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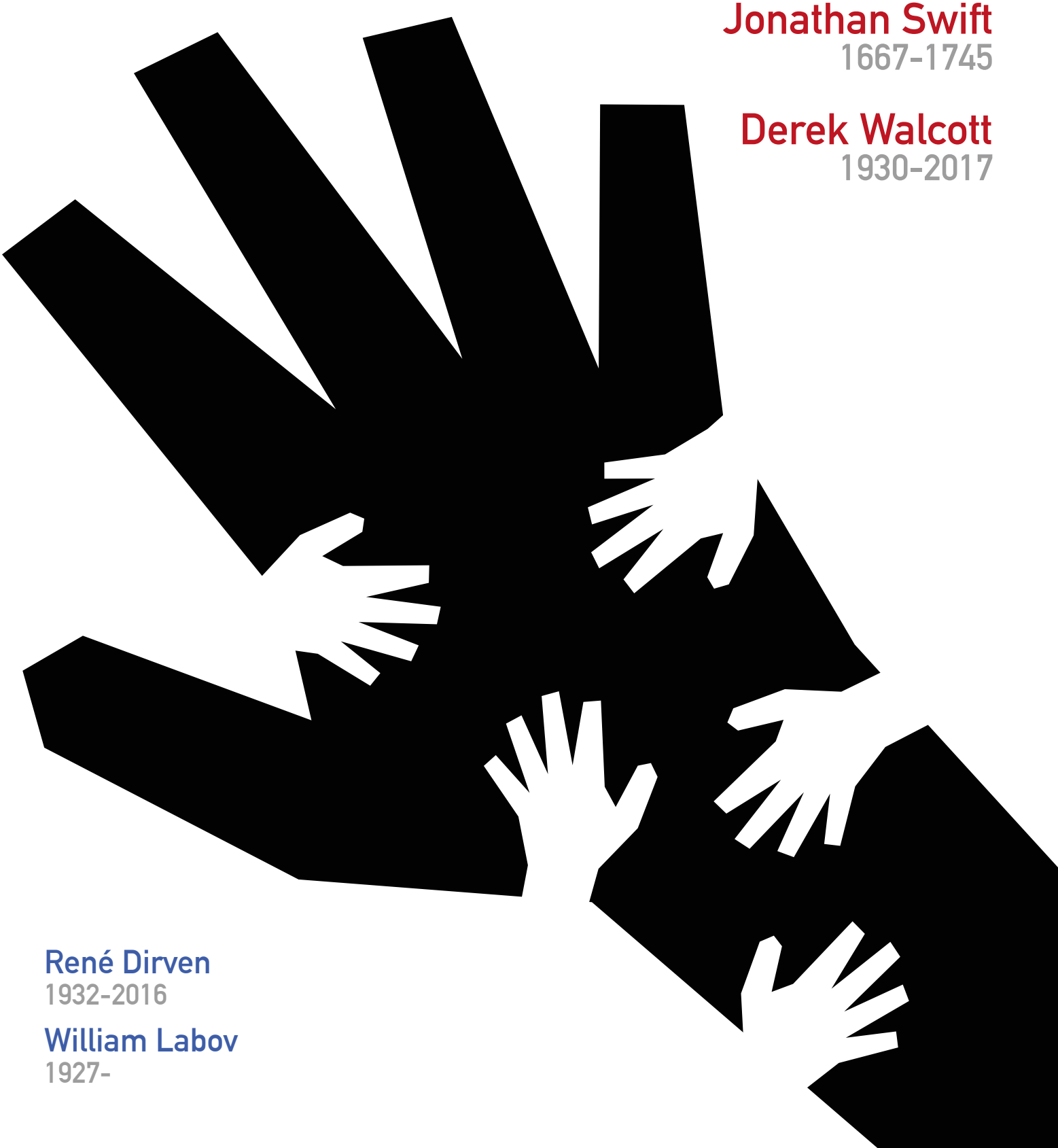
Henry David Thoreau
1817-1862

Jonathan Swift
1667-1745

Derek Walcott
1930-2017



René Dirven
1932-2016

William Labov
1927-

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NEXUS

"HOW SHOULD I LIVE MY LIFE?" H. D. THOREAU, PENSADOR, ESCRITOR, NATURALISTA, CAMINANTE, CONTROVERTIDO Y REVOLUCIONARIO

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¿Qué podemos celebrar en el bicentenario del nacimiento de Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)? Esta pregunta es menester hacerla y más cuando han transcurrido doscientos años y ríos de tinta se han vertido sobre un hombre tan polifacético, versátil y armoniosamente complejo. El mito de este escritor sigue, sin duda, muy vivo en la actualidad y podemos concluir que fue y es hoy en día uno de los intelectuales más brillantes, inspiradores y magnéticos del pensamiento universal. Asimismo, podemos afirmar que el pensador pragmático por antonomasia del trascendentalismo norteamericano ofrece en su obra una guía práctica de reflexiones para el ciudadano contemporáneo. Por lo tanto, celebrar su obra y su legado filosófico literario es pertinente y relevante. Sin embargo, la bibliografía académica de carácter filológico sobre el autor no ha sido en los últimos años muy prolija, a pesar de que en el caso de otros escritores señeros del American Renaissance —Hawthorne, Emerson, Melville, Poe, Dickinson— sea vastísima. Esto es así porque afortunadamente la obra de Thoreau ha trascendido a lo meramente literario e histórico y se incardina en la ética, la filosofía, el pensamiento político, el estudio del medioambiente y la ecología, entre otros campos del saber, y ha tenido un impacto más duradero en otras ramas del conocimiento de las ciencias sociales desde las que se ha indagado su obra a la luz de la contemporaneidad. Un ejemplo claro de este hecho indiscutible es el impacto de Thoreau en los movimientos ambientalistas, en la crítica ecológica, en los movimientos sociales, en la ciencia política y en la filosofía occidental.

Desde su juventud, Thoreau se instaló en el cuestionamiento y la duda existencial. En cuanto tuvo uso de razón se planteó con insistencia cómo vivir su vida, cuál era su lugar en la naturaleza y cómo podía ser un buen amigo, vecino y ciudadano. Sin duda, esta aproximación a la vida es extraordinaria porque no dejaba al azar ni su yo íntimo ni su yo social. Al contrario, Thoreau tenía una prodigiosa conciencia social y personal que le llevó a tener una vida coherente, plena e inspiradora para sus discípulos. Era consciente de que para

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reformar la sociedad había que empezar por uno mismo y no al contrario. Esas preguntas trascendentales fueron las que guiaron su vida profunda y plena de sabiduría en la que se implicó, sin dudarlo, con los debates más comprometidos de su momento y también tuvo la visión de plantear los que serían relevantes para el futuro de la joven nación norteamericana: los derechos civiles, la esclavitud, la cultura consumista, el individualismo, el significado del sueño americano, la ecología, el papel del gobierno y la obligación que todo ser humano de bien tiene de disentir ante las injusticias.

Henry David Thoreau nació en Concord, Massachusetts, en 1817 y su familia tenía un vínculo muy sólido con las ciencias, las humanidades y la escritura, no solo porque era gente leída sino porque tenían una fábrica de lápices en la que él mismo trabajó durante más de veinticinco años. Su vínculo con la fábrica era tan fuerte que se preocupó por mejorar la calidad del grafito y la maquinaria del negocio familiar para tener lápices de calidad que pudieran competir con los de la marca Faber, que se importaban de Alemania. De hecho, inventó aparatos para la fábrica porque tenía un don creativo para mejorar las máquinas y artilugios que lo rodeaban. En el ámbito afectivo, Thoreau estuvo soltero toda su vida, aunque profesó un gran amor por Ellen Sewall que no se plasmó en un vínculo duradero, pero de cuya experiencia dijo que "there is no remedy for love but to love more" (Richardson, 1988: 58). Tenía un fuerte vínculo con su familia con la que mantenía excelentes relaciones y con la que convivió durante largos periodos de su vida. Desde muy joven era muy crítico con la religión y no asistía a la iglesia. Asimismo, decidió no beber alcohol ni comer carne, aunque, parece ser que, tras unos encuentros desafortunados con una serie de marmotas que se comían el fruto de su huerto, decidió poner una trampa en la que cayó una de ellas y se la comió, según narra en sus diarios. En este sentido, hay que señalar que los diarios ocupan un lugar muy significativo en su obra. Según la crítica, tienen entre dos y tres millones de palabras y fueron sus confidentes cotidianos y testigos de su incesante caminar consciente por la vida.

El inicio de su verdadero camino de transformación fue precisamente en 1837 con tan solo veinte años, cuando se graduó en Harvard College. En esa prestigiosa universidad adquirió una formación académica crucial para toda su vida y estudió literatura, ciencias y agrimensura. Pero, por aquel entonces, Harvard era un lugar modesto y muy pueblerino donde convivían las facultades con granjas de cerdos y atraía a muy pocos estudiantes. Durante aquel periodo de formación inicial, Thoreau era un estudiante marginal, pero con unas inquietudes espirituales y sociales sorprendentes. Asimismo, ya destacaba por su actitud crítica que cuestionaba la tradición y también la educación convencional. Cuando se decía que en Harvard se enseñaban todas las ramas del conocimiento, él muy irónico replicaba: "yes, all the branches and none of the roots" (Richardson, 1988: 13). En 1837, Estados Unidos vivió una fuerte crisis financiera y el inicio de una grave depresión que duró hasta muy entrada la década de 1840. Los bancos habían suspendido pagos uno tras otro y Thoreau tuvo suerte y consiguió un trabajo como maestro en Concord. Aquel

periodo de penurias económicas, de crisis financiera y de valores en crisis, le hizo reaccionar e iniciar un viaje espiritual mucho más importante que el académico, el viaje de una vida consciente, plena y centrada en la búsqueda y en la confianza en el todopoderoso yo trascendentalista. En este sentido, Thoreau decía y con toda la razón que "the world is but a canvas to our imagination". Y así hizo al pintar con gran creatividad un mundo propio, singular, lleno de color, de sensaciones, sonidos, olores y sabores. La falta de incentivos creativos e imaginativos le hizo reconsiderar su trabajo de maestro porque, en la escuela en la que era docente, se aplicaban castigos a los estudiantes y esas prácticas no entraban en su ideario educativo. La vida le daría una segunda oportunidad docente, ya que abrió una modesta escuela con su hermano John en la que pusieron en práctica el trascendentalismo y a la que, por cierto, asistió la escritora Louisa May Alcott que más tarde publicaría el superventas *Little Women* (1868). Desafortunadamente, la escuela tuvo que cerrar ante la inesperada muerte de su hermano John en 1842 que lo sumió en una profunda crisis personal.

El viaje más importante de la vida de Thoreau fue el que inició desde muy joven durante sus largos paseos de cuatro horas por los bosques donde escudriñaba cada árbol, lago y animal con el que se tropezaba y el paisaje en su conjunto como un ser vivo del que él mismo formaba parte. El amor que desarrolló por la naturaleza, lo ayudó a convertirse en un filósofo natural y panteísta, como él mismo se denominaba. Precisamente, en ese contexto natural empezó su andadura como escritor, tomando notas y siempre vinculado a la poesía que era su género favorito y donde revelaba sus emociones y deseos. No obstante, en la prosa desarrolló la dirección que debía llevar en su vida y su ser más social y filosófico.

Como es habitual entre los grandes escritores, Thoreau era un lector voraz que acudió a beber, tanto de las fuentes clásicas de la cultura occidental, como de las de la oriental. Su ética de vida y su filosofía circulan y se incardinan en las raíces del pensamiento clásico, pero predomina un acercamiento ecléctico, sincrético y desprovisto de prejuicios que le llevó a investigar en la filosofía y en las religiones orientales. Hay que señalar que sabía leer francés, alemán e italiano, además de griego y latín. Por lo tanto, conocía de primera mano el canon literario occidental en las lenguas originales. Entre las fuentes más sobresalientes del pensamiento alemán destacan Schleiermacher, Goethe, Kant, y de la tradición grecolatina hay que mencionar a figuras como Homero, Anacreonte, Zenón de Citio, Platón, Ovidio, Sófocles y Virgilio, entre otros muchos. Hay que destacar que Thoreau buscó en la mitología y en la religión clásica la inspiración espiritual y la iluminación para sus sueños libertarios, pero también se inspiró para sus ideas del auto-gobierno, la divinidad inmanente de todas las cosas y la ética de vida en el estoicismo de Zenón de Citio. Su cuestionamiento de todo lo heredado, y en especial de la cosmogonía cristiana, le llevó a leer con una aproximación prístina *On the Origin of Species* (1859) de Charles Darwin, que le causó un gran impacto, ya que rápidamente captó las implicaciones de estas teorías en su formación cristiana.

A partir de ese momento, sus observaciones como naturalista fueron interpretadas en clave evolucionista y con una mirada desprovista de pensamientos antropocentristas y cristianos. Como señalaba previamente, el interés de Thoreau en la aprehensión del mundo exterior a través de los sentidos y de la intuición, lo llevaron directamente a sumergirse en el pensamiento oriental, en la forma de visualizar el mundo de manera pragmática de Confucio y en los textos del Avesta, compendio de libros sagrados del zoroastrismo de Persia. De igual modo, estudió la filosofía idealista del hinduismo y leyó en el verano de 1841 *Las leyes de Manu*, uno de los textos fundamentales de la religión hinduista, escrito en sánscrito, que interpretó desde su propia experiencia. Este último libro le causó un hondo impacto y fue una suerte de revelación personal, ya que pudo ver reflejada su teoría sobre la idea del hombre sublime e ilimitado a través de "austerity, withdrawal and purification" (Richardson, 1988: 109) que conseguía por medio de la observación de la naturaleza. En este sentido, Thoreau estaba convencido de que se podía encontrar como individuo y podía reforzar su propio pensamiento en su camino hacia la libertad personal en las raíces de la religión hindú del dios Manu, así como en los textos clásicos del *Mahabharata*, el *Vishnu Purana* y la literatura Védica, tal y como señala Lorre-Johnston (2013: 83). Otro texto que lo marcó profundamente y que le ayudó a desarrollar sus ideas sobre la resistencia pasiva en "Civil Disobedience" fue el *Bhagavad Gita* y su concepto clásico del abandono del yo, el autoconocimiento y el fluir de la conciencia. Pero quizás uno de los aspectos más significativos de estos textos orientales fue el concepto de la transmigración del ser humano en otros seres vivos y el hecho de que todas las criaturas tenían un alma suprema que les hacía participar inevitablemente de lo divino. Esta idea se convertiría en aspecto fundamental del trascendentalismo kantiano y estoico que practicó Thoreau y que, a su vez, heredó Walt Whitman cuando decía en "Song of Myself" que "If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles" (Whitman, 1973 [1855]: 88). Al hilo de esta alusión, Thoreau tuvo la oportunidad de leer *Leaves of Grass* (1855) y, a diferencia de los que censuraron el libro y lo tacharon de obsceno, él destacó su sensualidad y su pureza de espíritu frente a las críticas de sus vecinos puritanos.

Las fuentes orientales, como hemos señalado, alejaron a Thoreau de la Biblia y de la trama ideológica protestante de otros escritores del *American Renaissance*. Curiosamente no hay mención directa a este texto sagrado cristiano en su literatura. Por lo tanto, Thoreau fue uno de los pocos escritores norteamericanos que no entabla un diálogo directo con el puritanismo, como sí hacen Hawthorne o Melville en sus obras más importantes. De hecho, rechazó el lenguaje de la redención y el destino manifiesto de los fundadores de la nación. Así pues, cabe constatar que el escritor se liberó de la carga del pecado primigenio y en el proceso de construcción autodidacta, se transformó en un hombre hecho a sí mismo fuera del marco ideológico protestante y eso, quizás, es lo que ha contribuido a la trascendencia transcultural y a la recepción universal de su legado.

La voz naturalista y ecologista de Thoreau

La poderosa metáfora fronteriza de "I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all" (Emerson, 2001 [1836]: 232) de su maestro R. W. Emerson en el archifamoso ensayo "Nature" (1836), inspiró a Thoreau para buscar y observar con claridad lo que le rodeaba. Tener conciencia de sí mismo, en el presente y en la naturaleza a la que se acercaba para penetrar en lo invisible, visión mística que la poeta modernista Marianne Moore apuntaría más tarde en su "The power of the visible is the invisible", fue su camino de revelación y la clave de su espiritualidad panteísta. Sus sentimientos hacia el mundo natural estaban más allá de la idea de la corrupción del paraíso y la naturaleza como un lugar peligroso, oscuro, ominoso y lleno de bestias acechantes, tal y como se representa en ocasiones en la literatura colonial y en la de Hawthorne, Brockden Brown y Poe. Al contrario, en la naturaleza descrita por Thoreau, se percibe una luz magnética que proviene de un interior prístino, de una mente y un espíritu limpios y cristalinos. Así pues, el entorno natural se convirtió en su fuente de inspiración sublime, en el símbolo de la belleza suprema, quizás inspirado por el magnífico tratado estético de Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1837), que leyó y utilizó como base teórica para sus elucubraciones filosóficas. Por otro lado, también se percibe la profunda admiración que sentía por la plasmación pictórica de la naturaleza de la que hacían gala las escuelas de paisajismo del río Hudson y la escuela luminista. Sin embargo, la incipiente presencia de la fotografía en la sociedad norteamericana no logró captar su interés. Sin duda, su gran experimento ecologista se inició curiosamente un 4 de julio de 1845, fecha de la fiesta nacional norteamericana, y fue la construcción de su famosa cabaña en la laguna Walden con sus propias manos y con materiales reciclados por los que pagó 4,28 dólares y donde vivió dos años, dos meses y dos semanas. Como buen pensador que era se preguntó a sí mismo a qué había ido a aquel idílico paraje por donde había paseado, navegado y tocado la flauta y, finalmente, para qué había iniciado ese proceso de búsqueda y transformación. La respuesta fue contundente: "I wanted to live deep and to suck out all the marrow of life" (Thoreau, 1960 [1854]: 66). Su autobiografía filosófica, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), es un lienzo verbal a su imagen y semejanza en el que le ofrece al lector unas tonalidades sutiles de espiritualidad y de profundo amor a la naturaleza. Su voz se torna intensa y mística cuando describe, desde la soledad intermitente y la pobreza más absoluta, su encuentro con el bosque y la laguna que se convierte en el espejo del alma y en fuente de metamorfosis permanente. Allí empezó a cultivar la tierra para alimentarse de lo que cosechaban sus propias manos, a bañarse en la laguna, como un monje hindú, a meditar sobre la trascendencia del yo y el ahora y a demostrar con todo su ahínco que el ser humano podía vivir con mucho menos y ser mucho más feliz y holístico. De este modo, Thoreau experimentó la naturaleza como un proceso del que obtenía energía creativa y fuerza vital. Sus observaciones detallistas,

cuasi científicas, se plasmaron en las taxonomías de los seres vivos que aprendió con la lectura del naturalista sueco Carl Linneo, uno de sus científicos de cabecera, y que nos recuerdan a las descripciones de cetáceos que hace Melville en *Moby-Dick* (1851). La escritura eminentemente visual que podemos percibir en su autobiografía filosófica y poética es también un sutil manifiesto sobre la necesidad perentoria de preservar, cuidar y garantizar a la posteridad la subsistencia de "las catedrales" de la naturaleza norteamericana, como así las denominaba. Así pues, hace una propuesta sobre un despertar místico, pero a la vez pragmático sobre las maravillas del entorno natural que experimentó durante sus largos paseos. En este sentido y a raíz de la influencia de *Walden* en la ecología contemporánea, el filósofo Casado de Rocha lo describe con acierto como "profeta de la ecología y la ética ambiental contemporánea" (Casado de Rocha, 2014: 15).

Es muy difícil resumir en una semblanza la trascendencia literaria y filosófica de *Walden*, ya que es un lienzo verbal multicolor y poético, fundamentalmente sensorial a imagen y semejanza de la voz narrativa. Es también tarea compleja describir todo lo que Thoreau logra en este libro evocador, sin quedarnos en una serie de generalidades, pero este texto fundamentalmente pragmático es una de las obras literarias que sintetizan de forma palmaria el legado político del liberalismo norteamericano. Esto es así porque Thoreau parte de la defensa del individualismo radical para adentrarse a lo largo del texto en el análisis de los males que aquejaban a la joven nación norteamericana que se había entregado a los brazos del capitalismo y a la imitación exacerbada de los usos y costumbres de Gran Bretaña. Su filosofía trascendentalista sobre cómo había que vivir la expone de forma clara y sucinta: "simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust" (Thoreau, 1960 [1854]: 15) y resume de manera grandiosa su ideario sobre una economía basada en el ahorro y el reciclaje para la coexistencia armónica del ser humano en la sociedad y en la naturaleza. Del mismo modo, Thoreau cuestiona abiertamente los beneficios del capitalismo propugnado por su antecesor Benjamin Franklin en otra archifamosa y canónica autobiografía política, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791), en la que se defiende a ultranza un individualismo capitalista centrado en la cultura del trabajo y el éxito. Según Schueller, Thoreau socava de forma exitosa esos ideales "by parodying its slogans, proverbs, and language, and thus creates a double-voiced discourse that shatters the hegemony of a singular culture" (Schueller, 1992: 11). En efecto, la crisis de pensamiento que genera Thoreau con una voz nueva y poderosa en *Walden* se basa en cuestionar la ficticia unión de lo material con lo espiritual que propugnaba Franklin en su discurso iluminado, deísta y heredero, en parte, del puritanismo calvinista más conservador.

En el ámbito de la recepción de *Walden* en España, hay que señalar que cuando se tradujo al español por primera vez en abril de 1907 (Casado de Rocha, 2014: 17), el poeta Antonio Machado hizo una reseña evocativa sobre el capítulo titulado "Solitude", quizás impactado por el intimismo de Thoreau,

que él también había cultivado en su poemario "Soledades", y hace una clara recomendación a su lectura con un análisis verdaderamente acertado:

> Leed, pues, intelectuales españoles, si aún no le habéis aprendido de memoria el libro de este intelectual que soñó como latino y como sajón puso en práctica su sueño; en él aprenderéis cosas fragantes, enseñadas con toda la sinceridad de un humorismo que por esta vez no es melancolía y caminaréis a través de sus páginas por vericuetos que muchas veces no sabréis si son de bosque o de alma, pero en cuya más recóndita encrucijada hallaréis la choza pequeñita como todo lo bueno en que, según palabras del propio ermitaño, "hay una silla para la soledad, dos para la amistad y tres para la compañía." (Citado en Casado de Rocha, 2014: 17-18)

Desafortunadamente, *Walden* no fue un éxito de ventas en su tiempo, como tampoco lo fue el otro diario de viajes que publicó Thoreau de su propio bolsillo *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849).

Otro ensayo que hay que destacar es "Walking" (1862) porque abunda en el espíritu salvaje y rebelde de Thoreau y se convierte en una suerte de dios del bosque en el que pasaba muchas horas caminando y observando activamente a los animales. En este sentido, el escritor poseía un don extraordinario para relacionarse con los animales y podía detectar la presencia de un zorro solo por su olor. Su reflexión más importante en este ensayo es que todo lo bueno era libre y salvaje y por ello había que preservarlo, además de incidir en la iluminación que experimentaba cuando contemplaba la naturaleza y se fundía con el entorno como un ser más del cosmos. Para Thoreau, la naturaleza era fuente de fuerza, energía y proceso vital, como hemos señalado previamente, pero también tenía una dimensión estética de escena o de espacio eminentemente artístico por su armonía y belleza primigenia.

La voz política de Thoreau y su legado social

Thoreau disfrutaba como nadie con la polémica y la paradoja. Se sentía activo y vital cuando podía disentir abiertamente y debatir con la herramienta de la palabra y la razón y siempre optaba por hablar a las claras, como podemos constatar en sus textos. Su compromiso con la sociedad se plasmó en sus textos, pero también supo dialogar activamente con sus compatriotas y convirtió su humilde cabaña de la laguna Walden en centro de reunión de la sociedad antiesclavista y de otros grupos de reformistas. Su dialéctica inconformista se puso de manifiesto, cuando un día se cruzó con su amigo Sam Staples que además era, a la sazón, recaudador del "poll tax" (impuesto al voto) y éste recordó que no había pagado dicho gravamen desde hacía cuatro años. Con su habitual sinceridad, Thoreau le respondió que no lo iba a pagar más porque no quería contribuir a financiar a un gobierno que mantenía la esclavitud y que

había declarado la guerra a México en 1848 para conquistar más territorios y de ese modo expandir la esclavitud. El recaudador, como era lógico, criticó su actitud y lo denunció a las autoridades. No cabe duda de que Thoreau era muy crítico con el presidente demócrata James K. Polk y sus políticas racistas que defendían la guerra y la esclavitud. Con este acto deliberado, el escritor abrió un debate sobre el derecho del individuo a disentir y a negarse a contribuir con la injusticia de un gobierno que utilizaba la maquinaria de la guerra para expandirse territorialmente y encarcelar a los esclavos fugitivos o a los indios por defender sus territorios. De hecho, el pensador defendía que había que ayudar a los esclavos fugitivos a viajar a Canadá, hacia la libertad, en vez de devolverlos al sur esclavista. En su conferencia "Civil Disobedience" (1848), publicada como ensayo en 1849, Thoreau consigue, como otros escritores del canon occidental, conectar con el despertar de la visión auténtica de la verdad moral y con la búsqueda del yo y la posibilidad de renovación espiritual a través de la escritura. En este texto también comprobamos cómo Thoreau asume la misión heroica del escritor norteamericano en su papel social y defiende el papel de la literatura como factor movilizador de cambio:

> Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison…It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race, should find them, on that separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not with her but against her, —the only house is a slave-state in which a free man can abide with honor…If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose…This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution. (Thoreau, 1960 [1849]: 230-231)

En este viaje que inició el escritor hacia la confrontación con las prácticas de un estado que protegía la esclavitud, y que castigaba con prisión a los que se atrevían a disentir, Thoreau desafía al gobierno directamente al plantear de forma real que no tenía la intención de acatar la ley y sí de rebelarse en contra de lo que él consideraba la maquinaria cruel del gobierno:

> If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go; …but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. (Thoreau, 1960 [1849]: 229)

Su protesta y su negativa a pagar el "poll tax" le llevaron a pasar una noche en prisión que se convirtió en una suerte de símbolo de su política de resistencia pasiva, pero también de catábasis personal, de viaje y descenso a los infiernos del gobierno omnipotente, del gran Leviatán, como los describe Hobbes en su

obra homónima de 1651. En este ensayo de retórica vehemente y con un claro tono de activismo social, Thoreau plantea abiertamente cómo hacer frente al estado con la resistencia pasiva, cómo limitarlo y denunciar sus prácticas antihumanas de la esclavitud, la persecución a los indios o la guerra. El pragmatismo político de Thoreau queda plasmado en este ensayo crucial que tuvo un impacto vital en el pensamiento de generaciones de norteamericanos y de otros ciudadanos de la sociedad global que creían y creen todavía en la ética pacifista y en el activismo social. Pero, en último término, Thoreau hace un llamamiento para que seamos conscientes de que el individuo tiene la responsabilidad y el deber trascendental de erigirse como voz crítica del sistema.

En efecto, la impronta de su legado político fue duradera y crucial en el ámbito internacional y ejemplifica el viaje intertextual y circular que hizo la filosofía hinduista, ya que, como hemos señalado previamente, Thoreau se inspiró en el *Bhagavad Gita* para construir su poética de la resistencia pasiva en "Civil Disobedience" y éste fue a su vez una fuente de inspiración de Mahatma Gandhi cuya praxis política de resistencia pasiva en la India influyó posteriormente al gran activista de los derechos civiles Martin Luther King. De este modo, para el reverendo afronorteamericano el legado de protesta creativa fue fundamental en las marchas por la libertad y los derechos civiles en los años sesenta. Asimismo, también encontramos el rastro de este influyente ensayo en el pacifismo de la escritora Susan Sontag y en las protestas estudiantiles en contra de la guerra de Vietnam, en el partido laborista británico, en la resistencia danesa contra los nazis, en los luchadores en contra del apartheid en Suráfrica y en otros muchos escritores y activistas de todo el mundo. De este modo, la ética de la preeminencia de la conciencia del individuo y el derecho a rebelarse frente al estado de forma pacífica se convirtieron en una fuente inagotable de inspiración para las reivindicaciones sociales y políticas de los movimientos sociales.

Por otro lado, cabe constatar en el ámbito de la intertextualidad y la influencia literaria, las alusiones a Thoreau en la literatura del escritor ruso León Tolstói quien también estaba fascinado por la poética de la resistencia pasiva. En el ámbito socioliterario, destaca John Dos Passos quien se inspiró en "Civil Disobedience" en su lucha por la liberación de los anarquistas italianos Sacco y Vanzetti, así como la generación Beat con sus reivindicaciones de libertad y justicia social. En la literatura postmoderna hay que destacar el homenaje que hace Paul Auster a "Solitude" de *Walden* en *Ghosts* de la *New York Trilogy* (1987) y, finalmente, la escritora Maxine Hong Kingston, en una suerte de sentido acto de admiración y reconocimiento, titula su último libro de poesía *I Love a Broad Margin to my Life* (2011), con una declaración de principios que proviene del capítulo cuarto "Sounds" de *Walden*. Estos son tan solo algunos ejemplos significativos, pero la lista es realmente interminable.

Thoreau vivió como pocos seres humanos saben hacerlo: siendo absolutamente consecuente y sincero con sus ideales y sentimientos. No le importó si sus vecinos y compatriotas lo criticaban o no lo entendían; él tenía un

camino marcado por la autenticidad y la confianza en sí mismo para transformar su vida y compartir sus experiencias con aquellos que quisieran leerlo. En este sentido, en la última biografía publicada sobre el escritor que firma Laura D. Walls, la autora destaca que "Thoreau has never been captured between covers; he was too quixotic, mischievous, many-sided" (Walls, 2017: s/n) y es que efectivamente resumir la obra de un escritor tan prolijo que abarcó tantos aspectos de la realidad norteamericana y desde un idealismo pragmático es tarea compleja. Como ya hemos señalado fue abolicionista, defensor de los derechos civiles, pacifista, naturalista, poeta, ensayista, ecologista, filósofo, fabricante de lápices, caminante, maestro de generaciones, y tuvo muchos otros intereses vitales. Su pensamiento y sus escritos se imbrican a la perfección con muchas de nuestras preocupaciones actuales: el desafío ecológico global, la lucha contra el consumismo injustificado, el cuestionamiento del capitalismo inhumano, la educación de los jóvenes, la protección de los indígenas y de su cultura, la legitimidad de la insubordinación ante gobiernos o leyes injustas o la búsqueda de una vida más sencilla y autónoma. Por otro lado, su filosofía individualista de transformación pragmática nos enseña que el único camino de la verdadera revolución es aquel que empieza por uno mismo y puede servir del mismo modo como una suerte de invitación a la transformación de nuestros semejantes y que todos esos pequeños cambios individuales acaban, sin duda, por transformar nuestro mundo. En un contexto muchas veces desalentador, debemos volver nuestra mirada a los pensadores que cambiaron el mundo como Henry David Thoreau para iluminar nuestra vida y llenarla de luz, de inspiración y, sobre todo, de verdad y autenticidad. Es la única manera de llevar una vida digna y realmente productiva, tal y como nos recordaba en sus escritos el intelectual norteamericano. Debemos esculpir nuestra propia vida como una obra de arte ajena al desaliento y a la miseria ética que, en muchos casos, nos rodea. No podemos dejarnos llevar ni caer en el desánimo por la corrupción, la falsedad, la impostura, la falta de ideas y de creatividad que nos rodean. Al contrario, debemos leer y celebrar a pensadores como Thoreau, el padre del ecologismo y la desobediencia civil.

Para finalizar, a pesar de que, durante su vida, Thoreau fue conocido como el discípulo de R. W. Emerson y tenía fama de excéntrico y de ser un escritor un poco raro, su obra ganó en popularidad con el paso del tiempo y su proyección hacia el futuro supo ser interpretada por todos aquellos que se percataron de que la sociedad consumista podía tener efectos letales para el ser humano y el medio ambiente. Como última reflexión, podemos afirmar que la obra de Thoreau y su figura inspiradora siguen más vivos que nunca en cuanto a la dimensión social, política y literaria. En el contexto español también produce alegría comprobar que en las librerías hay traducciones, biografías y ediciones muy recientes de sus libros que inspiran a un público seguidor de sus enseñanzas ecologistas, en un mundo más necesitado que nunca de pensadores libres, auténticos, originales y verdaderos. Por otro lado, en el ámbito de los movimientos sociales también sigue influyendo a las nuevas generaciones de jóvenes en sus aspiraciones de cambio social, como lo demuestra el movimiento

"Occupy Wall Street" en Estados Unidos o las recientes movilizaciones juveniles europeas en un periodo de crisis económica en el que muchos activistas no hacen más que clamar por una sociedad que sea más sensible con las necesidades reales del ser humano y del medio ambiente. Como conclusión, invito a los lectores de esta semblanza a sacarle todo el jugo al imponente legado humanista de Thoreau porque seguro será una experiencia inolvidable e iluminadora en nuestras vidas.

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NEXUS

LEER A SWIFT EN TIEMPOS DE CRISIS

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En lo más profundo de la mayor crisis que ha sufrido Irlanda en la época contemporánea, tras tres años de austeridad en los que se congeló el gasto público y en los que miles de irlandeses se vieron forzados a emigrar de nuevo en busca de una vida mejor, el conocido economista Paul Krugman escribió un artículo en *The New York Times* en el que se podía leer: "What we need now is another Jonathan Swift", y añadía, "only a satirist – and one with a very savage pen – could do justice to what's happening in Ireland now" (Krugman, 2010).

¿Qué sentido podía tener acudir al viejo cascarrabias de Swift para analizar la situación de Irlanda casi tres siglos después de su muerte? Además, de todos es sabido que Swift se consideraba a sí mismo irlandés por accidente, que se sentía frustrado por no haber conseguido una parroquia en Inglaterra (había recibido las órdenes sagradas dentro de la Iglesia de Irlanda, la confesión anglicana en ese país), que era donde en realidad quería vivir, y no sentía ninguna afinidad con la mayoría católica de la población. Sin embargo, Krugman tenía razón, Swift era sin duda el referente a tener en cuenta para canalizar la indignación de un pueblo que, tras la bonanza de los años del Tigre Celta, se veía obligado a pagar con recortes en salud y educación, congelación de salarios y subida de impuestos los desmanes de los especuladores, la imprudencia de los banqueros y la negligencia de la clase política. Krugman encabezaba su artículo con una cita de *Una humilde propuesta* (*A Modest Proposal*, 1729), sin duda una obra maestra de la parodia satírica, pero para calibrar mejor el valor de Swift como modelo ético en tiempos de crisis creo que no hay nada como leer *Las cartas del pañero* (*The Drapier's Letters*, 1724-5), pues aquí Swift fundamenta la indignación de las gentes de a pie ante los abusos del poder en la exigencia de que se respeten sus derechos como ciudadanos, algo que tiene plena relevancia hoy en día.

El origen de estos panfletos yace en oscuros manejos en las altas esferas, por medio de los cuales un ferretero, William Wood, se hizo con una patente real para acuñar moneda de baja calidad, medios peniques de cobre, y distribuirla en Irlanda para obtener un beneficio propio. Esto, en opinión de Swift, arruinaría la economía irlandesa al verse inundada de monedas de escaso valor, provocando la desaparición del dinero en oro y plata, y teniendo como consecuencia una inflación descomunal en una hacienda ya de por sí maltrecha.

Swift, que ya era Deán de la Catedral de San Patricio en Dublín, publicó cinco cartas (más tarde llegarían a siete) bajo el seudónimo de M.B. Drapier en las que se posicionaba claramente en contra de la circulación de dicha moneda. Lo que destaca fundamentalmente en *Las cartas del pañero* es que Swift ejerce de forma eficaz lo que debería ser en cualquier época la función del intelectual: actuar por el bien común utilizando las armas que tiene en su poder, que son las de informar, razonar, exponer y convencer. El intelectual debería al mismo tiempo, como hace Swift, desmantelar las manipulaciones de la opinión pública por parte de los lacayos de los poderosos en los medios de comunicación (Wood había hecho publicar artículos en Inglaterra acusando de conspiración papista el rechazo generalizado a sus planes de introducir dinero de baja calidad en Irlanda). Swift en este sentido pone especial empeño en tranquilizar a sus conciudadanos, pues si uno se apoya en la legitimidad de la ley no hay que tener miedo a las represalias, e insiste en su mensaje de forma nítida: "no estáis obligados a aceptar ningún dinero que no sea de oro o de plata" (Usandizaga, 1983: 83).[1]

Swift, que era de talante conservador y partidario de los *Tories* en el gobierno de Gran Bretaña, nunca incita a sus conciudadanos a la rebelión ni a que tomen el poder. Las leyes protegen al ciudadano, insiste, nunca se debe dudar en ejercer los derechos que nos asisten: "rechazad esta basura indecente. No es traición alguna el rebelarse contra el Sr. Wood" (Usandizaga, 1983: 83), y propone que no se acepte dinero que no sea el de metal legítimo.

En *Las cartas del pañero* Swift se muestra como adalid de una ciudadanía harta de los abusos por parte de unas autoridades incompetentes. Se trataba de denunciar una corruptela entre un empresario y miembros de la clase política que sólo causaría perjuicios al pueblo llano: la concesión de la patente se había hecho con absoluta falta de transparencia, no se había informado a las autoridades irlandesas, no atendía a las necesidades del país, ¡y ni siquiera la moneda se acuñaba en Irlanda! Hay que insistir en esto: Swift no propone un asalto al palacio de invierno, sencillamente pide a sus vecinos que no usen esa moneda de ínfimo valor, nadie les puede obligar a hacerlo: "Pero vuestro gran consuelo está en que así como la licencia de Su Majestad no os obliga a aceptar este dinero, tampoco las leyes han otorgado a la corona el poder de obligar a sus súbditos a aceptar cualquier dinero que plazca al rey" (Usandizaga, 1983: 75). Los ciudadanos pueden reaccionar, protestar y actuar conociendo las leyes y defendiendo sus derechos.

También llama la atención que Swift nunca trata de manera condescendiente a aquellos a los que defiende. Es más, les recrimina que no se informen lo suficiente sobre asuntos que les atañen y que no se tomen la molestia de leer los escritos que apoyan su causa. Defender a la ciudadanía no significa menospreciar su inteligencia, y Swift apela a la responsabilidad del individuo al igual que, por ejemplo, denuncia a los altos cargos de la administración que cobran sueldos desproporcionados con respecto al escaso

[1] Las citas en este artículo están tomadas de *La cuestión de Irlanda/Irish Tracts*, texto bilingüe editado y traducido por Aránzazu Usandizaga.

trabajo que hacen (siendo la mayoría funcionarios ausentes de Irlanda). Al año siguiente de la publicación de las cartas, el gobierno se vio obligado a retirar la patente y Swift se convirtió en un héroe de la nación.

El papel de Swift como héroe irlandés está lleno de contradicciones. En realidad él nunca dejó de respaldar los derechos de la clase protestante a la que pertenecía y era un firme defensor de las leyes penales o legislación anticatólica, pero era más fuerte su intolerancia ante las injusticias y no podía dejar de denunciar las condiciones de pobreza en las que vivía la mayor parte de la población (*Una humilde propuesta* es el ejemplo más claro de ello). Por estos motivos, leer a Swift en tiempos de crisis es un ejercicio muy recomendable para recordar la función del intelectual en la sociedad y también para advertir de los peligros que puede tener una relajación en la vigilancia de aquellos que tienen responsabilidades de poder: "Un pueblo acostumbrado durante mucho tiempo a la injusticia pierde gradualmente la noción misma de libertad, y se considera a merced de los demás" (Usandizaga, 1983: 89).

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NEXUS

ROOTS IN THE WATER: DEREK WALCOTT'S CARIBBEAN VOICE

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Contemporary literature has seen the emergence of important writers that use languages such as English, French or Portuguese in territories that were previously under European sovereignty. This might suggest that Western hegemony still prevails, even after the demise of political and military occupation, just as Ngugi wa Thiong'o has repeatedly denounced (2005: 147-8). However, we can also consider an alternative interpretation, posing that, in the end, cultural colonization has produced an unexpected outcome, insofar as these writers have appropriated the European languages, moulding and modifying them to suit their view of life and artistic purposes. Moreover, at least in the particular case of English literature, there is a wide consensus that authors from the former colonies have often eclipsed their metropolitan counterparts. Thus, the David Cohen Prize, instituted in 1993 to recognize the lifelong achievement of a British writer, was granted for the first time to an author born in the Caribbean, V. S. Naipaul. Equally, the Booker Prize, the most prestigious literary award in Great Britain, has repeatedly gone to postcolonial authors. This is ironic since the Booker had initially been sponsored by a company that owned plantations in Guyana, a reminder of imperialistic times. However, the relationship between the metropolis and the former colonial outposts now seems more balanced and, to a point, symbiotic: the prize acquires prestige thanks to the awards granted to quality authors coming from the former Empire while, in turn, they use the recognition to build up or consolidate their careers.[1]

[1] The Booker has been awarded to the following postcolonial writers: V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad, awarded in 1971), Nadine Gordimer (South Africa, 1974), Thomas Keneally (Australia, 1982), Arundhati Roy (India, 1997), Margaret Atwood (Canada, 2000), Yann Martel (Canada, 2001), DBC Pierre (Australia, 2003), Kiran Desai (India, 2006), Aravind Adiga (India, 2008), Eleanor Catton (New Zealand, 2013), Richard Flanagan (Australia, 2014) and Marlon James (Jamaica, 2015). J. M. Coetzee (South Africa) has received it twice, in 1983 and 1999. Salman Rushdie (born in India) was awarded it in 1981 and again in 1993, when he received the so-called "Booker of Bookers", to mark the 40th anniversary of the literary prize.

Varela-Zapata, Jesús (2017), "Roots in the Water: Derek Walcott's Caribbean Voice", ***Nexus*** **2017.2.**

The Nobel Prize has similarly had a great impact on the promotion of postcolonial writers, as is the case with Derek Walcott who received it in 1992. This was a highly significant award, on the occasion of the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's landing in America; it was also the first time for an Anglophone West Indian writer to be given the prize; in this respect C. P. Marsh-Locket has stated: "For the people of the Commonwealth Caribbean, with its legacy of British colonial education […] the awarding of the prize to a son of the soil forced a major reconsideration of England as the cultural center" (1993: 1). Walcott was born in St. Lucia which, as happened in most of the islands, was once the battlefield where European imperial powers vented their rivalries. This meant that its inhabitants alternated French and English sovereignties for times on end. It is no wonder that, although the country was granted independence from Britain in 1979, and English became the official language, nowadays most of the population still speak French patois and pray at Catholic churches. Walcott's family, against the common trend in his country, were Anglophone and Protestant. This could have easily turned him into an outsider; on the contrary, Walcott has consistently hoisted the Caribbean flag. Very often, he has claimed to be the embodiment of the diverse Caribbean social and racial milieu by pointing out that both his grandmothers were black, while his grandfathers were white Europeans.

We often realise that Walcott considers the ocean as a unifying element of the Caribbean identity. However, it is important to notice that linguistic divisions still prevail among the islands, and this is why the English-speaking islands, having once rejected the political model of Federation that Britain intended to implement, have still endeavoured to maintain economic, political and cultural ties with each other;[2] as Paula Burnett points out: "There is no formal Caribbean nationality, but the reality of a cultural 'nation' is lived by the region's diverse inhabitants and its diasporas" (2000: 318). Thus, we generally label figures such as Sam Selvon, Earl Lovelace, E. K. Brathwaite, George Lamming or Walcott himself as Caribbean or West Indian (with the implicit assumption that this refers only to the Anglophone area), rather than identifying them with the individual islands of their birth.

For all the stereotypes of the West Indies as paradise on Earth, the fact is they have had a troubled history and large parts of the region are still mired in social turmoil and economic stagnation. Indeed, there was a heated debate on the political future of the Commonwealth colonies in the Caribbean. At the height of decolonization, Jamaica and Trinidad, like many of the larger British colonies, were seen as candidates for gaining full statehood. However, the remaining islands were deemed too small and parochial to follow suit. That is why a Federation of the West Indies was first envisaged, although its success was limited. Once the two major countries celebrated independence ceremonies

[2] CARICOM is the organization that embodies the desire for certain regional integration. This has been achieved in certain areas and the pan-Caribbean ideal has given rise to the University of the West Indies, as well as the Caribbean Examinations Council, that sets up common curricula and educational standards.

in Kingston and Port of Spain, the constellation of islands that speckled the map were left in a kind of political limbo until most of them were hastily granted independence at the end of the 20th century. However, for all the national anthems and seats at the United Nations, they remain small entities. Dominica, Antigua, Grenada and St Vincent barely reach 100,000 inhabitants, St Kitts, less than half as many. Although the population is concentrated in a few urban settlements, some of their capital cities are no more than small villages: Roseau, Basseterre or Kingstown each boasts around 15,000 inhabitants. Castries, St. Lucia's capital, seems large in comparison, with some 70,000 people.

It is in this context that literature from the region has evinced the plight and limitations of these postcolonial nations. In Caryl Phillips' *A State of Independence*, the protagonist tells of his landing on one of these newly independent islands and, after a cursory mention to the picturesque and luxuriant landscape, he ponders on the futile life of the islanders: "anyone stupid enough to give over a whole working life to driving a bus around an island with only one road" (1986: 116). Actually, Caryl Phillips has elsewhere explicitly stated his scepticism about the viability of these states (Bell, 1991: 600). However, no one can vie with V. S. Naipaul for the title of scourge of the Caribbean. Some of his criticism may sound similar to that of Caryl Phillips; for example in Naipaul's "A Flag on the Island" a tourist looks down on the local currency as "the new funny island money" (1969: 135), and citizens are referred to as "very little people attending to their very little affairs" (1969: 145). In assorted essays and interviews Naipaul has vented his negative outlook time and again: "[I come] from a place which is not real, a place which is imperfectly made" (Rowe-Evans, 1971: 56). Earlier in his career, he had confessed to Derek Walcott himself: "I find this place frightening. I think this is a very sinister place" (Walcott, 1965: 5). It comes as no surprise that his friendship with Naipaul could not last. In fact, with the passing of time, Walcott has become one of the most vocal West Indians to deride him. In a public appearance in 2008 at a literary festival in Jamaica, Walcott gave vent to all his anger and read a poem where Naipaul is disparaged in all possible ways; he has similarly coined for his friend turned foe a cunning alias: VS Nightfall. Such enmity should be seen in the context of their radically opposing views about Caribbean belonging, and has also strengthened the perception of Walcott as a regional champion.[3] In his Nobel acceptance speech, Walcott provides a radically different view of this milieu: "Ours are not cities in the accepted sense, but no one wants them to be. They dictate their own proportions, their own definitions in particular places and in a prose equal to that of their detractors" (Walcott, 2014).

Most postcolonial writing has focused on trying to dismantle Eurocentric perceptions, mental prejudice, and metropolitan hegemony that has

3 Derek Walcott has a positive view of the region, although he has not completely ignored its shortcomings, notably a past plagued by cyclical crises and abuses of human rights, including the cruelty of African slavery, as reflected in his work *Drums and Colours*.

conditioned all artistic production and its interpretation in any outpost of the Empire. Writers and critics have delved into the literary history of their countries trying to define distinct national traits. Very often they have concluded that the special treatment of landscape is one of them. Along this line, we can argue that spatial description is equally important and has a peculiar bias in Caribbean literature, with a general trend to emphasize the beauty of the ocean, beaches and bush (Varela-Zapata, 2014: 159). For example, the pioneering poet Tom Redcam in "My Beautiful Home" describes Jamaica in a very rhetorical way as "An island the fairest on earth" (1996: 1-4); similarly, Una Marson in "Jamaica" extolls the perennial benign weather "one grand summer all the year through/ Dost thou enjoy beneath a sky of blue" (1996: 9). In "Residue", experimental poet Anthony McNeill describes a similarly pleasing milieu: "The grass itself shines and is precious. / Ahead, the sky and the ocean/ merge in a stain of blue" (1996: 1-4).[4] Walcott is equally an aestheticist when he rejoices in the beauty of land and sea, usually presented in the tradition of the *locus amoenus*. It is important to note that Walcott was also a painter and some of his descriptions have the tinge of the watercolour: "when I am in the Caribbean my first attraction is towards representing it in painting" (Montenegro, 1996: 135). This can be seen in poems such as "A Sea-Chantey":

> Anguilla, Adina,
> Antigua, Cannelles,
> Andreuille, all the l's,
> Voyelles, of the liquid Antilles,
> The names tremble like needles
> Of anchored frigates,
> Yachts tranquil as lilies,
> In ports of calm coral (Walcott, 1973: 1-8)

This is poetry that conforms to the model of "art for art's sake", apparently disregarding social issues and politically charged writing. Walcott, unlike other postcolonial writers, failed to turn his writing into an act of rebellion against the metropolitan cultural heritage. On the contrary, he always paid tribute to Western art and the classical tradition. In fact, he was educated within the most orthodox Anglo-Saxon convention at the University of the West Indies, and he worked for a short time as a teacher of Latin. In keeping with his academic background, his first play, *Henry Christophe,* uses the metre of the English Renaissance and his characters speak standard English elsewhere, with occasional speech in Caribbean dialect. He has no qualms to admit his allegiance to the vast Anglophone cultural tradition, stating that: "When I meet

[4] Critics such as Michael Gilkes (1986: 4), Alison Donnell (2006: 64) or Helen Tiffin (2005: 200) have suggested that, for all its unique features, this kind of description is also tinged by stereotypes inherited from European literary convention.

Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, or Michael Ondaatje, we are sharing a language, but more than that, we're sharing an experience that has evolved out of the idea of the Empire and that hasn't pained us" (Benjamin, 1995: 31). Walcott is able to reconcile this allegiance to his condition as a West Indian: "The fact that I read Dickens, or Shakespeare, or Graves was not a matter of transforming me into an Englishman, but of my taking in an extra culture (not a superior or a primary one) that would include my knowledge and experience of St Lucian folklore as well as Jacobean theatre. That to me was an enrichment" (Benjamin, 1995: 30).

In this context, it has been difficult for Walcott to avoid criticism from assorted postcolonial quarters. Some have scorned his "elitist" approach to art, since he demands some effort and considerable cultural baggage from the reader. Therefore, he has been set against fellow Caribbean writers, notably Edward Kamau Brathwaite, whose style is much closer to the man in the street, or Linton Kwesi Johnson who has privileged orality over textuality, reggae over European academicism. However, Walcott never came to be estranged from his Caribbean milieu and, with the passing of time, the prevailing view among critics is that Walcott, rather than perpetuating Western cultural hegemony, has been able to integrate the diverse elements that compose his multiple identity, combining the tradition of Greece and Rome with his condition as a half-caste Caribbean (Thieme, 1999: 42-76). Hence, *Omeros*, his most acclaimed work, can be read as a composite of the rich African oral heritage and the Homeric tradition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Characters like Ulises, Achille or Helen make classic echoes resound in his poetry, providing the poem, at the same time, with local colour and utterance, combining masterfully the classical world with the tropical luxuriance of the West Indian landscape.

Walcott has admitted that these worlds are so distant that such mix might seem pathological, "In that schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect" (1988: 4). However, as a conclusion, we can say that his reputation will be supported on his blending of the local Caribbean identity and his cosmopolitan attitude, which stems from the confluence of races and cultures he represents so well because of his ancestry and his vocation. In fact, although he ended up accepting teaching posts in the United States and the UK, Walcott spent a great part of his working career living in the West Indies, at a time when most of the prominent regional figures were building their literary careers in Europe or North America. He never thought of himself as anything but a West Indian and, as such, he has been praised and mourned, both at home and the World at large, on the occasion of his death in March 2017.

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NEXUS

IN MEMORY OF RENÉ DIRVEN: HOMAGE TO AN ENTERPRISING SCHOLAR AND A GREAT MAN

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Nearly one year ago, the linguistic community received the distressing news of professor René Dirven's passing in Mechelen, Belgium, his hometown, on August 18, 2016. In July 2016, René Dirven had been hospitalized after having an accident in his own home. At the time, René Dirven and his wife, Lutgard, were still mourning the untimely demise of one of their daughters, which had happened at the end of 2015. While René Dirven was in the hospital struggling to recover, his wife passed away, on August 3. Sadly, Rene Dirven's worsening condition prevented him from attending his wife's funeral. Two weeks later he himself would depart forever, at the age of 83.

For cognitive linguists, and for linguists at large, René Dirven's parting meant the loss of one of the most influential figures in linguistics. But to those that knew him on a more personal level, René Dirven's death, after such a rapid succession of fatal events, came as a complete shock. When I first met René Dirven in the late 1990s his eyesight was speedily deteriorating. He told me openly that his condition was not curable and that with time he would be completely blind. Although he seemed to be concerned, it was not enough to stop him from being involved in doing what he loved most: promoting science and serious scholarship. With time, he lost his sight yet his morale remained high. His strength and determination became a proverbial source of admiration for many, including myself.

Now, one year later, still in somewhat of a daze, besieged by feelings of intellectual orphanage, we cannot look back without a sense of gratitude for everything that René Dirven meant to many of us on both the professional and human levels.

Professionally, René Dirven was professor of linguistics at the University of Trier, from 1972 to 1985. Then he was appointed Full Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Duisburg. In his doctoral thesis, defended in Leuven, Belgium, in 1971, he had identified problems in the application of the transformational framework to attribution and predication in English syntax and had advocated for a view of language centered on semantics and conceptualization. During his years at Trier, this semanticist view of language

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drew him to the incipient cognitive-linguistic movement. Later, while at Duisburg, where he worked until his retirement in 1998, he consolidated these views and applied them to a broad array of theoretical and applied issues. On the theoretical end, René Dirven explored the main developments on *Prototype Theory*, Talmy's *Cognitive Semantics*, Lakoff and Johnson's *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, the cognitive approach to metonymy, *Blending Theory*, the different variants of *Construction Grammar*, and Langacker's *Cognitive Grammar*. In 2005, he published a lengthy overview article entitled "Major strands in Cognitive Linguistics," where he addressed the major achievements of all these theories, discussed their strengths and weaknesses, identified points of convergence and offered solutions to pending problems. His spirit of perfectionism led him to write a heavily revised version of the "strands" paper in 2010, for which he sought my cooperation (Dirven & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2010). He had plans to publish a third and more condensed version of the same paper, which unfortunately remains in its initial draft format. On the applied end, René Dirven took two main directions. One had to do with his deep interest in providing second-language students with accessible explanations on second language structure and use. In his view, this could be achieved by using the principles of Cognitive Linguistics to cast light on areas of special difficulty for learners. These areas, he further argued, could be detected by using traditional contrastive analysis techniques. The result of this work would be the development of cognitively-oriented pedagogical grammars, which would be based on "the learning materials containing the best possible illustration, presentation and gradation of the learning problems in a given area of language learning" (Dirven, 2001: 18). The second applied direction had a sociolinguistic nature. Between 1996 and 1999, with funding from the Flemish government, René Dirven started a research and development program called *LiCCA (Languages in Contact and Conflict in Africa)*. This program involved research institutions from Europe, the United States and Africa (Dirven & Webb, 1993). His main aim was to promote the cooperation of researchers with government representatives and language communities to solve problems arising from the contact among languages, cultures and ideologies in sub-Saharan Africa.

René Dirven was a prolific writer. Endowed with a fertile mind and the highest academic rigor. By the time of his death, he had published nearly two hundred research papers and thirty books. He had an extraordinary ability to make in-depth analysis and original insights readable even to the novice. This is demonstrated in his book, coauthored with Günter Radden, *Cognitive English Grammar*. But René Dirven also promoted knowledge and research by bringing together competent linguists from all over the world into joint scholarly ventures. One such venture, and a landmark event for the history of Cognitive Linguistics, was the creation of the *Linguistic Agency University of Duisburg* (*LAUD*). This agency was an adaptation of the previous *Linguistic Agency of the University of Trier* (*LAUT*), which René Dirven had founded in 1973 in cooperation with his colleague and friend, Günter Radden. The initial aim of the agency was to disseminate important linguistic research by offering researchers pre-published versions of papers. While in Trier, the agency also

organized, starting in 1977, an annual international linguistics symposium. Among the invited figures were Charles Fillmore (1997), George Lakoff (1983) and Ronald Langacker (1984). Although not a cognitive linguist, strictly speaking, Fillmore is one of the most cited authors in Cognitive Linguistics while Lakoff and Langacker are recognized as two of the founding fathers of this movement. During its Duisburg stage, the agency converted the symposia into specialized thematic conferences with a variety of topics including pidgin and creole languages, computer linguistics and artificial intelligence. In 1989, there was another Cognitive Linguistics symposium, which would later be recognized as the *First International Cognitive Linguistics Conference* (*ICLC-1*). This symposium was witness to the foundation of the *International Cognitive Linguistics Association* (*ICLA*), to the launching of *Cognitive Linguistics*, the flagship journal of the Association, and to the creation of the book series *Cognitive Linguistics Research* (*CLR*). Both the journal and the series were to be published by Mouton de Gruyter. René Dirven, who was a major driving force behind these projects, became deeply involved in sustaining them over time. Thus, he served for years, together with Ronald Langacker and John Taylor, as co-editor of *CLR* while simultaneously acting as a board member of *Cognitive Linguistics*. Since its inception *CLR* has published 60 volumes and *Cognitive Linguistics* has become one of the most important linguistics journals in the world. René Dirven would also serve as the third president of *ICLA*, from 1995 to 1997. Beginning in the year 2000, the *LAUD* developed into two separate organizations, one specialized in symposia and the other, based at the University of Essen, in pre-publications.

René Dirven also initiated two large-scale bibliographical projects: *CogBib* (*Cognitive Linguistics Bibliography*), published by Mouton de Gruyter, and *MetBib* (*Bibliography on Metaphor and Metonymy*), published by John Benjamins. The first is an electronic database with thousands of entries covering all possible topics in Cognitive Linguistics. The second one is also an electronic database specialized in publications from all scientific disciplines on figurative language.

In the mid 2000s, René Dirven saw the need to create a new book series that would serve as a potential publishing venue for the increasing amount of excellent materials that were emerging as applications of the principles of Cognitive Linguistics to such fields as artificial intelligence, cultural studies, language teaching, language acquisition, specialized languages, terminology, lexicography and literary studies. Together with Gitte Kristiansen, Michel Achard and myself, René Dirven launched the book series *Applications of Cognitive Linguistics.* He coedited its first volume, *Cognitive Linguistics: Current Applications and Future Perspectives*, with the rest of the founders of the series. This book, published in 2006, would set the stage for the rest of the series, which to date totals 36 volumes.

On a human level, René Dirven had an enormous intellectual generosity. To the best of his ability, and despite his many commitments, he would find time to read and comment —often meticulously— on research materials from

fledgling linguists. He had a special eye for new talent, which, once detected, he would help become as productive as possible without seeking any personal reward other than the satisfaction of promoting science. René Dirven also had an eye for historical opportunities, as was evidenced by his role in the foundation of *ICLA*. His foresight also benefited the development of Cognitive Linguistics in Spain. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, René attended various conferences in Spain. In 1998, he attended the inaugural conference of the *Spanish Cognitive Linguistics Association* in Alicante, where he learned of the desire that many Spanish cognitive linguists had to create their own international journal, besides Mouton's *Cognitive Linguistics*, in order to further enhance the dissemination of their research. Then, in its 2000 conference at the Complutense University of Madrid, the Association entrusted me with the creation of its journal and asked me to make a formal proposal for the organization of *ICLC-8* in 2003 at the University of La Rioja. The journal and the conference were both expected to have an interdisciplinary orientation, with the purpose of bringing together work from different schools of thought which was compatible with (and beneficial to) the research pursuits of the cognitive-linguistic paradigm. Several renowned scholars were contacted for the initial discussion on the conference and the journal, René Dirven being one of them. He became an enthusiastic supporter of the two projects from the very start, especially due to their interdisciplinary nature. The first issue of the journal, the *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics* (now the *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*) was published in 2003 by John Benjamins, and *ICLC-8* was organized at the University of La Rioja in that same year. René Dirven was a major driving force behind them. He served very actively in the scientific committee of the conference and was a committed member of the advisory board of the journal from its inception.

René Dirven was a unique man, who taught several generations of young researchers not only through his advice and direction, but also as a role model though his own personal quest for academic rigor and his unrelenting determination. He is sorely missed. Nevertheless, his legacy, as a great scholar and a generous person, remains with us. He was a man with a vision, a forerunner and a pioneer, whose enterprising spirit is worth emulating. It is my hope that we can make his legacy a lasting one.

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NEXUS

IN HONOR OF WILLIAM LABOV

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This essay is written for the occasion of William Labov's ninetieth birthday. The founder of variationist sociolinguistics was born in Rutherford, New Jersey on December 4, 1927 just outside the dialect area of New York City, the community he would later focus on in his research. He obtained a BA degree from Harvard University (1948) in English and Philosophy. After completing his degree he worked as a commercial writer and an industrial chemist before he entered graduate school at Columbia University in 1961 to study Linguistics and to work on his PhD under the direction of Uriel Weinreich. He finished his MA in 1963 on sound change in Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, followed by his PhD in 1964 on variation in New York City speech based on social categories and style. Upon finishing his degree he took up a teaching job at the University of Columbia (Gordon, 2013). In 1971 he moved to the University of Pennsylvania where he trained and supervised sociolinguists who have had an important impact on the field. Among them are John Rickford, Penelope Eckert, Sharon Ash, John Baugh, and Maria Teresa Turell who was the main introducer of Labov's ideas in Spain.

Labov's ideas on variation in language, language change, historical linguistics, narrative, sociolinguistic methods, and discourse have been key to the field of Linguistics and more specifically to the development of the discipline of Quantitative Sociolinguistics. The academic context of Labov's early research coincides with the emerging ideas of Chomsky who was concerned with formal aspects of language structure that could account for the innate human capacity to know a language. For Labov the use of intuitions and native speaker judgments as a source of data failed to explain the social meaning and the reason why people use language in different ways. He sought to unveil the systematic nature of language variation, which from a Chomskyian perspective was considered an uninteresting deviation that did not require further explanation. The two differing theoretical perspectives on language are understood today as involving different paradigmatic approaches with distinct ontological and epistemological underpinnings.

The study of language variation had its roots in structural dialectology. The extension to urban contexts brought in by Labov along with new methods

for collecting language use data were, at the time, an important innovation. Perhaps one of the most outstanding contributions Labov has made to the study of language has been to demonstrate that free variation was constrained and that a choice of an allophonic variant was principled and could be predicted according to its social meaning or to the prestige a person or a social group assigned to it. While variation is attested at all levels of language, it is important to note that Labov's work has mostly focused on phonological variation (i.e., *the realization of post vocalic /r/*, *t/d* deletion, shifting of *ay* and *aw* diphthongs) and to some extent on lexical variation (i.e., *pop*, *soda*, *cold drink*, *drink* in different parts of the United States). Forms of morphological variation (i.e., the contraction and deletion of copula *'be'* in African-American Vernacular) have also centered the attention of quantitative sociolinguists while syntactic variation has been more problematic.[1] Lavandera (1978) points out that a sociolinguistic variable must involve variants that are truth functionally equivalent, namely, that the choice of one variant over the other does not entail a difference in meaning in the real world. The example Lavandera discusses is Labov and Weiner's (1977) claim that the active sentence and an agentless passive (i.e., *they broke into the liquor closet* vs. *the liquor closet was broken into*) are equivalent. According to Lavandera those two syntactic structures cannot be variants since they do not have the same referential or truth functional meaning. The agent is omitted in the second case in order to avoid disclosing or putting blame on the agent. Hence, the main focus of Labov's research has been on phonological, morphological and lexical variables.

In historical linguistics it is possible to trace language change over time and to identify the end form but with Labov's work it has been possible to analyze the influences on sound change in progress from a synchronic perspective. The study on the social motivation of sound change in Martha's Vineyard (Labov, 1972: 1-42) demonstrates how a synchronic approach to the study of sound change (i.e., the centralization of the diphthongs *ay* as in the word *right* and *aw* as in the word *house*) is tied to a particular social meaning involving the identification as a member of the island community, as opposed to being a newcomer or a tourist. Some of the deeper questions concerning the driving force for language change still intrigue researchers today (Gordon, 2006: 338) and were originally presented in the coauthored article titled "The Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change" together with Uriel Weinreich, and Martin Herzog (Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog, 1968: 95-188). The underlying paradox resides in the tension between the systematicy of language, variation, and change and explaining how this relation is instantiated by speakers.

> After all, if a language has to be structured in order to function efficiently how do people continue to talk while the language changes, that is, while

[1] Syntactic studies were carried out on the use of *avoir* and *être* in Montreal French by Gillian Sankoff and Pierette Thibault (1980).

> it passes through periods of lessened systematicity? (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog, 1968: 100).

The heart of the issue according to Weinreich, Labov and Herzog is the actuation problem that consists in understanding what factors (linguistic, social, and other) can account for the actuation of changes in a given language but not in others which have the same features, or exist in the same language but at some other point in time? While critiques of this puzzle have been put forth for sound change (Ohala, 2012: 23), finding a satisfactory explanation for the origin of change is still current.

Another key contribution to the field of sociolinguistics has been William Labov's commitment to demonstrating through his research the logic and rule-governed nature of African American Vernacular (AAVE). His interest in AAVE stems from the concern with the reading failure of black children in the public school system in New York City, a problem that persists today in most urban educational contexts. His book *Language in the Inner City* (1972b) sought to find out whether reading failure could be attributed to dialect differences. In this book Labov provides further empirical support for a stable and rule governed dialect, a variety of English spoken by black youths in the inner cities of the United States. This research also dispelled ideologically based views that considered spoken Black English an error-ridden, non-standard version of standard American English. Some of the features of the African-American English dialect as described by Labov include phonological (i.e., the devoicing of /b/, /d/, /g/ in word final position, the use of alveolar nasal /ŋ/ as a velar nasal /n/, the realization of the voiceless fricative /θ/ as /t/), morphological (i.e., the absence of third person present tense on verbs such as *she walk*, reduplication of past participle or past tense marker *likeded*), and grammatical (i.e., multiple negation or negative concord as in *he don' do nothin*, formation of direct questions without auxiliary inversion *as* in *why I can't* play) features that were shared by speakers of African descent all over the United States. Years after this pioneering research that established the systematic features of AAVE, the debate around Black English reemerged with the Oakland California school board decision in December 1997 to recognize Ebonics as a legitimate language system to be taught to children in California schools. Labov played a key role in this debate by testifying on the basis of his previous research at a US Senate hearing on Ebonics and education. As Walt Wolfram points out the real problem was more related to historically ingrained beliefs about African Americans that came to the fore on this occasion.

> To understand the full significance of the Oakland controversy, we have to understand that it is framed by a fundamental ideology about language and language diversity. By ideology, I mean an underlying, consensual belief system about the way language is supposed to be. (Wolfram, 1998: 109)

The explosive reaction this resolution provoked can be attributed to the intensity of the beliefs in the monolingual language norm in opposition to the actual language diversity present in today's society, along with the persistent misinformation about language variation and educational issues. Labov laments in an interview with Gordon (2006) that his academic dedication to the issue of reading levels and school success of African American children has not had the full impact he had intended to improve reading scores of black children.

Research methods are another dimension of the field to which William Labov has made an important contribution. The research techniques developed by Labov to study language variation in urban contexts have revolutionized the manner in which data collection is carried out and they have become the canon adopted by researchers for undertaking the study of language variation from a synchronic perspective. Labov's experience shows that the best data for the study of variation is spontaneous and natural speech. However, the task of obtaining such speech was a problem since researchers walking around with a tape-recorder in-hand and asking informants to read texts and questions about their community was not precisely conducive to obtaining the sort of speech they pursued. The "observer's paradox" as this dilemma is known became one of the central concerns of synchronic research on language variation and change. The development of sociolinguistic methods focused on techniques researchers could use to try to overcome this methodological difficulty. The principle proposed by Labov (1966) of the amount of attention paid to speech as the main criterion influencing speech style led to developing various interview techniques for eliciting spontaneous or vernacular speech. For example, the use of contextualized, rapid, and anonymous elicitations of a given sociolinguistic variable used by Labov in New York Department stores was successful for obtaining natural speech. The "danger of death" question was also very useful to get the data needed from male gang members in New York City. The notion of style based on attention to speech was also methodologically useful in order to identify more informal speech from formal speech. Different styles of speech could be obtained by getting informants to answer questions in which they would become emotionally involved, as well as reading texts with the variables under study and for the most formal style the reading of decontextualized word lists and minimal pairs. Style as a methodological consideration for identifying and obtaining spontaneous speech has been advanced theoretically by Bell (1977, 1984) with his audience design model and by Eckert and Rickford (2001). Labov adds:

> The organization of contextual styles along the axis of attention paid to speech was not intended as a general description of how style-shifting is produced and organized in everyday speech, but rather as a way of organizing and using intra-speaker variation that occurs in the interview. (Labov, 2001: 87)

Style, according to Labov (2001: 87), involves both accommodation and adaptation to one's audience along with different degrees of self-monitoring.

The quantitative sociolinguistic paradigm founded by William Labov has undergone changes that are insightfully explained by Eckert (2012) who distinguishes three waves of analytical practice in quantitative sociolinguistics. The first wave is exemplified by Labov's discipline defining studies of Martha's Vineyard and the social stratification of New York City speech. In these studies linguistic variables were correlated with macro-sociological variables such as social class, ethnicity, age, and sex. In the first wave studies of language variation, change arose, according to Eckert,

> … from pressures within the linguistic system, first affecting the speech of those least subject to the influence of standard language […] variables were taken to mark socioeconomic status, and stylistic and gender dynamics were seen as resulting from effects of these categories on speakers' orientation to their assigned place in the hierarchy. (Eckert, 2012: 90)

The second wave, which is best represented by the work of the Milroys in Belfast, Northern Ireland (1980) represents a move to incorporate ethnographic methods in order to explore the local meaning variation had for individuals in the community. Speaker agency and the choice of a variant to communicate a positive affiliation to one's network was an innovation to the first wave. As Eckert (2012) also points out, language variation went hand in hand with use of territory or physical space, forms of dress, organization of free time and preferred music in her study of jocks and burnouts in Belten High School in Michigan in the US. The point about second wave studies is that language variation does not solely index social categories but additional meanings and identities that have become more the focus of the third wave in variation studies. The direction in which sociolinguistic research appears to be headed today is encompassed by this third wave that goes beyond the fixed categories of speakers that just index a static identity and category affiliation. The current-day approach, according to Eckert (2012: 87), consists in a more dynamic view of the relation between language variation and the social meaning where speakers use language to construct identities and meaning in on-going interactions.

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NEXUS

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW VARIETY OF ENGLISH: MULTICULTURAL LONDON ENGLISH (MLE)

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1. Introduction

Language variation and change has long been one of the hot issues in Linguistics. For linguists, and indeed for society in general, there is a great deal of interest in looking at issues such as how languages change and develop, what innovations are introduced, how a particular word or expression evolves, why speakers from one region or community differ in the way they express themselves, and why young speakers communicate with a special jargon that differs from that of adults. This reflects the broader interest of human beings in observing what is going on around them, with language use occupying a central position in this respect.

During the late twentieth century, large cities in Europe, such as London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris and Madrid, saw a substantial rise in the immigrant population, with new arrivals from a wide variety of geographical and cultural backgrounds. Many factors account for this, among them economic migration, the search for better working and living conditions, population movement between former colonised territories and the old colonial powers, war and natural disasters (earthquakes, floods and tsunamis), and political, ethnic and religious persecutions.

The coexistence of different cultural, religious and language communities in these large cities has had a significant impact on their linguascape with the emergence of a number of multiethnolects, these also referred to in the literature as *contemporary urban vernacular* (Rampton, 2015), *urban vernacular* and *urban youth speech style* (Wiese, 2009; Nortier & Svendsen, 2015; Cheshire, Nortier & Adger, 2015).

In the case of London this new sociolect is often known as *Multicultural London English* (MLE), and although it has sometimes been pejoratively referred to in the mass media as "Jafaican", that is, a pseudo or fake Jamaican, due to a large number of its speakers coming from the Caribbean or Africa, the origin of MLE is far more complex (Cheshire et al., 2011). It has developed as the result

Palacios Martínez, Ignacio M. (2017), "The emergence of a new variety of English: Multicultural London English (MLE)", ***Nexus* 2017.2.**

of language contact and second language acquisition in a large proportion of young speakers, these also introducing innovations into the language system. Hence, MLE can be seen as a linguistic melting-pot, one in which different components and ingredients are present: Englishes from India and Africa, Caribbean creoles, learner English varieties, and even local London dialects such as traditional Cockney. It is present in many inner London districts, such as Hackney and Tower Hamlets, which have high young immigrant populations and which cover part of the area traditionally associated with Cockney. For this reason the new variety has also been called the "new Cockney" (Fox, 2015).[1]

Furthermore, this linguistic phenomenon has spread to other large cities in Britain, such as Manchester and Birmingham, to the extent that some linguists (Drummond, 2017) have recognised the existence of *Multicultural Urban British English* (MUBE) which shares a number of features across British urban centres. Drummond (2017: 644) proposes that there exists a variety which is found in various British urban centres, with each city having its own sub-variety or its own particular features, these deviating from traditional towns, albeit shared across different places in Britain. Although this is a sound proposal, the existence of MUBE has yet to be verified with sufficient empirical data.

2. General purpose and method used

The present study aims to provide an overview of the main linguistic features of MLE, with particular attention to lexis, grammar and discourse, but with some references to phonetics. An exhaustive treatment is beyond the scope of this contribution, and would require a far longer analysis. My intention, rather, is to describe in broad terms this emerging variety, and thus to familiarize the reader with it.

I will use several distinct sources for MLE, the first and most important being the *London English Corpus*. In addition, I will draw on a variety of websites and forums, television series and films, and the lyrics from London rappers, since rap music has also exerted a significant influence on the variety; we might note in this context that many of the most influential rappers currently working in Britain come from East London.

[1] Fox (2015: 8) maintains that the meaning of the term "Cockney" has recently changed and should no longer be associated with one particular group of people or seen as a marker of identity. In fact, "Cockney" today is related to a specific accent used by a large group of people in a wide area of south-eastern England. Kerswill's (2013: 148-152) study of identity, ethnicity and place in London youth language shows how London teenagers, in broad terms, do not associate themselves with Cockney as understood as a particular accent with its own social and economic background. The youths interviewed actually claim they speak "slang": "we are typical cockneys the way we talk and that we talk in slang. I write in slang as well I can't help it". Other terms they use to refer to their way of speaking are *street* and *ghetto*, "he's too into the ghetto talk [oh is he really?] and the ghetto slang and what yeah okay okay xxx # brother talks # oohh he's into the slang words" (LEC).

The *London English Corpus* (LEC) was compiled by Cheshire and her team in London between 2004 and 2010 (Cheshire et al., 2011). This corpus includes the *Linguistics Innovators Corpus* (LIC) and the *Multicultural London English Corpus* (MLEC). The data for the former corpus, which contains over a million words from 121 speakers, was collected between 2004 and 2007 in the districts of Hackney (inner London) and Havering (outer London), and includes the speech of both teenagers and adults. The MLEC was compiled between 2007 and 2010 and contains data not only from young speakers but also from small children as well as from adult speaker groups, covering parts of the districts of Islington, Haringey and Hackney in north London. It amounts to 621,327 words from a total of 137 speakers. In both cases the material was collected through individual and group interviews in youth centres and schools. The two corpora were accessed using the Sketch Engine interface, an internet tool designed to aid research into more than 90 different languages.[2] Part of the material was also kindly provided by Jennie Cheshire and Sue Fox.

Regarding websites and forums, much of my data are drawn from the Spoken English Language Teaching Resources, provided by the Department of Linguistics of Queen Mary University of London and containing, among other things, a Databank of Spoken London English and a Research Digest with abstracts of recent academic work on spoken English.[3] Other useful sources include the web-based Urban Dictionary, although information therein needs to be viewed with care since it is not always accurate, in that definitions are often written by non-specialists. In addition, there are a considerable number of TV series and films which involve speakers of MLE, these including *Phoneshop* (Phil Bouker, director), *Kidulthood* (Mershag Huda, director), *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish, director), and the series *Chewing gum* (Michaela Coel, director). These can all be freely accessed through the internet. Finally, for the lyrics of modern London rappers I have consulted those by Wiley, D Double E, Kevin Georgiou (K Koke), Ghetts (Justin Samuel formerly known as Ghetto), Trim, Kozzie and Speech Debelle.

3. MLE main linguistic features

3.1. Lexis[4]

MLE is full of expressions of its own, some shared by other varieties of spoken British English, although a large number fully autochthonous. Many of these words, expressions and idioms are closely related to the origins, living conditions, geographical and social background of MLE speakers. I am

[2] See <https://www.sketchengine.co.uk/> for further details.
[3] See <https:/www.linguistics.sllf.qmul.ac.uk>for more information.
[4] See Palacios (2018) for a more thorough study of lexis in MLE with particular reference to the language of London teenagers.

currently compiling a glossary of this material, one which might be extended to a dictionary in the near future.

3.1.1. Borrowing and use of words from other sociolects and languages

It is quite common to find lexical items and expressions from other varieties of English, such as Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean English, given that in some of the districts of central London, such as Hackney, there is a large community of immigrants from these areas. Examples include: *skeen*> OK, fine, *wah gwam*> what is going on?, *safe*> expression of approval, greeting, thanks, *sket*/*skettle*> loose woman and short for Caribbean *sketel* meaning "slut", *cotch*> to relax at home alone or with close friends, *pickney*> child or children, *yardie*> Jamaican or Jamaican descents that live abroad, typically in the UK (it may also refer to a gang), *chav*> a white working class person with a stereotypically "low-class" lifestyle and way of dressing, *yute*> kid, from "youth", *creps*> trainers, *batty*> homosexual, *ackee*> national Jamaican fruit. Here are some contextualized examples:

> (1) on my sixteenth birthday my mum goes . erm "I know you want cigarette so go out in the garden and have one" I was like "oh *skeen* bye". (LEC)[5]
>
> (2) "oh I heard you called my mum a slag". "I heard you called me a *sket*" and I was like "this is this is pathetic this is like junior school stuff". (LEC)
>
> (3) they've got nothing. *cotch* on the stairs and smoke cannabis shit. (LEC)
>
> (4) it's my fucking *pickney* don't tell me what to do with my child. (LEC)
>
> (5) my mum is a tough *yardie*. (LEC)
>
> (6) How's your *yute* these days? (LEC)
>
> (7) he started shouting *batty* boy and stuff like that. (LEC)

The adjective *bare* is also commonly used as a quantifier (8) and even as an intensifier of adjectives (9). This also seems to be fairly common in Jamaican English (Drummond, 2017: 645).

> (8) I ain't got a lot of cousins boy *bare* people have got *bare* cousins I've only got about three. (LEC)
>
> (9) That game is heavy, it's *bare* addictive. (LEC)

[5] Each example is followed by a code indicating the corpus or other source from which it was extracted. Thus, LEC and UD stand for *London English Corpus* and *Urban Dictionary*, respectively.

The plural suffix-*dem* attached to personal nouns, as in *boydem*, *mandem*, *peopledem*, also has its origin in this variety (Cheshire et al., 2011; Kerswill, 2013). By *boydem*, London teenagers mean policemen rather than a group of boys, and it is also a particular term for "police". Witness the following:

(10) It's baffling the *boydem boydem* not knowing where they're going. (LEC)

(11) he was stabbing up the mandem like. (LEC)

(12) it's funny now yeah but at the time it weren't [mm] . me and my *peopledem* yeah went to one shubs in er . in Shanktown yeah? (LEC)

3.1.2. Shortenings/Clippings

In colloquial spoken English it is very common to find shortened or clipped versions of full words. This is particularly frequent in the language of teenagers, and is not only motivated by the constraints of economy of language but is also a mechanism to reinforce identity. Thus, *cos* very often replaces because, *cas* for casually, *probs* for probably, *totes* as a reduced form of totally, *perf* instead of perfect, *uni* for university, *hack* for Hackney, *broth/bruv* and even *blud*, *blad* or *blood* instead of brother, *cuz* instead of cousin or good friend, *nan* for grandmother, *pop* as a shortened form for popular, *div* for divider,[6] *po(s)* for police, *fam* for family, *nuff* for enough, *mic(s)* for microphone(s), *vibes* as equivalent to the long form vibrations and *fav* for favourite. Consider the following examples:

(13) A: I'll come at 8 for the party. B: *Perf* (UD)

(14) That guy is *totes* a hottie. (UD)

(15) What's wrong with your locker *bruv*? (LEC)

(16) This is England *blad* it's free. (LEC)

(17) What ends are you from *cuz*? (LEC)

(18) I'm very careful of [yeah] eating cheese my *fav* cos when I was pregnant … (LEC)

(19) it's a bit hard you have to go to *uni* and everything. (LEC)

(20) I don't know if the *PO POS* are after me or something like that. (LEC)

(21) I think you just look like a *div* no one is impressed by it. (LEC)

(22) You see someone you got *vibes* with. (LEC)

3.1.3. Change of meaning of words

[6] This originates in UK prison slang, and refers to the job of putting cardboard into boxes, often given to the lowest-ranked prisoners. Hence, someone given this job is a "divider" or "div".

This is particularly common with adjectives, and involves a word which usually denotes something positive being turned into something negative, or vice versa. This is generally done to subvert reality and react against the establishment. Thus we find *wicked, sweet* and *sick* with the meaning of great or good, *mould* meaning stage or period, *crew* referring to a group of friends or gang, and *beef* meaning trouble. Also, for some meanings a large number of different terms are found, as if they are in competition to convey the same idea, as with *drugged, mashed, pissed, stoned*, all meaning to be high on drugs or heavily drunk. At times MLE speakers, teenagers in particular, alter the meaning of words by creating a metaphor or a metonymical image; this is the case with words such as *ends*, *turf* and *yard*, used to refer to a speaker's own area or district. Some examples follow:

(23) Oh it's lovely… it's *wicked*. (LEC)
(24) That game is *sick* it's brilliant mate. (LEC)
(25) my *ends* are East Ham and Manor Park. (LEC)
(26) I might start *beef* with you you get me? (LEC)
(27) You're just getting *mashed* with your friends. (LEC)

3.2. Grammar and discourse

3.2.1. The quotative system

As in other varieties of English we find the prevalence of certain quotatives or verbs/expressions to introduce reported speech in spoken discourse, these not corresponding to the traditional reporting verbs SAY, TELL, ASK and THINK. Of these, GO and (BE) *like* are two common forms, as in the following:

(28) "I'll be back by one o' clock", he *went*. (LEC)
(29) He *was like* "Come on". (LEC)

However, in addition to this we find in MLE a new quotative, the expression *this is* + speaker, which is restricted to the language of teenagers. Moreover, while the speakers of the age groups 12-13 years and 16-19 years use it exclusively to introduce reported direct speech, children who are 8-9 years old resort to it to introduce both direct speech and non-lexicalised words or sounds and gesture (Fox, 2012; Palacios, 2013, 2014). Consider the following:

(30) *this is me* "no I'm laughing out loud man". (Laura, 19 years old, LEC)
(31) *this is him* "blah". (Howard, 8 years old, LEC)

3.2.2. *Man* as a new pronoun

Jenny Cheshire (2013) has shown how the noun *man*, which is very frequently used in MLE as a vocative, has become, through a process of grammaticalisation, a pragmatic marker and subsequently a new pronoun. As a pronoun, *man* may represent first person singular (32) or plural (33), second person plural (34) or even a generalised *you* (35).

> (32) before I got arrested *man* (I) paid for my own ticket to go Jamaica you know . but I've never paid to go on no holiday before this time I paid. (LEC)
>
> (33) he used to make us laugh and that <putting on a voice> 'I told you not to bring your phone in school' make *man* (us) laugh like. (LEC)
>
> (34) You lot go like *man* (you) go like "don't do it". (LEC)
>
> (35) *man*'s got to jump up to hit him he could just go bang bang and pushing fist start hitting and that's it. (LEC)

Cheshire (2013) associates two rhetorical functions with this pronoun: membership category and emphasis.

3.2.3. Negation

MLE shows very interesting features in the system of negative polarity. A brief account follows.

- *ain't*

In MLE, and in other varieties from the southeast of Britain, this negative is very commonly used as a present negative form of BE and HAVE, with all subjects in positive and negative statements, and even in question tags. More marginally it can be equivalent to *didn't* and *don't*.

> (36) I've done alright since I've been here. I *ain't* had no trouble or nothing. (LEC)
>
> (37) There's about seventy cases I expect *ain't it*? (LEC)

Broadly speaking, *ain't* occurs more often as the negative of HAVE, followed by BE as copula and BE as auxiliary (Cheshire, 1991; Palacios, 2010).

Apart from this vernacular negative, we also record some less frequent forms, such as *nope*, *dunno*, etc.

> (38) Do you know what is about? *Nope*. (LEC)
>
> (39) I *dunno* what you've heard of it. (LEC)

- *never* as past tense negator or as a negative preterite

Contrary to the case in standard English, in MLE it is quite common to find this negative adverb negating a single occasion in the past rather than as a universal negator. This special use of *never*, which is also reported as pervasive in 24 varieties of English such as East Anglian English, Irish English, and Hong-Kong English (Kortmann & Lunkenheimer, 2013), is also known as punctual *never* and it is then equivalent to *didn't*.

> (40) I had a knife in my pocket and I picked it out and I put it to her throat . but I *never* done nothing. (LEC)

In a preliminary study (Palacios, 2015b), *never* as a negative preterite is seen at a frequency of 16.5% of total uses, and appears to be constrained by the nature of the main verb and by the type of following complementation. Most of these verbs are transitive and they may express different types of verbal aspect. Furthermore, they tend to be followed by simple and non-tensed complements.

- negative concord (NC)

As in many other varieties of English, a high number of negative concord or double negative structures are recorded in MLE, especially among young speakers (43.8%) as compared to adults (14.4%) (Palacios, 2017).

> (41) I *don't* want *nothing* to do with you *no more*. (LEC)
>
> (42) But *never* heard *no* more about it. (LEC)

I also observed that the repertoire of NC structures in teen language is wider than that of adults. The teenage data yielded 6 possible negatives as first negators (*n't*, *ain't*, *never*, *nobody/no one*, *nothing* and *hardly*), while only 3 (*n't/ain't/* and *never)* were found in adult speech. Contrary to what was expected, multiple negatives, that is, negative constructions containing more than two negatives in the same clause, are not common and all, but one example is found in the youth data (see 41 above).

NC tends to be associated with the presence of other non-standard negatives, such as *ain't* and third person singular present *don't*. Moreover, negative concord structures tend to occur with first person singular subjects followed by third and second person plural subjects, although these tendencies were not different when the distribution of standard negatives with compounds with *any* was considered.

Pragmatically speaking, NC structures are in most cases equivalent to single negatives, and as such they can express denials and refusals (Tottie, 1991), although they can also be used to intensify a negative statement and to make the speaker's account more credible and realistic.

- third person singular *don't*

A previous study (Palacios, 2016) showed that in the youth sample of the Linguistic Innovators Corpus (LIC) third person singular *don't* prevails over the standard form *doesn't*.

(43) It *don't* bother me that it's being recorded. (LEC)

(44) He d*on't* even look drunk, does he? (LEC)

(45) He *don't* have nowhere to live. (LEC)

However, this is not the case in the adult data, where *doesn't* clearly prevails over *don't* with a general percentage of 71.6 versus 28.4. The subject of the clause seems to constrain the presence of third person *don't* to a considerable extent, since in all cases personal pronouns (*he* and *she*) are more common than impersonal *it*, and full noun phrases as subjects of these negative forms are recorded only in small numbers. The presence of another non-standard negative in the clause also seems to condition the occurrence of third negative *don't*, since negative concord structures are clearly much more common with third person singular negative *don't* than with *doesn't*.

Furthermore, the speaker's gender and ethnic origin seem to constrain the presence of third person singular negative *don't* in a different way. Both male and female speakers use this feature at a similar rate. However, teenagers of Anglo and non-Anglo ethnic origin use this negative form differently, with Anglo speakers tending to use third person singular *don't* more often than those of non-Anglo origin.

3.2.4. Pragmatic markers

MLE in general, and the language of MLE teenagers in particular, includes a great many invariant tags such as *eh*, *okay*, *right*, *yeah, huh, you get me, you know* and *you know what I mean*, which really function as pragmatic markers. *Innit* is particularly distinctive and common here, its frequency having increased significantly over the last few years (Palacios, 2015a).

Innit may represent not only the verb BE but also DO, HAVE (as either an auxiliary or lexical verb) and most of the modal verbs. Furthermore, it does not always observe the polarity reversal rule typical of question tags, and is characterised by its flexibility, occurring in initial, medial or final position according to the pragmatic meanings associated with it. Here are some examples:

(46) It's for them to say *innit*. (LEC)

(47) It just can't can't be done *innit*. (LEC)

(48) We got two separate rooms *innit*? (LEC)

(49) You like Coronation street *innit*? (LEC)

(50) You might as well stand a good side of the fence *innit*? (LEC)

(51) We'll try that one *innit*? (LEC)

Thus *innit* should not be regarded as a simple non-canonical question and follow-up tag, in that it has come to perform more (and new) textual functions characteristic of typical pragmatic markers. These functions contribute to the propositional value of the sentence by expressing the speaker's attitude to the content of the utterance (expressing emphasis, incredulity, surprise) or reflecting aspects related to the relationship between the participants in the interaction (aggressiveness, softening device).

Torgersen et al. (2011) have also shown that some pragmatic markers (*you get me*, (*do*) (*you*) *know what I mean* and (*do*) *you know what I'm saying*) are increasing in use while certain others (*OK*, *right*, *yeah*, *you know*) are in decline. They also found that some of the pragmatic markers which emerged in the 1980s are now firmly established across groups of speakers.

3.2.5 Vague language

The expression of young MLE speakers is characterised by the prevalence of vague words and expressions (Channell, 1994), in particular placeholders (*thingy*, *stuff*, *thingybob*) (Palacios & Núñez, 2015; Núñez, 2018) and general extenders (*and things*, *and stuff*, *or something*, *and everything*) (Cheshire, 2007; Palacios, 2011).

Placeholders are lexical words that are almost empty semantically, multipurpose in communication, and without a referential meaning, since this has to be inferred by the listener. Contrary to our expectations, adults tend to use them more often than teenagers, although the latter group in fact have a larger repertoire of them. We identified a total of 14 placeholders, with *thing*(*s*), *stuff*, *thingy*, *so and so*, *thingybob*, *whatshisname* being the most common.

(52) for three year I went to a *thingy* innit … well… to a boarding school in in.. (place) or something like that… called (school) think it's a military school innit. (LEC)

(53) No [pause] I've warned Ron [pause] he's such an obstinate *so and so*, he won't be told!

(54) Some acid *stuff* I thought it was water. (LEC)

They can serve a variety of different communicative purposes (lack of precision, avoiding pomposity or pretentiousness, euphemism, derogatory intention, insult, etc.) and they also play a social function, particularly in the language of teenagers as an in-group identity marker.

General extenders[7] usually take the form of a conjunction (*and, or*) plus a noun phrase, such as *and stuff*, *or something*, *and things*, *and this and that*, *and all*. Of all the extenders, *and stuff* and *and everything* are the most frequent.

(55) He used to come and visit *and stuff* like that. (LEC)

(56) We had a street party *and everything*. (LEC)

(57) I had a ball *or something* like that. (LEC)

The conjunctions *and* and *or* are the only ones used, and despite being central components of these categories, in some exceptional cases they may not occur; this is the case, for example, in *and blah blah blah*, where the conjunction *and* is sometimes omitted.

General extenders tend to combine with a single previous item, although in some cases they may form part of a series or list of three or more elements.

(58) we get to do this bead thing and you like can make hearts *and stuff and* flowers [wow] *and* stars wow. (LEC)

All these forms occupy clause final position and they generally signal turn exchange. Finally, they should not simply be regarded as simple tokens of vague, sloppy language or hedges, since they can also perform other pragmatic functions: to mark solidarity, to intensify the message, and to involve the interlocutor more directly.

3.2.6. Past tense of BE

In MLE the system of the past tense of BE is not as straightforward as it seems at first sight. Cheshire & Fox (2013) have shown that in the outer eastern districts of London, for example in Havering, speakers use *was* in positive contexts for all persons and *weren't* in negative sentences for all persons as well.

(59) We *was* quite well off because we had three rooms. (LEC)

(60) I didn't go to my prom I *weren't* allowed. (LEC)

However, in inner London (Hackney, Tower Hamlets) this pattern is not so clear. Young speakers use non-standard *was* in positive contexts less frequently than adult speakers and a mixed pattern of both non-standard *weren't* and non-

[7] Other names for this category include *set marking tags* (Winter & Norrby, 2000), *discourse particle extensions* (Dubois, 1992), *utterance final tags* (Aijmer, 1985), *terminal tags* (Macaulay, 1985), *generalized list completers* (Jefferson, 1990), *post-noun hedges* (Meyerhoff, 1992), *generalisers* (Simpsom, 2004), *vague category identifiers* (Channell, 1994) and *final coordination tags* (Biber et al., 1999). The term "general extender" was first adopted by Overstreet (1999).

standard *wan't* in negative contexts. Ethnicity seems to the determining factor here.

3.2.7. The article system

Gabrielatos et al. (2010) and Fox (2015: chap. 5) report a tendency towards simplification in the definite and indefinite article system in MLE. This means that many teenagers in inner London do not make the distinction typical of standard British English with the indefinite article: *a* [ə] before consonant-initial words and *an* [ən] before vowel-initial words. Likewise, a similar lack of distinction is found between the two standard British English pronunciations of the definite article, *the* [ðə] when it occurs before a consonant-initial word and the [ði] when occurring before a vowel-initial word.

3.2.8. Intensifiers

Apart from the use of *bare* as an adjective intensifier, as noted above, we also find quite a number of cases of *proper*, *enough* (and *nuff*) and *well* as intensifiers. Here are some examples:

(61) They were *proper* strict in school. (LEC)

(62) They're *nuff* rude they even taped the interview. (LEC)

(63) You don't need that when you're like you're *well* drunk. (LEC)

3.3. Phonetics[8]

The main features here can be summarised as follows. As regards the vowel system, the main salient features are: the DRESS vowel has a more open quality than in standard English, according to Kerswill et al. (2008); the quality of KIT is considered to be more central than RP and no generational differences are found between elderly and young speakers; the STRUT vowel is more fronted in MLE, with differences reported in its pronunciation between Anglo and non-Anglo speakers; the FOOT vowel is more fronted than RP [u] with differences found between older and young speakers; the GOOSE vowel is fronted particularly in the case of adolescents; the vowel in FLEECE is near-monophthongal according to Kerswill et al. 2008; the vowel in MOUTH is monophthongised; the vowel in FACE becomes [æei] and [ai]; finally, the vowel in GOAT tends to become monophthongised [əu~ ɔ].

With respect to the consonant system, there are some notable differences in relation to RP: glotal stops replace /p/, /t/ and /k/ in intervocalic position; Kerswill et al. 2008 also observe what they call *K-backing*, the use of a retracted

[8] See Kerswill et al. (2008), Cheshire et al. (2011), Kerswill (2013) and Fox (2015) for fuller accounts.

voiceless velar plosive in word-initial position in such a way that the usual pronunciation of [k] approaches that of [q]; the fronting of the dental fricatives /ð/ and /Θ/ as /v/ and /f/ is considered to be one of the most salient features of MLE; finally, although in traditional Cockney the /h/ was not pronounced in stressed contexts (h-dropping), this feature is not widely attested in MLE.

4. Final words

This paper has sought to provide a descriptive account of the main features of a new English variety emerging in London, generally known as *Multicultural London English*. Our data clearly show that various innovations are being introduced into the language system in different areas, from the phonological to the discourse levels. There are several factors which seem to be responsible for this, language contact and the prevalence of young speakers being the most important. Our description has also shown that there is still room for further research. It would be interesting to investigate the extent to which some of these changes in the language are restricted to teen talk, or if they are retained by the same individuals when they become adults. Drummond's proposal of the existence of a broader British Multicultural English that would go beyond the area of London clearly merits further consideration and analysis. Finally, as noted at the beginning of this paper, the multiethnolect created in London is by no means unique in the European linguascape, particularly in large capital cities. In this respect, it would also be interesting to look at whether something similar is currently happening in a city such as Madrid, and hence whether we might also speak of the existence of a Multicultural Madrid Spanish.

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Sound Effects: The Object of Voice in Fiction

Jorge Sacido-Romero & Sylvia Mieszkowski (eds.)
Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2015, 360 pp. ISBN: 978-90-04304-38-3

Jacques Lacan considered the voice as a remainder without meaning in the overall process of signification. This leftover of the signifying operations relates to both body and language without pertaining to any of the two and, thus, works as a partial object of desire, or "object petit a" (Lacan 2006: 689). In this sense, the voice is to the aural what the gaze is to the visual: in the process of doubling produced when one is faced with one's own image or voice, one becomes a void, a frame of the sensorial experience. Nevertheless, whereas the notion of gaze has inspired stimulating readings of literary texts, its aural counterpart has generally been neglected in critical approaches to fiction. *Sound Effects: The Object of Voice in Fiction*, edited by Jorge Sacido-Romero and Sylvia Mieszkowski, is a collection of essays which successfully contributes to compensate this imbalance. The articles in this collection address the complicated relationship between voice and text and analyze different representations of the "object voice" in works of fiction.

The concept of the "object voice" was merely sketched by Lacan and remained that way until the publication in 2006 of *A Voice and Nothing More* by Mladen Dolar, where the co-founder of the Ljubliana School of Psychoanalysis thoroughly elaborated on this notion and its effects. The "object voice", Dolar writes, "does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning, and does not solidify in an object of fetish reverence", it is "an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation" (4). Dolar himself contributes a foreword to Sacido-Romero and Mieszkowski's volume in which he discusses the effects of the object voice in literature. He points at the inadequacy of an approach to literature guided by the pursuit of a voice within the text, for it presupposes the "singularity of [the] authorial voice" inscribed in it and the existence of an "ineffable meaning beyond textual meaning" (xiv), both of which are illusions. The effect of the "object voice" in the text is precisely to shatter those illusions. Using fragments from Beckett's work to illustrate his views, Dolar underlines that language, rather than a transparent means of expression, is a veil hiding the nothingness behind itself; far from bridging the gap between individual consciousness and real world, it cuts through both of them. The voice, whose origin is internal yet externally projected, epitomizes this cleavage being "most intimately [one's own]" while at the same time disrupting the "very notion of the self" (xix).

Dolar's foreword is followed by the editors' introductory chapter, entitled "Revoicing Writing: An Introduction to Theorizing Vocality". This introduction is one of the strengths of the volume since it constitutes a brief yet thorough outline of the theoretical approaches to the topic of the voice in the text and to the concept of the "object voice". Departing from dichotomous ideas

about the relationship between text and voice, such as Derrida's view that the voice, unlike the written word, emphasizes an illusion of presence (1976) and Walter Ong's opposite idealization of the oral/aural (1967), it focuses on those theories that foreground the disrupting power of the voice and the vocal effects in the text. These include Geoffrey H. Hartman's acknowledgement of the ambiguous power of the voice (1981), Garret Stuart's analysis of the phonic effects found in written texts (what he calls "phonotext" 1990), and Guy Rosolato's (1974) and Kaja Silverman's (1988) idea that voice destabilizes the subject's speech for it works at the intersection between body and language. Finally, the editors engage in the discussion of Lacan's and Dolar's psychoanalytic approach while appropriately justifying the critical value of the volume's contributions.

Garrett Stuart authors the second chapter, "'Secondary Vocality' and the Sound Defect". In his contribution to this volume, the author of *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (1990) emphasizes that voice is never fully repressed when becoming text but it tends to "leak back" in the act of reading. This resurfacing of the voice in the text, or "secondary vocality", may produce a variety of effects, which he illustrates with examples of poetry and fiction. Drawing from Giorgio Agamben's ideas and nuancing Dolar's views, Stuart underscores the destabilizing potential of such effects (or rather "defects") noticing that they are often transacted by an "object voice", perceived as disconnected from the subject and from intention.

The remaining essays of the volume are arranged according to the chronology of the analyzed texts and classified into three sections. Section I is devoted to the analysis of nineteenth century fiction. In its opening chapter, "The Object Voice in Romantic Irish Novels", Peter Weise analyzes instances of Irish voices in *Ennui* (1809) by Maria Edgeworth, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin and *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) by Sydney Owenson, all written against the backdrop of the Act of Union, signed in 1800. In these novels, Weise shows, the Irish voice tends to be displaced, fetishized and demonized. Ultimately, it emerges as an "object voice", eminently uncanny. These renderings of the Irish voice, Weise argues, bring forward the vacuity behind the notion of a national Irish essence and dismantle "the illusion of equality and political coherence" which the Act stands for (49).

Gothic literature specialist Fred Botting offers an insightful reading of Poe's narratives in Chapter 4. In his article "Poe, Voice and The Origin of Horror Fiction", Botting analyses the treatment of voice and sound in Poe's tales and traces a progression from the aesthetics of the uncanny to that of horror. In tales such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" or "The Tell-Tale Heart", phantasmatic and hallucinatory voices become manifestations of the uncanny, exteriorizations of a subconscious realm, evocations of horror which disturb a coherent sense of reality. These effects are intensified when voice becomes mechanized and, thus, detached from the human body. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" signals a definitive transition to horror fiction for, in this tale, the sentence "I am dead", uttered by a lifeless body, is illustrative of a

voice which exceeds the uncanny revealing the annihilating power of "absolute horror" (91).

Bruce Wyse's "Double Voice and Extimate Singing in *Trilby*" puts forward the adequacy of the notion of the "object voice" to approach George de Maurier's *fin de siècle* bestseller. Wyse appropriately reasons that the vocal abilities of the eponymous protagonist, who was transformed from tone-deaf to singing virtuoso by grace of the powers of the mesmerist Svengali, exemplify the Lacanian "object petit a". On the one hand, the protagonist's singing voice evokes a primeval stage of union with the maternal. On the other, the secret of this voice (the uncanny ventriloquism involved in its origin and the fact that it stems from two people who are otherwise unable to sing) emphasizes the extimate quality of the object of desire, residing in an ambiguous space which is neither interior nor exterior.

Philip Mahoney's "Bloom's Neume: The Object Voice in the 'Sirens' Episode of Joyce's *Ulysses*", inaugurates the second section of the volume devoted to the twentieth century. Mahoney builds on Lacan's theory that Joyce's "epiphanies" stage psychotic voices revealing the author's sharp awareness of what Lacan called "imposed speech" (Synthome, 42). He builds on previous readings of the "sirens episode" and examines the ways in which Joyce destabilizes the notion of subject through his rendering of multiple unsettling voices. The process of subject annihilation, Mahoney maintains, culminates with Bloom's final fart which he reads, combining Mladen Dolar's and Garrett Stuart's ideas, as an epitome of both the "object voice" and of the phonotextual quality of Joyce's texts. It constitutes what Mahoney ingeniously calls a "posterior monologue", a shocking bodily manifestation of the psychotic voice of the character's interior monologue.

Natalja Chestopalova's "Fantasizing Agency and Otherness in Ellison's *Invisible Man*" investigates the inconsistencies between voice and gaze in Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel. For her analysis, she relies on Dolar's and Slavoj Žižek's appraisal of the Lacanian notions of desire and fantasizing, Mary Louise Pratt's notion of "contact zone" as a locus of asymmetrical cultural relationships, and on Sara Ahmed's theory of affect. Chestopalova claims that it is precisely in the moments when voice and gaze do not coincide that the novel reflects on the process of subject configuration and othering. Moreover, such fissures between voice and gaze allow possibilities for individual and communal agency, giving the protagonist the opportunity to conceive of alternative and regenerating forms of American identity.

Jorge Sacido-Romero's "The Voice in Twentieth-Century English Short Fiction: E.M. Forster, V.S. Pritchett and Muriel Spark" focuses on the traditionally marginalized genre of the short story and pertinently argues that the affinity of this narrative form with "the mysterious" and "the bizarre" makes it especially adequate to deal with the voice as "uncanny" object (188). Drawing on Dolar and Slavoj Žižek, Sacido-Romero provides a noteworthy analysis of three stories in which the power of a singing voice respectively disturbs, transforms and supersedes the symbolic order, illustrating the

transition between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics. Thus, in Forster's modernist "The Story of the Sirens", the power of the voice of the Law, represented by the local authorities of a Sicilian village, is threatened by the prophesied return of a singing Siren. Pritchett's "The Voice" goes a step further underlining the ambivalent quality of the singing voice as both "godly" (a reaffirmation of the Law) and "devilish", a form of "senseless enjoyment" (191) to ultimately portray it as a manifestation of presymbolic bare life. In Muriel Spark's fabular narrative "The Girl I left Behind Me", a dead girl, unaware of her own death, is tormented by the whistling and humming of her boss. The story aligns with the postmodern since the figure of the boss represents the letter of the Law but also the Lacanian obscene superego embedded within it.

Matt Foley's article "Voices of Terror and Horror: Towards an Acoustics of Modern Gothic" opens the third and final section of the volume, the one devoted to twenty-first century fiction. Again following Dolar's and Žižek's reading of the voice, Foley argues that, in a context of normalization of the monstrous in horror and terror literature, the voice is an element that has not yet been gentrified because of its inherent "radical alterity", which resists such normalization (219). Foley analyses some of the common registers in which such voices manifest themselves in instances of modern horror and gothic novels: seductive, as in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1989); excessive, as in Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971); and ghostly, as in the neogothic novels *The Little Stranger* (2009) by Sarah Waters and *Pharos* (2002) by Alice Thompson.

In "'That which cannot be said': Voice, Desire and the Uncanny in Armistead Maupin's *The Night Listener*" (2000) Sylvia Mieszkowski intersects narratology and psychoanalysis to examine Maupin's radically metafictional work. *The Night Listener* seems indeed "to have already incorporated the theories best suited to analyse [it]" for the mysterious voice of Pete, with whom the first person narrator, Gabriel, converses on the phone, is a perfect illustration of Dolar's notion of the "object voice" (247). Eventually, Mieszkowski aptly argues, the protagonist's desire to find the origin of this "object voice", precisely because it is never fulfilled, becomes a therapy for his writer's block and for his inability to come to terms with loss. Significantly, the inconsistencies of the plot underline Gabriel's status as unreliable narrator and the reader's search for a coherent interpretation of the novel comes to mirror the protagonist's fruitless attempts to make sense of Pete's voice.

Alexandre Hope's contribution "It's only combinations of letters after all, isn't it?: The 'Voice' and Spirit Mediums in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*" dissects the episode of the *séance* in Pynchon's novel. In this scene, the voices of the mediums, both earthly and other-wordly, as well as the technical devices which make them audible, evidence the "objectality" of the voice by emphasizing its displaced and spectral quality (291). Moreover, Hope contends that these voices disturb Giorgio Agamben's idea of sovereignty based on the distinction between *zoe* (bare life) and *bios* (life) (1998) since a third element, *techne*, emerges between them.

In the last chapter, "'Voice-trace' in James Chapman's *How is This Going to Continue*? (2007)" Marcin Stawiarski offers an intermedial reading of James Chapman's novel and the musical composition which inspired it, Brend Alois Zimmermann's *Requiem für einen jungen Dichter*. This approach allows Stawiarski to point at the paradoxical effects of what he calls "the voice-trace": in a context of absolute meaninglessness the voice emerges as a fragmented remainder of the signifier simultaneously providing an illusion of meaning and betraying its own delusive nature.

On of the main accomplishments of *Sound Effects* is the consistency of the conceptual framework guiding the contributors' interpretation of the texts under scrutiny. This makes of this volume a highly coherent collection while also providing the reader with an insight into a wide range of fictional works from the nineteenth century to the present. Moreover, the editors succeeded in selecting and organizing a number of high quality contributions by some of the most prominent names in the field in a book which definitely fulfils its aims. *Sound Effects* can at times make a demanding reading but it is also a much needed one for academics interested on the ways literary criticism intersects with psychoanalytic theory and sound studies. By triangulating these fields, the volume does not only contribute to fill a critical vacuum, but it also paves the way to further research on the vocal effects of texts and the intriguing notion of the "object voice" in fiction.

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La imagen de España en los viajeros extranjeros: La colección de libros de viaje del Instituto Cervantes de Londres

Alberto Egea Fernández-Montesinos
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[available at http://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/viajeros/default.htm]

The topics of the image of Spain and the construction of a national identity have been widely discussed in the last decades of cultural, anthropological, and literary criticism, albeit in reference to a limited number of authors and travel narratives written in the last centuries. The contribution of this online publication in the form of a digital exhibition is that the number of authors, books, images, historical periods and national origins of the writers is broadened. In addition, most of the analyses of these authors so far had been confined to university publications with limited circulation. There has been little interest in trespassing the threshold of academia and making these travelogues accessible to wide audiences. This publication by Alberto Egea Fernández-Montesinos brings this traditionally academic study to a potentially huge audience thanks to its easy to follow and carefully designed structure. Instead of following the traditional classifications by author, century or national origin, the great contribution of this publication is to organize access to the works through thematic sections. This carefully designed online publication is the product of both the collaboration of the author with Instituto Cervantes and the support offered by Google in a brilliant presentation with impeccable content.

The exhibition presents the various ways in which Spain has been represented by English speaking travelers from 1750 to 1950. It is organized around 10 thematic sections (including Customs, Character, and Stereotypes, among others) and illustrated with texts, in its Spanish version, and numerous reproductions of engravings, maps, and lithographs from these texts. Despite the large quantity of material, the website is not only extremely user-friendly, but also attractive and accessible. The apparently simple structure of the interface holds an incredible amount of textual and visual information, which is rendered to the reader/user in the form of a very large catalogue (242 works by authors from 10 different countries) of carefully indexed works, many of which are freely available for the user to download, together with beautiful image

galleries (which, alone, would be worth a whole additional catalogue), which can also be downloaded or explored by users. Navigating the online publication, and particularly the collection catalogue, is easy and straightforward. In fact, the user will be gladly surprised to see the meticulous richness that the catalogue's navigation system hides, as it allows searches to be customized in different ways: by origin of the travelers, chronological order, author, title, topics, and whether or not the work has been digitalized.

In previous contributions, Dr. Egea focused mainly on issues of the travel genre and identity politics, centering his research on British and American women travelers and their travel experience in Spain. In his critical essays, Egea has analyzed the role of these women in portraying the Spaniards in the light of Postcolonial Theory. This new publication covers a much broader spectrum of writers, a large amount of archive images and historical engravings, a higher number of historical periods and of textual contents with a well thought-out structure and easy accessibility.

The corpus of the exhibition, comprises travelogues written between 1750 and 1950 about Spain by writers from Britain, the US, Ireland, Canada and Australia. The difficulties confronted when having to analyze such a diverse body of texts dealing with Spain become evident. Not only thematically, but also chronologically and in terms of historical circumstances, the authors are very diverse. Moreover, their narrative forms are so varied that it becomes difficult to talk about them all in general. The texts range from opinionated reportages to engaging dramatic narratives, and from dialogued travelogues to novel-like travel fictions. Some of these texts are first person diaries, others are supposedly objective travel guides, while the rest are novelistic accounts written in the third person singular. All that together with the different historical periods covered and the various geographical origins of the writers must have made the task a great challenge. The results are, despite the difficulties posed by the ambition of the project, solid and convincing and provide an important amount of information, a carefully arranged structure and a great diversity of authors, nationalities, historical periods and regions.

One aspect that may need to be updated is the theoretical frame used to approach the topic of the image of Spain (the most recent of those sources is Bhaba's *The Location of Culture* dating from 1994). More recent theoretical perspectives on travel writing such as those by Malcolm Andrews (2010), Noel Salazar (2012), Nigel Leask (2002) and Barbara Korte (2000) could have been considered, even if the publication's main target is a general audience rather than a specialized reader. In spite of that, the underlining themes addressed in the exhibition are engaged with classical debates about representation and travel, about culture and encounter, about hegemony and discourse, considering the works of Homi Bhabha (1994), Michel Foucault (1980), Stuart Hall (1997) and Edward Said (1978). After reading the material and analyzing how these travelogues have been presented, it is fair to say that the online publication has a solid theoretical foundation in Postcolonial Studies, Gender Theory and Travel Criticism. It is true that the exhibition does not include

theoretical references explicitly since that is not its goal and because it is aimed to a broader audience; however, the publication brings us very relevant hermeneutic approaches deeply related to current affairs of nation branding and identity representation.

The thematic sections presented are: Regions, Character, Travel, Institutions, Customs, Stereotypes, Women, Archetypes, and Cervantes, which constitute a very interesting collection of windows from where to peek at two centuries (1750-1950) of foreign visions of Spain. All the sections would deserve a specific comment and analysis; however, I have focused my attention on particular sections and examples to illuminate the pertinence of this work. It is of great interest, for instance, to look at the sections dedicated to Stereotypes (section 7), Character (3), Regions (2), and Women (8). With regard to the section on Women, it is certainly a valuable, fair and necessary contribution, and it helps to unveil the key role of women in Spanish history, culture and society. The subjugation of women and how social interaction plays a role in Spanish society is presented from various points of view. In addition, the hard work of Spanish women calls the attention of foreign travelers and parallels the efforts of women travelers who would provoke surprise and, at the same time, admiration in conservative locals.

Regarding the one dedicated to Stereotypes, the reading and analysis of the texts presented is fueled by Said's Orientalism. A simple East/West bipolar opposition is not sufficient to address texts written at a time far more complex than many authors have pretended. Even if Spain was obviously not the East by geographical location, the country was orientalized in the narrative discourse created since the end of the 18th century. This section also poses interesting questions, from a diachronic perspective, in relation to the validity of Spanish stereotypes over the last centuries. It is also interesting to see how certain stereotypes have changed from the earlier authors, such as John Armstrong or Henry Swinburne, to most recent ones such as Gerald Brenan or Gertrude Bone.

In the same section dedicated to Stereotypes (7), the exhibition devotes a chapter to a recursive obsession among foreign travellers to Spain: the reductionist dichotomy Modernity vs. Tradition. It is interesting to see how these texts present Spain, and other countries the travellers visited during the same trip, as "antiquated", and insist on its lack of "modernity". When things are described as not working properly (e.g. transportation, clocks and other types of machinery, lodging or other commodities of their contemporary world) in these new found lands, it is a clear sign of the importance the travellers give to materialism, and to the system of mass production and consumption in their societies back home. The quotes in this section, and throughout the whole site, are well selected and highly insightful. Just to illustrate with one, the American writer Susan Hale, refers to Modernity in the following terms: "Nowadays, Spanish trains are too modern to be picturesque" (270). Her quote is complemented by a few other references, among them the opinion of July Byrne on Spaniards and how they seem to reject modernity by rejecting commerce, business, and marketing: "Spaniards are definitely not oriented towards

business" (268). Analyzing over two hundred years of texts about Spain, Egea brings up an issue which reaches up to our current day. These and various other writers regret the fact that Spaniards are losing their original ancestral customs and are adopting the imported fashions from places such as Paris or London. This peculiar form of valuing modernity and questioning it at the same time, of embracing its advantages and contesting its effects in peripheral nations is presented masterfully by Egea in his analysis and use of quotes.

Another relevant contribution of this publication is the use of a new notion in literary studies: "Counter stereotyping". Egea proposes a fresh reading of these texts as they chose not to fall into the recurrent clichés used and abused in the texts written by previous authors. In his hypothesis, counter stereotyping is a process through which texts challenge previous clichés applied by preceding writers and tease notions such as empiricism, rationalism, objectivism, and even the notion of travel itself. A few interesting examples are presented in texts by Terence Hughes, Katharine Lee Bates, and George Dennis in section 7. After reading a few of these samples, we realize how these writers navigate two waters: one which constructs its narrative stories grounded in those societies whose subjectivity has been shaped in part by the subordinating power of European colonialism, and a second one in which a series of discursive practices involving resistance to colonialism and their subjectificatory legacy is also present. That is a relevant contribution Egea's publication makes to the field of Travel Studies and to the image of Spain in travel books.

These English-speaking writers provided us with a vast textual and visual body for analysis, a complex and polymorphous group of representations of Spain, a series of cross-representations over time and space, which has remained dispersed and without a serious classification following a thematic approach until today. The fact that this enormous exhibition and online publication is made available for both researchers (from a broad, interdisciplinary spectrum) and general public is in itself outstanding, but it is also significant in that they underline the importance of travel literature, a genre that was relevant in the 18th Century, and reached momentum during the Romantic period in the 19th Century. Spain became a travel destination since the Peninsular War (1808-1814), and was particularly visited by British and French travellers, who were fascinated by the patriotic, nationalistic, and somehow exotic character of the Spanish.

The current e-publication constitutes a relevant and original body of texts with an insightful classification, presenting a very diverse and large amount of texts, images and analysis, which will surely constitute a reference in the field.

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Dialect Matters. Respecting Vernacular Language. Columns from the *Eastern Daily Press*

Peter Trudgill
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 229 pp. ISBN: 978-1-107-13047-0

The title of the work here reviewed exploits a subtle accentual dichotomy based on treating the word *matters* either as a noun or a verb and accenting it or deaccenting it accordingly. It is well known to linguists and has been used in other deliberately ambiguous titles (*Accent Matters*, for example, is the title of a 2011 publication on Balto-Slavic accentology). Trudgill's book is a collection of 152 articles on language, which he published as from 2012 in the *Eastern Daily Press*, printed in the city of Norwich, many of them including data on the linguist's native Norwich speech. The broad aim of the anthology is to convince the reader that no language variety or phonetic, grammatical or lexical form is in any way intrinsically inferior to any other and the volume has two important

messages: language is a fascinating subject enjoyable for all, and *linguicism*—'language prejudice'—is as unjustifiable and as pernicious as other negative -*isms*, like racism and sexism (xiii-xiv).

The text is intended both for the layman and for the specialist, and supplementary explanatory notes are provided for both of these parties. Moreover, under the heading *Themes* (xviii-xix), local references, such as FOND (Friends of Norfolk Dialect) and Jarrold & Sons Ltd, a large department store in Norwich, are explained for the outsider.

The 152 articles are distributed among fourteen chapters, each containing between eight and fifteen contributions. The first chapter offers some facts about the history of English. Article 1.2 (4-5), for example, reveals that the oldest English word ever discovered is *raihan* 'roe deer', engraved on a bone found in the Anglo-Saxon graveyard in Caistor, near Norwich. One interesting additional detail that Trudgill might have mentioned is that the motivation for such labelling may have been the creation of some sort of word game: "Find the roe," perhaps (Crystal 2011, 4).

Unlike the other chapters, chapter 1 exceptionally includes a prologue (1-2) dealing with William Jones' revolutionary assertion in 1786 that Sanskrit was related to European languages of more familiar language groups, such as Latin, Greek and Celtic, all ultimately derivatives of a common ancestor, Indo-European.

Most of the other chapters deal with various different aspects of language in which the author is particularly interested or about which he shows himself to have specially strong feelings, such as prescriptivism (ch. 2), the inevitability of language change (ch. 3), grammar (chs. 6 & 10), everyday language (ch. 7), and respect for local speech (ch. 9). Chapter 4 talks about the opaqueness of foreign words as an instigator of language change; chapter 5 deals largely with language contact; chapter 8 looks at pronunciation and the associated prejudices and popular misconceptions; chapter 11 investigates various Norfolk dialect words; chapter 12 offers comment on names associated with East Anglia; chapter 13 discusses features of local accents and how they spread from one area to another; chapter 14 covers the pronunciation of some controversial or complex place names.

There is much to be said in praise of this publication. All in all, the book is a mine of linguistic information both for the uninitiated and the expert reader, all presented in a humorous vein, though the author is probably overstating when he tries to imply that Norfolk humour is different to humour elsewhere (149). To take just a handful of the numerous fascinating word stories, *mate* is originally someone one shares food (*meat*) with (115); in a number of languages, *inch* and *thumb* are expressed in the same word (66); the surname *Trudgill* comes from *Threadgold*, a nickname for men who embroidered vestments for the clergy (66-67); Caesar's dying words (*Et tu, Brute?*) were probably pronounced in Ancient Greek, rather than Latin (73). Trudgill insists on the fact that a word means what it means now, not what it used to mean or someone thinks it ought to mean (107). Another myth that is explored is the

widespread "I don't have an accent" belief (125). A correspondent is reprimanded for saying that the Norwich pronunciation of *twenty* is ugly (194-195) and we are reminded that a rich variety of accents is something to applaud rather than condemn (142). Writing on language death, Trudgill shows his full appreciation of our linguistic heritage: "Each language that dies will take with it, for ever, a unique product of the human mind …" (78).

All the usual phonetic topics related to English are covered: H-dropping (8.6), glottalization (8.7), TH-fronting (3.1), alveolarization of the nasal in the gerund (126-127), and so on, with useful information on each phenomenon. On the subject of rhyming slang (64), the author rightly states that the phenomenon is not confined to Cockney (see Lillo 2010, 124; McArthur 1992, 868-869), but the article could also have mentioned the fact that "…the favoured current model is a rhyme based on the name of a fashionable or well-known personality" (Ayto 2002, xi). An unmistakably modern creation, for example, is *Hank Marvin* (lead guitarist of *The Shadows*) 'starving'.

What some readers might disagree with, however, is the assertion "Learning a language as an infant is a doddle. We all do it, easily, and in the space of a few years" (83). Here Trudgill seems to have lagged behind in his ideas on language by merely accepting the Hegelian language-as-instinct thesis, and the concept of Chomsky's Universal Grammar, propagated by such scholars as Fromkin, Brinton and Pinker, because more recently Evans (2014, 131), quoting Langacker, contends that child language acquisition involves an enormous amount of effort and adds that "A grammar emerges from use, rather than being innate."

Trudgill underestimates the difficulty involved in ensuring a firm grasp of the standard variety while promoting the use of local speech. Moreover, in his endeavour to champion linguistic equality, he often attacks people with less linguistic knowledge than himself who, though admittedly sometimes misguided, are only showing a concern for education. One such target is Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, whom he accuses of not knowing what an adverb is (97–98), but then admits himself that it is the most elusive word class. In another article (142-143), he criticizes actors and actresses for not reproducing Norfolk accents correctly, something only trained phoneticians can be expected to do.

Trudgill subscribes to the widespread belief that the English and Danes under the Danelaw could very likely understand one another (13), but mutual intelligibility requires definition. Immediate understanding seems unlikely, though some degree of communication, probably aided by levelling of inflexions, would have developed after a period of contact.

Talking about more recent times, the author extols Norway as a model of tolerance (42-43, 103, 215), where everyone's dialect is accepted in all situations and must not be corrected by teachers, a state of affairs he claims has existed since at least the 1917 School Law. However, such open-mindedness is probably more recent. The northern dialects of Norwegian, in particular, are opaque to people from Oslo, like many dialects much closer to the capital, and country

people have often suffered prejudice and found it harder to find employment. Some change has perhaps come about owing to the numbers of immigrants that Oslo has recently received from the countryside, producing a new more liberal, but nostalgic, generation with their roots elsewhere.

Trudgill likes to be seen as a proletarian. Just as John Major projected himself as an ardent cricket fan and Harold Wilson boasted his loyalty to Huddersfield Town, Trudgill publicly proclaims his support for his local football club, Norwich City (38 and passim). However, to be fair, this is the popular press and obviously aims at currying favour. Note, in the same vein, his insistence that Norfolk people are not stupid (124).

A collection of separate articles of the same genre by a particular author will inevitably lead to some overlap, but this does not detract from the book as a whole. This latest publication by Trudgill is a volume that all those interested in language will want on their bookshelves for the detailed information it provides on so many aspects of English. It is a collection of articles written with unfailing clarity, a touch of humour and the unmistakeable expertise of a world-famous linguist.

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Estudios de género: visiones transatlánticas / Gender Studies: Transatlantic Visions

Isabel Durán Gimenez-Rico, Rebeca Gualberto Valverde, Noelia Hernando Real, Carmen Méndez García, Joanne Neff Van Aertselaer & Ana Laura Rodríguez Redondo (eds.)
Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 2016, 368 pp. ISBN 978-84-245-1343-6

Gender Studies: Transatlantic Visions (2016) is a volume of essays written in English and Spanish that employs a transatlantic approach to the study of

gender. As the book´s editors point out, quoting David Armitage´s definition, a transatlantic approach "indicates the existence of a relationship with the other, both far and near: it defines, therefore, a location that is permanently afar" (21), this relationship also entails, according to Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, movement and fluidity. As the editors signal "these [movement and fluidity] emphasize ideas of crossing and connection that make us question how national identities have been historically formulated and how such definition is always transient" (1). The interest of the editors as academic women has made them "approach the multidisciplinary character of Transatlantic Studies looking for answers to questions related to gender" (23) and encouraged them to work "from the rejection of a traditional perspective that tends to group questions of gender and its cultural representations in closed national or continental compartments, with a specific and air-tight development" (23). The different essays that are part of this volume have multidisciplinarity at their core and are divided in four sections.

The first section, "Women´s Empowerment Across the Atlantic", includes four essays that focus on the American continent and deal with female empowerment from multiple perspectives and cultural backgrounds. Olaya Fernandez Guerrero´s opening essay " El empoderamiento de las mujeres en Brasil: Tocatins y Río de Janeiro" tackles empowerment as "el mecanismo por el que las personas y comunidades asumen control de sus propios asuntos, de su propia vida y destino"(37) and identifies this mechanism in economic independence and agency. Analyzing the differences in the ways women from a rural and from an urban setting in Brazil construct their identities through their access to employment and education reinforces this notion of empowerment as stemming from the possibility to exercise responsibility over one´s life and destiny. In the following essay, "Cuando la frontera se encarna: mujeres migrantes en la frontera sur de México", Rodrigo Alonso Barraza García explores female immigration from Mexico to the USA and employs the body, in its relation to economic and social agency, as a category to analyze female empowerment. Julio Cañero Serrano in "Hacia un Nuevo liderazgo: La feminización de la política estadounidense" puts forth an examination of the growth of female presence in USA politics as the tool to question female empowerment through the access to political appointments in the US government. The last essay in this section, authored by Jill Partridge Salomon, extends the political approach of the previous one and adds a judicial component. "The Silencing of Anita Hill?" focuses on "showing the power of those who controlled the language during the hearings of Anita Hill´s denouncement of Clarence Thomas's sexual harassment and how this power was reinforced to such an extent that the victim became the defendant whose narrative was appropriated by others" (81). The paper explores the politics behind the judicial process, the manipulation of language that aimed to "erase Anita Hill as a political subject", but which ultimately led to create awareness regarding sexual harassment. The volume's first section achieves the editors' goal of analyzing transatlantic notions of gender using a multidisciplinary

analysis to interrogate how female empowerment is enacted through economic and political agency.

The second section, "Multicultural Feminist Identities", contains five articles that discuss literary representations of feminist identities. The first article, Silvia Pellicer-Ortín's "Family Frictions and Transatlantic Connections in Linda Grant´s Works", studies the way in which British-Jewish writer Linda Grant portrays in her novel the struggle of Jewish women to define their roles within traditional Jewish patriarchal models. An important contribution of this essay is its portrayal of the way in which "literary language is characterized by the power to (re)construct reality providing a space where the self and the world are in constant dialectical tension" (101). Similarly, in the following essay, "Reading (from) the Afro-Caribbean in Hurston´s 'Sweat': An Ecowomanist Voyage," Carolina Núñez-Puente proposes a transatlantic approach to Hurston´s short story "Sweat", pointing out the ways in which the folklorist articulates in her work not only a multidisciplinary but also a trans-imaginary representation of African-American female identity. In "Old Women as Political Figures in African and Chicano Literature: The Case of the Grandmother and the 'Curandera'", Isabel Gil Naveira analyzes the central role of old women in these two cultural traditions as "the perfect way of presenting their societies, and therefore their entire world, along with their political anxieties" (129). Naviera illustrates how these figures, rather than occupying a secondary role, are central to the development of their cultural traditions, since as the author points out, "they teach the past to maintain values and ideals in the future generations"(134). Such statement coincides with Toni Morrison´s definition of the figure of the ancestor[1] as a cultural agent. The Chicana identity continues to be analyzed in the following essay, "Gendered Territory in Chicana Feminist Literature: Helena María Viramontes´ *Their Dogs Came with Them"*. Elsa del Campo Ramírez examines how Viramontes "portrays neoliberal capitalism as a new kind of colonization which arrives with the construction of a freeway system that mutilates and destroys the houses of a Chicano community in a peripheral barrio in East Los Angeles" (145). This displacement becomes the metaphor of how women struggle within a highly patronizing hierarchy in a Chicano barrio and how, in colonial territories, women's bodies become the symbol of the conqueror's language. In the last essay, "La triología del desencanto de Alejandro Paez Varela y el feminicidio en Ciudad Juarez", Kristine Vanden Berghe points out how violence in Ciudad Juarez has different causes and the ways in which crime and murder have different connotations depending on the gender of the victim. This second section of essays achieves the purpose of analyzing how the representations of female identity within the transatlantic range entails a struggle not only to navigate the complexity of a double consciousness, but also to define it within patriarchal norms. The second part of the volume clearly provides a critical approach to the mapping of different identities within a multicultural framework.

[1] Morrison, Toni (1984), "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation", *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*, Mary Evans (ed.). New York: Doubleday, 339-354.

The third section, "Feminidades / masculinidades en la literatura y la cultura", extends the dialectical approach to gender within the transatlantic model analyzing how masculine and feminine identities influence each other across the ocean. In "Two Women Writers as Transatlantic Travellers in Mary Hays's *Female Biography* (1803)", Begoña Lasa Álvarez examines the transatlantic relations that were central to American and British people´s lives during the eighteenth century, using Mary Hays's text as a guide to both reflect on and question female gender issues and to offer a critical examination of how women's biographies "were under a much more severe scrutiny than those of their male counterparts […] because women writer´s lives became part of public opinion, even more than their works, which resulted in women´s writings being read in the light of their authors' biographies" (184). María José Coperías Aguilar´s essay, "A Transatlantic Perspective on the Industrial Novel: Elizabeth Gaskell and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps", analyzes the parallelisms between the British and American novelists in light of the similarities between their portrayals of the suffering of the workers and of the conditions in which they lived during the Industrial Revolution. These resemblances show the development of a feminine model from which to reflect upon the effects of industrialization both on the economy and on the work force. In "Totem or Taboo: Incest in the Life-Writings of Anne Sexton and Anaïs Nin", Francisco José Cortés looks at how Sexton and Nin publicly talk about their childhood experiences of sexual abuse. These two writers openly expose the violation of their innocence and employ it in their creative endeavors, as if it were a quasi-empowering experience. Sexton and Nin employ writing to uncover their intimacy and deeper self. Amrita Dass´s continues to analyze the connection between the personal and the act of writing, adding a political component to the analysis, in the "Roar of the Gazelle: Adrienne Rich Speaks to Mirza Ghalib". The author examines Rich´s employment of the ghazal, an Arabic form of poetry, to talk about her identity as a lesbian poet. For Rich, this poetic verse, used by Mirza Ghalib to express his revulsion towards institutions, provides her poetry with an empowering feminist roar. In "Farsantes, monstruos y reflejos: representaciones de la femineidad en la obra de Chuck Palahniuk", Alejandra García Guerrero interrogates how Palahniuk´s work employs womanhood as a metaphor to talk about the vicissitudes of developing an identity´s within a consumer´s society without values. Similarly, in "Wooden Man? Masculinities in J. M. Coetzee´s work: (*Boyhood, Youth* and *Summertime)*" Daniel Matías analyzes how Coetzee´s trilogy portrays the construction of manhood in a postcolonial culture. The final essay in this section, Juan González Etxeberria´s "De la *elocution* a la *eiaculatio*: la retórica masculina" looks at masculinity from a Foucauldian point of view. Etxebarria provides an interpretation of fellatio as a wordless act, one in which human flesh results in an absence of word. Such act is ultimately a metaphor for the crisis of masculinity in our days. This essay provides literary, political and filmic examples to support its thesis. Such concluding paper summarizes the progression in the analysis of how gender constructions ultimately reflect how gender constitutes a paradigm to interpret social progress.

The fourth and last section of this volume, "Arte, cine, teatro y medios de comunicación: voces femeninas", examines how different media artists articulate womanhood in their works. In the first essay, "Leonora Carrington´s Mural: A Quintessential Transatlantic Painting" Julia Salmerón analyzes how British-American painter Leonora Carrington's mural *The Magical World of the Mayas* captures how the Mayan society conceived time and existence as the simultaneous expression of heaven and hell and of the past-present and future. Such circularity opposes Western notions of time and knowing. Kathryn King´s "Gender Representation and Adaptation: Tyler´s and Kasdan´s *The Accidental Tourist"* compares Tyler´s novel with its filmic adaptation. The essay proves how the absence of certain details in the movie silences important aspects of the novel and its female protagonist. In "Poéticas de la historia: Mujer y autorepresentación en el cine de Ousmane Sembene", Raúl Saúgar extends the attention the volume pays to the cinematographic analysis of female identities by incorporating African culture to the discussion in his analysis of how "the annulment of the other's historicity is a cultural mechanism of domination frequently developed through artistic and literary creation in European Modernity" (301). Such denial of cultural modes different from the Western silences a discussion about women's centrality in African culture, the ways in which female agency is enacted through orality, the oral transmission of history and culture, and how such role entails activism and agency. In the following essay, "La traducción del texto audiovisual híbrido: voces femeninas más allá de las bodas y los prejuicios", María Pérez L. de Heredia studies the politics of the complex exercise of translation of products belonging to different cultures. Focusing on the film *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), the essay compares the similarities and differences between the original version, the dubbed one and the subtitled one to conclude that the translating process of this movie is an accurate one since it provides the appropriate cultural nuances. In "Contemporary US Women Playwrights' Transatlantic Odes to Lightness: A Tribute to María Irene Fornés and Her Disciples", Ana Fernández- Caparrós Turina provides an insightful interpretation of Fornés's influence on other female playwrights, an influence which inspired them to "summon on the stage *other* realities and to challenge the conventional portrayals of women to be found in more commercial productions and in the tradition of American realism" (331). In the last essay of this section and of the book, "Mode/Blending in Advertising: a Women Google Ad Campaign", Elena Domínguez Romero analyzes the rational apparatus behind the 2013 advertisement campaign that aimed to raise awareness about the sexism in network campaigns. Such denunciation serves to highlight the need to discuss gender inequality in ads. The volume's concluding section fulfills its purpose of interrogating the ways in which women are represented in the media and whether such picture promotes a dialogic model. In this way, Armitage's conception of the dialectical relationship established within transatlantic identities, stated at the volume´s introduction, is clearly illustrated in these essays.

Estudios de género: visiones transatlánticas / Gender Studies: Transatlantic Visions achieves its original purpose of providing a multidisciplinary approach

to transatlantic gendered identities. It looks at the ways in which women empower themselves through the access to politics, education and economic agency, the ways in which navigating transition and movement provides transatlantic gender constructions with a spatial dynamic, how this movement generates influence between nations, cultures and identities ultimately mediating the transatlantic approach to gender and its representation.

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"I AM WORKING ON A RETELLING OF *THE ILIAD*": AN INTERVIEW TO PAT BARKER

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Patricia Mary W. Drake, better known as Pat Barker, was born in Thornaby-on-Tees, Yorkshire (England) in 1943. She was educated at the London School of Economics, and later worked as a teacher of History and Politics. Pat Barker began her career as a published writer quite late, although, in fact, she had been writing since she was ten years old. It was while Barker was on a writing course that Angela Carter saw something in her and encouraged her to keep going. Married the zoologist and neurologist David Barker, with whom she had two children, she is now a widow and lives in Durham. The interview took place in that city, on July 24th, 2017 coinciding with a research stay of the interviewer at Edinburgh University.

Barker's works include *Union Street* (1982), winner of the 1983 Fawcett Prize, and subsequently filmed as "Stanley and Iris"; *Blow Your House Down* (1984), *Liza's England* (1986), formerly *The Century's Daughter; The Man Who Wasn't There* (1989); *Regeneration* (1991) filmed with the same title in 1997; *The Eye in The Door* (1993), winner of the Guardian Fiction Prize; *The Ghost Road* (1995), winner of the Booker Prize for Fiction; *Another World* (1998); *Border Crossing* (2001); *Double Vision* (2003); *Life Class* (2007); *Toby's Room* (2012); and *Noonday* (2015). In 1983 Barker was named one of the 20 'Best Young British Novelists' in a promotion run by the Book Marketing Council and Granta magazine; and in 2000 she was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).

In her novels, the author explores themes related to gender, social class, trauma, memory and the notion of survival. Her early novels focus on the harsh lives of working-class women living in Northern England. A clear example of this is *Union Street* (1982), her first published novel, in which working-class women are depicted struggling through poverty and violence. This novel was repeatedly rejected by publishing houses and was finally published in Virago Press. Over time, her interest shifted to the traumas of the First and Second World Wars exploring themes of violence and sexuality, as well as the class and gender roles of British men and women during the period.

This interview, informal in tone[1], allows us to a glance into Barker's writing process, and discusses in particular her trilogies: the *Regeneration* trilogy

[1] What follows is a transcription of a conversation with the author and no attempt has been made to modify or correct the text in any way.

(*Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door*, *The Ghost Road*) and the *Life Class* trilogy (*Life Class*, *Toby's Room*, *Noonday*). Honest and insightful, she allows us to learn a little more about herself and the art she has created.

María Villar Lourido (MVL): *What do you think most characterises your writing?*

Pat Barker (PB): I would like to think, well, brevity, strength, and I hope a certain kind of honesty.

MVL: *Was it very difficult at the beginning?*

PB: Oh, it was almost impossible. I began very very late. Partly because I think that I approached the publishing world on my knees. Something I am rather ashamed of now. Because I tried to write what I saw being admired and at that time what was admired particularly in women's writing was to be slender, sensitive. [...] I did that and the characters were middle-class, it was a middle-class setting, it was nothing to do with who I was at all. And on the basis of repeated rejections, I do mean repeated rejections. I was finally driven back to the point where I decided that I just had to be myself, which was Northern, working-class, female, and a bastard. And I decided this was who I was and this was what I was going to write, and then I wrote *Union Street* and I wrote it not thinking it was going to be published, this was the book I was going to write because I had to write it whether it was published or not. And, of course, that was the one that got published, but only because it was a feminist publishing house, Virago, which was interested in it. I don't think the mainstream publishing world would be particularly interested in it.

MVL: *What are you reading right now? Or what do you like to read in your free time?*

PB: [...] Oh, anything except contemporary fiction, really. I am usually reading for research, sometimes for projects that don't get off the ground. So, you know, [...] I read a lot for research, and that means that I read my contemporaries in very quick bursts. I hate to say it but I don't particularly like modern literary fiction. I read poetry, history, psychology, about the natural world, I am very interested in the arts. And, at the moment, of course I am reading Homer, that is my new project, the *Iliad*, every possible translation, and you know, books about early Homeric Greece. [...]

MVL: *Who are some of your favourite authors that you feel were influential in your work and what impact have they had in your writing if any?*

PB: I used to like Patrick Wright, I went through a phase. He used to get into my writing. And had to be taken out again because it was completely foreign. Similarly with Angela Carter, who was personally very kind to me when I was just beginning. You know, she wasn't influential on what I actually do, because we are so different, it was chalk and cheese which is

what makes her a great teacher actually. Because she saw something in me, although it was completely different from everything she herself did. [...]

At the moment, I am re-reading Tony Harrison, some of his film poetry which I think is very interesting. Partly because it has something to do with my current project. Because he was a pacifist, he was a working-class background kid, who was very bright and, you know, he studied the Classics. And he has blended the two things together and he uses the classics. […]

MVL: *What inspires you? What inspired you to write in the first place when you started?*

PB: No idea. I just knew it was something I had to do. I was eleven years old, no, I was ten years old when I started to write. And I lived in a place […] which has a petrifying well, that is the water turns anything exposed to it to stone. […] We used to go and drop the penny in the well and wish. And I dropped the penny in the well and wish to be a writer. I was already writing a novel at that point. But nobody in my family had written anything, or thought about writing anything so I don't know why it happened. But I never really thought about being anything else. I thought about being other things in order to finance my writing, but I never thought about being them, you know, for their own sake. It was always about buying the time to write, from the age of eleven onwards.

MVL: *What do you think it is the most difficult part of your artistic process?*

PB: Self-belief. Because, actually, people see writers winning prices and, you know, doing staff like that if the writer is lucky, or having films made. But actually the writer is always the unsuccessful author of the last paragraph he or she wrote. And, unfortunately, the last paragraph is usually crap, because first drafts are crap, so you have to believe in yourself while knowing that what you spent four hours this morning writing is probably going to end up in the waste-paper basket, and actually that would be a sign of your skill as a writer, if it does end up in the waste-paper basket, and yet you have to go on believing in writing, you have to go on believing that the project you are working on is worth doing and that is very very difficult. But, at the same time, I would distrust any writer who didn't have that problem.

MVL: *How did your interest for the First World War begin?*

PB: […] My grandfather fought in the First World War. It was my grandmother's second husband and he had a bayonet wound in his side. At the time, I mean when I was a little girl, I would see this wound and I thought that bayonet wounds were terrifically common, you know, if you picture the First World War, it is people charging, a bayonet charge. But, of course, it was nothing like that. Bayonet wounds were actually three per cent of the total injuries of the war. […] So, my grandfather survived though he

did lie out in no man's land for a long time. What you see, my experience, really, was of a wound in silence, because he never talked about it. He didn't say anything at all about it. But he used to get straight off and get washed at the kitchen sink before he went out to the British Legion which is a veteran's association in Britain. So I would see the wound, even touch it, but with no explanation of what the wound was. And that's what writers need. They don't need explanations, they need silence. They need a mystery. If you've got that, you've got something your imagination can grow around.

MVL: *Did you intend for* Regeneration*,* The Eye in the Door*, and* The Ghost Road *to be a trilogy?*

PB: No, no, it was only ever one book to begin with. And, in fact, I came to a complete dead end at the end of *Regeneration*. Because I know that a book is supposed to end with a feeling of completion. So I really struggled with the final chapter trying to get both, Rivers and Sassoon, who were in the final chapter a sense of having come to the end of the road, you know, learned things and being ready to move on. And it was impossible to do that because Rivers was actually in a state of greater conflict, I think, at the end when Sassoon left Craiglockhart, because he had been brought to question his assumptions about the war, he had been brought to question his own role in getting people better and sending them back in to what had made them ill in the first place. And Siegfried Sassoon had not actually gone back to his beliefs on the war at all, he was going back because he thought he could do the most good or the least harm in serving a particular group of men, the men in his platoon. After the war, he believed it was as unjustified as he always believed it. […] So, in neither case, was their story finished. And, then, it moved from being one book to being three books. It was never two. Whereas trilogies, once you've done them at least, looking back, it just looks very substantial. And then I had another terrible difficulty with the beginning of the second book because I knew I wanted to do the second book about splits, you know, before and after the war, them and us, at the front and people back home… It is all about splitting. I knew I wanted the central character to reflect all this by having actually splits in his own personality. For a long long time I was trying to create this character from scratch and then I realised, of course, that Billy Prior with his episodes where he doesn't quite know, doesn't remember what he's been doing or what he's being saying was in essence just such a character, and could be developed and deepened. And I also liked his relationship with William Rivers because he is, unlike all the other patients. He is sufficiently in charge of his own condition to be able to both emphasize with Rivers and see Rivers' weaknesses and pray on them. […]

MVL: *Why are men the main characters of the trilogy? Little attention is giving to women except Sarah, Sarah's co-workers, and Sarah's mother, is there a reason behind it?*

PB: Well, I think that kind of war in particular asks questions of men, and yes, you can have women characters observing the men being asked questions but that drains all the drama out of it. That war asked questions of men, women were not asked the same questions and it is the questions that interest me: what circumstances you do fight and if you conclude that they were because of you being there to fight for it, it is completely an illegitimate cause; but would you then justify withdrawing or the fact that you gave your word means you have to go on doing it without believing in it. No woman was asked that question. And also I have written exhaustively about women. […] The women who are slotting bullets in the machine gun belts by simultaneously revealing how despised they are for ending one unborn life, having an abortion is absolutely terrible, a sin against humanity, and, yet, they are doing this which is going to kill hundreds and hundreds of men who women conceive and gave birth to and brought up. That just points out the absolutely ludicrous nature of the society they were living in and probably the society we are living in as well.

MVL: *Why did you include historical figures such as Graves, Owen, Sassoon, Tonks and not others?*

PB: That started with William Rivers. You know when Siegfried Sassoon came to write his fictionalised memoir of the war, the one person he included as a real person was William Rivers and he said it was because Rivers could not be fictionalised. And I agreed with him in the end. You cannot, for some reason you cannot turn Rivers into fiction, and it would have been ridiculous I think to, you could have called Rivers, Paul, you know, and Sassoon, Simpson, but what's the point. I mean, that meeting between them is well-known in English literary terms. So what would have been the point of giving him another name. I thought it was best in the end just to admit that these are the people it was about. It is very exciting for me but it imposes limitations, self-imposed limitations because I decided that I was not going to write about their private lives. Their relationship is intimate but at the same time is very public. What is going on beneath the surface is never more than hinted art. And I took that decision very early and that also applied to Wilfred Owen. Because if Siegfried Sassoon is a real person, Owen or Graves obviously also have to be in the book as real people.

MVL: *I think, for me, Billy Prior is one of the most complex figures in both trilogies, and I wanted to ask you what the process of the development of this character was like.*

PB: Well, basically, Prior grew to the need to reveal more about Rivers, which meant that Prior is working-class, partly because that is my background, I got sick of all these upper-class English-men. And it was quite

nice to have somebody from a working-class background seeing things from a very different perspective, being a temporary gentleman in their world, but not of their world. And the second thing about Prior, of course, is that he is sexually extremely ambivalent, he has a lot of experience on both sides of the blanket. [...] See, the film of *Regeneration*, which in many ways I liked, has Prior attacking Rivers purely on a class basis and that was weak because Rivers could deal with any amount of that; what Rivers finds difficult is the combination of hostility with flirtation and rebelliousness that you get in Prior. He is a nightmare patient, but he is a nightmare patient specifically for that very person. And then I went on to develop Prior in greater depth afterwards. But to begin with, Prior is the key to unlock Rivers and that is his function in *Regeneration*.

MVL: *What kind of research do you do before beginning a book, how much time do you spend researching before beginning a book?*

PB: Before beginning a book, well, I do a lot of research before beginning it. And most of that it is going to be useless. And then you have to try to forget it. I actually write the book without making that terrible error of holding in the research whether it is relevant or not. And then you need to do…,- once you got your first draft, then you know what it is that you need to know, you then do a much more focused research, essentially looking for the details you need to know. For example I read lots of reports about the conditions in the munition factories and the fact that when the girls were eventually given gloves to wear, the gloves were too short, so they were plunging their hands into these horrible chemicals, and not protecting them but the staff was getting inside the glove and being pressed into even greater contact with their skin which is why, of course, they ended up bright yellow with red hair. That is just one particular, little detail that I remember.

MVL: *Do you have any anecdote or story about people you met while researching for this book? Such as veterans or…*

PB: I didn't meet a veteran of the First World War until after I finished the trilogy. Then, I met an absolutely marvellous man, who was 103 years old and clear as a bell mentally. He was very interesting to me because I was filmed while I was interviewing him. And we were filmed walking around the Imperial War Museum. […] And he was interested in the guns, and what guns could do. And I was not particularly interested in that, I was interested in him. And they kept sort of introducing the subject of "gender", you know, and they didn't seem to be able to see that they got it in the fact that you know he was interested in the killing machines while I was only interested in him. That is the gender difference, it is there, on the screen, you've already got it. And actually nobody really needs to talk about it, at that point. But they were trying, […] that he had to talk about, well, believe it or not, homo-eroticism, and the male bond that was forged in the trenches, and he was supposed to be looking into this trench and saying: "Oh we were so bonded

together, you know" and what he actually said: "what I remember the most it's how lonely we all were". He said the exact opposite of what he was supposed to say. The other thing that [...] was interesting about him was that he was a messenger and he'd gone through the full four years without a wound, and with only minimal time on leave, without apparent psychological damage and I thought that that was probably because he had been always on the move. What Rivers said, it is the static passive nature of trench warfare which was so stressful, which cause the men to break down…,- that they were helpless in the face of it. It was completely random what happened to you. But he, at least, was moving, and very rapidly from place to place. And because of that, I think, he had survived comparatively unscathed, and then he went back into civilian life and he had a job as a printer and he had a girlfriend already. So actually he slotted back into civilian life comparatively easily because he knew what he was going to do and who he was going to do it with. And, all that was fine, until the start of the Second World War, when he was on the Anti-aircraft guns and he had a really bad nervous breakdown. That second exposure to fire absolutely made him crumble. […]

MVL: *Do you think there is a dialogue between both trilogies?*

PB: Only that they are trilogies in the same period, I don't think there is much of a dialogue. And the fact that in each case you do have a group of young people who are both undergoing this experience and simultaneously trying to find a way of expressing the experience. With no time, no energy, no concentration, and no expectation even to being able to complete what they were doing. And I admire that in them. I admire the fact that people were both undergoing this tremendous experience and at the same time trying to think a new way of expressing it and a new way of looking at it. It is a great tribute, I think, to human beings, how they were able to do that. They weren't writing novels, you know, you can write a poem in the intervals of going into the trenches but you certainly can't write a novel.

It is interesting that Paul Nash, you know he was a soldier and fought and he said, when subsequently he was […] sent back by the War Office as an official war artist into the trenches in order to refresh his memory of this experience that nobody ever succeeded in forgetting. But anyway they sent him back, and he said he took more risks to get the right angle for his painting or his preliminary sketches than he ever took as a soldier…,- that is interesting.

MVL: *What do you think when they frame you as a Northern working-class feminist?*

PB: Northern, working-class, gritty and feminist. I think working-class is clearly inaccurate, I think I was born into the working class, or at least on the female side, I was. And you know class changes the rest... I would say it is still true. But, of course, it is also a very limiting thing, but then, you know,

being known as the working-class writer is also limiting. I mean, in the start of my career one of the most frequent questions was: why do you never write about men? and, at this stage, the question is: why do you never write about women? And the answer to both is: I do. [...] And people deal with it by putting you in a niche. And actually sometimes the choice is [between] being in the niche and being nowhere. And, to a certain extent, you have to accept that. I mean, you know, the actor who appeared in all those horror movies, Boris Karloff was asked once: how do you feel about being type-cast as a monster? And he said: well, if I wasn't type-cast, I wouldn't work. I think there is wisdom in that.

MVL: *Is there any question that you wish someone would ask you in an interview but they never did, they never dare? Maybe something that, for you, it was obvious should be asked.*

PB: Ah, yeah, that nobody has ever asked me… what a good question that is, let me say that first. I can't think of it. […] Perhaps what do you get out of the promotion, apart from the fact that you have to do it for your publisher. […] I get the sense of moving beyond this very narrow world, the agent, the publisher, the journalists, the festival organizers... Suddenly you are in a room and there are actual readers, there may not be a cross-section of your readers, but they *are* your readers. And the other thing I get out of it is, now and then, people ask a question, very rarely, that sets you off on a new track. I remember a question about how difficult it was to portray good people. I hope my version of Rivers works, and that [it] is certainly a portrait of an extremely good man. […] And now and then somebody would tell you something that [...] is interesting. For example, I can't remember which book of the second book it is…,- oh yes…,- it must be the third. Elinor's nephew comes in from the garden and there is the portrait of Toby on the wall, he throws his shoe at it and says: it is not my fault. Well, that was taken from somebody in a reading. She had done that in the 20s, she had done that to a portrait in her family's house. First of all, she had gone to the gentlemen's lavatory, she came in from the garden and she said she was going upstairs to the lady's lavatory, but she had gone to the men's lavatory, which was on the ground-floor so she was breaking a taboo at that point, and then she took off her sandal and threw it at this portrait, so she dominated her childhood, and said: it is not my fault. I don't suppose…,- she was a small child…,- I don't suppose she even knew what she was saying, but she was protesting against that grief that hung over this country and other countries in the aftermath of the First World War. […]

MVL: *So, what projects are you working on at the moment?*

PB: I am working on a retelling of *The Iliad* from the point of view of Achilles's slave Briseis. In *The Iliad,* it opens with a quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles. Agamemnon is the high king of the Greek coalition and Achilles is the best fighter and a prince, at any rate, in his own

right. And they quarrel because Agamemnon has taken as his slave a fifteen-year-old girl, Chryseys, who is the daughter of a priest, a priest of Apollo. The priest comes back with a ransom and says: "give me my daughter back, she is my only child daughter". And Agamemnon insults him and drives him out of the camp. And, then, there is a plague, and Apollo is the plague god, so the Greeks are dying of the plague. Achilles calls an assembly and says: you've got to give the girl back, Apollo is furious with us, clearly. So, he agrees to give this girl back to this god but then he takes Achilles slave girl, his sex slave, for himself. The point about her is not that she is a sex slave but that she was given to Achilles as a prize for his prowess on the battlefield. So it is like taking away your wife and taking away your medal for bravery at the same time. Because that is what she is, she is both. In this quarrel, which is, you know, a fantastic quarrel…,- Philip Roth, you know, it opens with a quotation from Philip Roth, I hope, if we get permission, in which he says: that this is the foundation of European literature, the foundation of European literature is two men quarrelling over the body of a young girl. And it is. But, the young girl is completely silent, from beginning to end. So I thought, well, let's stop the girl from being silent, let's see this sequence of events mainly from her point of view. I can't do it entirely from her point of view because there are too many scenes she doesn't witness.

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