Semiotica ispanica is not for the doubter nor for the unconvinced. It is for the critic who is thoroughly familiar with the field of semiotics and who enjoys pondering an adventurous application of its methods to the literary text. For that individual Ruffinatto's blending of the more traditional with the latest theories will offer insights as well as delights.

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San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam. By Luce López Baralt. México: Colegio de México, 1985. 435 pages.

Huellas del Islam en la literatura española. De Juan Ruiz a Juan Goytisolo. By Luce López Baralt. Madrid: Hiperión, 1985. 262 pages.

Two books by Luce López Baralt have recently appeared, virtually simultaneously. They were, in fact, written years apart but the first was delayed years in being published because of its controversial thesis, evident in its title *San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam.* Although at first glance they present "merely" further evidence for the considerable impact of Spain's Arabic past on successive stages of its literature, they also provide a veritable treasure trove of material for some of the most pressing current discussions on the nature of literature. Thus, López Baralt painstakingly explores the mixed linguistic-literary-cultural heritage of San Juan de la Cruz and of a series of other authors, from the Arcipreste de Hita to, as the title of the second book indicates, the contemporary Juan Goytisolo, from a historical-archeological perspective that extensively documents and explores the profound impact of the Hispano-Arabic and Hispano-Judaic traditions. Both the range of her knowledge of the various literary traditions and the high standards of scholarship in the execution of the studies justify the assertion, made on both dust jackets, that she is the current heir to the legacy of the great Asín Palacios.

But there is a great deal more in these two books than an elaboration of the neglected Semitic background of Spanish letters (a background that in fact becomes foreground in much of Goytisolo's work). For these studies of López Baralt's are at the same time complex elaborations of the recurring problem of the purposeful cultivation of polyvalence and mutability of language in the Peninsular authors most palpably writing within the mixed and difficult tradition of cultural polymorphism. As such, she has given us a major addition to both the raw material and the speculation on the nature of poetic language as perceived and executed by a series of major writers in the Hispanic tradition.

If we take as an example San Juan de la Cruz, we see from the outset the literary problem(s) that she has tackled. The obstacle San Juan sets out to overcome, of course, is the attempt of the impossible, the translation of the a-rational and infinite by means of the rational and limiting instrument that is language. This, of course, is an old issue in the theologic-linguistic realm, and in the medieval period there is a prolonged meditation on the insufficiency of language vis à vis God in particular. It is a tradition she scrupulously traces out and, focusing on the specific feature of the poet's commentary on his own poetry, which in the case of San Juan not only does not clarify or explicate the obscure poetry but obscures it further, is really an essential part of the incoherence of the poetry, she skillfully constructs a literary history that eventually excludes most traditional Graeco-Roman sources as the possible heritage for San Juan's radical new techniques. Among the most interesting features of her analysis is her placing the poet outside the mainstream of European Renaissance poetics while, at the same time, seeing him as distinctively modern *avant la lettre.* He is a revolutionary without followers in his own time because his concept of language, poetic language, is too radical—at least until nineteenth-century poetry and twentieth-century criticism begin to give us kindred poetry and to explore the theoretical issues of this "crisis of language."

Ultimately, she attributes the major phenomena that make San Juan both post-Baudelarian and incomprehensible within the classical Renaissance tradition to his immersion in the linguistic-poetic traditions of Spain's Semitic past. Her careful exposition of the cultivation of polyvalence and ambiguity, of seemingly bizarre combinations of tenses, of commentaries that conspicuously and deliberately fail to clarify, and other kindred features in both the Hebrew and Arabic poetic traditions is a fine example of a "source" study that is at once a delicate analysis of the poetry itself. And she succeeds masterfully in showing that, ultimately, San Juan's apparently radical attitude that one can only approach God through the communication of irrational and seemingly "meaningless" experience, "entender no entendiendo," has the firmest, if not the most "respectable" of antecedents in his own homeland.

The historical background she provides, *de rigueur* in this type of analysis linking a Christian poet with the Semitic traditions, is immensely valuable for the general public and the specialist alike (although not sufficient, it would appear, to have overcome publishers' scruples in Spain about the delicacy of the issue). In fact, the first chapter of the collection of essays that constitutes her second volume, *Huellas del Islam,* is an excellent overarching introduction to Islamic Spain, one that can profitably be used as an introductory text in general culture and literature courses. The other essays in this volume, some of them previously published elsewhere, both continue and expand on the central thesis of the book on San Juan and, once again, the unifying issue is the nature of language as it is

perceived and used by poets who are clearly outside the Graeco-Christian mainstream.

What emerges is a rich mosaic of distinct yet interrelated types of polymorphic authors. The cultivation of polyvalence, in the "three Juans" (Ruiz, San Juan, and Goytisolo) is explored both from the point of view of direct dependence on Arabic literary models and, perhaps even more fascinating, as a sensibility unique to those from polyglot and thus polyvalent cultures, as Bakhtin has pointed out (although, one is tempted to add, without as rich an example as Spain at his disposal!). She outlines for us a distinctively Hispanic (using that term as a Castrista, of course) tradition of *trobar* and *comentar clus* which is, in part, the logical product of the linguistic and literary hybridism of the Peninsula. But this tradition is no less fueled by the specific conviction, undoubtedly attributable to that pluralism of expressions, that the limitations of language can be attacked by appealing to multiple, even infinite possibilities of expression and meaning.

In these pages too, we are exposed to the issue of purposeful linguistic ambiguity in cases more directly affected by the repressive ambience of Golden Age Spain: the tortured and necessarily discreet writing of aljamiado-morisco authors, writing the "Crónica de la destrucción de un mundo," a remarkable chapter in Spanish literary history where individuals are torn not only between religious-national allegiances, but between linguistic poles as well. In a study complementary to Consuelo López Morillas' book on the Morisco Qur'ān, we see the results, linguistic and literary, of the forced de-Hispanization of individuals who, in many cases, no longer even knew the Arabic (or Qur'ān) they were being punished for. "The other side of the coin," as López Baralt aptly terms it, the complex figure of the "moro" in Renaissance literature, provides yet another focal point for her analysis. This too is an analysis that highlights the phenomenon of language viewed as a traitor or enemy, to be vanquished with itself through the most intense and manipulative control. These chapters provide rich detail of this literature of the underground and its clandestine language that is at once potential betrayal and potential revenge, a theme taken up once again in a chapter on the anonymous "No me mueve, mi Dios, para quererte."

Perhaps the most suggestive of the many areas of inquiry her studies both facilitate and encourage is that which we find in her final essay on Juan Goytisolo, aptly entitled "Hacia una lectura 'mudéjar' de *Makbara*." For here we see the extent to which so many of the features of contemporary literature, its explicit consciousness of itself and its continuous self-referencing, its presentation of ambiguous and/or polyvalent language as the appropriate instrument for an equally slippery "reality," the shifting temporal spaces that destroy "rational" traditions of narration, and so on, we see how all of these are clearly, often explicitly tied to the portion

of the medieval and Renaissance tradition represented by the *Libro de buen amor* and the "Cántico espiritual." The affinities of Goytisolo, an avid fan and student of Américo Castro's (as Manuel Durán shows in a forthcoming article from the Castro Centenary symposium) are readily explained, of course. But the fact remains that there are overlaps between contemporary literature, and the accompanying discussions of linguistic-literary theory, and the largely neglected aspect of medieval and Renaissance Spanish literature, that which is explicitly or implicitly heir to the complex polymorphism of a polyglot world. A great deal of ink has been spilt on the question of why when the rest of Europe quickly absorbed the scientific and rational from the Arab-Islamic world, via Spain and many Spaniards, Spain itself eventually rejected most of what it had propagated, most of that which would make the "West" so distinctive, so rationally oriented and scientific, and from which it was, as a result of the rejection, then largely isolated. López Baralt's study provides considerable evidence of another—the other, perhaps—side of that coin: the exploitation and concern with the polyvalence of language and literature was brilliantly, if sporadically, absorbed by Spanish writers. Thus, modern writers and modern issues in writing are at once explicitly ancestral.

These are certainly among the most provocative and enriching books recently published in literary history. In a clear, often elegant, style, López Baralt fills in considerable lacunae in our literary-historical background, gives us new readings of much-debated texts, presents us with new texts from a branch of the Hispanic tradition we scarcely knew existed, and provides substantial material for the old and new question of what is literary language. We are grateful she has so coherently grappled with the problem of the incoherence of language. And whether one reads both books from cover to cover or only the essay on Goytisolo, one emerges with an ampler and more complex view of Spain's literary history.

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Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context. Ed. John Miles Foley. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986. ix+190 pages.

This volume, which brings together six papers presented in March 1984 at the Missouri Oral Literature Symposium, also includes the editor's substantial Introduction (pp. 1–18) and a useful Selected Bibliography (pp. 170–81). Most of the papers do not directly pertain to the Hispanic field, but all offer important comparative vantage points from which the Spanish