Book Review

Book Title: The Poetry of Bruce Meyer: The inaugural poet laureate of the city of Barrie


Author: Juan de Dios Torralbo-Caballero (2015)

Juan de Dios Torralbo-Caballero (Professor at the University of Cordoba) studies in depth the poetic work of the Canadian poet Bruce Meyer. The book is published in the prestigious Publishing House Comares, within the "Interlingua" collection, which includes hundreds of specialized studies in the fields of philology and translation.

The book begins with a preface summarizing the contents of each of the six chapters that cover the poems of Meyer. In the penultimate chapter, the monograph presents a selection of thirty-three poems; allowing the interested reader to be able to read these signs and directly appreciate the style in the work of the Canadian poet. The book also incorporates at the end, the abstracts of the chapter written in several languages. Although I consider this is an illuminating preface, in this part of the monograph, it could have been included a paragraph about the status of the issue, as a preliminary start.

"I want to walk inside the language": Visiting Bruce Meyer, Inaugural Poet Laureate for the City of Barrie is the first chapter. We see it as a good introduction to the writer because it approaches Bruce Meyer as a singular reader of literature, as an academic and as a poet and Poet Laureate. Finally it presents the recurring themes in his work and a selection of his most representative books. From my viewpoint the content in this chapter is appropriate, I would like to suggest Torralbo-Caballero that the prose by Bruce Meyer could have been taken into account in this general overview. It is desirable to find an overview on Meyer’s short fiction and novel; perhaps in Torralbo-Caballero’s future research.

"Beauty in Tradition": The poetical beginnings of Bruce Meyer is the second chapter and contains an interview with the poet himself. Torralbo-Caballero makes Meyer focus on his early years as a writer and tries to deepen his origins (literary readings, parents, style and favorite themes). This is a very interesting chapter because the reader can find Meyer’s dicta first-hand following the author’s questions.

"I speak of Africa and golden joys": The search for the fabled city of gold in The Obsession Book of Timbuktu is the title of the third chapter. This block is studying the poems of 2013, The Obsession Book of Timbuktu, seeking the American dream and is built temporarily and specifically in the city of Barrie, of which Meyer was the inaugural Poet Laureate (until 2014). With the close reading of this chapter, one can deduce that this is narrative poem with a very original touch, following a mythological idea but centered on the chronological authorial coordinates.

"Beauty is When We entertain the cosmos": Classical English overtones in Bruce Meyer's The Seasons is the fourth chapter. It is based on the book of sonnets published in 2014, The Seasons. The Professor of the University of Cordoba is investigating the influences that can be seen in the poems of the book. The anatomy of poems is similar to that established by Pablo Neruda some years ago. Juan de Dios Torralbo concludes that Meyer draws on classical sources, belonging to the insular English tradition, as do the metaphysical and devotional poets John Donne, George Herbert or John Milton, and also showing a clear imprint of Shakespeare and even Jonathan Swift.
"The road was a monologue repeating itself": Searching for the earthy ἀρχή in Meyer’s Testing the Elements is the fifth chapter and explores the four elements that divide the contents of the book of poems. Torralbo-Caballero shows how Bruce Meyer tries to find the origin (the ἀρχή) of things. This chapter considers it shortly, although it is offset to the next which is also dedicated to the same book, published in 2014. The most original contribution one can find in this chapter is the indirect link between Meyer’s poetry and Greek Pre-socratic philosophy.

"And Became poetry": Didactic and dialogic landscapes in Bruce Meyer’s Testing the Elements is the title of the sixth chapter. Juan de Dios Torralbo starts dealing with the study of Aristotle and Sydney to emphasize the mimetic value of poetry and to show the correlation that poetry holds with painting. Torralbo explores the “Earth” section focusing on the verse “The trees of Barrie Brown shed leaves”. Then, he studies “The Water” section beginning with the verse “They Were of the sea”. Then, he analyzes “The Fire” section studying lines like “The fire in a sunset and ink in the eastern air”. Finally, he explores the segment entitled “The Air” following the semantics of some verses like; “is the sound of wind in wait for a bird”. From my point of view, this chapter is very original and offer new light on the study of Canadian poetry as it offers a contrast between Meyer’s treatment of the landscape and other compatriots’ “layout”.

We consider this monograph as a milestone in the study of Canadian literature in English for several reasons. Firstly because it addresses a contemporary poet whose literary work is in an emerging point, keeping his publications alive today. Secondly, because according to the repertories that we have seen, this book is the first monograph dedicated to Bruce Meyer; finally, because the writing style applied along The Poetry or Bruce Meyer. The Inaugural Poet Laureate of the city of Barrie makes it an easy book to read and allows the interested reader to enjoy and learn with the work, which also contains a good sample of thirty-three poems from Meyer’s opera prima. I can infer that, being “a first”, it is a brief and introductory study on Meyer’s poetry, that in the future could be completed with more papers on Bruce’s numerous books. Bruce Meyer has just published a new book of poems entitled The Arrow of Time and a short fiction collection entitled A Chronicle of Magpies. They both deserve Torralbo-Caballero critical attention.

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