottish Literature* (1987-8) and editor of its fourth volume on twentieth-century literature. He is also well-known as one of the leading contributors to the journal *Cencras*: his contributions to its early issues were largely responsible for its success. Both publications shared the common aim of relocating Scottish literature into a contemporary context, a position which discards the restrictions imposed by purely historical scholarship and the limiting paradigm of national or cultural identity.

Out of History is a collection of seven closely connected essays, «Prologue», «The Body in the Kit Bag», «Out of History», «Absences», «George Orwell and the English Ideology», «Being Between», and «Epilogue: Posting Towards the Future», which analyse the way in which Scotland has been out of history —outside the major development of UK affairs and outside contemporary theoretical models— in order to propose how it should engage in these issues. Little opposition has been made to the argument that Scottish culture stagnated in a time warp for most of the nineteenth century, however ironical it might be that Walter Scott is widely regarded as the father figure of the historical novel. Scottish culture became parochial because it saw itself as such: provincial to the metropolitan centre, making the high road to London the solution adopted by many gifted writers from Carlyle to Bar-

rie down to the present day. Cairns Craig argues that this situation arises because Scots continually looked to English models, to the kind associated with Arnold, T.S. Eliot and Leavis, only to feel inferior: «At no time in its history could Scotland have been described as an 'organic' or a 'unified' culture: it could never have been envisaged as one 'comprehensive' mind transcending the 'prejudices of politics and fashions of taste' of a particular period therefore it could not qualify as a tradition or as a literature.» (p. 15) T.S. Eliot's blueprint for literary history and tradition exile Scotland to the periphery, which is not, it has to be pointed out, a natural process for a marginalised culture, as the case of Ireland proves without a doubt; a literary tradition based on the creation of a powerful national mythology has led to the boast that Irish authors have written the best modern literature in English. Therefore, if we want to find an analogous situation to Scotland's, we have to look to the experience of writers of the other cultures which made up the British Empire. History «in a terrifying and alienating form» (p. 48) thrust Scottish culture back into a historical continuum in 1914. This is clear from the vast number of Scottish novels and poems which deal with the First World War and its devastating effects. Perhaps the most important of these is L.G. Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932). However, the novel ends when its major character turns her back on the historical world and the devastation it has caused to her life and that of the community's, retreating to a location