

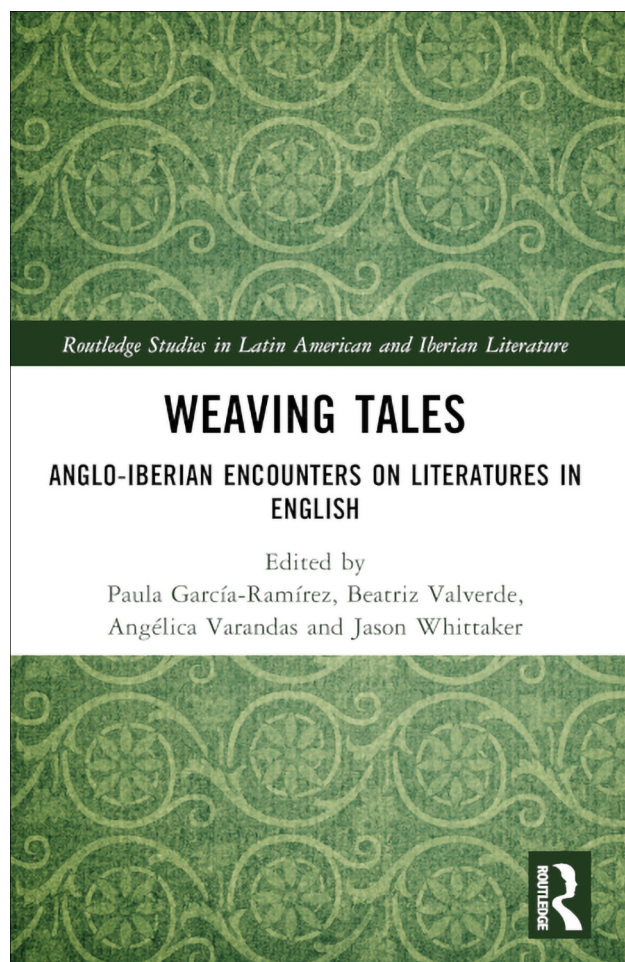
Paula García-Ramírez, Beatriz Valverde, Angélica Varandas,
and Jason Whittaker, editors, *Weaving Tales: Anglo-Iberian Encounters
on Literatures in English*

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Paula García-Ramírez, Beatriz Valverde, Angélica Varandas, and Jason Whittaker, editors. *Weaving Tales: Anglo-Iberian Encounters on Literatures in English*. Routledge, 2024. xxi + 237 pp. £160.00/\$210.00, hardcover; £38.99/\$52.99, paperback; £38.99/\$52.99, e-book.

DRAWING on the motif of Arachne's tapestry in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Weaving Tales* is a thought-provoking and well-curated volume that weaves together multiple interpretative strands to offer complex and unbiased perspectives on a variety of works and authors—William Blake among them—and, in doing so, interrogates fixed assumptions and establishes previously untraced connections between different texts. The subtitle, *Anglo-Iberian Encounters on Literatures in English*, bears witness to the remarkable international character of the book, as it gathers the work of editors and contributors based at various British, Spanish, and Portuguese universities. It is the result of a long and fruitful Anglo-Iberian collaboration initiated in the context of the project "English Literature the World: From Manuscript to Digital/New Pathways" (2018), developed at the University of Lisbon's Centre for English Studies (Portugal), with the collaboration of the University of Jaén (Spain) and the University of Lincoln (United Kingdom).

The volume is not divided into sections; instead, its fifteen chapters follow a coherent order in which works that rewrite texts and trace new connections are followed by those dealing with identity and gender. The first group starts off with two chapters on Blake. In the first, Alcinda Pinheiro de Sousa and Jason Whittaker revisit traditional readings of Urizen and propose new ones from a transhistorical perspective, while in the second, M. Cecilia Mar-



chetto Santorun discusses Blake's impact on British and Spanish popular culture and literature, thus exploring his presence beyond national borders. Thereafter, a variety of authors and works are explored: Marta Villalba-Lázaro

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deals with Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* as a rereading of Euripides's *Medea*; Maria José Pires delves into the influence of Shakespeare in six novels by Angela Carter; Jesús M. Nieto García traces the similarities in terms of theme, structure, and style in P. D. James's *The Black Tower* and Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*; Nuno Ribeiro shows the parallels between John Keats and Fernando Pessoa in the genesis of Pessoa's poetics; and Angélica Varandas discusses Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* as the first attempt to create a sense of Englishness.

The second group, on identity and gender, takes up the rest of the volume. The issues of fragmentation and construction of female identity are addressed by Pilar Sánchez Calle, on Alice Munro; Ritu Mohan, on Mahasweta Devi's novel *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* and its film adaptation; and Yolanda Caballero-Aceituno, on eighteenth-century women's writing and the discursive construction of gender. The relationship between feminism and violence is tackled in Milagros López-Peláez Casellas's chapter, where she analyzes the use of violence in Louisa Honore Medina Hamblin's short fiction as a protofeminist tool in the hands of wronged women; Almudena Machado-Jiménez focuses on eating disorders as a form of violence in contemporary feminist dystopias. Some chapters in this group incorporate new technologies, social networks, and digital literature and culture into their discussions. Mairi Power analyzes two works by Jennifer Egan to show her experimentation with new technologies and digital materials as an important contribution to the current literary landscape. Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen comments on Joanna Kavenna's representation of the impact of the Internet and artificial intelligence in the transformation of reality in her dystopic novel *Zed*. Finally, Alejandro Nadal-Ruiz delves into Nikita Gill's Instapoetry, in which she rewrites grand narratives from a transnational and feminist perspective, contributing to the global debate on feminist consciousness.

Within the context of *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, special attention must be paid to the first two chapters in the volume, the aforementioned "Urizen Now: Reading Anew William Blake's Response to His Times," by Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker, and "William Blake in Spanish Popular Culture and Literature," by Marchetto Santorun. They approach the many complexities of Blake's figure and work from different but complementary angles, ultimately demonstrating the impossibility of a single set of interpretations across time and national borders.

Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker's chapter opens with a wide-ranging but concise overview of Blakean scholarship since the 1950s that traces its evolution, starting from the

first interpretations of Blake that aimed to render a precise picture of his system—which one must create to avoid being "enslav'd by another Mans." In their account, they omit the first attempts to decode Blake's symbolic system by Edwin J. Ellis and William B. Yeats in *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical* (1893) to focus on the interpretations of the Four Zoas, particularly Los and Urizen, at the core of the canonical works by Erdman (*Prophet against Empire*, 1954), Raine (*Blake and Tradition*, 1968), Mitchell (*Blake's Composite Art*, 1978), and Damrosch (*Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth*, 1980). Next, they address the new perspectives in Blakean studies that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s—works such as Paley (*The Apocalyptic Sublime*, 1986) and Viscomi (*Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 1993)—that paid attention to Blake's printing methods in his illuminated books. They also pinpoint the greater accessibility of the illuminated books afforded by the Blake Trust series, edited by Bindman. These publications allowed readers to fully appreciate Blake's work as he conceived it—that is, as a complete integration of image and text in the same piece of art. The overview concludes with a necessary reference to *The William Blake Archive* (1996–), instrumental in this scholarly turn, as it permits readers to approach the illuminated books as they were originally created.

Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker invite us "to engage in that common ground of the prolific" (13) in interpreting Blake. Blake himself, they argue, expected his readers to actively construct responses to his texts, not as an act of reinterpretation but rather one of co-creation. The discussion turns to the intrinsic transhistoricity of his works. While they can be read as a response to his times, new readings may be produced in the context of contemporary events—reference is made to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Moreover, Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker draw attention to the fact that Blake's peculiar type of art, in which text and image converge, and the different virtual Blakes created during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, resulting from the reproduction of the illuminated books, complicate his reception. A case in point: the authors explore the different, even opposed, politically charged interpretations of "And did those feet" from the Preface to *Milton a Poem*, today known as "Jerusalem." They argue that although the words were meant to be an open rejection of violence in their original context, only a century later, in 1916, the musical version of Sir Hubert Parry was used as a propaganda tool to reinforce the necessity of continuing war against Germany. Only two years later, Parry made it a hymn in support of women's right to vote. All this was only possible, they claim, because in the nineteenth century "And did those feet" was decontextualized, republished without the Preface, "re-

moved from ... the illuminated image act" (16), and presented as a separate unit in anthologies.

In her chapter, Marchetto Santorun also tackles the issue of the many biased and politically charged interpretations of Blake and his works in English popular culture. She notes and gives examples of how at different moments Blake was seen as a solitary mystic; a poet of the devil's party; a conservative with patriotic, traditionalist, and monarchist values; and a subversive, anticolonialist, and seditionist. Following the thread initiated in Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker's chapter, Marchetto Santorun draws attention to the many and even opposed readings of "And did those feet." She resumes the account at the point where Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker left off—Parry's adaptation—and cites research by Whittaker on the hymn's appearance since the 1980s: its presence in *Chariots of Fire*, expressing nationalist values; the parodies by musical artists like Test Dept. and The Fall; its use as an English sporting symbol in the 1990s; the association with the far right as it was co-opted as a rousing tune by the British National Party in the 2000s; and, finally, its role in the representation of Blakean apotheosis, the idea of nation, and visionary art in Alan Moore's novel *Jerusalem* in 2016.

The second part of her chapter is devoted to Spain. Drawing on work by Flores, she first traces an overview of the reception of Blake by important literary figures such as José Joaquín de Mora, Pablo Neruda, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Luis Cernuda, and Leopoldo María Panero, as well as by the rock band Héroes del Silencio. However, Marchetto Santorun's greatest contribution to the study of Blake's reception in Spain is in the connections she establishes with certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gali-

cian writers and artists, who turned to the "nationalist" Blake to support their own nationalist ideals. She discusses Rosalía de Castro, who shared Blake's simplicity of language, folk musicality, and nature imagery. Plácido Castro, a literary critic and translator, claimed in his essays that Blake was an exponent of a "Celtic spirit." Castro had a clear preference for *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and published Galician translations of "Ah! Sun-Flower," "Infant Joy," and "The Lamb" in the newspaper *El Faro de Vigo*. Marchetto Santorun establishes further connections between Castro, Luís Seoane, and Álvaro Cunqueiro, all of whom showed an interest in Blake and notably contributed to his reception in Galicia. Seoane illustrated Neruda's translations of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and "The Mental Traveller" (1947), and created "a construct of a Celtic Blake" (27), as Marchetto Santorun shows through a detailed analysis of his letters. Cunqueiro also translated some of Blake's poems into Galician—"I laid me down upon a bank," "Are not the joys of morning sweeter," and "Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau"—and commented on Blake's aesthetics. All of them, she concludes, contributed to create "the ambiguously patriotic but transcultural Bardic Blake" (28) in Galicia.

Grounded in a solid knowledge of Blake's works and Blakean scholarship, both chapters prove invaluable in showing that he resists a fixed and unique interpretation. They both convincingly open new paths in Blakean studies, unconstrained by either historical or national boundaries, which well deserve further exploration. I join Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker in their conviction that "Blake's works and Blake studies are in an ideal position to continue inviting all types of readers to that common ground of the prolific" (10).