

Reseñas

ANGELA DOWNING AND PHILIP LOCKE: *English Grammar. A University Course*, second edition. London, New York, Toronto: Routledge, 2006. xxii + 610 pp. ISBN: 0-415-28786-3 (Hb U.K.); 0-415-28787-1 (Pb U.K.); 978-0-415-28787-6 (Pb. U.S.A.); 978-0-415-28786-9 (Hb U.S.A.)

The second edition of Angela Downing and Philip Locke's grammar, entitled *English Grammar. A University Course* (2006), has been completely revised and updated by Angela Downing alone, for sadly, Philip Locke passed away in 2003. As Christopher Butler states in the *Foreword* to this new edition of the work, "Philip Locke would have been very proud of it", for it undoubtedly embodies a substantial improvement on the 1992 edition in many respects.

In the first and already ground-breaking edition, published under the name *A University Course in English Grammar*, the authors acknowledged influence from Hallidayan linguistics as well as from grammarians such as Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik (1985). This influence is also generously acknowledged in the new version, together with that coming from Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) as well as Huddleston & Pullum (2002). But even when the systemic basis is still found in the ideational, interpersonal and textual dimensions of the course (although Downing does not actually use the Hallidayan term *metafunctions*), most of the rest differs considerably from Halliday's *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, second edition (1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004).

Thus, this new edition can be said to be 'more Downing' than before. It embodies the reflection and research of the author over the last decade or so, and in a way it could be labelled as 'eclectic' within its field (Functionalism), for it reflects recent findings in Functional Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics – all in relation to grammar – and certain concepts from cognitive linguistics, as well as her own theoretical and empirical findings, intuitions and conclusions as a researcher and professor of the subject.

As stated in the Preface to the Second Edition, the structure of the book remains essentially the same as that of the first edition, but there has been some rearrangement of the material. For instance, Chapters 11 and 12 have been merged into one (Adjectival and Adverbial Groups), the section on negation has been

brought forward to Chapter 1, and the syntax of prepositional and phrasal verbs is made more explicit in Chapter 2. Many of the modules have been completely or partly rewritten, presenting a clearer specification of the concepts and ideas involved. These modifications are particularly notable in Chapter 3, which deals with complementation patterns of the verb.

This new edition consists of 12 chapters, each of which is divided into a given number of modules, depending on the needs of the topics covered. The twelve chapters make up a coherent whole, but at the same time each chapter is self-contained and therefore could be studied separately from the rest. The connections between chapters can be clearly observed, for there is what might be called 'a spiral approach' all throughout the book, given by the fact that the authors look at grammatical units from different angles, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic etc., depending on the point of view adopted in the chapters in question. In order to help the reader make these associations and tie up one point with others related to it, the author provides useful cross-referencing, which facilitates comprehension and can be used judiciously for learning or teaching in depth, if desired. Two new sections have been sensibly included in this edition: *Further reading* (at the end of each chapter) and *Select Bibliography* (at the end of the book). Of particular interest are the *Exercises* section at the end of each chapter and the *Answer Key* section at the end of the book, which help the readers in the process of studying and comprehending the material, and allow for independent study, thus facilitating the work for any student who might wish to follow the course in an autonomous way.

It is worth mentioning that the publishers (Routledge) seem to have spared no effort in producing a very clear, readable and well-presented edition, with a considerable improvement in the fonts, typeface and paper, with respect to the first, Prentice Hall edition. Also, the good-sized print will surely be appreciated, as it makes for easier reading. The book is aimed at two main sets of people: university instructors/tutors and students, and, undoubtedly, has the potential for succeeding in reaching both, due to the clarity of mind shown in the writing and the lucidity of the presentation, added to the pedagogical approach found throughout the 12 chapters that comprise the work. Furthermore, this grammar is extremely versatile, in that it can be used in many ways, namely:

- a) as a one year/two year-long course;
- b) as a semester course;
- c) for translation or stylistics courses;
- d) as a background course on discourse/ pragmatics;
- e) partially, by using some chapters independently or grouped, for short courses on syntax (Chapters 2 & 3), on semantics (Chapter 4), on grammar and interpersonal interaction (Chapter 5), etc;
- f) as an independent-study grammar book, for any person to follow at their own pace, by reading the material and then doing the exercises and checking their performance by using the feedback given in the *Answer Key* section.

One important new contribution is the inclusion of many and varied illustrative texts taken from different sources, in contrast with the prevailing number of literary

texts used in the First Edition. Thus, the new edition has fewer examples from literature and more up-to-date illustrations belonging to varied discourse types, such as journalistic writing (e.g. p. 93, 453), advertising (e.g. p. 274), political discourse (e.g. p.59), everyday conversation (e.g. p. 533) or scientific discourse (e.g. p. 141, 254), just to name a few. All the texts (old and new) have been carefully chosen to illustrate the desired points, and in all cases they are timely and appropriate, showing good judgement and effort in corpus gathering on the part of the authors.

With the exception of Chapter 1, which gives a bird's eye view of the whole book, each module begins with an introductory summary of the main points therein. Further useful learning aids are the charts, tables and summary diagrams, such as the *Summary of major verb complementation patterns* (pp. 114-115), the *Summary of processes, participants and circumstances* (p. 166), or the *Summary of intrinsic modals and modal meanings* (p. 393), among others.

Chapter 1 introduces the basic concepts and, as noted above, an introductory module on negation has been brought forward, under the pedagogic consideration that negation is a crucial topic in English, different from that of other languages, for it not only involves a negating element, but also an auxiliary or primary verb, and the use of non-assertive items (*any* and its compounds, *ever*, *yet*, *much*...). All these grammatical facts make negation a difficult learning-point for non-native students. Negative questions are included, and also treated later in Chapter 5 in relation to question tags and politeness strategies.

An important new contribution introduced in Chapter 1 and developed in later chapters is that of *supplementives*, i.e. non-restrictive units which are not integrated into the main clause, but which add supplementary information, and are therefore subordinate but not embedded, as shown (in italics) in the following example on p. 14:

- (1) *Built of cypress, brick and glass*, the house exhibits many of the significant contributions that Wright made to contemporary architecture.

The term *supplementive* is also used in recent prestigious works such as Biber, D; Johansson, S; Leech, G.; Conrad, S. & E. Finegan (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002), presenting the idea of supplementary, non-integrated information as a satisfactory way of analysing extremely common occurrences of non-restrictive units in present-day speech and writing, be they clauses, nouns, or adjectives. The following example (taken from the text on p. 454, Chapter 10) presents an instance (underlined) of an adjectival group as *supplementive*:

- (2) 'Hello, I'd like a table, wooden preferably, for two, in the smoking section...'

Chapter 2 deals with clause structure, giving an overview of its syntactic elements. For all syntactic functions (*Subject, Predicator, Direct Object, Indirect Object*, etc.) the authors provide both the typical and less-typical realizations, making it clear to the reader that, with the exception of the Predicator, there is no one-to-one correspondence between syntactic function and class of unit -a crucial and very basic tenet of Functional Grammar.

Chapter 3 treats the major complementation patterns and valency of the verb. Special emphasis is laid on complementation by clauses, to which the last two modules of the chapter are devoted. The syntactic category which had been called ‘Predicator Complement’ in the First Edition (borrowed from Aarts & Aarts, 1988) is no longer used, as a simpler and more satisfactory analysis is made use of. Considering that in English the variety of complementation patterns is enormous, in this new edition complementation of the verb has been evidently streamlined for ease of understanding. Here, as in many other chapters, the open-mindedness of the authors’ perspective is made manifest, when, for example, they make an important point by saying that, rather than talking about transitive or intransitive verbs, we should talk about *transitive or intransitive uses of certain verbs*, thus presenting a much wider view than the traditional one, shedding light on what actually happens in discourse. A clarifying instance of this fact is illustrated by the examples of ergative pairs (p.91):

(3) He opened the door SPOd (Subject, Predicator, Direct Object)

(4) The door opened SP (Subject, Predicator)

Chapter 4 deals with the conceptualization of patterns of experience, i.e. with the types of processes, participants and circumstances found in situation types. We learn here how language enables us to conceptualize and describe our experience, making a connection between the internal world of thoughts, feelings and perceptions, and the external world. A welcome and clarifying illustration of some of the many ways of conceptualizing an event, for example (which is related to the example above), is given on p. 136:

(5) Ed broke the glass active

(6) The glass was broken (by Ed) *be*-passive

(7) The glass got broken *get*-passive

(8) The glass was already broken copular (state)

(9) The glass broke (anti-causative)

(10) Glass breaks easily (pseudo-intransitive)

Chapter 5 is devoted to the connection between speech acts and grammar. In accordance with the overall approach of the book, the authors present the readers with many pragmatic concepts, as well as others coming from discourse-analytic approaches. Such is the case, for instance, in Module 26, in which attention is paid to grammatical phenomena of spoken English. Two noteworthy examples of the non-prescriptive character of this grammar, which permeates all throughout the course, are the treatment of question tags (Module 23) and the inclusion of the (for some people) socially stigmatized form *innit* as one of the possibilities for interaction (cf. the last chapter of Biber et al’s grammar, called ‘The grammar of conversation’).

Chapter 6 deals with thematic and information structures, a topic that has been widely studied and researched by Angela Downing, as her many publications on the subject give proof of (2004, 2002, 2001, 1999, 1997, 1995, 1996, 1991, 1990, among others). Once again, the authors go far beyond what is prototypical or what is strictly syntactic, to delve into interesting considerations affecting the final message, such as the discourse motivations that involve the choice of passive (p. 253) or the new role as a kind of introductory particle that existential *there* has acquired in discourse (p. 257).

In Chapter 7 the different possibilities of clause combination in English are explained and analyzed. The terms *paratactic* and *hypotactic* (used in the First Edition of the book for naming the two basic relationships between clauses) are replaced by the more transparent terms *coordination* and *subordination*. The authors give an exhaustive taxonomy of the different ways of elaborating, extending and enhancing the message, which may seem too detailed and complex for the students to memorize, but which also seems inevitable, considering the high level of scientific rigour always present in the authors' analyses. The term *pragmatic conjunction* deals with a particular type of *discourse marker* (cf. Fraser, 2006), and its treatment is of interest (pp. 294-6).

Chapter 8 is devoted to the Verbal Group. Worthy of mention is the inclusion in this edition of the concept of *Motion Event* (Langacker 1987, 1991; Slobin 1996; Talmy 2002) to give a cognitive explanation of the semantics of *phrasal verbs*. It is a well-known fact that phrasal verbs are one of the single most difficult and opaque grammar points for speakers of other languages, and the cognitive explanation comes in handy and appropriate in this chapter to dispel the aura of obscurity and complication often ascribed to this kind of verb. Also very useful (especially for Spanish-speaking students) is the comparison of *motion*, *manner* and *path* combinations in English and Spanish (p. 339), which warns the reader against non-idiomatic translation equivalents.

Chapter 9 deals with tense, aspect and modality in English. Once again, the pragmatic approach becomes noticeable in, for instance, the treatment of tense as a deictic element (p. 353). When treating aspect, some comparisons are made between British and American English (pp. 365, 370), which turns out to be a great aid for those learners who very frequently have doubts as to whether they should say, for example, "I've just eaten" or "I just ate". I believe it to be a relief for the reader to see that both options are appropriate, and that grammarians are tolerant with different varieties of English.

The last three chapters, i.e. Chapters 10, 11 and 12, are devoted to the Nominal Group, the Adjectival and Adverbial Groups and the Prepositional Phrase, respectively. In the three of them we find fine and conscientious analyses of the topics covered, such as indefinite, definite and generic reference (pp. 418-422) or adjectival complementation (Module 53), to name but two. One salient feature of Downing & Locke's analyses is the fact that, when there is doubt as to the identification of a given constituent, they always provide the readers with useful tests wherever possible, as is the case on pp. 478-9, where, in order to distinguish the *-ing* adjectives from participial modifiers, they suggest that we test them by using grading or intensifying modifiers.

As a final comment within the description of the twelve chapters of the book, I would like to point out another difference the reader will notice between the first and second editions. I refer to the elimination of the terms *disjunct* and *conjunct* (taken from formal grammars) in favour of the more functional terms *Stance Adjuncts* and *Connective Adjuncts*, respectively (mainly found in Chapters 1 and 11).

All in all, it can be said that, among the number of books devoted to the study of English grammar, this volume stands out as a valuable source for both university teachers and students, as well as for linguists, translators, pragmatics and discourse analysts. The following are some additional strong points worth signalling:

1. The authors show open-mindedness and common sense in their rigorous analyses and explanations all throughout the book.
2. This new edition presents a wiser, much more mature and meditated version than its preceding First Edition.
3. The clear and neat presentation of the material shows a high degree of empathy, on the part of the writers, with their potential readers/students. The combination of clarity and simplicity with scientific rigour is not an easy goal to attain, but has, however, been satisfactorily achieved by Downing & Locke.
4. In comparison with other Functional Grammars (e.g. Halliday's), Downing & Locke's grammar can in all fairness be considered to be much less opaque and obscure to the eyes and mind of a university student. It certainly sheds light on many issues of grammar which have traditionally been labelled as 'frightening' by the student community, especially foreign students, lending them a generous hand in the difficult task of putting the different pieces of the English puzzle together.

In short and to conclude, I am convinced that the academic world will welcome this volume, for apart from its high scholarly value, it also has a certain inspiring content which takes the readers through many 'aha moments' that will eventually –as far as the grammar of the English language is concerned– move them away from the dark zones of confusion and incomprehension, into the realm of light, clarity and comprehension.

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ABELLO-CONTESSA, CHRISTIÁN, RUBÉN CHACÓN BELTRÁN, M. DOLORES LÓPEZ JIMÉNEZ AND M. MAR TORREBLANCA LÓPEZ, eds. (2006). *Linguistic Insights* Vol.22 Bern/Berlin/New York/Oxford/ Wien: Peter Lang.

This book continues and broadens an interest in the importance of the starting age in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and subsequent teaching, issues discussed in depth in Applied Linguistics. When SLA researchers have tried to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of why there is such a high degree of interindividual variation in the ultimate attainment of the components and skills acquired by the L2 learner, they have put it down to the existence of a set of individual factors (age, aptitude, motivation, intelligence, etc.). For the last three decades, most of the attention has been concentrated on the age factor, a distinctive element in its study being the role played by the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). It could be argued that, taken to extremes, the CPH can predict the existence of a cut-off age after which acquiring native-likeness is practically impossible. Thus, by comparison to the process of L1 acquisition, it is generally thought that if L2 acquisition begins before puberty, the process will be smooth and complete.

As the editors of the present volume (2006: 16) observe, in spite of never being able to move away from its hypothesis status, some authors seem to treat the CPH as an invariable law rather than a tendency. This interpretation is not shared by the contributors to this book, who, on the contrary, have chosen to explore other factors that interplay with age, and whose findings are much more revealing and broader in scope.

The work examined here is divided into three parts, beginning with the editors' introductory chapter, moving on to Part I on *Age, theoretical issues and pedagogical implications*; Part II, the most lengthy one, on *Age and L2 learning in school and family settings* and Part III on *Age, aptitude and child/adult L2 learning*.

In their opening chapter, the editors offer a thorough state-of-the-art analysis of the CPH, followed by a balanced, enlightening discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of this theoretical approach. Finally, they set the agenda for the chapters to follow.

Thomas Scovel's *Age, acquisition and accent* begins Part I by making his now familiar claim (first proposed in his 1988 book) that "foreign accents are pervasive, permanent, incorrigible, and epiphenomenal" (2006: 32). This paper reinforces Scovel's longstanding interest in the variables and limitations that surround successful adult second language learners. In his view (2006: 36) "sounding like a native speaker is a much more demanding and virtually impossible criterion to achieve than being judged as speaking with almost accentless proficiency". The difficulty lies in the fact that "pronunciation is the only linguistic skill that is neuromuscular" (2006: 34) and, consequently, the younger you start learning a foreign language, the easier it will be to attain native-like exactness. However, Scovel warns us that age is not the only factor that affects the whole learning process and in isolation will not lead to success.

In the third chapter (*A critique of recent arguments against the critical period hypothesis*), Robert DeKeyser makes a strong defence of the CPH, showing a highly critical spirit towards those voices that in the professional literature question its vali-

dity. DeKeyser feels the need to avoid controversy because more than enough evidence is available to support the CPH and, above all, because the counterevidence is limited and often flawed.

In one of the most interesting chapters (*Critical period or language learning difficulties: are there two types of adult foreign language learners?*), Paul Michael Chandler analyses the difficulties encountered by non-traditional L2 learners (age 25 and older). Relating these difficulties to a variable of decline in L2 learning ability, he proposes revising the CPH, suggesting that there are a series of critical or sensitive periods that may vary according to the individual's foreign language aptitude, experiences and other general learning processes.

In another fascinating chapter (*The BAF project: research on the effects of age on foreign language acquisition*), Carmen Muñoz discusses the early findings of this study. Although more definite results are to come as the longitudinal project continues, it seems that the learning rate of younger learners is slower in those skills that are more cognitively demanding (writing fluency and phonetic discrimination), than in those that are less demanding (listening comprehension and phonetic imitation). Yet the author forecasts that in the long term, when early starters and late starters do not differ in cognitive maturity, the late starters' advantage will disappear. She makes the point that the influence of age, learners' cognitive development and the quantity and the quality of exposure to the L2 should not continue to be underestimated in non-academic circles.

Christián Abello Contesse offers a careful examination of peer-peer interaction in a school context. The merit of this chapter (*Does interaction help or hinder oral L2 development in early English immersion?*) is to suggest a broad emotional perspective which combines social, affective and neurobiological factors in order to further Tarone & Swain's (1995) explanation for immersion students' reluctance to use the L2 with each other. His findings warn against some common practices in teaching methodology: contrary to extended belief, L2 learning is most enhanced through the whole class or through teacher-directed grouping, which leads him to conclude that group work should only be introduced occasionally and in a structured and carefully monitored way.

Even though Gallardo del Puerto & García Lecumberri admit that some parts of their findings go against their experience and intuition, and hence recognise the need for further research, their chapter on *Age effects on single phoneme perception for learners of English as a foreign language* is one of the most stimulating. The authors present the results of an empirical research project which assesses the influence of onset age on non-natives' perception of English vowel and consonant sound. Contrary to most studies in naturalistic learning contexts, their data reveal that subjects' age in sound discrimination favour older learners. They have also found that the CPH is not sustainable either as far as formal learning in a foreign language context is concerned.

Part II of the book concludes with two chapters, chapter eight on *Family multilingualism and multilingual education*, and chapter nine on *Promoting the productive use of the weak language in family bilingualism*, by Carmen Pérez Vidal and by Gloria Ruiz González, respectively. Both chapters offer interesting observations about the difficulties faced by children and parents alike when a second language is

spoken within the family context. The second chapter, however, based on the author's personal experience, is too dependent on mere description.

The last part of the book opens up with James Milton & Thomai Alexiou's chapter on *Language aptitude development in young learners*. Arising from one of the authors' continuing interest in the topic, this joint paper addresses an important aspect of language learning that, nevertheless, has received "intermittent attention from academics" (2006: 177): aptitude. The argument is that language aptitude in young learners can not only be determined but also stimulated through such cognitive skills as analytic ability, semantic integration tasks, memory ability and sound skills.

In the closing chapter, by Pedro Guijarro Fuentes and Kimberly Geeslin on *Interpretation of Spanish copula choice by Portuguese near-native speakers*, the authors conclude that input received in a naturalistic setting by learners over the age of 12 may not be sufficient for the native-like acquisition of subtle, semantic contrasts, making some additional formal instruction necessary.

This collection of papers makes a valuable contribution to current literature for several reasons: firstly, because it gives a broad, present-day view of how age interacts with other factors in SLA. Secondly, because almost all the contributors apply the consequences of their results to teaching methodology, and in so doing justify the title of the book. Lastly, because in nearly all the papers authors point the way to developing further research in the field. Therefore, we can cherish the hope that, in a not-too-distant future, these academic findings may have a direct bearing on teaching methodology and language education policy.

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VILLACAÑAS, Beatriz (2007). *Literatura irlandesa*. Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 219 pp. Madrid: ISBN 978-84-975647-4-8.

El pasado mes de mayo, la editorial Síntesis lanzó, con el número cincuenta y cuatro de su colección *Historia de la literatura universal: movimientos y épocas*, el

volumen *Literatura irlandesa* de Beatriz Villacañas. La colección comprende una serie de manuales orientados a exponer, describir, comentar y valorar las claves concretas que han ido conformando el panorama de la literatura universal. El texto que se presenta aún muchas de las virtudes que caracterizan al resto de volúmenes de la colección, entre ellas, un indudable interés divulgativo. Ahora bien, debido al particular enfoque que emplea la autora, *Literatura irlandesa* logra superar las limitaciones del género del manual universitario para convertirse en una suerte de perspicaz ensayo sobre la incardinación entre literatura e historia, texto e identidad. En efecto, *Literatura irlandesa* no es una historia literaria al uso. Aun cuando la autora recurre al criterio histórico para organizar buena parte del material, la obra traza, en última instancia, un minucioso panorama de la identidad literaria irlandesa en todos sus matices, tanto de orden estilístico como ideológico.

Literatura irlandesa lo forman diez capítulos (más una “Introducción”) coronados por un glosario de palabras clave (característico de la colección), una extensa “Cronología” del período estudiado y una bibliografía en la que abundan, sobre todo, los títulos publicados en estas dos últimas décadas. La introducción del texto sirve a la autora para plantear el escollo más importante con que la crítica académica suele encontrarse a la hora de tratar un tema tan amplio como éste. Debido a su pasado colonial y su condición de contexto cultural plurilingüe, la identidad irlandesa es proteica y multiforme, lo cual supone una dificultad esencial para su posible aprehensión por parte del discurso crítico. Para comprender la voz irlandesa no sólo se debe “tener en cuenta la influencia que la lengua, la literatura y la cultura de la Irlanda celta han venido ejerciendo” (9), también hay que comprender que, pese al conflicto subyacente a las dos voces culturales predominantes en Irlanda (angloirlandeses protestantes e irlandeses gaélicos católicos), o quizá por ello, “la literatura irlandesa en inglés la han escrito y consolidado conjuntamente irlandeses no sólo social y religiosamente diferentes, sino, dadas las circunstancias históricas, opuestos entre sí” (10). Como bien recuerda la autora en diversas ocasiones (10, 14, 66, 199-200), la literatura irlandesa es, en efecto, una literatura del conflicto, es decir, un discurso que nace por causa de un continuo proceso de síntesis entre contrarios pero que, a su vez, ha derivado en una peculiar asimilación de la *diferencia*. A partir de esta premisa, la autora se afana en componer y desarrollar un modelo crítico con el que poder articular los distintos componentes del conflicto: el folklore y las raíces celtas en oposición al sustrato normando, la cristiandad en lucha con ese mismo sustrato (un antagonismo clave para comprender la configuración del espacio social en la Irlanda medieval); el poder de la clase dirigente angloirlandesa (la “pequeña colonia protestante de origen inglés, (*The Protestant Ascendancy*)”, 16-17) y su lucha (una lucha de clases, en esencia) contra “la mayoría católica irlandesa” (16) como resultado del período colonial, etc.

El enfoque que emplea la autora para tratar la identidad irlandesa tiene un carácter híbrido que se mueve entre el relato histórico y el análisis cultural. Se logra así una dialéctica textual que encarna con precisión el contrapunto entre historia y texto de que se compone el discurso identitario irlandés. La identidad no es ni historia ni literatura, sino ambas cosas a la vez, algo que la autora comprende muy bien al configurar el plan general del texto:

Lo novedoso del planteamiento del presente estudio, estimamos, consiste en haber conseguido un método que combina análisis minucioso y exposición amplia. Un método que combina el estudio, sin rupturas temáticas o formales, de texto e historia. [...] Por último, [...] el libro se cierra con un capítulo que aglutina el planteamiento general y que viene, creemos, a redondear un estudio que comienza con un primer capítulo de claves históricas (10).

Los capítulos del primero al tercero se corresponden con el contenido de una historia literaria al uso (lo cual, quede claro, no tiene por qué ser un demérito, ni siquiera en los tiempos que corren). El capítulo primero intenta asentar las claves históricas que puedan explicar la naturaleza de los diversos conflictos (sociales, religiosos y culturales) que generan el discurso literario irlandés. Por su parte, los capítulos segundo y tercero (que tratan las manifestaciones literarias de los siglos XVII, XVIII y XIX) se ocupan del período de formación de la identidad irlandesa como voz particular en proceso de escisión del discurso de la metrópoli. En estos capítulos, la autora aborda el problema de distinguir a los autores *ingleses* nacidos en Irlanda (Congreve, Sheridan, Sterne, Goldsmith) de aquellos que comienzan a asumir la voz autóctona irlandesa, una voz formada, en buena parte, por “la perspectiva del ‘otro’, (...) la del nativo irlandés, la del que trabaja para la clase protestante terrateniente” (29). En este sentido, la autora demuestra una perspicacia inusitada para detectar, exponer y evaluar aquellos elementos (temática, estilo, orientación ideológica) que convierten a escritores como Thomas Moore, Maria Edgeworth o William Carleton en autores de *literatura irlandesa*.

Igual talante historicista demuestran los capítulos quinto, séptimo y octavo. En ellos se analiza, de una parte, el período conocido como “Renacimiento literario irlandés” (con el cual culmina el largo proceso de emancipación literaria irlandesa), y, de otra, la producción literaria escrita en Irlanda durante el siglo XX. El enfoque histórico tiene aquí una doble vertiente. Lo explico tomando como referencia el capítulo quinto. Por una parte, la autora organiza el material siguiendo una línea cronológica bien definida, la cual, a su vez, sirve para arrojar luz sobre las relaciones de influencia (estética, ética, política y, a veces incluso, afectiva) que mantuvieron las figuras emblemáticas del “renacimiento irlandés” (se trata aquí de William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, John Millington Synge, Lord Dunsany, AE y Sean O’Casey). Por otra, la autora no escatima comentarios sobre el papel crucial que desempeñaron determinados acontecimientos históricos en la evolución, tanto estilística como ideológica, de los citados autores. Así, por ejemplo, la inexorable deriva nacionalista de principios de siglo XX, que culmina con el levantamiento de Pascua de 1916, explica el interés que mostraron autores como Synge, Lady Gregory o incluso Yeats hacia los mitos celtas en tanto emblemas de la Irlanda autóctona, una Irlanda ajena por completo a la herencia de la clase dirigente anglosajona, esto es, a la clase de la cual provenían, paradójicamente, muchos de aquellos autores. Ahora bien, el análisis de tan curioso fenómeno identitario quedaría incompleto si no se ponderara el peso específico que esa “reivindicación de las raíces históricas y mitológicas” (65) de Irlanda tuvo en el devenir histórico de la nación. La autora no elude la

responsabilidad que adquirió con los lectores en la introducción y explica cómo el desarrollo de una nueva estética purista de lo irlandés tiene efectos inmediatos sobre la identidad histórica y social del país. Esos efectos, además, se presentan en forma de nuevos conflictos:

No obstante, dado el carácter de la “Sociedad Literaria”, cuyos miembros eran angloirlandeses y protestantes en su mayoría y dado que reivindicaban un pasado irlandés heroico en el que unían de forma idealizante al aristócrata y al campesino dejando fuera a los católicos independentistas de clase media, el conflicto y la controversia acompañó a la andadura del mítico [*Abbey Theatre*]. Para Yeats, como para Synge, entre otros, los independentistas católicos irlandeses, los descendientes de pequeños granjeros o arrendatarios agrícolas que constituían las nuevas clases medias urbanas, eran todo lo contrario al modelo de lo irlandés en el que ellos creían, pues, desde su perspectiva de angloirlandeses cultos, el independentismo católico estaba marcado por la vulgaridad y la estrechez de miras. Sin duda, podemos ahora también hablar de dos Irlandas (66).

Hasta aquí, la destreza y el oficio de la autora (combinados con una facilidad natural para explicar las cosas de forma clara, virtud que olvidamos los autores académicos en no pocas ocasiones) son suficientes para proveer al lector de una idea bastante solvente de la identidad literaria irlandesa. Una idea, claro, que se expresa en los términos previstos por la “Introducción”. En efecto, Los capítulos que se han descrito logran aunar en un único discurso crítico (el discurso crítico de la identidad irlandesa) tanto la praxis literaria como el devenir histórico de la nación. Ahora bien, la simple incardinación de ambas facetas culturales en un mismo discurso crítico resulta acaso insuficiente para que la autora pueda afinar el tono de la voz literaria irlandesa en términos absolutos, es decir, como corresponde a una voz individual y característica en el conjunto del canon occidental. ¿Cómo se relaciona la literatura irlandesa, su identidad concreta, con el corpus literario inglés en general? ¿Por qué tiene entidad propia? ¿Qué valor debe darse a esa entidad en el canon literario occidental? Estas preguntas son sólo una muestra de las muchas cuestiones que suscitaría un enfoque exclusivamente historicista (incluso un enfoque tan seguro y homogéneo como el de este caso). Pero la autora consigue sortear esos últimos escollos al alterar su plan de actuación historicista en cuatro capítulos concretos. Los capítulos cuarto y sexto contienen tres estudios monográficos sobre otras tantas figuras emblemáticas de la literatura irlandesa en particular, y anglófona en general: Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw (ambos se estudian en el capítulo cuatro) y James Joyce (cuya figura se trata en el capítulo seis). En estos capítulos se da cuenta detallada de la vida y obra de los tres autores y, en especial, de los valores (formales y estilísticos, temáticos e ideológicos), por los cuales se han ganado un puesto de prestigio en el canon occidental. Tampoco se olvidan muchos de los rasgos más propiamente “irlandeses” que engalanan las obras de todos ellos. Y, en fin, se pone en perspectiva las particulares relaciones que los tres autores mantuvieron con la nación irlandesa. Estos capítulos fuerzan, en buena medida, la perspectiva histórica del libro, pero sirven para calibrar tanto la madurez de la voz irlandesa como su posición relativa en el canon occidental. Es verdad que la universalidad de las tres figuras justifica, por sí sola, el estudio de éstas en capítulos aparte, pero

tampoco habría sorprendido a nadie si los tres autores hubieran sido reubicados en otras secciones del libro o incluso, por idéntica razón, si hubieran salido por completo del volumen. Es legítimo pensar, pues, que la decisión de la autora forma parte del plan general que rige el texto.

Precisamente, el penúltimo capítulo del libro es bastante revelador de ese plan. Está dedicado a “La diáspora”. En principio, su orden interno obedece a criterios geográficos pero sin olvidar del todo la perspectiva histórica. En él se describe la disrupción geográfica de la voz irlandesa por causa, claro, de los continuos movimientos migratorios allende la isla. La autora trata aquí las cualidades proteicas de la identidad irlandesa, además de su permeabilidad en otros contextos literarios como puedan ser el español, el australiano y, sobre todo, el británico y el americano (así en general, pues la atención de la autora le impide olvidarse de la voz irlandesa en el contexto hispanoamericano). La propia idiosincrasia de la nación irlandesa (la emigración es un fenómeno crucial para entender su identidad) marca de algún modo la pauta con que debe enfocarse el fenómeno de la diáspora en el contexto irlandés. No obstante, la autora logra interpretar de forma prístina esa idiosincrasia y se vale de ella para completar con éxito el objetivo que planteó en la “Introducción”. El tratamiento de la diáspora podría haberse hecho de forma gradual, capítulo a capítulo, siguiendo el criterio histórico del inicio. Pero no es así. Antes al contrario, la autora, con muy buen criterio, decide condensar ese tratamiento en un solo capítulo con el fin de evaluar, en otros contextos culturales, la presencia invisible de esa identidad irlandesa (la identidad del conflicto, pero también la identidad de la *diferencia*) que ya ha quedado fijada en los capítulos anteriores. La autora reivindica así la condición irlandesa de la voz de la diáspora y descubre con ello ricos matices de significado en textos, autores y movimientos que van de Scott Fitzgerald y Eugene O’Neill a Lafcadio Hearn, pasando por la narración carcelaria australiana o el legado hispano-irlandés de Timothy O’Scanlan y Leopoldo O’Donnell.

El último capítulo contiene una breve y deliciosa antología de poesía que sirve para ilustrar las razones del modelo crítico que ha elegido la autora:

La concepción de este último capítulo hace posible mostrar, de manera totalmente directa, que incluso la poesía, de entre todos los géneros literarios, y en contra de lo que, en un principio, pudiera pensarse, nos ayuda de la manera más hermosa, a comprender la historia, y que ésta, a su vez, desde su casi inabarcable amplitud, puede, paradójicamente, introducirnos en la escondida raíz de la palabra poética (10).

Las glosas a los poemas incluidos en el capítulo diez ilustran de manera elocuente el análisis con que la autora se aproxima a la identidad literaria irlandesa. El libro se vale del enfoque historicista para desvelar el proceso de formación y consolidación de una tradición dinámica en constante evolución, pero que mantiene caracteres comunes a sus distintas manifestaciones. El análisis histórico está orientado a desvelar esos caracteres identitarios propios que, de algún modo, definen a la *Literatura irlandesa* (no a la *historia de la literatura irlandesa*, ese no es el título). Pero la literatura irlandesa, en tanto que discurso fundamental de la identidad, también puede revelar las claves internas la historia. A ese respecto, todo el plan gene-

ral del libro parece estar inspirado en uno de los poemas antologados en el capítulo diez. No me resisto a concluir esta reseña sin citar el comentario que la autora hace de “Digging” de Seamus Heaney:

Y la tierra, siempre la tierra en la poesía de Heaney. La tierra como país y como elemento físico en el que viven y trabajan los suyos. La tierra es, en Heaney, realidad y metáfora a un tiempo. De ahí el paralelismo perfecto de la pala y la pluma. La pala en el acto de cavar, se hunde para extraer de ella el bien necesario (en este caso, la turba). La pluma se hunde también en la tierra de Irlanda, en la memoria y en el presente del poeta para extraer de ellas igualmente el bien necesario (199).

En conclusión, creo que debe saludarse la aparición de este volumen sobre *Literatura irlandesa*, pues se trata de un texto serio y consistente que aúna el enfoque divulgativo con el rigor propio de la reflexión académica. En efecto, la autora derrocha oficio didáctico mientras logra articular un curioso ejemplo de cómo explotar las posibilidades académicas del género de la historia literaria (un género que goza de poco predicamento en la actualidad). El libro en su conjunto alberga cualidades suficientes para convertirse en un claro referente dentro del corpus académico sobre la literatura irlandesa en España. No en vano, es el primero que se publica sobre la materia.

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