

FUCHS, BARBARA. *The Poetics of Piracy: Emulating Spain in English Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. 200 pp.

In *The Poetics of Piracy: Emulating Spain in English Literature* Barbara Fuchs focuses on the interconnectedness of early modern Spanish and English literatures. Through an extended meditation on the theme of piracy she reveals how Elizabethan and Jacobean writers (as well as several contemporary ones) occluded their literary borrowings, or, as she describes it, their looting of Spanish literary treasures.

As Fuchs explains, the debt of English writers to France and Italy has often been recognized, but the debt of English writers to Spain has largely been ignored. In her view this is due not only to the political rivalries between Spain and England in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries. It also results from an explicit elision of Spain and Spanish literature in the formation of the English literary canon and from the ways both English literature is defined and English literary studies are carried out to this day. English literary studies, Fuchs contends, has neither fully incorporated Spain into its field nor convincingly accounted for its absence. It is in part in order to address these lacunae that she has written the book.

Informing *The Poetics of Piracy* is a notion of *imitatio* “as a historically situated practice, coterminous with imperial competition and national self-definition” (4) and *translatio* “as an act of successful looting” (7). Fuchs justifies her conception of imitation and translation by showing that some early modern English texts actually imagined the rewriting of Spanish literature as a violent taking for the national good. Chapter 1, “Forcible Translation,” surveys literary appropriations during the Elizabethan period and looks at how figures such as Ben Jonson encouraged translation as an act of piracy. In commenting on Jonson’s poem for James Mabbe’s translation of Mateo Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache*, Fuchs asserts that the end product, as with many English translations, is so domesticated in English terms that it disguises its status as a Spanish import. In Chapter 2, “Knights and Merchants,” she examines Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, in which, she argues, the English writer transforms Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quijote* into a rumination on national and local mercantile practices as the essence of English identity.

In Chapter 3, “Plotting Spaniards, Spanish Plots,” Fuchs analyzes various texts, including Thomas Middleton’s “A Game at Chess,” “the most notorious anti-Spanish play of the period” (11); Middleton’s “The Lady’s Tragedy,” based on Cervantes’s “El curioso impertinente;” and John Fletcher’s “Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,” composed in the context of the proposed but failed “Spanish Match” between Charles I of England and the Infanta María of Spain. Fuchs’s discussion of “A Game at Chess” is particularly interesting in the light of current studies of race in the early modern period. In this play the characters appear as chess pieces, with the Spanish cast as the black ones and the English as the white ones. According to Fuchs, Middleton’s drama reveals “an essentialist and racialized version of Spanish difference” (65). In so doing it anticipates modern constructions of racial alterity and a racism based specifically on categories of color.

Chapters 4 and 5, “*Cardenio* Lost and Found” and “*Cardenios* for Our Time,” center on a lost play purportedly penned by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher and based on Cervantes’s tale of Cardenio in *Don Quijote*. As Fuchs puts it, for scholars of Anglo-Spanish literary relations the lost *Cardenio* “is the absent center, the purloined letter, [and] the missing link” (1) in the connection between the two foremost representatives of early modern Spanish and English literatures, Cervantes and Shakespeare. As she maintains, what is of significance in this Spanish/English connection is the extent to which English writers were actually aware of developments in Golden Age Spanish prose long before the supposedly proprietary English birth of the novel.

As Fuchs explains, recent iterations of the lost *Cardenio* have been produced by the Shakespearean scholar Stephen Greenblatt and the playwright Charles Mee, and also by Gregory Doran, a director for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Fuchs discusses their works as well as Greenblatt’s so-called *Cardenio* Project, which engaged theater companies in different parts of the world to take his and Mee’s play and rework it in forms they deemed appropriate for their respective cultures. As an example, she assesses the Spaniard Jesús Eguía Armenteros’s play, also titled “The *Cardenio* Project.” In fact, Greenblatt and Mee’s production reworks “El curioso impertinente” of *Don Quijote* rather than the tale of Cardenio, but, as Fuchs argues, it largely occludes its Cervantine roots. In contrast, Doran’s version,

which is more explicitly hispanophilic, fetishizes Spanish difference and exoticizes the play's setting.

In addition to the light Fuchs sheds on seminal texts of English literature and their contemporary reworkings, her book is also important for what it says about the nature of the modern Anglo-American disciplines of literature and how these disciplines affect the way literary history is understood. Most scholars who study Anglo-Spanish literary connections work primarily on Spanish literature, in Fuchs's words "the less esteemed and vocal of the two disciplines in our own academy" (95). Her trenchant assessment of this situation should give pause to all of us in the fields of Spanish and English literary studies: "Early modern English writers looked to Spain for inspiration, and relied heavily on Spanish originals, yet our own academy, marked by the Black Legend and sustained anti-Spanish prejudice, is unable to recognize those early debts. When English specialists encounter England's abundant use of Spain, their first question is often, 'What about the reverse?'—what did Spain take from England? The answer—that this exchange was largely one-sided, because Spain had the cultural capital England sought—rarely satisfies, as it fails to align with the entrenched relative standing of the disciplines in our own time" (95-96).

In *The Poetics of Piracy* Fuchs takes a significant step in dislodging our disciplinary biases and blindness. In so doing she begins to construct a truly transnational literary history beyond conventional national boundaries. Her book will thus be of tremendous value not only to specialists of early modern Spanish and English literatures but also to a wide range of scholars and academics.

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