

K. Alfons Knauth, Ping-hui Liao (Eds.)

# Migrancy and Multilingualism in World Literature



This volume, the third in a series of four on the general issue of Multilingualism in World Literature, is focused upon the relationship between Migrancy and Multilingualism, including its aquatic, terrestrial and globalizing imagery and ideology. The cover picture *Wandering Tongues*, an iconic translation of the book's title, evokes one of the paradigmatic figures of migrancy and multilingualism: the migrations of the early Mexican peoples and their somatic multi-lingualism as represented in their glyphic scripts and iconography. The volume comprises studies on the literary, linguistic and graphic representation of various kinds of migrancy in significant works of African, American, Asian and European literature, as well as a study on the literary archetype of human errancy, the Homeric *Odyssey*, mapped along its periplus and metamorphosis in world literature.

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## Migrancy and Multilingualism in World Literature

# poethik polyglott

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## Going Native: Multilingual Migrancy in Some Contemporary Bolivian Literature

Alfredo Grieco y Bavio

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Paraguay

At first glance, it may seem incongruous or frivolous to cast Isabelle Combès or Alison Spedding as some of Bolivia's best writers, since one is French and a most distinguished anthropologist and historian and the other British and a most distinguished ethnographer and economist. From the early eighties, however, they have been providing a growing readership with quirky, demanding narratives about peoples and people living at the heart of the heart of Western and Oriental Bolivia. Since 2009, their home is a Plurinational State that in the new Constitution recognizes more than 30 Amerindian Nations. The Government of Evo Morales Ayma has made mandatory the use of Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní along with Spanish in the Administration and in the Diplomatic Service.

### East is East and West is West: Orientalism in the Plurinational State of Bolivia

*Las tierras bajas de Bolivia: Miradas históricas y antropológicas* (2012) is one of Isabelle Combès' latest books, a compilation she edited with fellow anthropologist Diego Villar – who is Argentine born and a garrulous storyteller on his own right.

Even if this 444-pages volume was not devised for the common reader, *Las tierras bajas* works as an astutely adept general introduction to the Bolivian lowlands. Against any prevailing stereotype, only a tiny part of

Bolivia dwells on the *hauts-plateaux*: all the rest is valley, plain or tropical rainforest.

When in town in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Mme Combès favors a downtown café because of dark, cavernous smoking areas and slow but effective internet. Born in the French Midi, she loved tropical Santa Cruz, where she married, from day one. As a born-again *cruceña*, not to say *camba*<sup>1</sup>, she disliked Andean, cold La Paz; in *colla*<sup>2</sup> landscape, she feels instantly *dépaysée*. She feared the paranoid style of Aymara society, the stage-whispering animus of the people in this dilapidated city, their fairly open conspiratorial manners, their laughter in the darkness at noon, the daily beheadings, figurative or otherwise, to which you feel a tolerated but uninvited guest. Similar glimpses of La Paz gruesome hostility may be found in the painfully accurate depiction offered by Jan Morris in his/her travelogue “La Paz” (Morris 1963) as the mountain metropolis of a land-locked State, a haze of ill-understood intentions, a blur of Indian faces and sinewy limbs, a sky so clear, so close that you confuse the galaxies with the street lamps.

Combès has the eye for the telling anecdote, the passing frisson of the right adjective. Her addiction to the (Bolivian) Orient is infectious. Her countryman Jules Michelet, unaware of American national regionalisms, but a connoisseur in all things Eastern, decried “l’Orient qui s’avance, invincible, fatal aux dieux de la lumière, par le charme du rêve, par la magie du clair-obscur” (Michelet 1864: 277). When saying *en passant*, in a Spanish sentence, that someone is a *ñembo* (*bogus*, not *mock*) scholar, or that another one, on the contrary, is *ñembotavy* (*tongue-in-cheek* ; *pince-sans-rire*), these ‘right adjectives’ in Guaraní, delightful in their *innuendo*, show that nowadays Gustave Flaubert’s *le mot juste* may also be heteroglot.

### Inner heteroglossia: Aymara speakers in a Spanish narrative

Despite its being only 164 pages long, *La bala no mata sino el destino: Una crónica de la insurrección popular de 1952 en Bolivia* (2012) is no introduction to the great Bolivian Revolution. On the contrary, this slim volume may be positively boring for those unfamiliar with the well-chosen subject matter, with XXI Century Bolivian politics and domestic policies, with the

<sup>1</sup> Cruceña = from Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Oriental Bolivia; *camba* = lower-class, popular inhabitant of Oriental Bolivia.

<sup>2</sup> Lower-class, Indian or non-white inhabitant of Western Bolivia.

psycho-geography of La Paz and Oruro, with mainstream Latin-American historiography. For those in the know, this rather elegant but difficult narrative by La Paz sociologist Mario Murillo doesn't leave the readers unscathed.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *doyenne* of Oral Historians in Bolivia, eulogized the author and his methodology in the emphatic but not self-indulgent "Preface" she composed for the book. Carlos Mesa, left-leaning rightist President of Bolivia 2003-2005 and a trained journalist and professional historian, was infuriated by this tall tale of a 'stolen Revolution', as he wrote in some emphatic but self-indulgent critical pieces.

Even if most allusions may go unnoticed, any reader will quickly grasp why Mr. Mesa was infuriated. *La bala no mata* integrates first-hand narrative of the three days in the Holy Week of 1952 that led to the victory of working-class fighters, mostly miners and factory-workers, mostly Aymara speakers of Indian ascent. As a result, a duly corrupt military regime was substituted by a Revolutionary government. It may come as a surprise to learn that this slender volume is the first oral history ever to be published about the most world-historical event in XX Century Bolivia –that Easter in April when a terrible beauty was born, as in the Easter, 1916 of the William Butler Yeats short poem.

To show why this was indeed the case is one of the quests that had driven Mr. Murillo's historical and societal research. To make a long story short, it was in the interest of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), Mr. Mesa's party, which co-opted the triumph of the *proletariat* immediately after the *coup d'État*, to keep that matter quiet.

Those who relish examining egotistical scholarly polemics will enjoy Mr. Mesa and Mr. Murillo crossing swords in the three 2012 issues of La Paz cultural and political review *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno*; those who relish *la petite histoire* should notice that Borja Mesa, son of Carlos and for a while somewhat successful soccer player, was at San Ignacio a schoolmate of Murillo's, who is himself a soccer aficionado and vocational sports journalist. President Mesa points out all the things which would have never happened if Víctor Paz Estenssoro, MNR leader in 1952, had not raised the standard of the Bolivian Revolution; and he does not realize the Jesuitical fallacy that is involved when this is inverted and all these things are counted as the work and achievement of the MNR and Dr. Paz. Mr. Mesa does sometimes give the impression of being spread-eagled between

the views that Mr. Murillo's doctrines are empty and devoid of any meaning, and that they are nevertheless very false and wicked.

The poignancy of the voices of the octogenarians who in their youth fought on the streets and the steep hills of La Paz and El Alto and in the battlegrounds of Oruro defies all exaggeration. Less expected and most welcome is the intimate relationship Mr. Murillo was able to create and develop with more than a hundred protagonists and witnesses, both male and female, he interviewed over the years: the book neither records nor overstates but transpires this unique closeness.

*Las tierras bajas* and *La bala no mata* are about forgotten lands, forgotten people. But no rehab was at work here. Lands and people come back to life without looking modern –the reader is both elated and grateful.

### Spedding: Andean Spanish, British English and Hot Aymara

As a British anthropologist working since the 1980s in Bolivia, Alison Spedding Pallet has published over three decades, from *Wachu Wachu*<sup>3</sup>: *Cultivo de coca e identidad en los Yunkas de La Paz* (1994) to *Chulumani Flor de Clavel: Transformaciones urbanas y rurales* (2013), a substantial contribution to the ethnography of Yungas, a *quechumara* word meaning *hot lands*. By travelling less than three hours from La Paz, where Dr. Spedding teaches Sociology at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA), people can cross a summit at 15,000 feet inhabited by llamas and occasional glimpses of condors, before descending from the chilling highs to the tropical Yungas region where bananas, oranges, papaya, coffee and avocados are cultivated by Aymara and Afro-Bolivian peasants. The most profitable of cash crops are coca leaves, though. Dr. Spedding, who owns some land there and cultivates coca, is both a successful gentlewoman-farmer and a popular peasant union leader, who has run to office and was once elected 'with more votes than president Evo Morales', as she used to boast.

Yungas landscape feature as a favorite setting in the fiction she publishes in Bolivia (she was a best-selling author of fantasy fiction in Great Britain before her coming to South America), which she signs under the sole surname Spedding, dropping her first name. Always dashing and lively

<sup>3</sup> Aymara: 'to every coca-leaf harvester her or his furrow', a method described in this ethnography and decried in the novel *Catre de Fierro*.

in provocative re-invention, she defines a 'half-cast' ethnic identity she herself coined as 'Anglo-yungueña,' meaning the compound of white Britishness with the *mélange adultère de tout* of Yungas people (Aymara, *ch'ixi*, Afro-Bolivian volatile and nomadic identities). Her novels draw attention to the responsibility involved in depicting areas, geographical, social, linguistic and otherwise, which remain largely unmapped, unimagined by literary fiction, in opposition to the white, male, middle-class standard Spanish urban narratives of writers who find a climax and a model in the Cochabamba born Cornell University Professor Edmundo Paz Soldán's novels like *El delirio de Turing* (2003).

Radically, Spedding confronts the possibility that physical and social reality of Bolivia might be unyielding to metaphor or decorative description. In this way, she also resists the aestheticization of starkness and surrealism, the programmatic 'cosmic awareness' of younger Aymaraland novelists like Juan Pablo Piñeiro in *Illimani Púrpura* (2010). Or the new, inner 'generic' heteroglossia of an Aymara poet like Mauro Alwa, who in *Arunak Q'ipiri* (2010) transgresses, or trespasses, the limits of XX Century Aymara poetry: he writes lyrical short poems, instead of adopting the anthemic tunefulness of rhetorical political hymns and cosmi-comical Pacha Mama common prayers.

After the early but exemplary post-modernism of the short stories in *El tiempo, la distancia, otros amantes* (1986), one of the most efficient pieces in the New Nastiness School ever published, each of Spedding's books has been a new start both stylistically and generically. The colonial picaresque novel *Manuel y Fortunato: Una picaresca andina* (1997) was followed by the thriller *El viento de la cordillera: Un thriller de los 80* (2001), by the science-fiction novel *De cuando en cuando Saturnina / Saturnina from time to time: Una historia oral del futuro* (2004), and by the family saga in the form of a 'straight' novel *Catre de fierro* (2015). The latter is the only one of her novels released by a commercial but dignified and well-established publishing house in La Paz. The imprint of Plural may help Spedding in reaching out to a wider readership and a more nuanced critical reception.

### ***La loi du genre, la langue des genres***

The bulkiest of Spedding's fictions so far, *Catre de fierro*, 460 pages-long, is the only without a subtitle with a genre hint. Therefore, it is the one lack-

ing an anticipated narratological pattern and a suggested hermeneutical key. In a *Selbst-Darstellung* written for the Argentine collection of new Bolivian fiction *De la Tricolor a la Wiphala: Narrativa contemporánea de Bolivia*, she has referred to this long novel as a *revenge tragedy* of sorts. The Elizabethan drama genre may be conflated to a (revengeful) *family saga* and even a *roman-fleuve* like the kin-obsessed ones of Nobel Prize novelists Romain Rolland, Roger Martin du Gard or John Galsworthy. These are some of the genres competing for hegemony when the critic looks for a characterization of a historical novel which is the answer of a reader of Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace to Bolivian novelists such as José Fellman Velarde and Jaime Saenz. The novel may also be seen as a *Bildungsroman* or *Entwicklungsroman*, and in this department Carlos Medinaceli is one of the classical Bolivian novelists Spedding 'outsmarts'.

Spedding can immerse herself in past ages and past styles and yet avoid pastiche and purple patches. The British author has that iron stomach for digesting turbulence which is the born Bolivian novelist's absolute requirement. Both male and female narrators are in Spedding's fictions filled out in Browningsque depth. They are invention rather than ventriloquism, an act of creation which gathers a veritable ectoplasm of Spanish colonial rule in *Manuel y Fortunato* or of post-revolutionary, cliché-ridden, riff-raff MNR Bolivia in *Catre de fierro*. As Spedding the novelist implies, Bolivia is also Oblivia, and a moral, even didactical cure for bad memory substitutes here the professional suspicion Alisson Spedding the anthropologist has always in stock for the craft of historians. Despite her post-modern leanings, Spedding is more Ivy Compton-Burnett than Angela Carter, more Amis *père* than Amis *filis*, more Margaret Drabble than A. S. Byatt.

As in any of Spedding's previous novels, a glossary, mostly of Aymara terms, is at the end of the text of *Catre de fierro*, and the Aymara dialogue, spoken when mostly Indians intervene, is translated into Spanish in footnotes. But the ratio of Aymara to Spanish has shrunk in this novel. The Spanish prose of Spedding shines more polished and fluent and grammatical than ever before, due to the painful care of the literary critic Mauricio Souza Crespo, who is credited with the editing.

## The Woman in White hits the Moonstone

In *De cuando en cuando Saturnina / Saturnina from time to time*, heteroglossia is well-advertised from the very cute, double, alternative title. Spedding embraces the crudely obvious in her writing: she makes a style out of colloquialism and overstatement. Considered as a book, this novel may seem rather unsatisfactory. There is a great deal of repetition, much unevenness in the elaboration of details, much descriptive matter which seems not strictly relevant, and occasional traces of a jocular concern for her habitual audience of La Paz Sociology students. But hers are comical social novels, dark comedies of manners, and that puts them apart in the rather solemn panorama of contemporary male and female Bolivian narrative. Deliberately unwieldy, far-flung dialogue may evoke a modern, authentically commonplace sensibility:

- Miz Saturnina Mamani
- ¡Presente! He dicho descargando mi q'ipi y sacando el teclado. Which is my machine? Una de las sillas giratorias delante de la pantalla de navegación yastaba ocupada, ahora se dio vuelta. Un moreno, inconfundible: *Ch'uxña* Sindicato.
- Alejandro Valdés, para servirle.  
Bueno, me he dicho. Esto es lo que te pasa por andar tras de la plata. Apenas le he saludado con la cabeza, he enchufado mi teclado y luego sacado mi coca, aunque la campanilla de despegue estaba sonando y el gringo se mostraba medio enfadado.
- Akhulli'astwaya, he dicho. Ukatx sarxatanañi, y el *ch'uxña* extendió su mano hacia mi coca.
- Lisinsiyamampi, dijo.  
Ellos no consiguen, pues, porque está prohibido en los Estados Jodidos y además, ¿acaso nosotros la vamos a vender a ellos, aunque sea de contrabando? Apenas consiguen una miseria de contrabando de los peruchos, yo he visto, nunca iguala a la yungueña ni de cerca.
- We have a strict timetable, Miz Mamani, dijo el gringo.
- Don't worry, yo ley dicho. We'll ge'back e loss time after takeoff. You ain' hire a top class navigator for notin.

This passage shows how Aymara, English and Spanish are interwoven. It is the Spanish of the Andes, with a peculiarly shortened morphology: *yastaba* stands for *ya estaba*, *ley dicho* for *le he dicho*. It is the Aymara of the Yun-

gas. And the English is deformed (or recreated) at will by the heroine, Miz Mamani, Saturnina Mamani Guarachi, who embodies the Utopian, feminist, retrofuturist Quillasuyu Marka (the former Bolivia) of 2086.

Spedding communicates an excitement at the renewed possibilities of language. The raucous, energetic style of this novel represents a way of going beyond the notion of literary sophistication towards an ideal of movement, looseness and spontaneity. In this, it is faithful to the subtitle of this Andean science-fiction novel: *Una historia oral del futuro*, an oral history of the times to come –the shape of things to come, as in H.G. Wells.

### Speaking tongues: the nightmare of history, the dreaming of stories

*Catre de fierro* offers a lavish re-writing of Bolivian national history since the 1952 Revolution, which put an end to oligarch rule, nationalized the mines, and granted full civil and political rights to the Indian population. Spedding's novel is a saga often recounted as paradigm of inner colonialism made into a tragedy fit for King Pentheus or to be played by any other heroic overreacher.

In *El viento de la cordillera*, History met Utopia and Dystopia. The action of this eighties thriller was deliberately set in 1984, which is both a year in the calendar, while the War on Drugs was being waged in Latin-America by the Reagan Administration, and a year in a literary reality, that of the George Orwell anti-Stalinist parable, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, first published in 1948. *Catre de fierro* is also an allegory, but events overwhelm what they are meant to signify. The allegory begins in myth, in the very first chapter, "El agenciador de *kuchus*". Fresh corpses of sacrificial men, women or children (the so-called *kuchus*) are needed, even (or specially) in modern, fast-growing La Paz, in order to ensure the lasting resistance and resilience of new buildings. The author, who is very learned in comparative Anthropology, avoids the universal undertones and overtones of the myth. The rich Balkan versions are among the most well-known. The ballad of *Die Brücke von Arta*, the ballad of *Mesterul Manole*, deeply studied by the Italian folklorist Giuseppe Cocchiara, was recreated by the Romanian fascist Mircea Eliade but also, in German, by the Hungarian communist György Lukács. Instead, Spedding puts together a Bolivian network of allusions, where the *kuchu* is also the Chaco War of 1932-35, including the military



defeat inflicted by neighboring Paraguay, cradle of nationalism and mother of revolutions.

*Catre de fierro* is much more than a product of a clever modern intelligence inhabiting the fiery and (formally) uneducated personality of characters who lived in the past half-century, unable to read a book like this novel, not to mention writing it. Spedding sets sharp realism against a background of folk tale and fable, a world of hauntings and curses against a fiercely political portrait of a society. The energy of the plot lines and the fearlessness in the tone makes the novel immensely readable. The ideological objective, however, is often more stated than realized, more reluctant and elusive than what it seemed when the novelist doubled as a critic poured scorn on Óscar Cerruto's *Aluvión de Fuego* (1935) or Saenz Felipe Delgado (1979), both canonical Bolivian novels of the aftermath of the Chaco War against Paraguay.

### Other voices, other rooms, faces in the crowd and graphic media

In many ways, many of these books are the reward of collective efforts. Seventeen different writers contributed original papers to *Las tierras bajas*. Combès and Villar signed together the robust, dutifully comparative 'Introduction'. Lorena Córdoba offers a fascinated and fascinating panorama of the boom and the crash of Bolivian Amazonian rubber—a bang followed by a whimper. Villar shows some of the best dry humor available in the Tropics in his own article “Tsirihacato: Notas sobre el humor chacobo”, where he prefers the authority of Schopenhauer and Borges to that of Bergson and Freud when working out a tight taxonomy of six types of comical ambiguity in this Amerindian tongue. Many hands, mostly from *El Colectivo 2* in Tembladerani, helped Mr. Murillo's endeavors. Special mention must go to the neat, beautiful sketches of battlefields contributed by Diego Loayza and Mario Piñeiro, authors of that most compelling and thrilling and heteroglossical of Bolivian graphic novels, *El monstruo del Choqueyapu*.

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Die Schriftenreihe poethik polyglott versammelt Studien zur kreativen Mehr- und Mischsprachigkeit in Literatur und Medien, unter Einschluß von Paraliteratur und literarischer Übersetzung. Der literarischen und intermedialen Mehrsprachigkeit eignet eine poetische und eine ethische Funktion, letztere im Sinne der Herausbildung einer mobilen und pluralen Identität im Zwischenland der Kulturen. Neben historischen und theoretischen Studien zu den genannten Themen ist die Didaktik mehrsprachiger Kreativität ein Programmpunkt der Reihe.

La collection poethik polyglott réunit des études sur le plurilinguisme littéraire, paralittéraire et numérique, y compris la traduction littéraire. Ce plurilinguisme, qui se veut interlinguistique et intermédiaire, a une double fonction poétique et éthique dans la mesure où il contribue à la formation d'une identité plurielle et mobile au Zwischenland des cultures. Outre des études historiques et théoriques consacrées à ces thèmes, la collection accueillera des recherches sur la didactique de la créativité plurilingue.

poethik polyglott is a series of critical studies on the creative use of multilingualism in literature, new media, and literary translation. The use of several or mixed languages is viewed as having both a poetic and an ethical function, insofar as it contributes to the emergence of a mobile and multiple identity in the Zwischenland of cultures. In addition to historical and theoretical studies on these topics, the editors welcome pedagogical research on creative writing in the area of multilingualism.



This volume, the third in a series of four on the general issue of Multilingualism in World Literature, is focused upon the relationship between Migrancy and Multilingualism, including its aquatic, terrestrial and globalizing imagery and ideology. The cover picture *Wandering Tongues*, an iconic translation of the book's title, *Xi b ^ X f ~ b a X ~ b Y ~ g [ X ~ c T e T W \ Z ` T g \* multilingualism: the migrations of the early Mexican peoples and their somatic multi-lingualism as represented in their glyphic scripts and iconography. The volume comprises studies on the literary, linguistic and graphic *e X c e X f X a g T g \ b a ~ b Y ~ i T e \ b h f ~ ^ \ a* cant works of African, American, Asian and European literature, as well as a study on the literary archetype of human errancy, the Homeric *Odyssey*, mapped along its periplum and metamorphosis in world literature.

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