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Susana Onega, ed.,
*Telling Histories:
Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature.*
Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995. 202 p.

The paradoxical, quasi-oxymoronic nature of the title of this book, *Telling Histories*, added to the chiasmic pattern of its subtitle, *Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature*, splendidly brings to the fore the no less contradictory character of the relationship between history and the literary phenomenon. This relationship is interestingly discussed and widely explored in the papers that compose this volume, which has been edited by Susana Onega and recently published by Rodopi.

Searching for the phrase that would best define the most outstanding features of a current fictional trend, Linda Hutcheon proposed the term "historiographic metafiction" in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, published in 1988. The term was initially meant to refer to a large body of well-known novels which combined the kind of intense self-reflexivity which is characteristic of metafiction, and had been inherited from modernism, with historical events, characters and settings depicted in accordance with the most traditional techniques of classic realism. Hutcheon further contended that historiographic metafiction shared with postmodernism two of its most salient features: its overtly contradictory nature and its apparent rejection of any form of totalization. In line with her reasoning, Hutcheon affirmed historiographic metafiction to be the most characteristic mode of postmodernism in literature. This assertion seems corroborated by the considerable amount of novels with overt metafictional traits and a historical background which proliferated in Britain in the late 1970s and especially in the decade of the 1980s, as well as by the increasing critical attention paid to historiographic metafiction as an outstanding literary mode.

On the other hand, it should be noticed that in the late 1970s and 1980s both historians and philosophers of history were paradoxically challenging

the legitimacy of history as a supposedly scientific source of knowledge. The apparent contradiction generated from the fact that historical novels were proliferating in Britain at a time when the validity of history as a science was being challenged from within justified the celebration of the symposium on the relationship between literature and history which was held in March 1993 at the University of Zaragoza, and accounts for the readiness with which scholars from Spain and other European countries responded to this call. The fruitful outcome of the intellectual debate generated at the symposium appears now as a volume, *Telling Histories*, which collects some of the papers presented at the symposium. The criterion for the selection of the papers is accurately exposed in the foreword to the book and rests on the conviction that a complete comprehension of historiographic metafiction as a postmodernist literary phenomenon inevitably requires the exploration of the origins of historical fiction as well as the study of the relationships between the development of this literary mode and the concept of history itself.

This is the purpose behind the introductory chapter of the book, by Susana Onega. In the first few pages of the book, Onega manages to trace the roots of historiographic metafiction by going as far back as Renaissance literature in search of the origins of the unstable relationship between literature and history, a relationship which not only lies at the core of postmodernist fiction itself but is also problematized in the critical analysis of the works proposed by the contributors to this volume. The development of modern historiography from the Enlightenment to Hegel's dialectical description of "world history" is shown to have been simultaneous with the evolution of realistic fiction and the historical novel. Later on in the chapter, Onega establishes a new parallelism between the development of historiographic metafiction and the appearance of the New Historicism as the contemporary philosophy of history. With the New Historicism, the attempt at separating literature from history which had begun in the Renaissance comes full circle, since, as Susana Onega clearly states, contemporary philosophers of history and/or historians like Jacques Ermarth, Adam V. Veaser, Paul Veyne or Hayden White, among others, emphasize the linguistic nature of both history and literature and therefore expose the inability of history to express absolute truths. Having been reduced to the category of a human construct, History, the discourse of the powerful mainstream of culture, loses its status of "grand narrative" and "monolithic truth," and in so doing it leaves ground for the emergence of equally valid, and/or equally constructed, discourses of the marginalized Other. Believing in the ability of literature to reveal those truths which cannot be grasped from traditional history, contemporary writers of

fiction experience a certain impulse, even a compulsion, to write historiographic metafictional works. The discovery that fiction can be more truth-revealing than history allows for the positive flavour in Onega's final words, since such a discovery permits contemporary writers of historiographic metafiction to strive for self-identity against the oppressive background of history and to try and fight against the anxiety of difference that had suffocated their predecessors.

Coherent with its general aim, the volume presents a first part composed of four preliminary articles which are understood as the necessary point of departure for the discussion of postmodernist literature that frames the second part of the volume. These first four preliminary articles introduce the reader, first, to the appropriation of history by literature since the appearance of Walter Scott's historical romances and, secondly, to the characteristic mechanisms at work in postmodernist texts —creation, imitation, and parody— by resorting to nineteenth-century historical fiction. The first two articles focus on three Victorian authors and their works, whereas the last two articles are dedicated to less orthodox chapters related to the nineteenth-century: the ballad history of Ireland, on the one hand, and Indian historical fiction, on the other. Andrew Sanders's contribution is an overview of the work of Victorian writers who explored the implications of Sir Walter Scott's innovatory fiction. Historical fiction in Victorian Britain was "a reflection of ideas of dialectical advance," Sanders contends. In his article, special attention is paid to George Eliot and her novel *Romola*, as a representative of Macaulay's conception of history and to Charles Dickens and his *A Tale of Two Cities*, as exemplifying Carlyle's historical ideas. Sanders interestingly explores the full implications of these two historical approaches in the final message conveyed by each of the two novels. In the second article, Dolores Herrero brilliantly analyses the often neglected fiction of the late Victorian writer, Mary A. Ward, in the light of Hegelian "world history." Her thorough analysis leads to the conclusion that Ward's fiction proves more interesting as a sociological and/or religious document of the period than for its actual literary value. The ballad history of Ireland and its patriotic significance centres the discussion in María Pilar Pulido's article, the third in this first part of the volume. Finally, Felicity Hand exposes the clearly biased representation of a historical moment, the 1857 Indian Mutiny, in two imperialist novels, Henry Kingsley's *Stretton* and Edward Money's *The Wife and Ward of a Life's Error*. Hand criticises the devastating effects that such manipulating literature had on later Anglo-Indian historical fiction.

The second part of this volume is dedicated to the "postmodernist era." The eight articles selected indisputably contribute to provide an overall vision of the workings of contemporary historical metafiction in Britain, as the ensuing quick revision intends to suggest. Luisa Juárez presents a close analysis of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as a novel which explores the frontiers between history and fiction. The concept of history is problematized in the novel through the foregrounding of all those fictional elements characteristic of historiography. In so doing, *Midnight's Children* challenges institutionalized versions of history and proposes the creation of a national conscience through the writing of fiction. Marita Nadal explores the postmodernist combination of history, parody and reflexivity in William Golding's *Rites of Passage* which, as the title of the novel suggests, serves the author to expose a world in transition poised between Neoclassicism and Romanticism. Nadal concludes that Golding's novel is an ironic inversion of conventional sea novels.

A play is under scrutiny in the third chapter of the second part of this volume. Leaving aside what would have been a more traditional but much less illuminating study of the position assigned to woman as the other of man, Chantal Cornut-Gentile demonstrates clearly and effectively how *Top Girls* dramatizes all the important feminist issues which are embodied in the oft-quoted sentence "the personal is the political." María Lozano's article is a very clever contrastive study of two quasi-simultaneous novels by two acclaimed authors, Julian Barnes and Jeanette Winterson. Lozano's gifted analysis of the novels *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* and *Sexing the Cherry* concentrates on the discourse of love each of the two novels discloses. Susana Onega's next article is also centred on a novel by Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Onega presents this novel as a somewhat idiosyncratic *Bildungsroman* in which the author redefines the concepts of history and story-telling, on the one hand, and refunctionalizes fantasy not as the source of mere escapism but as an alternative space in which lesbian subjectivity can be asserted, on the other. Ángeles de la Concha examines Margaret Drabble's extensive literary production which, as de la Concha signals, has a clear penchant for history as its common denominator. In her interesting article, de la Concha exposes the parallel development of Drabble's conception of the meaning of the historical element that pervades her works and of the evolution in the narrative form of her novels. Celestino Deleyto concentrates on Angela Carter's *Wise Children* as a novel which explores the search for origins through the exploration of sexual relationships. In so doing, the novel does away with history and patriarchy

and proposes in their place the female body and female sexuality as a space in which to locate female identity. Finally, Jesús Benito selects an Afro-American novel, *The Chaneyville Incident*, to explore how historiographic metafiction can outwin history in the forging of one's own past and in regaining one's cultural heritage especially when searching for one of the cultures which has been marginalized and systematically silenced by mainstream history.

In spite of the variety of styles and authors included in this book, or maybe because of them, *Telling Histories* is definitely a highly recommendable work. The combination of theoretical issues with the analysis of specific works from varied perspectives and angles makes the book an illuminating overview of both the origins and development of historiographic metafiction. It also offers crucial insights into the meaning and purpose of recent historiographic metafiction in Britain.

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Salman Rushdie,

The Moor's Last Sigh.

Londres: Jonathan Cape, 1995. 437 p.

El último suspiro del Moro.

Traducción de Miguel Sáenz. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1995. 493 p.

La aparición de una novela en las circunstancias que rodean a la publicación de *The Moor's Last Sigh* supone un acontecimiento literario internacional, y un éxito asegurado. La publicación casi simultánea de la traducción española de Plaza y Janés ha de explicarse como parte de un lanzamiento editorial orquestado a nivel mundial. Algo quizá necesario, por otra parte, para ofrecer a los francotiradores integristas un blanco múltiple y móvil, como ya se hizo al publicar *The Satanic Verses* un consorcio de editores.

Rushdie se ha convertido en un símbolo, y ésa no es una posición cómoda para un escritor. Su posición hace que se espere de él un alegato, un mensaje que sólo pueda enviar quien está "encumbrado" en una posición ex-