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Keep Calm and Enjoy Your PhD: Notes on Joy, Difficulty, and Care

Research Paper

Parsing Grammar vs Parsing and Grammar: An Outlook

Tributes

Jane Austen at 250: Tracing the Creation of a Literary and Cultural Icon

Truth and Tragedy: In My Reading of Dreiser's Doctrine for Lasting Literature

Interview

"You'll Have to Remember This": An Interview with Theo Dorgan

In Memoriam

In Memoriam David Lodge: A Great Writer and a Generous and Honest Man

In Memoriam: Prof Cora Kaplan (1940-2024)

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ÍNDICE

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ÍNDICE

BOOK REVIEWS
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

BOOK REVIEWS
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

BOOK REVIEWS
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

BOOK REVIEWS
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

ÍNDICE

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS
LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

ÍNDICE

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS
LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

ÍNDICE

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

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LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ÍNDICE

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“Keep Calm and Enjoy Your PhD: Notes on Joy, Difficulty, and Care”

The invitation to give a talk for the participants of the AEDEAN Doctoral Seminar, which was celebrated in early July 2025 in Santander, made me feel both immensely honored and somewhat challenged. First came thankfulness for everyone who made it possible for me to enjoy that special event, full of talented PhD students and scholars, including some very dear friends. What a treat to be part of it! What luxury to be able to escape to this beautiful place by the ocean, with perfect temperature in the middle of the boiling summer! Gratitude was thus the first thing I experienced and it is relevant to start thus, for I believe this is one of the most—if not the most—important emotions that are also associated to the PhD. I remember that, a long, long time ago, whenever I was stuck in my own dissertation writing, I used to think about the acknowledgements I was going to write, to the point that I had them all figured out in my head way before the thesis was even close to being ready! To me, this was a reminder that I was not alone, and that no matter how important the thesis is, it is never as important as having good people to share it with. We should always remember that the academic is inherently, unavoidably personal. In a context where this might be taken to indicate a lack of professionalism or seriousness, we should vindicate it and cherish it.

At the same time, however, I also experienced great insecurity. What should I, what could I talk about? What can I say that students can potentially learn from or be inspired by? There are so many things in the PhD world, so much information about the process, publications, conference papers, scholarship applications, research stays, and a long etcetera. I cannot even claim to be an expert in any of those. So, I thought, if I were in the audience, what would I like to hear about? In the process of reflection, the words of Toni Morrison accounting for her origins as a writer came to my mind. She explained in several interviews that at some point in her life, when she could not find the experience of black women accounted for in literature, she decided to write the book she would have wanted to read herself. I do not intend to establish any kind of comparison between Morrison and me, but I did find great inspiration in this. What did I miss from my own PhD experience? What is the most important thing that I would have liked to be told in the process? This led me to my decision to talk about the joy that can—and this is my main point, should—be involved in the PhD, that long road which drains you of energy, time, social life, romance, and so many more things, but which is also fulfilling, inspiring and rewarding like nothing else can. There is, I am well aware, an inherent contradiction here—how can you feel joy when something is so incredibly taxing? As my dear Walt Whitman famously wrote in "Song of Myself,"

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
>
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)

We should not be afraid of contradiction, but embrace it. When we do, we see that it is perfectly possible—in fact, it is unavoidable, and also desirable—for the process of completing a PhD to be both extremely challenging and uniquely exciting.

Yet, we do not usually talk about the joy. More often than not, we focus on the stress and difficulties of a PhD, but it is also important to acknowledge the positives. If you decide to do so, you must know that you will be going against the grain, practicing a kind of swimming upstream in the present context. You can choose this path or not, and, either way, this is a deliberate choice. What a relevant word this is, *deliberate*! One may remember Henry David Thoreau's words in *Walden* about why he decided to go and live in the woods. He wrote,

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. (97)

Thoreau was speaking about a different project—about living simply, in harmony with nature—but his ideas can also be relevant to the PhD experience. My point is that making a deliberate effort to focus on joy rather than dwelling only on the challenges—which is what we dwell on, more often than not—matters.

The importance of this lies in the fact that what we focus our attention on tends to grow. This is something that all of us have probably perceived intuitively, but it has also been demonstrated by psychologists. As defined by the American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology, *selective attention*—also called *controlled attention*, *directed attention*, or *executive attention*—explains how we concentrate on certain stimuli while ignoring others. Interestingly, the stimuli that we focus on are those that align with our goals or mental frameworks. To this we need to add *confirmation bias*, defined as "the tendency to gather evidence that confirms preexisting expectations, typically by emphasizing or pursuing supporting evidence while dismissing or failing to seek contradictory evidence." This means that once we focus on a belief or idea, our brain tends to seek out and interpret information that confirms it, thus reinforcing such focus. Needless to say, the fact that we tend to see the things that we already believe, and simultaneously search for evidence to confirm it shapes our experience of reality profoundly. If we add recent developments in neuroscience to this, especially through the concept of *neuroplasticity*, or "the ability of the nervous

system to change in response to experience or environmental stimulation," we see that what we focus on literally grows in our brain's wiring. This is at the basis of *positive psychology*, a field of research that focuses on the psychological states, individual traits or character strengths and social institutions "that enhance subjective well-being and make life most worth living." As reflected in the *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* manual—which changes the focus from mental illness as categorized in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—, well-being and resilience can be cultivated by focusing on strengths and positive experiences. What we learn with a quick look at these terms and theories is that if we focus on affirming aspects of our academic work, we can reinforce the neural pathways associated with motivation and joy.[1]

Apart from psychological and neuroscientific theories, we, language people, literature people know that words and stories shape the way we look at the world and ourselves. Personal and cultural narratives do not only represent life—they shape life and identity. The stories we tell ourselves and others are, therefore, profoundly important. We can—and should—focus on stories of growth and resilience to reinforce those experiences within our communities. What all this means in the context of doctoral research is that deliberately attending to moments of curiosity, intellectual growth or achievements is more than a matter of attitude: it is a strategic intervention which can make a difference in our long-term engagement with the PhD journey.

It is important to clarify that my emphasis on joy should not be confused with the contemporary imperative to perform happiness at all times that Byung-Chul Han observes in texts like *The Burnout Society*. For Han, we are living in a society obsessed with achievement and the constant invitations to produce, optimize and remain positive are in fact contemporary culture's way to discipline us. This is not only exhausting but also a form of violence: the individual internalizes this pressure to maximize their own performance, which ultimately becomes a form of self-exploitation. The focus on joy I have in mind is very far from an attempt to discipline anybody—in fact, it is precisely the opposite, a call to rebellion, to dissenting. Moreover, it is focused on the process of researching rather than productivity. Most importantly, it is based on relationships. In my view, curiosity, connection, and insight coexist with doubt, frustration, vulnerability. The latter are not failures to overcome but key elements in the process of becoming a scholar. Thus, joy is not an obligation but a reminder and an invitation to make the most of the journey you have chosen.

Precisely because the focus on joy is not meant to erase difficulty, it is important to acknowledge that writing a PhD dissertation is not easy. It requires great commitment and discipline to manage the long, demanding process of research, analysis, and writing. Moreover, it is common to feel insecurity and doubts about your self-worth, especially when you are constantly being tested. You need to present a paper and everybody is looking at you, and you are afraid they will figure out how much you don't know; you need to have your work evaluated by the doctoral commission, ANECA, a hiring committee… There are so many opportunities to feel that you don't do enough, that you don't know enough! It is no wonder that academics in general and doctoral students in particular are associated with a high rate of mental health problems. PhD students should be well aware of the difficulties they are going to face, and supervisors should be very open about this from the beginning. Of course it is not easy to stay positive in this context, and if we add the times of uncertainty and chaos we are living in, even trying to do so becomes a sort of revolutionary act. Yet negative discourses about academia seem to outweigh the positive right now, and we need to redress the balance.

Because theory is never truly separate from life—and because even when we focus on the personal, we often feel compelled to draw on the wisdom of smarter people, a tendency that academics eventually become very good at—I will be looking for support in a few concepts that I believe can be useful here.

First, the idea of **self-care**. I am recovering the original sense given by Audre Lorde, whose ideas are still extremely relevant today. In her 1988 essay collection *A Burst of Light*, Lorde reframed self-care not as luxury, but as essential for survival under oppression, connecting it to resilience and engagement. She wrote:

> I had to examine in my dreams as well as in my immune function test the devastating effects of overextension. Overextending myself is not stretching myself. […] Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare. (130)

Lorde, a black lesbian feminist poet and writer, was living with cancer at the time she wrote this, and we need to consider such particular context. Different though the circumstances may be, we know that the academic world can

1 All these definitions and ideas are available at https://dictionary.apa.org/

be inhospitable. We may be ignored, ill-treated, silenced, marginalized, underpaid, overburdened, overwhelmed, or precarized in various ways due to the fact that we are PhD students, people of the humanities, of a certain age, or because of other identity-defining features like gender, race, class, nationality, or ability. Self-care is more relevant and urgent when the system is not precisely interested in us thriving in it or enjoying it, for very often it seems to be the opposite. In this respect, self-care is a kind of resistance, and therefore, a political question.

One thing to note is that Lorde's formulation is not the same as the idea of self-care most generalized at present, when it is more often than not stripped of its political emphasis, and absorbed by neoliberalism through individualism and consumerism.[2] The idea of self-care I am evoking is not primordially about finding me-time or putting my wishes or needs above everybody else's. Lorde speaks of self-care as tending to one's body, mind, and spirit, and always does so in connection to other people. The importance of communal self-care cannot be overstated, for it is clear that we cannot do this alone. Moreover, self-care is emphatically not, as André Spicer puts it, a "cheap replacement for social care." It should never serve as a substitute for governments and institutions providing resources to take care of us, because, basically, it is their job to do this. Another disclaimer: one central problem with the current self-care discourse is that it can become yet another burden. The system frequently expects us to care for ourselves and we may be blamed when we struggle. Responsibility should never rest solely on the individual, for some issues require structural issues: more funding, more support, systemic change… Needless to say, this is where community becomes essential. By community, I mean a web of support—a tribe of friends, family, colleagues; institutional networks like the university, the PhD circle, and the broader academic world; as well as initiatives you can seek out, such as the AEDEAN Doctoral Seminar or the AEDEAN community as a whole.

Another compelling idea that Audre Lorde offers is that of **the erotic**. At first glance, linking the PhD to the erotic may seem unexpected, even eccentric. Yet, the PhD experience *should* be erotic, at least if we follow Lorde's own conceptualization. As she argues in "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," part of *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984), her notion of the erotic as a source of power can change how we understand not only personal life but also intellectual and academic work. I need to clarify that Lorde is reclaiming the erotic from its limited sexual connotations. In her understanding, it is not just about sex, but a source of deep, embodied knowledge, a site of presence and connection, and a creative energy that drives us toward truth and integrity. As she writes, "The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (53). Although I do not think the erotic should be limited to the female, we can understand why this is a relevant vindication for women especially, for we have been objectified, discriminated against, and so much more, on account of the patriarchal conception of the body. Women are of course not the only ones, and if we think of racialized bodies, for example, we have another realm where the erotic can be vindicated as a strategy. In any case, if the erotic is a way of knowing not through disembodied rationalism but through felt experience, it can serve as a powerful counter to academic alienation. What counts as knowledge should include embodied, affective, and intuitive forms as well. I think this can be connected to joy, for in research work—like that leading to the PhD dissertation—one of the moments when we feel most alive and fulfilled is when a sentence clicks, when we're surprised by an idea, a connection we have made, something we have figured out. This is evidence of the erotic, that full-bodied knowing, and it is so joyful, indeed! Lorde says: "once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of" (57). She also argues that the erotic is not trivial pleasure but a demand for excellence. Joy can, therefore, be a research ethics, for it calls us back to meaningful inquiry, and it can keep us honest, in deep connection to the truth.

Lorde also insists that the erotic is not private, but political. In her words, "Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world" (59). This is connected to the joy that emerges from community learning spaces—such as the AEDEAN Doctoral Seminar—which can be immensely inspiring and transformative. In a way, the erotic becomes a radical reclaiming of meaning beyond hyper-productivity and burnout. I truly believe that not everything needs to be citation-counted or reduced to a ckecklist of items in our resume, and all those other things that have to do with profit-based academic work and which PhD students know very well. Some things matter simply because they feel right. Although academia often trains us to distrust feeling, and being serious is interpreted as detachment and distance, Lorde seems to be granting us permission to go in a different direction. This is good for PhD students but also for academics at large: I encourage you to try to think of a moment in your PhD when you felt fully alive—perhaps on account of an insight, a moment of awe, a connection. This is the erotic and it is a form of intellectual integrity and honesty. If you have experienced it, cherish it, relive it, look for it again and again. If you haven't… go for it!

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2 See André Spicer's ideas on this in 'Self-care': How a Radical Feminist Idea was Stripped of Politics for the Mass Market" (2019).

I also think that Sarah Ahmed's idea of the **killjoy** can help us here. In *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), Ahmed explains how the figure of the feminist killjoy is a reminder that "When you expose a problem you pose a problem" (37). The joy she is killing as a feminist is not exactly the joy I am trying to foster in the context of the PhD. She refers to the public signs of joy that are hiding and displacing bad feelings or behavior under its surface. This is like sweeping things under the carpet. Thus, the killjoy is someone who brings that to the surface, who names what others would prefer to keep hidden or repressed under that false appearance of public joy; who refuses to perform cheerfulness in unjust or exclusionary settings, and who is often accused of being too sensitive, too serious, too negative. We could probably develop a new concept—"the PhD killjoy"—by bringing together all these elements. But here's the deal: it is important to note that not conforming to the superficial appearance of something being right does by no means indicate a failure of character. On the contrary, it can be a practice of resistance, of ethical clarity, and of deep intellectual engagement. So, if you feel that you are being asked to fit in rather than question the way things work; expected to remain silent in the face of unjust practices; encouraged to suppress feelings of discomfort, especially if you are marginalized in any way, then considering the killjoy stance can help reframe those feelings and responses not as weaknesses but as signs of integrity and attunement. For one thing, this can help us all to be fine with saying "no" to certain practices in academia, and at the end of the day, to try to find our own way in it and make it better.

In *Complaint!* (2021), Ahmed also observes that academic institutions often individualize structural problems, turning systemic barriers into "personal" failures. In short, institutions deflect responsibility by portraying those who do not fit in as insufficiently resilient rather than acknowledging the fact that there might be something wrong with the institution itself. **Solidarity** counters the isolation derived from this by affirming that you are not alone, and that you are not the only person going through this. Solidarity does not assume that we are all the same or going through the same; we can be different but we do "live on common ground" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 189). It is about sharing commitment through difficulty, about establishing an ethical relation in spite of our differences. This means that solidarity is made and reinforced through practice, creating spaces to be together and establishing meaningful relations of support. In a culture that promotes the lone genius, vindicating a strong community of mutual care is a necessary act.

Another critic that I want to bring to the conversation is Rebecca Solnit. I am interested in her vision of uncertainty as fertility; of beauty and joy as radical responses to difficulty; and of art, intellect, and activism as overlapping acts of hope and care. This is especially relevant in the difficult times we are living in right now. What Solnit does is turn uncertainty into a method of discovery and joy. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2005), she writes: "Never to get lost is not to live, not to know how to get lost brings you to destruction, and somewhere in the terra incognita in between lies a life of discovery" (6). Getting lost is a generative, creative, and even pleasurable experience. So, don't take this the wrong way, but… *get lost*! And if you feel confused or lacking direction, try to reconsider this feeling, to reframe it as essential to discovery, and, therefore, learning. After all, as Solnit says in *Hope in the Dark* (2004, 2016), "The future is dark, with a darkness as much of the womb as the grave" (5). I cannot overstate the relevance of this idea: darkness can be gestational. This changes the meaning of obstacles in general. And in particular, something like the second-year blues in the PhD, which you may have experienced already, may be not just an obstacle but a necessary step in the process.

This also leads us to try to embrace, following Solnit, hope as much as we can. Hope is, in her words, "a gift you don't have to surrender, a power you don't have to throw away" (*Hope* xi). Expectedly, hope thrives on uncertainty: "Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act" (xiv). The PhD's unknown outcome can be paired with Solnit's "spaciousness," and uncertainty here equals agency. Hope is not a naïve optimism but a way of living with uncertainty and still choosing to act. Because the future is genuinely open, what we do matters. This also connects to joy. In Solnit's words, "Joy doesn't betray but sustains activism. And when you face a politics that aspires to make you fearful, alienated, and isolated, joy is a fine initial act of insurrection" (24).

Bringing together Solnit's spaciousness of uncertainty with Lorde's erotic power and Ahmed's killjoy solidarity, we can argue that to keep calm and enjoy your PhD is not to deny its darkness; it is to work in that darkness with curiosity, making community, and trying to enjoy not knowing exactly what happens next. As I see it, the choice of path that one can take for the PhD presents us with either a railroad, with a fixed path, laid out in advance, or a walk in the woods, where you can follow an existing trail, change direction, or tread your own. This is in fact not an either/or choice, for the two approaches can be combined, and different phases of the PhD will probably require different strategies. Still, the planning v. exploration visualization helps, for it points to the balance that I believe should be our aim: be organized, but avoid perfectionism and the urge to control everything; stay open to surprise and embrace uncertainty; be ready to follow your plans, and be ready to take a U-turn too! In short, we can draw inspiration to rekindle our love for the PhD again and again by listening to these lessons on how we can practice joy in several intertwined ways:

- Joy as a stance: a mindset that lets us sit with discomfort, speak inconvenient truths, and hold space for both care and self-care without apology.
- Joy as a method: a creative engine that rewards curiosity and treats surprise as the source of insight.
- Joy as kin-making: a communal ethic aimed at weaving solidarity and mutual support.
- Joy as politics: a deliberate, hopeful choice to keep curiosity alive so that scholarship remains a site of transformation rather than mere production.

Taken together, these four faces of joy remind us that research is not only something we do but a way we can live—body, mind, and heart opening up to others from the conviction born of the changes we want to see in the world.

These ideas can be used to illustrate particular aspects of the PhD. What follows is an attempt to gather my thoughts into a few tips of sorts. I am quite sure they will not be especially innovative or original, but I hope at least some of them prove useful along the way.

The first thing I would definitely say to any PhD student willing to listen is **stay open and fall in love**. Do this deliberately. Be open not just with your eyes or through the intellect but with your whole self. What you are doing for your PhD is never too far away from life and it should be in direct communication with it. Seeing this, feeling it can be a form of happiness. The most rewarding thing about the PhD is how it is full of promise and opportunity: curiosity, excitement, development. You learn a lot, you get to read interesting things and meet amazing people, you get to travel to conferences and see places… Being willing to learn from others, to embrace new ideas, perspectives and challenges will make the experience much more productive and also enjoyable. In order to stay open and fall in love, I think you should always remember that what you are doing is meaningful. Your PhD journey is a unique and exciting opportunity to deeply explore a subject you care about, and to contribute to your field as you develop your skills and expertise. If you are interested in self-growth, you will like what the PhD does to you.

I believe passion is the most powerful fuel—it's what makes the world go around!—and this is why you should choose a research area you are truly enthusiastic about. Once you have done that, remind yourself regularly why you chose it. Choose it again, every day. It's like falling in love—and then choosing to *stay* in love. Passion will carry you far, but staying committed takes effort, too. Always remember the privilege of depth and devotion: you can spend hours and hours, perhaps all day, reading, writing, and thinking. *Reading, writing, and thinking*. This is luxury! Spoiler: it will most likely not happen, ever again. You are spending more time with your topic of research than with many family members, friends, or partners. You will love it, you will get mad at it… And you will get to know it like nobody else will until it becomes a part of yourself. I remember being in the midst of my PhD when a colleague, a year or two ahead of me and already a Doctor, expressed that she *missed* the PhD. I must admit that, at the time, I did not get it: how can anyone miss *this*? Yet, with some distance, I began to understand. It is the intensity one misses. The engagement, the sense of purpose. You may not always know *how* to do it, but you know exactly *what* must be done: write that dissertation. There is a clarity in this and it is precious. Believe it or not, you may very well miss it when it's over.

Of course this is not the whole story. You will also feel not in love. Bored. Tired. Not convinced at all. Doubting yourself and everything else. When this happens—not *if*, but *when*—I would say, **just go with the flow**: we are alive, we are constantly changing, and we won't feel the same throughout a single day—let alone over the entire course of the PhD journey. Don't judge yourself based on this. Also, **embrace the power of the normal**. Everything that happens to you is probably normal. I know, because I tell my PhD students this all the time, that just saying "don't worry, this is normal" does not necessarily make things ok. One can believe it intellectually but we need to absorb it emotionally as well, and that takes longer. But repeating it to yourself is a great start. We are individuals, and we are special, but perhaps not as special as we think we are, in the sense that if we talk to other people, we are very likely to find that similar things happen to them as well. I guess the trick is to try to find some balance between being unique and being part of a group. This is why speaking, telling our stories, and strengthening the sense of community is so important. We need to know that we belong, that we are not alone.

As you can see, trying to focus on the positive is by no means a denial of hardship. There are challenges, of course. Apart from the things that happen to us as individuals living in the world, there is the generalized post-pandemic exhaustion, institutional pressures, uncertainty, and so much more. We would prefer not to have to go through negative experiences in life at all, but the truth is that we need to learn how to **tolerate frustration**, and how to make the most of it. Because we need frustration in order to learn! It probably signals that your mind is working hard, that you are about to figure something out, or on the edge of a transformation. So, we should try to listen to frustration as we would a good teacher. I am not trying to reproduce the old ideas about "learning the hard way," or "no pain, no gain," although it is true that

progress—including learning—requires effort and sometimes discomfort. I prefer the one that goes "experience is the best teacher." As you grow older, you learn to tell yourself something like "this, too, will pass," because you have been through more difficult experiences before, and you know they have a way of working themselves out.

Another key thing that you can do is **choose the people** you invite into the play or movie that is your PhD. Although you don't write the whole script, you can be the casting director and choose who joins the cast and who doesn't. So, yes, this is about the people around you—those you work with, talk to, learn from—and how they can shape your experience as much as the research itself. Some people will inspire you. Others might challenge you. Some will model behavior you want to follow; others will show you exactly what not to do. All of them teach you something. Keep your eyes and ears open—especially when you're still figuring things out. And do make the most of the opportunity to meet interesting people—there are so many interesting people in the academic world!—and enjoy every moment spent connecting with them.

Before **choosing a supervisor**—or asking a supervisor to choose *you*—you should talk to them, really talk. Ask questions, make sure you know what to expect. Also, be honest about your expectations and commitment. This will help getting this relationship right, and remember, this is a very important relationship. Apart from the supervisor, and because you need to remember that no single person can meet all your needs, try to build a network of mentors, colleagues, friends. Some will give you technical help. Others will offer encouragement when you're down. Some will simply remind you who you are outside the PhD. All of them matter. And of course, consider that, just as you look to others for help, support, or inspiration, someone else may be looking to you. Be generous when you can and contribute to the larger community. This will always come back in a good way.

This leads to something else I think is crucial: **share your experience**. Talk to people. When you speak openly about what you're going through—especially the hard parts—you give others permission to do the same. And that builds a sense of belonging that can carry you through the toughest parts of the journey. When I was in the process, it was just as important and helpful for me to talk to people who knew what I was talking about as it was to hang out with people who had absolutely no idea what I was talking about (I am still thankful for their patience!). I think you need both perspectives, one to find community and company in the process, and the other to keep you grounded in life beyond the PhD. And of course, laugh when you can, cry if you need to. And let people be a part of it.

While you're doing all that, remember to **focus on care**. This may sound obvious, but I don't think it is said enough in academic spaces. More often than not, we separate academic work from the emotional world, but they are not separate. We are caring animals and you should care for yourself, for others, for your work, and for the ideas and ethics that guide you. First, self-care is serious work. It is not selfish or indulgent—it's essential. Sleep. Move. Eat. Take breaks. Laugh. Call a friend. Go outside. Do something that reminds you who you are outside your research. The work will still be there when you get back—and you'll be better equipped to do it. It is not always easy to see, but caring also means protecting your own boundaries. Take your work seriously, yes—but not too seriously. Boundaries are part of care too: knowing when to stop working, when to say no, when to step back. PhD work (and all academic work for that matter) has the superpower to invade every single minute and inch of your life if you let it. And it will never be enough. It reminds me of the *windiigo*, the cannibal figure of the Anishinaabe tradition (an Indigenous group of tribes of the US and Canada). When it appears in stories, the windiigo grows and grows, it's greedy and it can become unstoppable. Academic work can be like that! We need to stop it by focusing on other things as well. An important idea to remember is that your worth is not tied to your productivity. Real confidence comes from knowing that you will be ok even if you don't succeed. Interestingly, when your sense of value isn't tied to academic outcomes, you can actually become better at the work, for you think more freely, learn more, and enjoy it more. Care also extends to the work itself, to the ideas you are struggling to figure out. In moments of doubt or exhaustion, it can help to return to the reasons you started. Why am I even doing this? You might forget temporarily, so it's worth reminding yourself. Finally, care for others. Be generous with your time, your solidarity, your company. Ask people how they are doing, listen to their troubles, celebrate their successes… We are all responsible for creating a culture of generosity and respect, for making the academic world better.

One thing you can do when the task feels too big—and I am sure it often feels too big and overwhelming—is to **cut the big elephant in little pieces**. We cannot take the whole thing all at once. If you try to, you will probably not manage, and this may lead you to disengage or procrastinate. The trick is to pause, slow down, and try to break the problem into smaller parts. You can ask yourself: what is one single thing I can do right now? Not finish the whole chapter, but maybe just outline the next section, or prepare how I will begin tomorrow. Not fix the entire argument, perhaps just write one clear paragraph, one email, one sentence that makes sense…

Be organized. This is a good way to make the journey smoother. Track your time. Keep good notes. Back up your work. Name your files clearly. Save your references. Keep a writing log or a to-do list. These things will save loads of time, and thus free up mental energy. And when it comes to writing, start early, and write often. Don't wait until everything is clear. Clarity comes through writing, it is a way of thinking! An early draft may be rough but it can teach you what you're trying to say. Always remember that writing is an ongoing, evolving process.

Another thing to keep in mind is that, in the PhD process, **everything counts**: what you do deliberately and what you do unconsciously, what you perceive as success and what you interpret as a waste of time. The truth is that progress is not linear. Some days you move ahead, other days you feel lost or stuck. It all adds up, even when it doesn't look like it. One of the myths we soon absorb is that unless we are writing 3,000 words a day, presenting at conferences, or producing "output," we are wasting our time, and this is simply not the case. There's a difference between productivity and purpose. You can be purposeful even when you're not being "productive." You might be taking a long walk or lying on the sofa or having a shower and suddenly something clicks, you make a connection or untangle an idea. This kind of thinking is essential to make progress. In any case, always remember that total rest counts too. Not thinking *at all* counts. Your brain needs pauses to make sense of complexity—it needs silence to integrate. Be careful with screens; they often trick you into thinking that you're resting when you're not. Try real rest and your work will be better for it. And of course, celebrate all achievements, large and small. Some may be apparently small: something nice your supervisor tells you about your work, a good question you asked in a seminar, a paragraph that makes sense after struggling with it for a while… If you kept a joylist to keep track of the small things that go right, you may be surprised how many there are!

Another thing to consider is that learning does not happen in spite of failure but because of failure. As the Muscogee poet Joy Harjo writes in her memoir *Crazy Brave* (2012), "There is no poetry where there are no mistakes." When an idea fails or a chapter collapses, rebuilding can produce something stronger. So, we have to learn how to tolerate, even **embrace failure**. Think about this: a PhD is aimed at turning you from a directed learner into an independent researcher. How do you do that? Well, through practice. And you have to make mistakes before you get it right. The thing about academic life—although not exclusively here, of course—is that others will comment on, even criticize your work, and we don't usually like that. But we have to accept that this is part of being a researcher, and that it is not necessarily personal. Over time, we should learn to be more tolerant of this, by staying confident in our self-worth regardless of the circumstances.

The fact is that you are still a student, and that is great news! It gives you permission to be unfinished, to ask naïve questions, to make mistakes, to hesitate. Do not rush out of that space. On the contrary, I would strongly encourage you to try to **love being a beginner**. You are not expected to know everything, for learning is the point. In general, PhD students feel compelled to constantly appear competent and smart. We must admit that this is a lot of pressure and it can fuel impostor syndrome. Try to remember that you are here to improve. You can try to replace "I should know that" with "I want to know that" and see how many doors this change of focus may open. Also, don't underestimate the power of saying "I don't know." These three words can disarm the room and invite collaboration. To be able to say this openly can be such a relief! It is not a weakness or an evasion of responsibility, but a confident position that facilitates learning and connection. And we all feel that we don't know enough—every single one of us. Especially as a student, you are supposed to feel this way, so let yourself feel this way. It comes with being new and with the humility needed for learning. And then, you will soon move from "I don't know anything" to, "I seem to know a thing or two"… And it feels great. The best scholars I know are lifelong learners. Thinking about why I admire them makes me think that we should try to retain a beginner's curiosity and humility long after we have finished our PhD.

Then, at the end of the day, try to remember that **it's just a PhD!** You should take it seriously, but not *too* seriously. Some pressure can be motivating and necessary, but seeing the PhD as a life-or-death mission can paralyze you. You know what they say: "matters of great concern should be treated lightly and matters of small concern should be treated seriously." Holding the work lightly may help you demythologize it a little bit, so as not to obsess over the gigantic picture. You are more likely to work on it consistently this way. You should tell yourself that the PhD dissertation is not going to be your best work. It will be great, but not your masterpiece. We live in it for so long that it is only natural that we start thinking it is all there is. But it is not, it just is an exercise, marking the beginning of something, not the end.

If you have to remember only one thing from all this, make it this: You are going to need a lot of alone time but do not isolate yourself. **Connect with others**. Attend conferences, seminars, workshops. Network with other researchers in your field. Join a research group or a student association and collaborate with other PhD students. Participate in the AEDEAN Doctoral Seminars and the AEDEAN Conferences. Try to enjoy every minute and make the most of it. You will go back home with invaluable inspiration that will help you go on and get you through the hard times you face along the way.

Thank you for reading, thank you for doing what you do, and I hope that your PhD brings you lasting moments of joy!

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RESEARCH PAPER LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Parsing Grammar vs Parsing and Grammar: An Outlook

1. Introduction

Linguists who value the notion of *psychological adequacy* (that is, the idea that whatever grammar we may design must be psychologically realistic and therefore processable by a human mind) are often disheartended by the fact that many other linguists and many psychologists mind their own business respectively without caring too much about what actually happens in the other building. This separation allows grammarians to treat their competence theories—formal models describing the rules accepted by an ideal speaker—as independent from real-time language use, or performance, which involves cognitive constraints like memory and timing. From the experimental side, there is also often a tendency to dismiss theoretical grammars as unrealistic, favoring instead a view of language only as a set of useful processing shortcuts. Poeppel and Embick (2005) have described this divide as "interdisciplinary cross-sterilization," a sentiment many cognitive scientists recognize.

In retrospect, the historical fallout from the Derivational Theory of Complexity episode (late sixties and seventies of the last century) significantly shaped this disconnect[1]. Even if one sees the DTC as a failure (though this is debated: e.g. Phillips 2013: 296), that controversy is now decades old. During all this time, formal grammars have evolved a great deal, and a common move has been to delegate some explanatory work to 'interface areas' like processing constraints. Also, there is now greater awareness that grammatical well-formedness (the linguist's main tool) interacts closely with performance limitations, especially short-term memory. This means that even linguists disinterested in general cognitive processes would do well in still understanding them a little, if only to delineate their boundaries and say 'that is not my business' with better cause. Ignoring them outright may be practical, but it is ultimately arbitrary and all too conveniently avoids the challenge of confronting difficult data. In essence, all of this means that the typical reaction of many linguists in the past when confronting explanatory problems and even plain descriptive data that did not fit their theories (namely: *blame it on performance; it's not my problem*) feels just too shameful today. Obviously, those who believe that language *is* inherently tied to general psychological processes would benefit even more from seriously investigating the interface between core grammar and processing.

Indeed, modern forms of generative grammar have made progress in addressing earlier flaws by embracing more realistic competence models. Minimalism accounts for 'processing considerations' via concepts like *interface conditions, derivation by phases*, and *computational economy,* where for instance operations like *Merge* are favored over more 'costly' ones like *Move*. It also factors in memory somehow, as derivations are phase-bound and access to previous phases incurs a cost. Some newer theories reflect this shift toward integrating complexity and time constraints more closely (Phillips & Lewis 2015; Chesi 2015). Interestingly, certain minimalist research actually resembles the spirit of the old DTC. For example, Friedmann, Belletti, and Rizzi (2021) suggest that the well-known greater processing difficulty of object relatives (*I saw the man that the doctor wants --- for the job*) compared to subject relatives (*I saw the man that --- wants the job*) may reflect grammatical notions like *locality* and syntactic *complexity*, with greater complexity depending on factors such as the number and kind of relevant features shared between a moved item and interveners/distractors along a processing path (between *the man* and the gap -- in the Object Relative mentioned above, with *the doctor* as a potential intervener).

Another lingering reason for the resistance of many linguists to revisiting ties with experimental agendas lies in the belief that real-time structure building is really too imprecise compared to idealized grammar, the only thing they care about. However, decades of psycholinguistic research—especially using methods like eye-tracking and ERP—have provided high-resolution data on online grammatical processing. We are now far better equipped to assess how precise real-time parsing really is. We don´t need to *assume* or *speculate* …

This paper explores the link between grammar and processing in light of experimental findings, many of them electrophysiological studies from the past two decades. Section 2 revisits early ideas about heuristic processing. Section 3 considers how some complex structures are parsed using grammatical rules rather than shortcuts. Section 4 focuses on *illusions* (that is, cases when the processing system is tricked into forming representations that actually differ from reality, that is representations that cannot be real) and their implications for the way we view grammar vis-a-vis processing. Section 5 builds on those illusions to sketch a few explanatory ideas—such as the notion that an illusion's persistence depends on how easy it may be to turn it into a ready-to-use template, how easily it becomes a gestalt-like pattern. Another idea that will be proposed is that some illusions are simply grammar in slow motion. These concepts could open new avenues for research.

Overall, this work advocates for the idea that recent findings reduce the need to separate grammar from processing as rigidly as was done post-DTC. It suggests that alignment between grammar and processing is more common than previously assumed, and that the idea of a real-time parser entirely detached from grammar is now less compelling. While heuristics still play a role, the space they occupy is shrinking—an important and promising development in understanding language cognition[2].

2. On Heuristics: The Short-cut Route

The quickest way to tackle the question of how grammars and processing systems relate is to assume they are one and the same thing: if they are, then there is no relating to speak of (Phillips 1996). While this may have seemed plausible

1 In reference to the Transformational grammars of the sixties and seventies of the past century, (Chomsky 1965, 1973), the DTC refers (referred) to the idea that there should be a monotonic increase in complexity in structures whose generation requires more vs fewer transformations from their deep structure to their final surface form. So for instance, since negatives or interrogatives were thought to (loosely speaking) originate in declaratives, the former involved more transformations than the latter and should therefore take longer to process (Miller & Chomsky 1963). Early experiments proved the DTC wrong.

2 Most of the ideas in these pages are further developed in Acuña-Fariña (2022) and Acuña-Fariña (2024a).

initially, by the mid-1970s it became clear that at least the formal grammars of the time were not being used in real-time language experiments. This disconnect prompted a need for more realistic grammars, and a deeper awareness of how linguistic elements are ordered during derivations. It also spawned the creation of new ideas. Thomas Bever emerged as a key scholar in this context. Bever (1970) highlighted a core issue for psycholinguists: the idea that language is processed linearly (word by word), yet grammatical derivations are hierarchical and complex (so one is horizontal; the other vertical …). This mismatch means that processors really cannot wait for complete information to form perfect grammatical structures (Phillips 2006; Momma & Phillips 2018). Language parsing is rapid and *incremental*—we interpret as we go, often making quick decisions that lead to missteps (*garden path* effects). The brain processes speech at a very rapid rate indeed (15–17 phonemes per second). There really is no time to waste. Take a long-distance dependency like agreement, for instance. A sentence that starts as in *the son of the neighbors in our apartment complex last summer* forces a parsing device to zero in on the head of the subject NP, *son*, and disregard distractors in the shape of other nouns (*neighbors, apartment, complex, last summer*) while waiting for the verb to show up, as in, say, *the son of the neighbors in our apartment complex last summer was just promoted to Head Manager. Was promoted* goes back to *son,* not to any other of the previous referential NPs, but there is too much structure along the path of the long-distance dependency to expect a parser to just do nothing in between. One thing the parser can do is consult meaning directly, or statistics, or both to start forming some kind of interpretation. (Levy 2008a). In this sense, perfect grammar may just be too perfect, and something 'less perfect' but faster might do just fine...

This suggests the presence of two *paths*: a fast, left-to-right processor, and a slower, more abstract and symbolic grammatical system. This idea

> solves the conundrum (…) by fiat – sentence processing is both fast and complex because it is simultaneously handled by two systems, one fast and sometimes wrong, one slower but ultimately correct. This is an inelegant solution to the conundrum, but shows that humans may solve it, albeit inelegantly. Bever (2009: 288).

On Bever's view, while we might be tempted to rely solely on the fast system, symbolic grammar remains essential—it enables the infinite creativity of language and supports complex thought. He argued too that a slower derivational system helps mediate both comprehension and production needs. So he proposed that the mind relies on heuristics—fast and efficient mental strategies—to handle actual language use without abandoning grammar. These heuristics can be thought of as simple, flexible templates and cognitive scientists refer to them in a variety of highly expressive ways: *rough-and-ready templates, surface schemata, quick-and-nasty pseudo-grammars, underspecified representations* … (Townsend & Bever 2001; Bever 2009; Christianson, Hollingworth, Halliwell, & Ferreira 2001; Ferreira & Patson 2007; Slattery, Sturt, Christianson, Yoshida & Ferreira, 2013; Karimi and Ferreira 2016). They are habitually recognized via three complementary mottos: *late assignment of syntax* (LAST), *semantics proposes and syntax disposes*, and *we understand everything twice*. And they are embedded in the theoretical confines of the notion revealingly known as *satisficing* (Simon 1956).

Bever's main criticism of highly complex grammars was that they are simply unlearnable and he pushed the idea that "how language is produced, comprehended, and learned shapes language structure, and thus must lie at the heart and not the periphery of understanding linguistic structure" (p. 410). In sum: if a grammar is the result of usage, it should not be completely unrelated to it (of course this will still not convince those who believe that grammar is *not* the result of usage …). Interestingly, these concepts mirror ideas in usage-based models in linguistics (e.g. Construction Grammar; Goldberg 2006, 2019; Ziegler, Bencini, Goldberg & Snedeker 2019; Goldberg & Bencini 2005) and modern cue-based approaches in psycholinguistics (Lewis & Vasishth 2005; Lewis et al., 2006; Vasishth & Lewis 2006). There is thus a shared view that language processing is often imprecise but fast, driven by two streams rather than two stages. Unlike the classic model, where syntax leads and semantics follows, the two-stream view emphasizes parallelism (although many insist that experience-based processing strategies are primary).

Some of Bever's strategies have proven especially compelling, and this is perhaps due to their unabashed simplicity and commonsensicality. For instance, the NVN (noun-verb-noun) strategy reflects the expectation that sentences describe an agent (N) acting (V) on a patient (N). Similarly, for a language like English at least we often assume that the first noun phrase before a verb is the subject. He also proposed a *plausibility strategy*, where lexical meanings help generate expectations—like assuming that in a message involving a 'killing' predication and the noun phrases *the squirrel* and *the lion* the sentence will be something like *the lion killed the squirrel*, not the reverse, based on real-world knowledge (Levy 2008a). Today we know that brain responses (e.g., the N400 and P600 waves; see below) support these insights, showing that implausible or unexpected structures trigger reanalysis in perfectly clear syntactic structures (like *the squirrel killed the lion*), implying that the brain does not start with a syntactic blueprint necessarily (Kutas & Hillyard 1984).

Research by Fernanda Ferreira has carried Bever's heuristics forward, arguing that deep syntactic parsing is often unnecessary (Ferreira 2003, 2005; Christianson, Hollingworth, Halliwell, & Ferreira 2001; Ferreira & Patson 2007; Slattery, Sturt, Christianson, Yoshida & Ferreira, 2013; Karimi & Ferreira 2016). On this view, the brain settles for fast, rough interpretations that are simply good enough. We now know that often we do not fully analyze or resolve

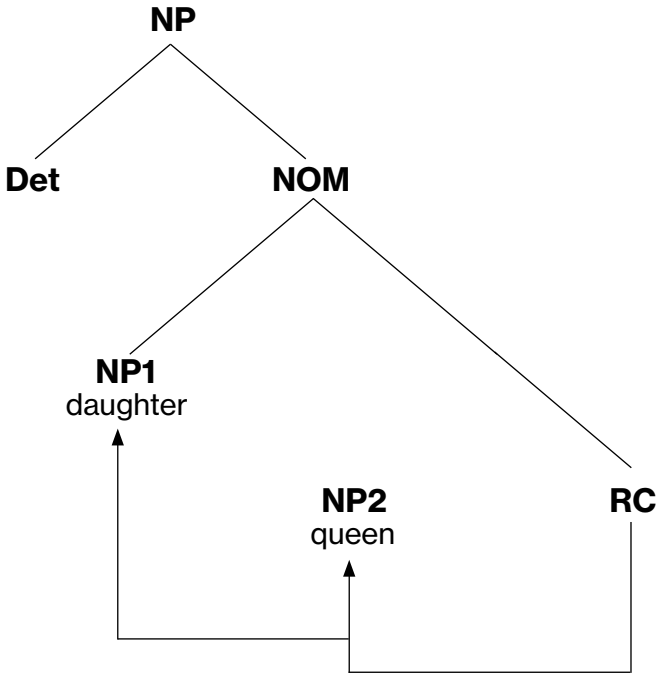
elements like pronouns or ambiguous scopes, particularly under cognitive strain, and we just form quick underspecified representations instead. For example, in sentences such as *While Anna bathed the baby played in the crib*, readers wrongly assume that *the baby* is the object of *bathed*, revealing lingering effects of a misparsed structure. This suggests that the misparsed representation is too tempting to skip, something meaningful in and of itself (Christianson, Hollingworth, Halliwell, & Ferreira 2001). Other findings show that syntactic ambiguities can actually speed up reading when comprehension questions are superficial. The classic illustration of this is in the area of relative clauses after double antecedents. Consider (1)-(3):

(1) I just met the daughter of the queen that kissed herself at the gala

(2) I just met the son of the queen that kissed himself at the gala

(3) I just met the son of the queen that kissed herself at the gala

(1) is ambiguous: the RC can point back to either *the daugther* or *the queen*:



(2) is disambiguated high by pointing to *the son*. (3) is disambiguated low pointing to *the queen*. Traxler, Pickering & Clifton (1998), Van Gompel, Pickering, Pearson & Liversedge (2005) and Swets, Desmet, Clifton & Ferreira (2008) have shown that the likes of (1) are read faster unless participants are prompted to reflect on the ambiguity itself, that is, unless they are told in advance that they are going to have to answer questions about what they read (in which case the so-called *ambiguity advantage* practically -but not wholly- disappears). This effect has been attested for other similar ambiguities, like Prepositional Phrase adjunction (e.g. *the son of the colonel with blue eyes*) and pronominal reference (e.g. *I loved the son of the colonel when **he** helped the old man*): ambiguities can aid reading speed rather than hinder it, presumably because blurry interpretations are formed rather easily (Grant, Sloggett & Dillon 2020).

Ultimately, good-enough theories do not (generally) deny the role of full syntactic analysis—they argue for a balance between heuristic shortcuts and deeper parsing. However, many insist that in this two-stream model when a shortcut works well, it is the brain's first choice. On balance, while counter evidence and counter arguments do exist (see next section), a widely-held belief today is that normal understanding does not depend on the signal alone but also -crucially- on the language-user's knowledge of what is likely before the signal arrives. This entails that some portion of language processing does rely on experience-based, efficient strategies. These come from a variety of places, including lexical meaning, statistics, prediction, avoidance of short-term memory stress, etc. Prediction in particular (Hale 2001; Levy 2008a, b; Gibson et al. 2013) is proving to be a major factor in recent research. For instance, in a sentence such as *He mailed the letter without a stamp, a stamp* is much more predictable than *the car* in *There was nothing wrong with the car*

(Levy 2008a). Of interest too is the notion of *lossy memory* (e.g. the so-called *Lossy-Context Surprisal Theory*; Futrell, Gibson & Levy 2020), that is the idea that the processing difficulty of a word is determined by how predictable it is given a lossy representation of the previous context. The related notion of *structural forgetting* is also often invoked in this context. The challenge now is to determine how much and under what conditions all these factors start acting, and the order of their interactions. Notice, finally, that expectation-based theories are *forward-looking* and that memory-based theories are *backwards looking*, so current research is at long last seemingly seriously considering *all* possibilities and renouncing 'magic-bullet' scenarios of the past, thus taking the challenge of explaining ordinary language understanding as the extraordinary challenge that it unquestionably is.

3. Accurate Parsing

Despite the earlier cautionary remarks, there is significant evidence too that syntactic parsing can be both highly precise and remarkably fast. This is especially evident when looking at ERP (event-related potential) studies. ERPs are electrophysiological brain responses to specific stimuli, such as a specific syntactic structure or a word. The electrodes in the scalps of the participants in these experiments provide exquisite temporal resolution of the reading process. Three well-established components linked to language processing have been long recognized: N400, LAN, and P600 (the descriptions below come from Acuña-Fariña 2024a: 102; see also especially Molinaro, Barber & Carreiras 2011; Caffarra, Mendoza & Davidson 2019):

> **N400**: This wave is a centroparietal peak that manifests in a negative current (hence the N) that begins around 400 ms after the onset of a violation. It is usually associated with violations of lexical-semantic expectations in particular (so-called selection restrictions). Informally, an N400 records how much the brain is surprised by a stimulus, given what it expected to find (for example, *the child devoured the hamburger* vs *????the child devoured the happyness*).
>
> **LAN**: This is a left anterior negativity that also begins around the 400 ms time interval. It is generally associated with morphosyntactic anomalies, including, for example, violations of subject-verb agreement (e.g. **the girl eat*).
>
> **P600**: This is a late positive parietal (hence the P) component: it starts to peak around 500 ms and returns to base around 1000 ms. This wave is often interpreted as a reflection of reanalysis and repair processes, as well as of pure syntactic complexity. Many researchers distinguish early and late P600s: the early type has a larger distribution in the scalp and is supposed to index difficulty in integrating a constituent with the ongoing sentence fragment; the late type peaks in more posterior brain regions and ideally reflects repair itself.

Morphosyntactic violations (e.g. **the boys is worried*, assuming standard English) tend to start with LAN effects and conclude with P600 responses. Since LAN emerges around 400 milliseconds after the beginning of the anomaly, it is clear that normal syntactic parsing operates quickly and efficiently. This is often overlooked when the focus is placed precisely on exceptional cases where often several factors militate against the use of only syntax to derive interpretations. Some researchers also identify an even earlier LAN (eLAN) for clear violations of phrase structure (e.g. **John's of picture* instead of *John's picture of*...), appearing in the 200–300 ms time window—suggesting that morphosyntactic processing may begin even earlier than previously thought (Friederici & Weissenborn 2007). Reviews of ERP studies on agreement, particularly in morphologically rich languages like Spanish and Italian (Molinaro et al. 2011), reveal that errors (e.g. **el casa*; 'the-masc house-fem') typically trigger a LAN followed by a P600 brain wave pattern —representing both detection and subsequent repair efforts. This is 400 ms for anomaly detection and about 200 ms for the beginning of a more conscious repair strategy. There cannot be much that is delayed in these time measures …

An interesting phenomenon known as *unagreement* helps further illustrate this. In Spanish, constructions like *Los lingüistas escribimos un artículo muy interesante* ('We linguists wrote a very interesting article') display a surface mismatch in the *person feature* between subject and verb (subject in 3rd person plural, verb in 1st person plural). Despite the mismatch the construction is grammatically acceptable (similarly to number mismatches in English, as in *the staff are unhappy* or *Manchester United have not won anything this season*). In contrast, a standard agreement form would be *Los lingüistas escribieron* ... with both elements agreeing in the 3rd person plural. Studies by Mancini, Molinaro and colleagues found that Spanish speakers detect the formal mismatch early by eliciting a LAN response but suppress the repair response (the P600 effect) once they recognize the structure as legal (Mancini et al. 2011a/b; 2019). This suppression must occur within a very narrow timeframe—between 400 and 600 ms after the anomaly. This is exquisite precision.

A compelling case for real-time grammatical precision arises from research on *islands*, which are syntactic domains from which elements like *wh*-phrases cannot be extracted (Phillips 2006). For instance, whereas

(4) Who did she hope that the singer admired —?

is acceptable, sentences like:

(5) *Who did the singer read a report that praised —? (meaning praise who?)

violate island constraints and are ungrammatical. There is interesting evidence that these (highly complex) island constraints are obeyed during real-time processing. This comes for instance from the absence of *filled gap effects* (FGEs) in island environments. Let us explain the FGE first:

Typically, when the parser encounters a fronted *wh*-word like *who*, as in (6) below, it anticipates a gap and temporarily places the filler (the *wh*-word) in it as early as possible:

(6) I just saw the student who your father wanted (GAP) to bring (GAP) roses to (GAP) for her excellent performance

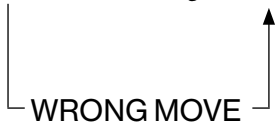
In (6) the parser has several gap possibilities and we can be confident that it tries to use the very first one to get rid of the filler (Frazier & Flores D'Arcais 1989). It is so avid because it seeks to alleviate its working-memory load: keeping fillers (*the student*) in a memory buffer while processing the rest of the sentence is computationally costly. We know this because of the FGE. Stowe (1986) compared sentences with filler-gap dependencies to similar ones without such dependencies, as in (7)-(8):

(7) My brother wanted to know who^{i} Ruth will bring **us** home to (t)^{i} at Christmas

(8) My brother wanted to know if Ruth will bring **us** home to Mom at Christmas

At the position of *us*, she found elevated reaction times (RTs) in (7) compared to (8). She interpreted this as the penalty that the parser incurred for having bet on that position to be free, when in fact it wasn´t. The parser was thus forced to undertake reanalysis and to keep on looking for a gap (a time-consuming process):

(9) My brother wanted to know who Ruth will bring --- XXXXXXXX,



Stowe's early work suggested that this avid anticipatory gap filling stops when parsers enter island domains. Subsequent studies across languages (including work by Sprouse, Wagers, and Phillips (2012) in English, and Pañeda, Lago, Vares & Felser (2020) in Spanish) confirmed this, showing that sensitivity to island constraints is not modulated by individual working memory capacity. This supports the idea that parsers rely on detailed grammatical knowledge in real time. The following are instances from Spanish (from Pañeda et al. 2020): the basic idea is that in the asterisked (island) structures no evidence (no time penalty of any kind) was found that the parser attempted to put the filler (*quien/qué*) in the --- gaps.

Non-island

(10) ¿Quién crees [que --- ofendió tanto a Julia con el discurso?
'Who do you believe that offended Julia so much with the speech?'

Subject Island

(11) *¿De quién crees [que el discurso --- ofendió tanto a Julia]?
'Of who do you believe that the speech offended Julia so much?'

Non-island

(12) ¿Qué has pedido [que resolvamos --- en la reunión el viernes]?
'What have you asked that we solve at the meeting on Friday?'

Complex NP Island

(13) *¿Qué has hecho la petición de [que resolvamos --- el viernes]?

'What have you made the petition that we solve on Friday?'

Similar precision has been observed in processing long-distance dependencies involving pronouns, particularly those governed by binding constraints like the one that generative grammarians call 'Principle C'. This principle states that a pronoun cannot *c-command* its referent. This basically means that pronouns cannot normally appear in positions that are structurally higher than their antecedents, which generally implies that pronouns cannot precede the nouns they refer to.[1] Sentences like (14)-(16) violate this principle:

(14) *He$_i$ likes John$_i$.

(15) *He$_i$ said that Johni likes wine.

(16) *He$_i$ drank beer while Johni watched a soccer game

Thus in all these sentences *he* cannot refer to *John*. However, interestingly, self-paced reading experiments by Kazanina and colleagues aimed at exploring how the parser reacts to Principle C environments show that the parser halts its retrieval of potential referents in Principle C environments, a fact that suggests that it applies grammatical rules in real time to guide reference resolution and avoid illegal bindings. They used structures like (17)-(20) below:

(17) Principle C/match:

Because last semester shei was taking classes full-time while Kathryn was working two jobs to pay the bills, Ericai felt guilty.

(18) Principle C/mismatch:

Because last semester shei was taking classes full-time while Russell was working two jobs to pay the bills, Ericai felt guilty.

(19) No constraint/match:

Because last semester while shei was taking classes full-time Kathryni was working two jobs to pay the bills, Russell never got to see her.

(20) No constraint/mismatch:

Because last semester while shei was taking classes full-time Russell was working two jobs to pay the bills, Ericai promised to work part-time in the future.

In the no constraint/mismatch condition, (20), elevated RTs at *Russell* indicated that readers attempted to link the pronoun *she* to that noun, causing a so-called *Gender Mismatch Effect*, GME (a similar move to the Filled Gap Effect described above; Van Gompel & Liversedge (2003):

(20') GENDER MISMATCH

Because last semester while she$_i$ was taking classes full-time Russell was working two jobs to pay the bills, Ericai promised to work part-time in the future.

We know this because no such penalty was observed in the no constraint/match condition (19), where the same operation linked *she* to *Kathryn* smoothly. However, the contrast between (19, smooth) and (20, slow) was not replicated in the pair (17) and (18) because the parser seems to have realized that the linking of *she* and either *Russell* or *Kathryn* was not allowed, so it did not implement it (meaning: there was no GME in (18)). In summary, in the Principle C conditions, the very urgent need to assign reference to a previously-introduced pronoun was simply suspended by the online observance

3 In generative grammar a node A c-commands (for constituent-command) another node B if it is its sister; it also c-commands the daughters of its sister. So this is basically a relation between an element and all constituents to its right that are at the same level of structure, and the descendants of these constituents (so right and down in the tree). Reinhart (1976).

of a grammatical rule (something equivalent to the c-command requirement) that disallowed that co-indexation.

As in the case of islands, it seems intuitively evident that the structures over which these operations are conducted are quite complex. A shortcut (a heuristic) would have been great, surely … Similar work on *Strong and Weak Crossover* configurations by Kush, Lidz & Phillips (2017) (**Which candidate did shei say that we should vote for __i*?) and by Tollan & Pallaz (2021) on the processing of complement clauses (e.g. *Who did Joe think Mary could drive us home to* ---?) further demonstrates real-time adherence to fine-grained grammatical constraints.

If parsers are capable of applying complex grammatical constraints in real-time processing, it is reasonable to assume they do so consistently, so also in simpler cases. This takes us back to the idea, expressed for instance in Lewis and Phillips (2015), that there may be no need to posit a theory of interaction between grammar and parsing: if both are the same system, no coordination is necessary. Perhaps, as Phillips (1996) put it a long time ago: "the parser is the grammar".

4. The On-line to Off-line Transition

It appears that there are valid reasons to believe that certain linguistic strategies are effective —they are often fast, economical, and cognitively efficient (as noted in section 2). However, there are also situations where the precise application of complex grammatical constraints seems to be at work (section 3). I suggest that a possible pattern emerges here, which may depend on the interaction of three key factors: **processing time**, **grammatical complexity**, and the **degree to which a structure can be turned into a template** («templatability", REFS). This interplay is especially visible in cases of **grammatical illusions** -sentences that initially appear grammatical but are later revealed to be flawed. Take, for example, sentence (21):

(21) More people have been to Russia than I have

Upon first reading, this sentence often feels grammatically correct, even though it is really nonsensical: the idea that more people have been to Russia than I have is simply logically incoherent. The illusion stems from a misleading comparison structure: readers assume that the second clause completes the comparison, but it does not (the number of the people that have been to Russia exceeds the number of me . . . Compare: *More tennis players have been to Russia than Padel players last year*). Scholars like Townsend and Bever argue that this illusion arises from a blending of two constructions: *More people have been to Russia than I* and *People have been to Russia more than I have.* Others interpret the illusion through the lens of shallow or good-enough processing. These two views are not incompatible (see de Dios 2019, 2021). It seems that in these cases readers assign an ambiguous interpretation without fully resolving the meaning. Their parsing system appears to settle on a vague sense of comparison (people going to Russia vs me going to Russia …), even if the sentence cannot be logically or grammatically justified.

Another strong example is (22):

(22) No head injury is too trivial to be ignored

At first glance, readers interpret this to mean that even minor head injuries should not be overlooked. However, upon closer inspection, the sentence actually means that all head injuries should be ignored —even the trivial ones, a clearly unintended and incorrect interpretation.

So just like visual illusions mislead the eye, **grammatical illusions** mislead the parser. These illusions occur when an initial parse suggests one structure, but further interpretation reveals a mismatch of that on-going interpretation with the overall meaning and/or structure that unfolds later. Traditionally, illusions have been seen as processing errors rather than grammatical ones, the reason being that the ungrammaticality becomes apparent upon deeper reflection (importantly: in off-line measures). This supports a **two-system view** of language: one for grammar and another for real-time processing. However, this is too simplistic because some illusions are more persistent than others, indicating that at the very least detection thresholds vary. In fact, some errors are easily detected, while others remain elusive, even with time. We seem to be missing something.

One of the most studied illusions involves **Negative Polarity Items (NPIs)** like *ever* or *any*, which require a previous (structurally higher) negative element to be grammatically valid. In (23) *no* c-commands *ever* and the structure is all right. In (24) there is no licensor for *ever* (no preceding negative element in a higher structural position), so the structure is ungrammatical:

(23) No athlete has ever done that

(24) *An athlete has ever done that

Yet, when reading sentences like (25), although ungrammatical (because *no* does not c-command *ever,* as it is lower in the tree), language-users tend to accept them at least momentarily as correct:

(25) *An athlete that no coach likes will ever say that

Studies using eye-tracking and ERPs have shown that these *illicit licensors* (the word *no* in (25)) can temporarily trick the brain, creating an **illusion of grammaticality** (experts call this the 'intrusion effect'). This happens because -everything seems to indicate- the processing system performs a *partial cue match:* it sees a prior negative cue (*no*) and assumes it licenses the NPI (*ever*) that comes later, even when the syntactic structure is incorrect. Clearly, they are not using 'fine grammar' here, for 'fine grammar' (something like c-command) makes it clear that the structure is wrong. They seem to be using a rough-and-ready template: the appearance of *'no' before 'ever'*.

Interestingly, more recent studies show that this illusion can be *neutralized* if more time passes between the appearance of the potential licensor and the NPI (e.g., via a parenthetical clause, as in *The authors [that no critics recommended for the assignment] have, as the editor mentioned, ever received a pay raise*). Cross-linguistic data (e.g., from Turkish; Yanilmaz and Drury 2018) supports this too. This aligns with the view that in the cases where the illusion was created it was just a matter of the processor not having had time to consult the grammar (so there is a processor, and a grammar?).

Recently, another class of illusion has come to light that presents the opposite scenario: the case of actually grammatical sentences that *feel* wrong. These are then **illusions of ungrammaticality.** Consider (26)-(28) now, from de Dios (2021):

(26) The authors [that the critics recommended] have never received acknowledgement.

(27) The authors [that no critics recommended] have never received acknowledgement.

(28) No authors [that the critics recommended] have never received acknowledgement.

All three are grammatically correct, but sentence (28), with **double negation**, is much harder to process and often judged incorrectly. It is indeed a very tough structure to 'digest'. It seems that the mere surface co-ocurrence of *no* and *never* causes the problem (probably because a heuristics style reaction is prompted by the surface presence of two negative forms). Experiments (both self-paced reading and eye-tracking) reveal a scale of acceptability: sentence (26) is the easiest to process and judge, followed by (27), with (28) being the hardest, really resistant to fading. This suggests now that the perception of grammaticality is not binary but **gradient**, depending on structural complexity (in this case, negative scope, at least). Not just on having had time to consult the grammar. So: time *and* complexity. But there's more.

Consider now probably the second best-documented illusion, involving **subject–verb agreement errors**, such as:

(29) The label on the bottles are all wrong

Work by Kathryn Bock starting in the 90s of the last century illuminated this area of studies, a classic in research in production (Bock & Miller 1991; Bock & Cutting 1992; Bock & Eberhard 1993; see also Acuña-Fariña 2012). Here, the plural noun *bottles* wrongly *attracts* agreement, leading readers to momentarily opt for the incorrect verb *are* as correct, hence the term for this whole area of psycholinguistic research: *attraction studies*. In production, attraction leads to observable mistakes. In comprehension it eases the reading of ungrammatical verbs (Pearlmutter et al. 1999; Wagers et al. 2009; Acuña-Fariña et al. 2014; Lago, Acuña-Fariña & Meseguer 2021). Because the ungrammaticality is relatively easy to detect later, it is usually interpreted to reflect a mismatch between **online (real-time)** and **offline (reflective)** processing, a classic illusion therefore, again. The illusion is often explained through **cue-based retrieval models (**Lewis, Vasishth & Van Dyke 2006**)**, where memory retrieves matching chunks (here, plural *bottles* aligns with plural *are*), misleading the parser.

However, as was the case with NPIs above, this neat view is challenged or at least qualified by more recent research. Work by, for instance, Acuña-Fariña, Carreiras & Meseguer (2014) and Patson & Husband (2016) indicates that even **grammatical strings** can show signs of attraction if the subject and attractor mismatch in number. This means that in a string like *the key to the cabinets is …* the surface co-ocurrence of [*cabinets is*] presents a hurdle. In fact, interestingly, some studies have reported processing difficulty (Acuña-Fariña et al., 2014; Patson & Husband, 2016), while others have found the opposite: processing facilitation (Franck et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2021: experiment 1; Villata et al., 2018; see Hammerly et al. 2019 and Lago, Acuña-Fariña & Meseguer (2021) for reviews). Although, when reported, such effects are smaller than in production studies, they suggest that: 1. **attraction does not occur**

only in revision (by looking back when an error is detected), and 2. it exists along a continuum that seems to be sensitive to various factors.

One of them is a basic calculus of the number of cues available. Consider reflexives. For quite a long time reflexives worked as a parade example of stubborn compliance with grammar and resistance to illusory effects of any kind. This was shocking because agreement with reflexives affects the same structural position (the subject) and the same feature (number, in most experiments). For instance, in an eye-tracking study by Dillon, Mishler, Slogget & Phillips (2013) the authors found that the plural verb *were* in (30) showed attraction effects from *managers*, but that plural reflexive *themselves* in (31) did not (see also Sturt (2003), using gender agreement; Xiang et al. (2009); and Cunnings & Sturt (2014)):

(30) The new executive who oversaw the middle manager(s) apparently was | *were dishonest about the company's profits.

(31) The new executive who oversaw the middle manager(s) apparently doubted himself | *themselves on most major decisions.

In view of this different *intrusive profile, Dillon and colleagues suggested that reflexives and Subject-Verb agreement use different retrieval cues: morphological information would be prioritized in the former, and structural information (the need for antecedents to c-command the reflexive) in the latter. However,* recent research is refining the profile of attraction and making it look even more gradient by showing that even **reflexives** *can* be affected if the right coalition of cues is summoned simultaneously, that is when multiple mismatched cues are present (e.g., animacy + gender). For instance, Parker & Phillips (2017) obtained **intrusion effects** in the '2-feature mismatch' condition below:

TARGET MATCH CONDITION

Distractor match

(32) The strict librarian said that/ the studious schoolgirl reminded/ herself/ about the/overdue book.

Distractor mismatch

(33) The strict father said that/ the studious schoolgirl reminded/ herself/ about the/ overdue book.

1-FEATURE MISMATCH

Distractor match

(34) The strict librarian said that/ the studious schoolboy reminded/ herself/ about the/overdue book.

Distractor mismatch

(35) The strict father said that/ the studious schoolboy reminded/ herself/ about the/ overdue book.

2-FEATURE MISMATCH

Distractor match

(36) The strict librarian said that/ the brief memo reminded/ herself/ about the/ overdue book.

Distractor mismatch

(37) The strict father said that/ the brief memo reminded/ herself/ about the/ overdue book.

In summary, both NPI illusions and agreement attraction reflect the complexity and subtlety of language processing. Rather than being brief, easily correctable errors (and just errors …), **grammatical illusions can be persistent, graded,**

and influenced by many interacting variables. They provide an excellent test ground to work on the idea that the boundary between grammar and processing is not always clear-cut (on-line vs off-line effects). Illusion research reveals how deeply intertwined they are.

5. So Where Are We Headed?

Since the foundational work by Miller and Chomsky on memory and sentence processing, it has been understood that while certain grammatical operations are handled quickly and automatically by our parsing system, others -despite being relatively simple- must be handled more slowly using general cognitive resources. By way of comparison, think of *string reversal*, the ability to change the order of a series of characters, so changing *Hello* to *olleH*. This is not computationally complex, yet it is not processed automatically by the human brain and it clearly requires deliberate effort. This illustrates a puzzling gap: some complex operations are parsed seamlessly, while simpler ones are not. Take subject–verb agreement in a phrase like *the label on the bottles + V,* for instance. How can the parser struggle with this basic agreement rule ('assign the same number feature of the subject NP to the verb'), but still successfully navigate intricate structures like islands and binding domains? The answer may lie in how syntactic complexity interacts with general cognitive factors such as how far apart related elements are (proximal vs distal processing), how that affects processing time and how easily a structure can be mentally stored and identified as a pattern (an easily-recognizable template). And how these three factors -and potentially others- interact (on complexity, see Hawkins 1994, 2004).

Most existing research on syntactic illusions tends to focus on how likely a structure is to be subject to intrusion effects, but as we have seen not all illusions are equal. Take constructions involving comparisons or negation. These are more cognitively demanding because they require simultaneously tracking two sets of relationships, or two members of a correlative structure that may show up close by, a little close by, rather separated, quite separated or very far away -while the rest of the ongoing structure is also being assembled. In contrast, subject–verb agreement involves juggling matching grammatical features like number and gender, which often do not even require semantic interpretation. In Spanish, for instance, a language characterized by arbitrary gender, there is not much conceptual structure to map to 'unify' the constituents of a phrase like *la casa blanca y cuadrada de allí* ('the white, round house over there'): all that is needed is to identify the gender and number features of the head noun (*casa*) and replicate them in all the satellite expressions (the determiner and the modifying adjectives). In this type of languages, agreement is purely formal: phrases like *las ideas verdes incoloras* ('colorless green ideas') show matching gender and number even if the meaning is nonsensical. This kind of feature-matching is straightforward for the parser and more often than not it is done within a clause.

In fact, already a little before the advent of Chat GPT4, Gulordava et al. (2018) showed that an AI system trained only to predict the next word handled agreement quite well in four languages (English, Hebrew, Italian, and Russian), with a success rate only moderately lower than that of humans. These authors also used phrases like *colorless green ideas* and found that the system showed only a slight reduction in agreement performance compared to normal phrases. That is, it was able to compute a long-distance dependency in the absence of lexical or semantic cues (Acuña-Fariña 2024b: ch. V). Surely the simplicity of the rule matters. Contrary to this, however, illusions involving negation or comparisons typically span multiple clauses or involve long-distance dependencies that can really be long …, without the helping hand of an easily identifiable alliterative template (-a, -a, -a; *la casa blanca*). These are harder for working memory to handle. Compound sentences, especially those involving negation or Negative Polarity Items (NPIs), demand more memory to track and resolve these long dependencies.

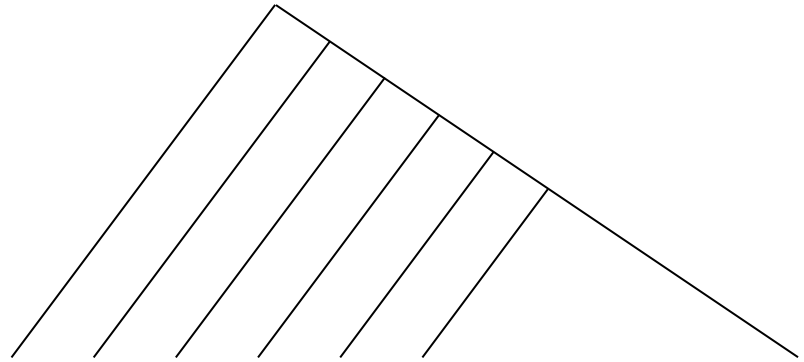
Long ago, research has shown that human working memory is severely limited. For example, comprehension breaks down with three or more center embeddings in a sentence:

(38) A teacher that many students want

(39) A teacher that many students that parents know want

(40) A teacher that many students that the parents that the rector saw know want.

In (38), for instance, *a teacher* has to be connected with *want* (*many students want the teacher*) but that connection is interrupted by all the content in the middle. *Many students* is also connected with *want* (*many students want something*) but that also has to wait till *that parents know* is dealt with. This is not a problem of the *quantity* of working memory, but of the *quality* or type of the embedding. We can embed much more easily to the right: *the man in the shop by the square with the neon signs in the middle* … We humans have these 'funny' limitations (Pinker 1994; Fodor 2013).



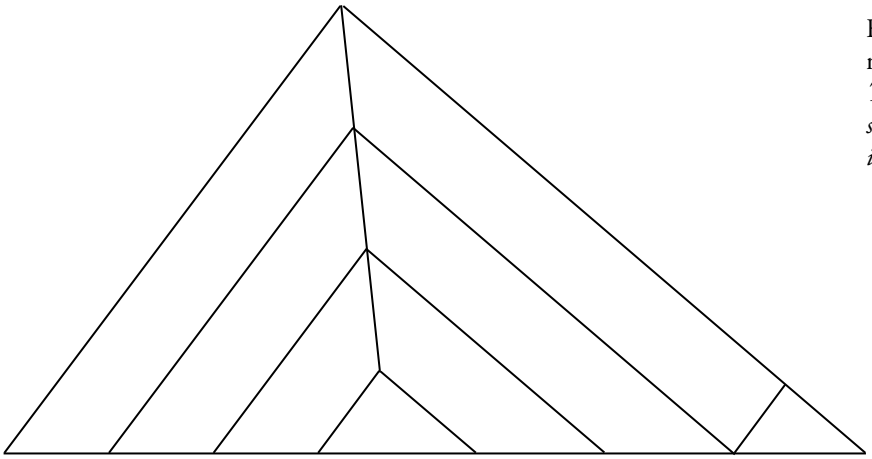


Fig. 1. Embedding to the right
The man in the shop by the square with the neon signs in the middle...

Fig. 2: Embedding to the center
A teacher that many students that the parents that the rector saw know want

Current memory load models of sentence processing like **Cue-based Retrieval** (Lewis & Vasishth 2005; Lewis et al., 2006; Vasishth & Lewis 2006) and **Dependency Locality Theory (Gibson 2000)** now account for memory limitations more precisely, showing that complexity is not just about structure depth, but about the position and role of co-dependent elements. Retrieval is influenced by how much information must be remembered, how salient it is, and how similar it is to other information being processed. Electrophysiological studies (e.g., ERP research) further support the idea that memory is the main bottleneck in processing language. In many of these studies researchers talk of a *Sustained Anterior Negativity*, or *long negativity*, which is registered precisely between fillers and gaps (so between *what* and the gap in *What do you want me to tell Sue --- on Monday?*; Fiebach 2001; Fiebach, Schlesewsky & Friederici 2001, 2002; Phillips, Kazanina & Abada 2005). This neural signature surely reflects the cost of maintaining a filler in working memory while the gap is not visible (hence Leiken, McElree & Pylkkänen (2016)'s observation that traces are 'hemodynamically demanding').

Coming back to the lessons that AI is teaching us these days, also a little before the advent of Chat GPT4, Wilcox et al. (2018) fed their DNN (Deep Neural Network) with island sentences like (5) above (**Who did the singer read a report that praised —?*) and saw that it was not clear about which sequences were grammatical and which were not. Compare that to agreement. Islands are tough … Agreement, much less so. So in discussing illusions like agreement attraction (e.g. *The label on the bottles are ...*), it may simply be that the parser temporarily accepts the incorrect agreement because this is after all locally valid (*bottles*-pl *are*-pl), only correcting the error once the larger structure is parsed (processing time). This

illusion is fleeting and recoverable. On the other hand, illusions involving NPIs or negation tend to be more persistent because: 1. they span complex and often large processing domains with plenty of distracting material (leading to potential *structural forgetting*), and 2. they rely on tempting heuristics, because, well, … because these are easy to make: after *no* or *more* the brain expects a pattern like *[No...ever]* or *[more...than]* and fills in the rest based on frequency and expectations, not punctilious observance of grammar. There is no such easy template for an island domain. In sum, with attraction and, say, NPIs in mind, complexity and processing time impact the illusion's lasting effect quite differently.

These observations lead to the following one, already sketched above:

> … we are, in fact, entitled to wonder if, rather than a true illusion, attraction is nothing more than an instance of incremental processing where the intruder and the verb are validated locally and fleetingly before distal processing makes it clear that that local validation must be abandoned later. That is, in a string such as *the key to the cabinets are . . . , cabinets are* is not ungrammatical locally (fleetingly), it simply becomes ungrammatical very soon, as soon as the time needed to process the long-distance dependency (subject–verb agreement) is available. This is surely why the illusion of attraction with grammatical materials has proved weak but the illusion of NPIs with grammatical materials is very robust, to judge from De Dios's recent findings [see Examples (26)–(28) above]. That is, we recover from the mini interference caused by a frequent [pl + pl] local match (*X X X cabinets are X X X*) easily but not so from *No authors that the critics recommended have never received acknowledgment for . . . .* (…) because we fall for a heuristic in the latter but not in the former. In the former, we simply use 'mini grammar' locally (local parse of frequent formula: pl + pl), until time for deploying 'maxi grammar' becomes available (Lewis and Phillips 2015). "One representation is favored at one moment and then disfavored just a couple of hundred milliseconds later. Acuña-Fariña (2022: 13-14).

I suggest that these representations are the different steps of a single parsing mechanism, not necessarily the output of separate systems (Phillips 2006; Lewis & Phillips 2015; Parker & Phillips 2016). We use heuristic processing with NPIs (incurring in illusions) because local parsing is impossible and the inherent complexity of the construction (the c-command requirement) makes it useful to turn it into a template. Islands, by contrast, are complex but difficult to turn into templates, so only grammar remains available. Structures involving specific items (*no, never, ever*, etc.) and correlations (*No . . . . ever; more . . . than*) are ideal templates: more often than not, the appearance of *ever* is indeed preceded by the appearance of a c-commanding negative element, and the appearance of the first set of a comparison is more often than not accompanied by the appearance of an appropriate second set. So heuristics are really good enough if complexity is high.

We started this paper wondering about the relationship between grammar and processing, whether we humans use one system or two systems to deal with the wondrous complexity of understanding syntactic structure. What recent research seems to be zeroing in on is something along the following lines: In the first place, some of the phenomena analyzed, such as attraction, can be easily reanalyzed as local vs distal discrepancy, instead of as illusory processing or heuristic-driven parsing. Note that even the famous garden path in *While the woman bathed the baby played in the crib* is not actually caused by a move to abandon syntax, for *the woman bathed the baby* is perfectly grammatical. 'Local grammar' and 'lossy memory', together with the idea of a changing, flexible constituency (Steedman 2000; Phillips 2003) is all we need to account for these cases. In the second case, we can also reanalyze some good-enough heuristics as the on-line use of a simpler syntax, rather than the use of non-syntax. And in the third place, we can tightly delimit the few illusions remaining (comparisons, negative structures) as truly easily 'templatable' shortcuts, that is cases where complexity can be dealt with by the easy recognition of a very frequent schema (a move not allowed for islands). As can be seen, these observations do not justify abandoning the idea of a processing shortcut that may be fast, effective and cheap. They simply call for re-evaluating the portion of processing that may be explainable along those lines, making it much smaller. Alternatively, it makes grammar (a realistic grammar) still the major route to comprehension. No doubt, the idea that we (mostly) use grammar to process grammar ought to be intuitively correct …

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TRIBUTES · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Jane Austen at 250: Tracing the Creation of a Literary and Cultural Icon

Being a Jane Austen scholar is exhilarating, exhausting—and expensive. Each year, numerous scholarly works on her life and oeuvre are published; new adaptations are produced across various media; prequels, sequels, and rewritings of her completed and unfinished novels are penned; new Austen merchandise is marketed; fresh tourist routes and experiences are designed in association with her name; and there is always at least one colleague and one student—always men—who will share with me their opinion that she is overrated, irrelevant, boring, excessively feminine, or overly popular—these last two adjectives pronounced with conspicuously pejorative emphasis. Fortunately, this is always balanced by another group of students and colleagues—both men and women—who enjoy reading and discussing her works, who will let me know every time a new artefact comes in view, share links to pieces of news, and warn me about what they think I might despise—that is, of course, the latest *Persuasion*. So, engaging in the study of Austen is this intense experience in which, on the one hand, you live in a state of constant update due to the ever-expanding scope of the field—and your shelves overflow with lovely Austeniana gifts—, and, on the other, you learn to adopt a resigned stance in anticipation of the criticism that will inevitably come, both from the most devoted fans for whom you are not getting it right, and from that contingent of readers and academics for whom her very name triggers an almost visceral rejection, or what we could term *Austen exhaustion* at what Claudia Johnson calls her "bonanza of presence" (2012, 180). Few remain indifferent to Austen. However, this is not a contemporary phenomenon; rather, such polarization has characterized her reception from the very beginning, as has the need to distinguish between Jane Austen, the writer, and 'Jane Austen,' the phenomenon, two concepts that have seemingly been at odds, but which we can place in constant dialogue since the start.

Devoney Looser starts her illuminating *The Making of Jane Austen* claiming that "[s]he was not born, but rather became, Jane Austen" (2019, 1), meaning that during her lifetime she was Austen the anonymous writer, and after her death the "crossover author, bridging high and low culture," that "cultural signifier with global recognition" (Dow and Hanson 2012, 1) started to be constructed. Austen went from being a writer who published incognito, who meticulously crafted her sentences and explored the depths of human nature with insight and humour, who recorded her reviews and earnings, who was admired but not universally acknowledged, who jocularly mocked the famous and the familiar, and spoke about marriage and motherhood with frankness in her letters, to an edited version of herself, a modest aunt and amateur writer, an emblem that would stand for Regency nostalgia and romance, and a universal icon that would be appropriated by innumerable critical and ideological positions. Tracing how that happened weaves a fascinating tale of literary appreciation and fandom, criticism and love, creative genius and entrepreneurial insight, family pride and exploitation. A sometimes contradictory tale that started the very year of her death. For instance, the biographical notice written by her brother Henry to accompany her posthumous publications already offered material of interest to enthusiastic readers such as Thomas Macaulay (Southam 1987, 2), who lamented the scarcity of details on her life, while, probably at Henry's request, her tomb is mentioned in John Britton's 1817 *The History and Antiquities of the See Cathedral Church of Winchester,* with reference to her four published novels, *Northanger Abbey,* and Henry's short memoir, "ensuring her status as a tourist site in the very year of her death" (Johnson 2012, 28). Yet, surprisingly, not Henry, whose boastful comments had revealed his sister's authorship, nor any other sibling chose to include any references to her writing career on her headstone: instead it focuses on her family relations, so that whatever "specificity" she lost, "her family gained in celebrity," for the inscription "both situates Austen in her family circle and uses Austen to situate her family" (Johnson 2012, 29). Thus, Austen's literary, or otherwise, fame will be shaped by these early family narratives. The landmark of said impact is, of course, the publication of the famous biography by her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, in 1869 (dated 1870), which bestowed upon her the gentle yet problematic epithet of "dear aunt Jane." Adapting her image to his time and context with admirable marketing ingenuity, and, as Southam has persuasively argued, responding to a Ruskinian female archetype, her nephew's "Jane Austen is unquestionably ladylike, unquestionably the lady amateur, an unconscious and unlabouring genius" (1987, 5), who can make the reader "feel at ease": while a "prose Shakespeare" the novelist "is also a universal aunt, sweet-natured and loving" (1987, 6). The fact that Austen's life and career have not been recounted in her own terms, but through men who have recurrently reduced her to a devoted sister or beloved spinster aunt who hid her writing, did not aspire to fame, and was characterized by her temper rather than her talent has tremendously impacted her subsequent reception (Looser 2019, 7-8), and 'dear Jane' or 'dear aunt Jane' survives to this day—to the chagrin of scholars who would rather see her treated with the same respect as her male colleagues, who are never 'dear uncle Will' but Shakespeare, or 'dearest Charles' but Dickens, nor are their readers and researchers termed 'willies' or 'charlies.' Although—who knows?—it might catch on.

The difference in their reception compared to Austen's also resides in the scale of the cultural component fuelled by this assumed closeness, in which literary devotion and fandom go hand in hand. By 1850 visitors to the cathedral were an habitual sight (Johnson 2012, 8), and Austen pilgrimage increased with the subsequent publications of *Letters of Jane Austen* (1884), edited by a great-nephew, Lord Brabourne, and *The Story of Jane Austen's Life* (1891) by Oscar Fay Adams, with a second edition that included photographs of locations associated with her (Fullerton 2016, 81), together with his "In the Footsteps of Jane Austen," published in *New England Magazine* in 1893, in which the characters of Austen came alive to him via his visits to the locations of her novels (Johnson 2012, 7). In his preface, Adams explains that he visited the locations and had the help of her relatives (1891, iv), making sure his contribution fell within the family-sanctioned

canon. Moreover, he differentiates his work from other recently published volumes on Austen, claiming: "*Jane Austen the novelist* is too well known to the literary world *to need much more said concerning her*; while *Jane Austen the woman* is, I am compelled to believe, still a stranger to most of those who read her books. To place her before the world as the winsome, *delightful woman* that she really was, and thus to *dispel the unattractive, not to say forbidding, mental picture* that so many have formed of her is the purpose of the chapters that follow" (1891, iii, italics added). Although at this time similar works on Shakespeare are being written, Austen's closer proximity in time make the "Austenian emanations occupy a liminal space between the past and present" (Johnson 2012, 75), explaining part of the greater attraction, while their equal biographical obscurity fuelled writers' imaginations. However, as a woman, the terms in which her biography will be reconstructed will differ vastly from Shakespeare's, whom, as far as I know, to this day has not been defined as a *delightful* man with an *unattractive* reputation in need for correction. Moreover, the tensions between literary and domestic aspirations, the Jane Austen novelist and woman, will echo in contemporary reimaginations of her life, such as *Becoming Jane Austen* (2007) and *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008), in which Austen the woman almost obliterates the great novelist (Johnson 2012, 183). But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

In 1900 a memorial dedicated to her was inaugurated at Winchester Cathedral, and two years later the Hill sisters published *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Friends,* a book describing their pilgrimage to all the relevant sites in Austen's life, with illustrations, interviews to family members and quotations of family manuscripts, as well as an important description of their personal response to Austen—stepping into her "presence," finding "relics" when no trace was left and supplying a great deal of idealistic imagining (Johnson 2012, 69-73)—and a vindication of her as a novelist, while still maintaining the idea of a close and universal "aunt" (Looser 2019, 8-10). Another landmark in Austen reception had come in 1894, when George Saintsbury coined the term *Janeite*, later popularized by Kipling in his short story of the same name, where Austen is portrayed as a source of spiritual balm intrinsically linked to a "myth of Englishness"—a recurring aspect in her later reception (Dow and Hanson 2012, 13). By 1901, William Dean Howells, in *Heroines of Fiction*, was already speaking of the cult and devotion surrounding Austen and her most beloved novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, while Henry James famously decried the fact that "our dear, everybody's dear Jane" was made to serve a very "material purpose" (Southam 1987, 22), a reflection provoked by the mass printed Austeniana of his time—which makes me think Johnson is right in imagining his horror at the present state of affairs (2012, 181). As Looser has masterfully documented, the aforementioned Austeniana included illustrations and dramatic pieces, and was expanded by conflicting political appropriations both by conservative men and the suffragist movement, by dissertations and textbooks, contributing to cement her status between the novels' republication in 1833 and the bicentenary of her birth, in what she terms the "middle period" of her reception, before the 1990s momentum. Looser widens the horizon of Austen's reception studies, showing how all these varied "forms and media radically changed Austen's image and our sense of how she matters" (2019, 11-12), often advancing what contemporary artefacts claim to bring to her understanding and illustrating the diverging visions of the author and her work.

In following decades, Austen's popularity grew through stage and screen adaptations, new editions, translations, and increasing merchandising, culminating in the pivotal year of 1995, when the so-called *Austenmania* accelerated dramatically with the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*—featuring the now-iconic wet white shirt scene—and forever reshaped her reception. This phenomenon, often dismissed in academic circles as *Darcymania* (García-Periago 2023), marked a shift in the cultural afterlife of Austen's work, as many scholars have documented. Today, Austen's fandom not only consumes but also produces literature, both in print and digital form, often blurring the boundaries between amateur and professional publishing (Mirmohamadi 2014, 3). All this leads to the current "bonanza of presence," in which Austen "seems to be everywhere, reaching well-beyond the English-speaking world" (Johnson 2012, 180).

At this point, the scholarly readers who have made it this far might be wondering what role her reputation as a writer and the study of her novels played in all of this. If in recent years more attention has been paid to the cultural capital of Austen, it is nevertheless true that her literary value has never been forgotten. Austen had already enjoyed moderate success during her lifetime, and several of her contemporaries expressed admiration for her work—among them Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Walter Scott, and Mary Russell Mitford. Subsequent novelists and critics—including George Henry Lewes, George Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, Virginia Woolf, and Harper Lee, among others—praised her literary qualities or sought to learn from her (Brand 2016, 52–55; Looser 2019, 4; Southam 1987), while figures such as Alfred Tennyson, Winston Churchill, Beatrix Potter, and Reginald Farrer adopted an attitude more akin to fandom, rereading her novels and finding pleasure and solace in them (Lane 2016, 6-8), as did the great painter George Frederic Watts (Southam 1987, 9), who was born on the year she died. Interestingly, considering today's perception of Austen as a popular rather than academic author, and as the precursor of *chick-lit*, her initial reception was that of a writer appreciated by a small, educated elite—mostly male—capable of fully appreciating her work (Johnson 2012, 8; Southam 1987, 20), or just following in the trend of the (male) "fanatics" of Austen to be found in men's clubs and elsewhere (Looser 2013, 175-77). Even after the publication of the *Memoir*, the prevailing impression remained that only a handful of connoisseurs—with Scott, Whately, Macaulay, and Lewes at the forefront (Southam 1987,

21)—could look past the domestic and sentimental image crafted by her nephew. In the 1940s, Austen was formally reclaimed for academia, first with R.W. Chapman's scholarly essays and editions of the novels (reprinted since 1923, but mostly from the 1940s onwards), and then assuming a privileged position in F.R. Leavis's controversial *The Great Tradition* (1948), where she was canonized alongside Eliot, James, and Conrad as one of the four great anglophone novelists. In 1940, the Jane Austen Society was founded, soon embarking on an ambitious campaign to acquire and preserve the Chawton cottage where she wrote the final versions of her novels. Among the signing petitioners for funding were figures such as Lord David Cecil, Mary Lascelles, and C.S. Lewis (Fullerton 2016, 82). From the 1940s onward, literary criticism has seen Austen appropriated by a wide range of ideological and interpretive frameworks, generating a multifaceted—and at times contradictory—image that nevertheless points to the remarkable interpretive richness of her work (Looser 2019, 11–12; Todd 2015, 1), enriched further by the speculation allowed by the relative scarcity of reliable biographical data (Todd 2015, 2). A striking example comes from feminist scholarship. Austen was claimed by the suffragist movement and New Women at the turn of the century (Looser 2013, 178; 2019, 164-78), feminist writers—such as Woolf, Mansfield and West—praised Austen (Dow and Hanson 2012, 6-7; Looser 2013, 178-79) and academia has played a key role in her appraisal, although often emphasizing her negotiation between "subversiveness and conformity" and having a lasting impact on her still current reading as conservative by current feminist writers (Dow and Hanson 2012, 9; Looser 2013, 179), which certainly speaks of the need to carefully contextualize the author in her own time, while also exposing the wealth of reader responses throughout the ages, a charting of which enables us to "see in Austen's novels properties and possibilities we rarely if ever suspected they were there" (Johnson 2012, 14). In any case, Austen's grounding in academia paved the way for a wider study of other women writers: if the "fathers" of the novel and their influence on Austen had been acknowledged, it was time to do the same with the corresponding "mothers" (Todd 1989, 2). Austen's defence of women novelists, in general, and Burney and Edgeworth, in particular, in *Northanger Abbey* spoke of a female genealogy, of a "rich legacy" that had been ignored (Spender 1986, 1), while the strong sense that she "situates herself firmly within a community of women writers" (Dow and Hanson 2012, 2) has been attested in her novels, letters, and in the (re)productive efforts of a host of later women writers, from translators to authors of fiction (2012, 3-5).

From this dual narrative a tension has often been described between the "responses of her 'common readers' […] and the views of the literary-critical establishment, a tension that has strongly been marked by gender" (Dow and Hanson 2012, 1). These two groups have long coexisted, as is evident in a well-known 1949 cartoon titled "The Two Camps of Austen Devotees" by Carl Rose for *The New York Times* in which the Jane Austen Fan Club, carrying a banner that reads "Janie" stands on one side of the author, while on the other there are three or four circumspect scholars (see in Brodey et al. 2022, 1005). These "camps" are sometimes termed Janeites and Austenites—popular readers and academic scholars, respectively—each claiming their own version of the author, of Jane or Austen, from positions that have been characterized either as enthusiastic fans—now predominantly identified as women, though originally men of socio-economic privilege—or as members of an elitist and exclusive academic circle (Brodey et al. 1004). While Janeites in the past described themselves as avid readers of her novels (Johnson 2012, 185), Janeism has now become synonymous with "a self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for 'Jane' Austen and every primary, secondary, tertiary (and so forth) detail relative to her" (2012, 6). Such passion I have only also witnessed among Cervantean or Shakespearean readers and scholars, yet without receiving an equally endearing name.

Ultimately, the tensions between 'dear Jane' and 'Austen' seem increasingly balanced, with Austen conferences now catering to the inner-Janeite of the attendees and recent titles on her reception appealing to both audiences: *Everybody's Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination* (Wells 2012) and *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives* (Dow and Hanson 2012), for example. From these works—and from the studies by Lynch, Looser, or Deborah Yaffe (2013)—emerges a growing recognition of the fragile boundary between the elite and the popular, the canonical and the non-canonical (Lynch 2000, 8), and the critical value of examining what was until recently dismissed as "cultural detritus" (Looser 2019, 11). These scholarly volumes also shed light on how the feminization of Austen's image and her readership has significantly shaped her critical reception and cultural valuation (Lynch 2000, 10, 14) and give us clues as to how to reclaim her from the auntly shrine in which she has been placed. They also awaken us to the highly "patronising admiration" (Southam 1987, 14), to the tendency to reduction and condescendence, that we can expect to find in many of the appraisals of scholars and devoted readers alike. Still in the nineteenth century, there were lengthy analyses that seriously and critically extolled the literary merit of Austen's works and tried to reduce the noise produced by the family portrait and the growing fandom. Yet, according to Southam, these more professional approaches penned by the likes of Mrs. Kavanagh, Margaret Oliphant and Richard Simpson, among others, would disappear without a trace, "submerged by a rising tide of sentimentality and the seas of Janeite idolatry" (1987, 18), until the following century. Even praise by other authors including Scott or Trollope was often qualified and reduced in scale. The latter claimed that her novels are filled with excellent principles, free of pernicious ideas and offer "a sweet lesson of homely household womanly virtue" (Southam 1987, 8). Leslie Stephen, for instance, who would later choose her works to accompany him in his final illness and who vehemently claimed that "[t]o deny Miss Austen's marvellous literary skill would be simply to convict oneself of the grossest stupidity," wrote that "allowing all possible praise to Miss Austen within *her own sphere*, I should dispute the conclusion that she was therefore entitled to be ranked with the

great authors" (Southam 1987, 174, italics added). Her sphere will be the "bit of old china" compared to "Raphael's masterpieces," the "humours of a country-tea table" rather than the "depths of human passion" (1987, 174). This sentiment was echoed in an obituary for Trollope: Austen was considered "at the head of the *second order*" of writers, one level below "the *great novelists* of the century" (Southam 1987, 175, italics added). Many of the praises she receives ambiguously call out her reduction to domestic and feminocentric scenes, to virtuous romances, to idealised pictures outside of time, never engaging with history, which often miss the nuances of her work. Another sign of a different level of appreciation comes from the constant comparison of her talent to that of coeval men (Richardson, Fielding, Scott or Dickens), and, of course, to Shakespeare's, the measuring rod for every man and woman of letters in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Looser records epithets such as the "Shakespeare of Prose," "a female Shakespeare *in miniature*", or "a *little* female Shakespeare" (2019, 6, italics added), emphasizing her diminishing. One can only wonder what the reaction of the Shakespearean community would be dared I start using the terms "the Austen of drama" or "a male Austen in miniature" to refer to the Bard.

Confronting this reduction comes from remembering that Austen is not just an icon or a cultural brand, she is an exceptional artist: nuanced, deep, with subtle symbolism, in which comedy and ethics are balanced and presented without overt didacticism, and the joy of reading comes from discerning what lies beneath the surface (Jenkyns 2016, 126-27). Austen is experimental and innovative: each novel "presents a different sort of heroine, a different take on society and the relationship of behaviour and personality to environment, a different sort of investigation, almost a different moral message" (Todd 2015, 17). She is also deceptive for undiscerning readers: "[a]ppearing simple and superficially repetitive, the plots are in fact innovative in their tightness, their insistence that every incident and character serves the onward thrust" (2015, 17). Her novels moreover dialogue with each other multiplying the effects: the "echoes and dialogues across novels increase the comedy and complexity, while suggesting other possibilities of feeling and action;" they "add to the impression of fluidity, implying that there is no single secure moral or socio-political vision that cannot be investigated, a little ironised, or a little mocked" (2015, 18). She has studied, dissected the literature of her time, and in her artistry "she has made most of her contemporaries seem excessive, artificial or absurd" (2015, 19). Her novels go beyond mere romances, and the fairy tale endings that many believe characterize her work are more a construction of her film adaptations than her own doing. She, on her part, creates hybrids of "romance and comedy, satire and sentiment, fairy tale and realism," without diminishing any of them: accepting the romantic conclusion does not mean there is an intellectual surrender, for she always forces the reader to keep thinking (2015, 27). Her novels, despite the expectations of those who come to her from the adaptations, are not mere plot, are not easy and fast-paced narratives: she wishes to build critical awareness in her audience just as she does in her heroines (Borham-Puyal 2015), she requires rereadings that reward faithful and patient readers with what lies beyond (Johnson 2012, 184; Todd 2015, 26). Additionally, her full-length novels self-reflexively "imply a critical perspective on fiction which drives through their narratives the contemporary debate over the status of the genre and the dangers and profits of its reading;" consequently, in her oeuvre "the novel itself is assumed as the common ground or shared locus of illusion on which all readers can draw" (Sutherland 2004, 249). She adds to the foundations of what we now term the modern novel with her manipulation of perception; her lack of full disclosure; her "ability to reproduce conversation as the probable exchanges of morally fallible human beings" (2004, 253); her construction of narrative fiction as a "confrontation between previous fictions (of whose artifices this new novel will be both digest and critique) and everyday life (whose dimensions the new novel will reproduce and enlarge)" (2004, 254); her development of the inwardness of her heroines: "the conversation of the self with itself," that is, her "deployment, deepened from novel to novel, of a narrative method inflected by the personal subjectivity of a self-conversing heroine" (2004, 254). For James Thompson, Austen was the "first novelist capable of conveying both the interior and the exterior of human life, in her 'reconciliation' or synthesis of Richardson's psychological skills and Fielding's sociological scope. […] Austen developed the means of representing the totality of human life" (1994, 276). Her work is then nothing but complex and nuanced, which is why interpretations are diverse and contradictory, posing questions on what we base our critical readings and on whether we are capable of seeing the wider picture without reductionist positionings (Duckworth 1983; Monaghan 1983).

Furthermore, *Austenmania* is much more than a mass phenomenon that has generated an important cultural—and economic—capital. It is a field of research that has propelled new ways of approaching the teaching of literature, paying attention to adaptations as bridges that bring literary works closer to students, open the path to discussions on the historical and literary context, and illustrate how relevant topics can be addressed or updated (Wells 2022). In this sense, for Pucci and Thompson Austen is a "blueprint for pedagogical practice" (2003, 6), which illuminates how we currently consume culture, refracted in diverse media that interact and influence each other (2003, 5). In addition, studies on Austen have widened reception and adaptation studies, placing particular emphasis on the past (re)created through our present, with (re)visions of Austen serving as reflections of ourselves as we shape an identity of the author, a signifier through which our desires and fantasies about who we have been, are and will be find expression (Pucci and Thompson 2003, 6), leading scholars to ask "whose Jane Austen?", that is, which of all possible Austens is the object of our study (Looser 2019, 2, 12). Austen scholarship has indeed promoted interdisciplinary conversations among different branches of the Humanities—literary criticism, cultural studies, Digital Humanities, history, philosophy—, and among other fields seemingly as far apart as medicine, mathematics and literature, with academic works on the representation of

neurodiversity in her novels, medical studies on her illness or on the representation of sickness in her oeuvre, and books on how game theory can be illustrated by means of her narratives, just to name a few examples.[1]

So, how to conclude this pilgrimage through Austen's fame? Maybe with suggestions on how to celebrate this year's milestone in Austen's reception history. One could attend conferences, balls, parades, tea parties and tours; watch old films and new shows; look out for fresh adaptations in the making; read the ever-expanding works that engage with her oeuvre; buy new items—and perchance gift them to die-hard Austen fans who still have room on their shelves. My personal choice: reread her works and be reminded of her brilliancy as a writer, her insight into human nature, her subtle subtexts, her humour and wit, her defence of reading and critical thinking, her vindication of women writers and the art of the novel. Is there anything more scholarly, more fandom-like, and more countercultural than taking time to slowly enjoy and unpick what the texts offer us? In this idea I am not alone. Claudia Johnson concludes her book establishing a contrast between the "screen-oriented, plot-hungry readers" consumed by a sense of immediacy with "Janeites of yore," who "boasted about reading her novels hundreds and hundreds of times not because they loved to reiterate their pleasure but because their pleasures were different and deeper every time" (2012, 185). It is true: Austen is never exhausted by rereading. Johnson then closes by quoting Reginald Farrer, scholar, explorer and devoted Austen reader, who carried copies of her novels in his travels and climbs, and for whom Austen becomes, in Johnson's words: "incarnate within us," for by "reading, rereading, and quoting her, we have transformed her novels" into part of our collective imagination, transmitting her from "generation to generation. World without end" (2012, 186).

Because, ultimately, it is only by reading her and carrying her with us that she becomes truly immortal.

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TRIBUTES · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Truth and Tragedy: In My Reading of Dreiser's Doctrine for Lasting Literature

My relationship with Theodore Dreiser has always been a complicated one, oscillating between admiration and unease. As an enthusiast of literary naturalism—both in its Zolaesque European form and in its American incarnation—I have never been able to resist the power of his novels, with their blend of sensationalism, documentary detail, taboo subjects, and unhappy yet inevitable endings. What has always moved me most, however, is Dreiser's stubborn belief that literature must face the world without illusions. For him, truth and tragedy belong together: to tell the truth about life involves recognizing its tragic weight, its constant admixture of hope, ambition, struggle, and defeat. As a feminist reader, I also value his decision to foreground characters often neglected in early twentieth-century literature: young working-class women, so vulnerable yet dignified, whose lives he approaches with sympathy, although not without a certain degree of gender stereotyping. At the same time, his fiction offers surprising portrayals of strong women, who stand in contrast to weak, indecisive male protagonists, men often driven by impulses they cannot control. Nonetheless, this sympathy sits uneasily alongside his private life: Dreiser was an unabashed womanizer, often without scruples. His intellectual positions also reveal contradictions. On the one hand, his grasp of capitalism—brutal, unforgiving, yet "natural" in its Darwinian struggle for survival—has always seemed to me both lucid and persuasive. On the other, I find it troubling to recall his enchantment with the Soviet experiment, a system which I cannot see as anything but profoundly unnatural, having myself been born and raised under the stifling yoke of Poland's communist regime. Such contradictions—between the individual and his writing, between his incisive critique of one system and his misplaced trust in another—define the framework through which I approach Dreiser. And, perhaps most importantly, the questions he raises have not lost their urgency: even though *An American Tragedy* was published a century ago, its themes—class inequality, gender oppression, and the precariousness of individual lives under vast social forces—retain a distressing pertinence in the fractured political landscape of Trump's America.

These contradictions in Dreiser—between empathy and cruelty, insight and delusion—raise the larger question of naturalism itself: why this genre, so often dismissed as outmoded, continues to matter, particularly in America. Naturalism, despite its critical neglect, has always felt alive to me. I return to Zola, Pardo Bazán, Zapolska, Chopin, Crane, Norris, Yezierska and Steinbeck not only out of admiration but because their work still offers a way of thinking about the world. What some call "concreteness" or "sensationalism" I, along with Lawrence Buell, see as literature's return to the material, rather than a flight from it (Buell 1995). June Howard reminds us that the ideology of naturalism lies in its very form: its refusal to sentimentalize, its insistence on showing us how violence and social forces shape human lives (Howard 1985). As Donald Pizer observes, the generation of Crane, Norris, and Dreiser was the first to abandon the idealistic promise of the American Dream—"the faith that America guaranteed all men the free and just pursuit of self-fulfillment and of the good life" (Pizer 1982, 4). From Norris's description of naturalism as unique and powerful beyond words (Norris 1896) to Walcutt's sense of its shifting outlines (Walcutt 1956), the genre resists precise definition, yet remains unmistakable in its darkness. Even its coldest experiments could not escape critique; instinct, sex, decline, and the violence of crowds were never neutral observations, but interventions. In that sense, naturalism is less a relic of the late nineteenth century than a vocabulary which still resonates with the instability of our fractured present.

The question of Dreiser's relationship with naturalism is itself contested. On the one hand, critics such as Vernon Louis Parrington—who in 1930 confidently called the latter the "chief of American naturalists"—as well as many of those from his wider readership, who hailed him as "America's Zola" after the publication of *An American Tragedy*, have seen him as the quintessential representative of the tradition (Gammel 1995, 5). And yet, Dreiser himself openly mocked the label (Gogol 1995, x). Part of the difficulty, as Irene Gammel reminds us, lies in the static notion of naturalism that equates the genre with Zola's hereditary determinism; in the North American context, however, naturalism proved to be more dynamic, transformed into a mode which was preoccupied mainly with sexuality and power, one that could survive alongside and even within modernism (Gammel 1995). Moreover, Miriam Gogol argues that Dreiser's honesty—his willingness to "get his hands dirty," to show both the psychic struggles of his characters and the external forces that shape them—made possible the first authentic portrayals of the working class in American literature (Gogol 1995, vi). At the same time, his empiricism and formal innovation mark him as characteristically American, his tradition being, paradoxically, the abandonment of tradition (Lynn 1957/1970). For Pizer, Dreiser occupies a central if uneasy place within naturalism: "Those writers who most clearly appear to be naturalists, such as Dreiser and Farrell, are almost always praised for qualities which are distinct from their naturalism" (Pizer 1977, 51). Dreiser's social milieu was not proletarian in any Marxist sense but rather populated by fringe figures— "wasters and spoilers and enjoyers"—drawn with the same fascination Balzac brought to his demimonde (Moers 1963–64/1970, 517–518). Oddly enough, when making heroes of the inarticulate, Dreiser relied less on theory than on the raw material of his own family: sisters seduced and abandoned, and brothers who drifted into petty crime or hustled for easy money. From this chaos, he forged a vision that gave form—and, strangely, a measure of dignity—to lives otherwise written off as failures. If there is a definition of naturalism broad enough to contain him, it must be one that acknowledges both the determinisms he inherited and the distinctly American improvisations he made upon them.

Dreiser's literary production, extending from 1900 to the 1940s, makes this complexity tangible. His debut, *Sister Carrie* (1900), long regarded as a cornerstone of American naturalism in the novel, was initially suppressed due to its forthright treatment of sexuality and material ambition. He followed it with *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), and then

the "trilogy of desire"—*The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914), and *The Stoic* (published posthumously in 1947)—a sustained exploration of capitalist accumulation through the career of Frank Cowperwood. *The Genius* (1915) offered a Künstlerroman grounded in his own struggles with art and society, while *An American Tragedy* (1925), which became his most widely read and influential novel, is often cited as a culmination of naturalist technique. His shorter fiction includes *Free and Other Stories* (1918) and *Twelve Men* (1919), both of which feature marginal and often socially precarious figures. In addition to fiction, Dreiser published two autobiographical volumes—*A Book About Myself* (1922) and *Dawn* (1931)—which chart his personal and artistic development. His nonfiction also illustrates his political engagement: *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (1928) reflects his sympathetic response to the Soviet experiment; *Tragic America* (1931) offers a sharp critique of American capitalism during the Depression; and *America Is Worth Saving* (1941) collects his late essays.

When Dreiser's only bestseller, *An American Tragedy*, appeared, it was immediately recognized as his masterpiece and a defining novel of its time. Based on the 1906–08 Gillette-Brown murder case in upstate New York, he used contemporary newspaper accounts as the basis of the narrative, but reset the story in the 1920s. As Pizer notes, this choice reflected his belief that the forces driving the crime—ambition, class pressure, and the fusion of sexuality with success—were not confined to the early twentieth century but were in fact endemic to American life (Pizer 2015, 123). Dreiser stressed that the case was "only one of a long series of crimes with a similar configuration," in which "a young man starts out after a career, untrained, unqualified … filled with the common dope of success … [and] luck in love" (Pizer 2015, 125). On similar lines, Kathryn Plank (1991) compares *An American Tragedy* to his essay 'I Find the Real American Tragedy,' noting that both works explore how ambition, social constraint, and moral hypocrisy recur across American society, while legal and social institutions often mask the pressures that produce crime. However, she argues that the "paradigm" Dreiser identifies in various murder cases is largely a conceptual construct, shaped by his personal experiences and social attitudes, rather than a neutral reflection of broader social patterns.

Interestingly, by the time of the novel's composition, Dreiser's style had absorbed the visual influence of emerging technologies, particularly the motion picture. Its opening paragraphs display "a technical and epistemological kinship to a filmed sequence," and the vivid, detailed narration reflects a positivist realism rather than strict determinism, offering "a more truthful version of the sort of events his contemporaries read about in newspapers and magazines" (Enfield 2010, 48–51). In this light, Dreiser functions both as storyteller and observer, and the novel's social critique emerges from this cinematic mode, which positions readers as viewers of a fully realized world, compelled to witness the pressures and moral choices that shape Clyde Griffiths's life. Even the automobile—central to both Griffiths's hotel-bellhop milieu and Sondra Finchley's world of the leisured classes—becomes a symbol of modern mobility that simultaneously reinforces entrenched hierarchies of money, sex, and power (Pizer 2015, 127).

Women in Dreiser's fiction are particularly complex figures, often caught between society's constraints and personal ambition, and as such reveal both the author's sympathy and his cultural ambivalences. The inherent contradictions in his work reveal the tensions and sexual dynamics of his culture, and scholars have analyzed his female characters within the frameworks of both gender studies and psychoanalysis. In *An American Tragedy*, Roberta Alden exemplifies the working-class woman rendered vulnerable by economic dependence, whereas Sondra Finchley represents the upper-class flapper whose confidence and privilege shield her from similar pressures. Meanwhile, Hortense, a minor character, enacts a working-class version of the vamp, employing her sexuality to manipulate men, thereby illustrating the gendered power dynamics of the flapper era. However, as Pizer observes, the apparent freedom of the 1920s good time girl conceals the enduring constraints of social hierarchy and moral expectation: "*An American Tragedy* depicts a society which has seemingly rejected the conservative social and moral conventions of the past but is nevertheless still firmly in their grasp" (Pizer 2015, 130). Class and wealth determined women's access to reproductive control, including contraception and abortion, reinforcing inequalities in sexual and economic freedom (Pizer 2015). This aspect of the novel reverberates strongly today: in many U.S. states, access to abortion is severely restricted, creating a stark divide along economic and social lines. Just as Dreiser's working-class girls faced systemic barriers to controlling their own bodies, contemporary women continue to encounter legal and institutional obstacles that shape their choices and life outcomes. Dreiser's young female characters—Carrie Meeber, Jennie Gerhardt, and Roberta Alden—illustrate the urban material reality of female migrants seeking opportunity, yet their labor, bodies, and morality are exploited, showing the illusory promise of the American Dream (Gammel and Wang 2016). From another angle, Clyde Griffiths's failures with women reflect not only his own narcissism and alienation but also the broader constraints of a patriarchal society; as Leonard Cassuto argues, Clyde's narcissism is compounded by an estrangement from his mother—a woman of quiet strength and steadfast commitment to her children, presented, as I see it, almost as a law of nature—and his inability to acknowledge the authority, or "law," of his weak father, reflecting an Oedipal dynamic (Cassuto 1995, 123). Significantly, Gammel situates Dreiser's portrayals within a theoretical framework linking naturalism and feminism, drawing on Foucault to show how the material body is shaped by culture and history, how institutions determine individual lives, and how sexuality functions both as a cultural construct and as a decisive force in human experience (Gammel 1995, 37).

Dreiser's social vision also extended beyond American borders. In 1927, at the age of fifty-six, he was invited to the Soviet Union as the unofficial dean of American novelists, and his request for an extended tour, including famine-

stricken regions, was readily granted by the government, which recognized his cultural influence (Riggio 1996, 1). During his seventy-seven-day visit, he observed Soviet life first-hand and, upon returning, published *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (1928), praising the system's focus on collective welfare, industrial advancement, and social equality. This trip marked a turning point in his political engagement, which grew increasingly radical over time, ultimately leading to him joining the Communist Party in 1945. His political works, later collected in *Political Writings* (2010), critique American capitalism, advocate for labor movements, and reflect his broader concerns with social justice and economic inequity. These commitments once again reveal a Dreiser who, however contradictory, could never remain indifferent to the structures of power that shaped human lives.

In the end, Dreiser's achievement lies in his refusal to separate art from life. He inherited from Zola the model of the novelist as scientist, but he transformed it. In Åhnebrink's opinion, the naturalist should abstain from commentary and let the facts speak for themselves (Åhnebrink, 1950), yet Dreiser's facts always carried weight, pressing the reader toward moral reflection. For him, "tell the truth," as he wrote in 1903, was the core of both art and morality, and truth was simply "what is" (Dreiser 1903/1970, 482). To look at life directly, and to describe it honestly, was not only the writer's duty but also a moral act, because the tragedies of the age were rooted in ignorance, greed, and power. To Otis Notman in 1907, Dreiser put it plainly: "life is a tragedy," but the very ordinariness of daily existence made it dramatic, even compelling—"every human being is intensely interesting" (Notman 1907/1970, 482–483). From these convictions came his distinctive naturalism: not cold or detached, but engaged, grounded in the belief that tragedy itself is what reveals truth. If Zola sought the rigidity of scientific truth, Dreiser sought the more stubborn reality of lived truth, the drama of ordinary people under extraordinary pressures. His novels, above all *An American Tragedy*, remind us that literature is not an escape from life but a confrontation with it. For Dreiser, truth meant facing tragedy, and tragedy gave shape to truth; this double vision is what makes his work not only a landmark of American naturalism, but a lasting doctrine for literature a century later.

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INTERVIEW

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"You'll Have to Remember This": An Interview with Theo Dorgan

Theo Dorgan is one of the most prominent writers in Ireland at the moment. With a very individualistic voice and a love for travelling both in space and time, he ventures into unknown seas, taking his readers on his fascinating voyages on paper. He is a true man of letters; in his own words, he is "a poet, prose writer, documentary screenwriter, editor, translator, librettist and broadcaster."

Dorgan has published several collections of poetry, for which he has been awarded such literary prizes as the Listowel Prize for Poetry (1992), the O'Shaughnessy Award for Irish Poetry (2010) and the Poetry Now Award (2015). He is the author of *The Ordinary House of Love* (Salmon, 1990), *Rosa Mundi* (Salmon, 1995),[1] *Sapphos's Daughter* (Wave Train, 1998), *Greek* (Dedalus, 2010), *Nine Bright Shiners* (Dedalus, 2014), *Orpheus* (Dedalus, 2018) and Once Was a Boy (Dedalus, 2023). In addition, he has written Days like These (Brooding Heron, 2007), with Tony Curtis and Paula Meehan, andÉriu and Amergin: A Poet of the Tuatha Dé Danann and a Poet of the Milesians (Wave Train, 2022), a long poem in Irish and English. His poetry work also includes some early pamphlets and his verse response to the satirical drawings by Tom Fitzgerald in *The Celtic Zoo: A Report back on the State of Modern Ireland in 24 Satirical Watercolour Drawings* (Occasional, 2014). Dorgan's work travels well beyond its borders: some of his collections have been translated into Spanish, Italian and Greek, and selections of his poetry have been rendered, among others, in French, Russian and German.

As for his prose, Theo Dorgan has two novels in print: *Making Way: A Novel* (New Island, 2013), which traces a voyage from Siracusa to Palma de Mallorca, and his recently published Camarade (Mercier, 2025). He has written two further books about his transatlantic crossings: the best-selling *Sailing for Home: A Voyage from Antigua to Kinsale* (Penguin, 2004; rpt. Dedalus, 2010) and *Time on the Ocean: A Voyage from Cape Horn to Cape Town* (New Island**,** 2010). He is the author too of Jason and the Argonauts (Wave Train, 2014), a libretto set to music by Howard Goodall that was commissioned by and premiered at The Royal Albert Hall in 2004. Another important facet of Dorgan is his challenging work as a translator. Not only has he rendered Federico García Lorca's *Romancero gitano* in Irish as *Bailéid Giofógacha* (Coiscéim, 2019); he has also translated into English poetry by the Slovenian Barbara Korun—*Songs of Earth and Light* (Southward, 2005)—and by the Syrian Maram Al-Masri—*Barefoot Souls* (Arc, 2015), *Liberty Walks Naked* (Southward, 2017) and The Abduction (Southward, 2020).

Equally prominent is Dorgan's work as an editor. He has edited *Irish Poetry since Kavanagh* (Four Courts, 1996), *A Book of Uncommon Prayer* (Penguin, 2007) and What We Found There: Poets Respond to the Treasures of The National Museum of Ireland (Dedalus, 2013), to name but a few, and co-edited the fascinating and beautifully-produced manuscript volume *The Great Book of Ireland / Leabhar Mór na hÉireann* (1991), *Watching the River Flow: A Century in Irish Poetry* (Poetry Ireland, 1999) and *An Leabhar Mor / The Great Book of Gaelic* (Canongate, 2002). He has also been series editor of the European Poetry Translation Network publications. Dorgan's active role in the Irish arts and culture is noteworthy too, both in extensive collaboration with musicians and visual artists and as a broadcaster. In this sense, in addition to the two long-running literary programmes *Poetry Now* (RTÉ Radio) and *Imprint* (RTÉ Television), he has scripted and presented numerous documentaries on both radio and television, such as the series *Hidden Treasures* (RTÉ and BBC) and *The Laughing Boy* (TG4). Finally, Dorgan has been director of Poetry Ireland, has served on The Arts Council and is currently a member of the prestigious Irish academy Aosdána.

I met Theo Dorgan at the AEDEAN conference in Seville in 2024. Moved by the "sheer human warmth" of the participants' interest in Irish literature and armed with his poetry and his voice, the Irish poet conquered the heart of the city—none other than its *Alcázar*—with his brilliant plenary speech, "The Logos of Magic and the Book." It stood out from the academic papers, not only for his informed views on literature, but also, and foremost, for his transmission of *duende*. In his readings of both his Irish translation of a gypsy ballad by Federico García Lorca[2] and of his own "Ithaca," Dorgan shared with the public what García Lorca described in his conference "Juego y teoría del duende" as a mysterious and ineffable charm of the emotions when stirred by poetic experience. Poetry flowed with the stream of Dorgan's voice: a *sean-nós* recital from this Irish bard alluring his thrilled audience. The present interview with Theo Dorgan has taken place a year after that speech with the aim of exploring some of the major themes of his work and his ideas on both poetry and translation.

1 *What This Earth Cost Us (Dedalus, 2008)* is a revised edition of his first two collections.
2 Alberto Egea Fernández-Montesinos read the original text in Spanish.

1. Travelling with "the Watcher"

M. Ángeles Conde-Parrilla: You are no stranger to Greece and the Mediterranean. Do you feel a recurrent need to leave your green Ithaca? Why?

Theo Dorgan: It seems very obvious to me that life is a journey, literally a journey from the cradle to the grave; and I have always had a strong sense that life is elsewhere, that you multiply and deepen and broaden your own life by encountering as many other ways of being in the world as possible. When I'm in Greece I grow by two centimetres. Habitually in Ireland we're hunched over so that the rain can roll down off us; but when I'm in a hot dry country the head comes up, the shoulders go back and I walk differently. It's a way of being other to yourself, I think. You walk into places that you've been introduced to in your reading—I love the poems of Kavafis. I love the poems of Seferis, I love the music of Theodorakis—and when I'm in Greece, I'm in the place that nurtured those phenomena; I have another life. I've never felt a prisoner of an Irish identity and I've never understood that sense of superiority that most countries have. I'd be as happy to be Spanish had I been born in Spain or to be *gallego* if I'd been born in Galicia as I am to have been born in Ireland, though, sure that leaves on us a huge and special quality.

I'm naturally very curious—my detractors would say "nosy." I'm fascinated by this world; I know that we've only got one shot at it and I want to see as much and understand and experience as much as I can, and the simplest way to do that is to move the body from one place to another. I know that time is running out, so I feel a certain kind of avidity. I haven't got much time left to experience as much, and this may be the one and only world I'll ever know. I've no idea of what happens after it stops here, I don't know if there is a life on the other side of the grave; I have no idea, and I certainly don't remember other lives, other experiences. But I do feel that I carry a travelling kind of consciousness, the one who was saying to me as a child "You will have to remember this." And in a way I owe that other self—I call him "the watcher"—the opportunity to see as much of this glorious world as possible. Look what an extraordinary vivid world we live in. Who wouldn't want to see as much of it as possible, to experience as much? The concept that's most alien to me in the world is "bored." I simply have no way to understand what it is to be bored; I've never felt it.

2. Presences at Absences: The Memorial Impulse

MACP: Is death present in your poetry? How do you deal with death?

TD: Death is everywhere. I firmly believe that every day you should think about your death in order to learn how to live; that means that you're not going to be here for ever, so don't let this moment got waste. Of course I've lost people; in the last five years I've lost three brothers. I look at my beloved Paula [Meehan] and say, "Some day you'll be dead," and I don't know which would be worse: to go before her or to go after. It's the most absolute thing we know: none of this is for ever; and if you're prepared to look at that in the face, it opens up a huge light over your life. If we keep death in mind, we'll behave much better to each other and treasure what we have.

MACP: Are we, as a society, trying to hide death?

TD: I think you've touched upon something that's very interesting. I think that we've become accustomed to the idea that we can pick and choose, because we've been turned into consumers. We do not wish to experience grief; therefore, we won't. But grief is part of the deal. Sometimes I've seen people who shut themselves down, but it turns up inside, the subject, the pressure; it comes out afterwards. Paul Durcan has a poem in the persona of the great actor Micheál Mac Liammóir and says, "If you must weep, bawl." Countries where grief is explicit and open, it seems to me, have a much healthier attitude to death. And the other thing is ceremonials surrounding death: they're always extremely important, but people are shutting down on those as well. The Irish tradition of the wake, where you have a party, is a joyous event; it's joy in the face of death, a defiance of death and a celebration of the life that's passed. These are traditions that grew up on an instinctive level for a very good reason: for the help of the larger society. It is life and recognition that masks the fantastic mystery whose meaning we don't know. Do we go on or don't we? Could there be a more invigorating question?

There is a great deal of death in my poems: there's celebration of people who've died, there is the anticipation of looking at the beloved's face on the pillow and saying, "Call me if you need me over there." Sleep is the great metaphor. Almost every night over the last thirty-five years Paula [Meehan] falls asleep before me and I'm looking and thinking, "God, imagine if you weren't there. Imagine if this is you gone and for ever." It's the seed of a great tenderness towards the other to realise that they must die. I'm more interested in what the prospect of another's death means rather than mine: it's a richer source of trying to find your own humanity. It teaches as well to reflect on the great dialectic of presence at absence. And from a technical writing point of view it means you realise that you must also in some of your poems attempt to

encompass, not just the presence of what is offered to the reader, but the absences that surround it. When Pasternak says, "To live your life is not so simple as to cross a field," it evokes all the other things that are happening while you're trying to cross the field, the things that you have deserted on the boundary, at the other side of the fence. That's one of the great themes of poetry: the memorial impulse, to remember. That great writer and scholar, Antonio Rivero Taravillo, died last week. I will always remember him, and then he's gone. Death is the cradle that holds its absence, but that absence is strangely enough also a presence; being conscious of the absence means that the person is present. It's total mystery to me. But then, think of Shakespeare's sonnet: "So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." That's an important perspective of the poet for the writer, anyway. If I thought that one poem would still be recognised and read and quoted after I am gone, that would be marvellous; I think it would all be worthwhile, all red blood and tears. I tell people in workshops that I hope to write a poem before I die; not any particular poem, just one that will survive.

3. A Poet in the Making: Learning to Sail through Language

MACP: Born or forged a poet? When did you know that you were a poet?

TD: I'm very tempted by Robert Graves saying the title of poet comes only with death. I don't know; I have difficulty in a particular way of thinking of myself as a poet. None of us know what work will be kept; the second-hand bookshops are full of three-volume editions of people who were huge in their time and now we don't read them, we've forgotten them. You send poems out ahead of you into the void and wait the verdict of history; but then, strangely, it doesn't matter. The only useful way to think of being a poet is that you are faithful to the poems you're giving and do the best you can to frame them in the language so that they have some hope of surviving.

When we're living the language... Well, I was thinking of sailing through the language: there's wind and waves and water and currents, and you learn certain skills. I learnt to read at the age of four and I always knew I was going to be a writer, but I thought I'd write novels. I was writing essays—compositions—in primary school. Almost every Monday I would have to read out my essay to the class; so from very early I was used to making words that I knew would be read and heard by other people. I began to write poems when I was a student in university. The Irish poet, Patrick Kavanagh, said "I dabbled in verses and found they have become my life." I'd had a very similar experience when I began to make poems. I was quite surprised actually when poems started to come in and I found myself reaching out to the poems trying to capture them in words; and then that becomes a learnt skill, I suppose. I had to teach myself to wait for the poems, to recognise them as they came in. Then you have to find a voice for the poem that's constant with your own voice; otherwise it'll sound artificial. Poems kind of frightened me, because they make such demands on your resources of language. It took me a while to realise that writing is easy, but rewriting is hard work. I'm thinking of craft in the ordinary sense of making and also as a vessel: an Irish language poet says, "I set my poem afloat on the stream of language." I think you have to make sure that the seams are tight and the boat is well able to survive whatever the weather is. Every word is difficult; its force, the masts; everything has to be right and fit for purpose. And that takes a long time to learn; in fact it takes a lifetime.

4. Traditions and Reading Companions

MACP: As for literary transmission and communion, what literary traditions are you heir to? Which authors do you read?

TD: Well, it's a kind of mixture, really. I'm fortunate; I did much of my schooling in the Irish language, so I have both traditions. It's only recently I have noticed that from school days, for instance, most of the poems I remember are in Irish, not in English. And that's to do with memorability, a process in your making things that you hope will inhere in memory. Of course that's where the whole complicated history of forms comes from: certain forms have enhanced our memory to retain them. I suppose the Irish poems of the eighteenth century were very important to us, not least because many of them were made into songs or were intended to be remembered as songs. So you have that lovely connection to the lyric.

In the English language, curiously enough, the poet who had definite influence on me is Robert Graves, an Edwardian office-class gentleman of the English persuasion who couldn't be further in many ways from my own sensibility. But Graves was an anarchic presence in the English tradition, a superb craftsman with a very strong sense of the enduring presence of the mythical, that is, of cultures and language and their frame of imaginations. Graves is the overriding absolute respect for the language, the history of all words. He says the dictionary is a valley of dry bones and our job is to bring them to life. What you bring is a certain kind of life essence.

I also found a great deal to liking the American poet Gary Snider. He seems a great nature poet from the beginning; he understood that the human being is not separate from the whole plenum of being: the plants, the animals, the landscape, the water, the rock, the earth; that we belong in that. To me everything is nature; everything, including what we make. I tend to read according to necessity. If, for instance, I have moral and ethical questions, I find quite comfort and a source of companionship in Doris Lessing, the Rhodesian Zimbabwen British novelist; I find her very sympathetic. At a certain time in my life I found the four great Russians of great help: Akhmatova, especially Mandelshtam, Tsvetaeva, not so much Pasternak; they wanted to find the language that was absolutely true to the individual poetic impulse and at the same time situated us on the social context. I have an intent political view of the situation; I'm very aware of being in the world with other people.

5. Singing Sounds: Writing Scores for Voices

MACP: Poetry is not what you say, but the way you say it. How much of your poetry is music, sound on air?

TD: You've touched something that's very important to me: the sound pattern is an intrinsic, central part of the poem's meaning; absolutely. Sometimes what you need is strict form to carry it and other times you need free form to carry it, but there's always a pattern. I would encourage students to speak a poem out loud. A good analogy is with a score for a piece of music. I'm in awe of people who can hear music when they read the score; the black marks on the white sheet are a code, but it's code to produce sound. Poetry is an oral tradition and the poem on the page is five hundred years old really in the culture, compared to, say, a forty thousand year history of the spoken poem, as Gary Snyder estimates. It's a score for voices.

MACP: Yes, even when reading fiction one should be able to hear the characters' voices.

TD: I'm smiling here because I have a novel out recently called *Camarade*; much of it is in Paris and very deliberately when I have French characters speaking—of course the book is written in English—I use French constructions for some of the things they're saying. But the copy editor kept saying that it wasn't proper English and she completely missed the point: you can hear the musicality of the French voice when you invert the construction here, when you separate the verb farther or you bring it closer depending on what they're saying.

MACP: Thomas Kinsella did something similar in his translation of the early Irish narrative, *The Táin*: he used defamiliarising techniques, such as calque and literal translation, to foreground Irish elements in his English version.

TD: Oh, they're dreadful, his translations are very dry. The Irish language is obsessed with the conditional tense. It doesn't like fixities and definites; it's not that keen on nouns, it's not that keen on the binaries: "Will you be here at seven o'clock? I have every intention of being there." You can't say, "Yes, I will be there at seven," because you don't know if that will happen. Kinsella, I think, was deeply suspicious of all Irish writing after the sixteenth century and he hated the English in a strange sense—I have the feeling that he really wasn't comfortable in English. But doing the translations he missed the musicality of it entirely, because his generation was brought up with a horror of the Americanised stage Irishry, "Ah, you know, begorra and bedad." It's such a horror of that he became over austere.

6. Building Structures: The Poems Write Us

MACP: Poets like Federico García Lorca turn to traditional versification for many of his compositions. Do you think that trying to accommodate words in a rhyming and rhythmic structure helps distil their essence?

TD: I think that if you decide, for instance, that you're going to write a sonnet, then you're not going to end up with a poem; but you may have a poem swirling around and the poem may say, "Sound would just but hold me," and so you do it. I've a long poem, *Orpheus*, in Sapphics. I'd been thinking about writing something in Sapphic meters just to see if they suited the genius of English. So I just tried to make a little experiment and suddenly I'd done the whole book in Sapphics; but the poem in *Orpheus* took off because it had been hanging around waiting for me to trip into it. That's in very strict form and it suited it. I have other poems where the form is more like the Irish *sean-nós*, the Irish traditional form of singing. People think that's free form; it isn't. It's a very strict form that allows for the elongation of certain lines with grace notes and then it comes back to the core rhythm. Certain emotional states have a rhythmic presence in your actual breath, in your body; and forms have evolved that correspond to those states.

We have an inherited corpus of forms that we can reach to. Sometimes they suit the poem and sometimes they make a horrible recreation, a willed mutilation of the original poem as it proposed itself into a pre-set form. I'm very relaxed about if some poems work well in strict forms and other poems work best in free forms. The trick is to be conscious at the moment the poem proposes itself to you of what would suit it best. It's good for people, especially for young poets, to practise the forms so they know what to do if the occasion arises; but it's not good to take these exercises and present them as poems. I'm sort of obdurate about the ancient distinction between verse and poetry. Verse is a magnificent thing in itself, but the poem is something that makes the hair at the back of your neck stand up when you speak it; a different quality of experience. Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* speaks of the "secondary imagination" as the ceaseless recombination of known "fixities and definites." A great deal of what's called poetry in the English language at the moment is actually verse, perfectly respectable free verse, but I think it's a mistake by the poet as it masks a true poem.

True poetry allows us to experience our selves as mysteries. A sheer thing that drives me mad is poetry tutors who tell people that it's about the emulsifying "express yourself." Self-expression! Poetry isn't self-expression. The self expresses the poem through words and you can intuit the sensibility that made it. But I have no interest in what Lorca wore, I have no interest in what Lorca really thought of his aunt or whoever. I'm interested in the poems and what I learn about people in the poems can be entirely meaningless. We don't write the poems; the poems write us. It's as broadly true and simple as that: the poems write us. Obviously, the poem is going to bring something of my life with it, but it's not going to tell anybody what height I am, what weight I am or what my preferred food is. If I sense a poem coming in, if a phrase in an odd book suddenly comes to life and starts to speak itself as a poem, my only responsibility is to that poem; and I might never publish it, it doesn't matter; sensation, it doesn't matter. My primary duty is fidelity to the poem as it comes in.

7. Reading "Ithaca" with Duende...

MACP: It's nearly a year since your mesmerising reading of "Ithaca," which was part of your splendid plenary speech for the AEDEAN conference in Seville. How did you experience that electrifying moment?

TD: That night in the *Alcázar* reading "Ithaca"... When you read poems sometimes there's a very particular silence when you feel there's real communion, that all of the minds are in the same place, all of the hearts are in the same place, that all of the sensibilities are in the same place at the same time; and that's why we keep our letters, why we keep our cultural expressions, why we keep painting, why we keep music, why we keep poetry: because it allows us to be other as well as, at the same time, be ourselves. I find that enormously affirming.

MACP: That fleeting and magical emotion in communion with the audience is called *duende*.

TD: I was very humbled to feel it. It happens from time to time and it's always a very humbling experience; the ordinary human being says, "Jeez, I must have done something right," but it's craft as well as pride, because I don't believe that the moment we shared that night in *Salón del Almirante*... I don't think that you could do that if the poem wasn't okay. So it reassures you, the poem has probably something going.

8. ... And the Geared Moment

MACP: At that moment the bond between the poet and the poem felt to me like the entrancing "dance" between a bullfighter and the bull: both creating ephemeral art before a transfixed audience.

TD: I detest the idea of torturing an animal to death, which is what bullfighting is, but it doesn't mean that I can't understand the mastering of the terror that the *torero* feels; he can get killed, and grace and practice are the only things that will keep him alive. There's a moment where watching a really good bullfight you realise, "Now, it's now; now he's going to die or now he's not, now he's going to hit the right pass, now is the exact moment to put the sword between the horns." Everything leads up to that moment: the life of the *torero* and the death of the bull; it's just one single moment; it's *the* moment, for life and death are in a perfect balance. In poetry too there is *the* moment if you're lucky. Paula [Meehan] has a poem, "My Father Perceived as a Vision of St. Francis," which has a line that I cannot explain: "The sun / cleared O'Reilly's chimney / and he was suddenly radiant." Every single time I hear the poem I get a lump in my throat when it comes to that line. I call it "the geared moment" and a good poem always has a gear change: something opens up that I can never explain; but unless that comes in a poem, the poem is dead on the page. Paul Simon has a song called "America" with a line in it: "And the moon rose over an open field." There are immensities that might be said out of that line, and it's all the open *o's*: they bring the moon up through the sky. Bob Dylan has a line in "Visions of Johanna," "The ghost of electricity howls in the bones of her face." There is a point where there's mystery which produces the hair-raising

effect, and that's a gift; it either comes to you as a gift or it doesn't, but you can't plan for it, you can't decide to do it. If it comes, then the poem comes to life; if it doesn't, burn it, tear it up, throw it away.

9. "Translaterating": The Bridging of Tongues

MACP: You have translated into Irish and English authors such as Federico García Lorca, Maram Al-Massri and Barbara Korun. Has that experience inspired you as a poet?

TD: It's a simple question to phrase but a difficult question to really understand. It's a jigsaw. When I was involved in a project called *Loco por Lorca* and I was asked to translate some of Lorca's poems into Irish for a stage show, I was astonished in the *Residencia de Estudiantes* in Madrid that people were so taken with the sound of Lorca in Irish; people could think, "This is the only language into which we've heard him translated that has sensitively done it." Then I translated *Romancero gitano* to Irish. It was something of Lorca that came. It wasn't so much the narrative sweep or the patterning or all of the usual things that attract of his poems; it was something in the language that spoke to Irish. It was a way as much of learning something about the Irish language, I suppose. The poetry of the eighteenth century in Irish is heavily influenced by the Spanish language, because the Irish nobility and their fathers went to Spain after 1690 and that fed back: the Catholic priests who were ranging about to Ireland clandestinely after the Flight of the Earls had been formed in Salamanca and in the Spanish seminaries; when they came back to work among the people—it was a Gaelic-speaking country still—they brought back something of the sensibility and sense of form of Spanish poetry. It's like so many underground rivers, braiding together and separating and coming together again.

I've translated four books now, three of them published (I've just finished the fourth one), by the Syrian poet Maram Al-Massri, who writes in French and Arabic; I translated obviously from the French. Something of her sensibility has helped me to understand certain impulses. When you translate from another language, what you think you're contacting is sensibility, and, if you're lucky, as I have been, that awakens in you a latent ear of sensibility. The supple fluency of French woke me up to a sense of floating sensibility in the originals. "Translaterating" carries over. I have only very little Spanish, so some people were outraged when I translated *Romancero*. But I have an ear and I have good dictionaries. The point is not the craft, but the finished product; and nobody yet has been able to sort any grammatical or lexical errors in the translation. I also published a book of translations of the Slovenian poet Barbara Korun. I have not a word of Slovenian and people objected—a friend wrote a letter to the *Irish Times* complaining about it. But that book won a prize for the best translation of a contemporary Slovenian poet into English, in Slovenia. The key test, to me, is: if you can carry the emotional effects of a poem into the new language, then you've translated it.

MACP: What about the translations of your own work into other languages? Are you in touch with your translators?

TD: Not particularly, no. I lift my hand and say, "You do it." People might come back and say, "I'm not sure how to translate this, did you mean this or that?" When I hear that I think there's a failure in the original, because I haven't made it clear enough. It's never any good asking me what I did mean; ask you what you think the poem means. I don't think that the author is the greatest authority of the poem. The only advantage the poet has over others interested in the poem is he's probably spent more time with it than anybody else, the authority of having lived with it for longer. The Spanish translations of *Sappho's Daughter* are very good. Pilar Villar Argáiz's father was the lead translator and they did a very good job. I do like sometimes to very clumsily speak the translations to myself to see what they sound like; it's very interesting to see how the different vocalic patterns in a translation sound.

10. Camarade *Unfolding Itself*

MACP: How was the writing of *Camarade*, your recently published novel?

TD: The novel just started and I wrote the next page to see what happened next and then after that I wrote the next page again to see what happened next. It's a story that began to unfold and I just began to follow it. It's like a long slow poem: the imperative is "Take me there." I found myself entering a world slowly page by page unfolding and following the principal characters into it, then meeting other auxiliary characters, and then it came to the end; it was like that. Of course you come back and you shape that and you rewrite it afterwards, but that's superfluous. The essential book was just me following in the footsteps of the characters.

A key incident in the book is when the young protagonist shoots a policeman. It was only after I'd published the book and during this year that I certainly remembered as a boy hearing of a Republican activist who was being driven crazy by a policeman in Cork and he turned around one day in the Main Street and shot him. I remember hearing that story and saying, "You will have to remember this." It vanished and suddenly I realised that it had popped up at a key moment in the novel, but I only remembered the prompt long afterwards. The protagonist's grandfather, who had commanded a flying column in the Irish War of Independence, a guerrilla band, has a house and the old pal comrades from the flying column are his lodgers. Well, it's only two weeks ago I realised there's a painting of a flying column in the Crawford Gallery in Cork called *Men of the South*, and that must have been what prompted it. I'd forgotten the painting; I wasn't actually thinking of it when I was writing the book, but now I see it was there all along. What I am writing is a complete mystery to me until it's there on page.

MACP: How is *Camarade* doing?

TD: I'm a bit puzzled, because so many people are getting in touch to say how much they enjoyed it. I'm kind of astonished by this, because I expect nothing of anything I write: I do it, I finish, I set it off to find its own way in the world; and I'm always slightly taken aback to find that anybody has read anything I've written. This is nothing to do with modesty, honestly, it isn´t. I've never met a modest writer in my life...

11. Being Open to What Comes Next

MACP: What are you doing at the moment? Any plans for the future?

TD: It's a strange moment: no poems there anywhere about. I have a play that I want to do one more version of; I have faced another book of translations by Maran Al-Massri; at the moment I'm editing an issue of *Poetry Ireland Review* and the theme is love poems to humans. But there's nothing new there. I'm just having to hold my nerve and hope that there may be something else. It's not the case of thinking, but of being open to it. We'll see...

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BOOK REVIEWS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Discursos polarizados. Modos, medios y estrategias

Isabel Alonso Belmonte y M. Dolores Porto, eds.

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El libro *Discursos Polarizados: Modos, medios y estrategias* pertenece a la serie Comares Comunicación, cuyo propósito es la difusión de trabajos académicos y científicos sobre la comunicación desde una perspectiva plural y multidisciplinar. Analiza el discurso polarizado en diversos medios y géneros en contextos sociopolíticos de la época actual, cuando el término "polarización" ha adquirido una gran relevancia. No en vano, la Fundación del Español Urgente (FundéuRAE) lo eligió como palabra del año en 2023. Cabe aclarar que el vocablo en sí mismo no tiene significado negativo, pues alude a la caracterización de grupos enfatizando las diferencias y minimizando las semejanzas —cf. Díez-Prados y Cabrejas-Peñuelas, pp. 71-72 de este libro. No obstante, en estos últimos años se viene utilizando casi exclusivamente con connotaciones negativas, para designar la percepción exagerada de diferencias ideológicas y la consiguiente actitud afectiva de identificación con el endogrupo y aversión al exogrupo.

El crecimiento de la polarización sociopolítica no es un fenómeno exclusivo de España, sino que está documentada en países tan distintos y distantes como Estados Unidos, India, Brasil, Argentina, Reino Unido o Turquía. En consonancia, en los últimos años el interés académico por el tema se ha intensificado. Ciñéndonos a los estudios lingüísticos, entre las publicaciones en inglés destacan el libro editado por Filardo-Llamas et al. (2021), que aborda las estrategias discursivas que construyen el conflicto y la polarización en diversos contextos de España y del mundo, así como Berning (2021), monografía que analiza la polarización de la sociedad estadounidense en editoriales periodísticos sobre la campaña electoral de las elecciones presidenciales de 2020. En cuanto a las publicaciones en español, podemos citar libros de enfoque político como Arroyas Langa et al. (2022) o Martín Jiménez (ed., 2023), este último también de la colección Comares Comunicación, pero los estudios lingüísticos sobre la polarización siguen siendo escasos. *Discursos Polarizados* desvela las estrategias discursivas en un amplio repertorio de contextos sociopolíticos, siendo, por tanto, una adición valiosa a la bibliografía existente sobre el tema.

1 Esta reseña se ha escrito en el marco del proyecto competitivo "Estrategias de posicionamiento en el discurso del racismo y la inmigración: análisis y aplicaciones en prácticas afectivas de aprendizaje (RACISMMAFF)", Ref. PID2021-125327NB-I00, subvencionado por el Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovacion (MCIN) y el Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional (FEDER).

Discursos polarizados consta de una introducción y diez capítulos, divididos en dos partes, dedicadas a estrategias de polarización discursiva socio-cognitivas y pragmáticas, respectivamente. La Introducción (pp. IX-XX), escrita por Isabel Alonso Belmonte y Mª Dolores Porto, editoras del volumen, aborda la creciente polarización de los discursos y caracteriza el discurso polarizado basándose en el cuadrado ideológico de van Dijk (1998: 267), que señala el refuerzo de las acciones o propiedades positivas y la mitigación de las negativas del grupo "nosotros", y el refuerzo de lo negativo y la mitigación de lo positivo del grupo "ellos". Seguidamente, se definen las estrategias discursivas de polarización como las herramientas lingüísticas y extralingüísticas que utiliza un enunciador para lograr su objetivo comunicativo, consistente en persuadir de la existencia de "dos opciones irreconciliables" (p. XII) y estigmatizar una de ellas, y se mencionan algunos tipos de estas estrategias, para terminar con un resumen de los capítulos del libro.

La primera parte, que aborda las estrategias socio-cognitivas, consta de cinco capítulos. Los dos primeros analizan el discurso polarizado sobre dos cuestiones que, aun teniendo implicaciones políticas, pueden considerarse como problemas sociales. El Capítulo 1 (pp. 3-25), de Manuela Romano y María Muelas-Gil, analiza las narrativas polarizantes de cien carteles que contienen metáforas lingüísticas y / o visuales, publicados en 2022 y 2023 con motivo del Día Internacional de la Violencia de Género. El análisis demuestra convincentemente que las mujeres sufridoras de violencia de género y los actores sociales de apoyo son representados con roles activos —denunciar, luchar, rechazar, implicarse…—, mientras que el exogrupo—maltratadores y parte de la sociedad que no rechaza abiertamente la violencia de género— nunca aparecen aislados ni como protagonistas. De este modo, los carteles proyectan mensajes positivos de empoderamiento de las mujeres y evitan su victimización.

El Capítulo 2 (pp. 27-46), de Silvia Molina Plaza y Samira Allani, analiza las metáforas y metonimias multimodales en 30 chistes gráficos sobre la subida de la luz desde el inicio de la guerra de Ucrania hasta diciembre de 2023. A la selección de viñetas, realizada aleatoriamente a partir de una búsqueda en Google, se podría objetar la excesiva presencia del humorista JR. Mora, autor de 9 viñetas, que disminuye la representatividad del corpus. El análisis demuestra que los protagonistas más significativos de los chistes son con diferencia los ciudadanos, representados como víctimas, manifestantes, amas de casa, matrimonios o multitud enardecida. Por su parte, las compañías eléctricas están representadas por diversas metonimias —bombillas, enchufes, hombres de negocios…—y metáforas—asesinos, ladrones, monstruos. Este humor tiene un efecto polarizante, al contraponer eléctricas y consumidores, pero también fomenta la reflexión en busca de soluciones más justas.

Los capítulos restantes de la primera parte versan sobre el discurso político. El Capítulo 3 (pp. 47-70), de Maria Josep Cuenca y Albert Morales, estudia las estrategias léxicas de polarización vinculadas al feminismo, mediante un análisis lexicométrico de la frecuencia y colocaciones de ocho lemas —*igualdad*, *género*, *feminismo*, *feminista*, *machismo*, *machista*, *mujer* y *familia*— en los programas electorales de los seis partidos más votados en las elecciones generales de 2023. Los resultados revelan diferencias ideológicas —por ejemplo, la frecuencia de *igualdad*, *género* y *mujer* es comparativamente alta en Sumar y PSOE—, así como la resignificación de algunos de estos términos en el discurso de VOX. El análisis es riguroso y convincente, aunque cabe señalar la falta de atención a la llamativa escasez de casi todos los lemas en el programa de Junts.

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El análisis cualitativo de discurso político continúa en el Capítulo V (pp. 91-109) de Manuel Alcántara Plá, que aborda el estudio de las emociones como estrategia polarizadora en los mensajes publicados en la cuenta de X de Isabel Díaz Ayuso durante cinco días de 2024. Se aplica una metodología desarrollada por el mismo autor (Alcántara Plá 2024), basada en la detección de una relación entre un elemento explícito del discurso (objeto superficial) y otro relevante y vulnerable que suele estar implícito (objeto profundo). Se echa en falta una explicación más clara sobre cómo se determina este último; aun así, el análisis en su conjunto demuestra que la intención subyacente de los mensajes es inducir a los lectores para que construyan un marco emocional negativo contra el presidente de España Pedro Sánchez y su gobierno, codificados con frecuencia como objetos superficiales.

La segunda parte, que trata de estrategias pragmáticas y retóricas de polarización, comienza con el Capítulo 6 (pp. 113-132), de Edurne Garde-Eransus, que propone un análisis cualitativo de las estrategias de polarización de 42 contenidos

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editorial se alinea con la derecha radical europea. Siguiendo la teoría del encuadre propuesta por Gallardo-Paúls (2013, 2021), el estudio demuestra cómo las estrategias contribuyen a una representación negativa del gobierno, la izquierda, las feministas y los inmigrantes, mediante el análisis de la ilocutividad de los actos de habla, la selección léxica y la actancialidad. Esa última presenta especial interés, pues los colectivos representados aparecen con frecuencia como sujetos agentes de acciones indeseadas. En cambio, la ilocutividad tiene un papel residual: la sección denominada "Estrategia intencional" (pp. 119-121), supuestamente correspondiente a la ilocutividad, se centra sobre todo en expresiones evaluativas, cuya inclusión en esta sección y no en "Estrategia léxica" debería haberse motivado más explícitamente.

La teoría del encuadre de Gallardo-Paúls es también la base del marco teórico del Capítulo 7 (pp. 122-150), de Carmen Llamas Saíz, cuyo corpus consiste en 26 titulares de noticias y artículos de opinión de los periódicos *El País* y *ABC* sobre la primera sesión de investidura del candidato del Partido Popular Alberto Núñez Feijóo, publicados al día siguiente de la misma —es decir, el 27 de septiembre de 2023. El estudio se centra en las estrategias de encuadre con función polarizadora en el nivel enunciativo, concretamente la ilocutividad expresiva y el léxico valorativo.

El análisis cualitativo de discurso polarizado prosigue en el Capítulo 8 (pp. 151-171), de Mª Elena Gómez Sánchez, donde se aplica la pragmática sociocultural al análisis de las 30 cartas electorales enviadas por los partidos políticos al electorado desde 2008 hasta 2023. Los resultados revelan estrategias de cortesía constantes hacia el electorado, mientras que la polarización se incrementa con los años, mediante estrategias de descortesía hacia los adversarios políticos cada vez más explícitas y menos despersonalizadas. Aunque la descripción del corpus está muy detallada (Sección 3), se echa en falta la especificación del número de cartas de cada partido.

Los dos últimos capítulos abordan las estrategias discursivas polarizadoras en corpus de comentarios en redes sociales sobre dos acontecimientos de gran repercusión social. El Capítulo 9 (pp. 173-193), de Ana Pano Alamán y Esperanza R. Alcaide Lara, estudia 15.768 comentarios de Facebook asociados a 10 mensajes multimodales en cinco diarios españoles —*El Mundo*, *Marca*, *OKDiario*, *Huffington* y *Público*— sobre el caso del beso en la boca de Luis Rubiales a Jenni Hermoso. Los mensajes fueron publicados entre agosto de 2023 y enero de 2024, siendo por tanto anteriores a la sentencia de 20 de febrero de 2025 que condenó a Rubiales por un delito de agresión sexual y lo absolvió de otro de coacciones. Mediante un análisis de la selección léxica de las expresiones referidas a Hermoso y otras estrategias polarizadoras, el capítulo demuestra un alto grado de polarización y el predominio de estrategias de valoración negativa, que la caracterizan como "mujer mala". Las autoras argumentan certeramente que esta valoración refleja la existencia de dos grupos enfrentados en torno a la igualdad de género. Sin embargo, la presentación de los resultados habría ganado en efectividad si se hubieran separado los mensajes que evalúan explícitamente solo a Hermoso y aquellos con alusiones ideológicas o políticas más generales.

El Capítulo 10 (pp. 195-214), de Olga Cruz-Moya, analiza los mensajes publicados en X en enero y febrero de 2024 sobre la canción "Zorra" del grupo Nebulossa, seleccionada para el Festival de la Canción de Eurovisión de ese año. Los mensajes que mencionan la palabra "zorra" fueron objeto de un análisis cuantitativo de sus diferentes significados y las tonalidades emocionales. La tonalidad negativa posee connotaciones peyorativas asociadas al significado tradicional de prostituta, mientras que la positiva asocia este término, por resignificación léxica, con el disfrute, la desinhibición y el empoderamiento. Cabe señalar que en la p. 203 aparece la figura que muestra la distribución de las tonalidades —repetida en la p. 206—en lugar de la figura correspondiente a la distribución de los significados. Por otra parte, podría interpretarse que la polarización de los mensajes está sobrevalorada en la discusión de los resultados, pues las tonalidades más extremadas —"muy positiva" y "muy negativa"— suman solo el 12% de los mensajes, correspondiendo el resto a las tonalidades "positiva", "negativa" y "neutra."

En conjunto, *Discursos polarizados* ofrece investigaciones cualitativas y cuantitativas de calidad sobre estrategias polarizadoras en una amplia muestra de discursos en distintos contextos comunicativos, españoles excepto en el capítulo sobre Zelenski. Las observaciones críticas realizadas en esta reseña tienen escaso peso en el conjunto del libro, pudiéndose considerar casi anecdóticas. Una lectura atenta del volumen conciencia al lector del amplio repertorio de estrategias discursivas polarizadoras a disposición de los usuarios del lenguaje: selección léxica, actos de habla expresivos, roles sintácticos, metáfora, metonimia, resignificación lingüística y coloquialismos, entre otras. Por tanto, es de esperar que el libro fomente la adquisición de conocimiento mediante la observación directa y la lectura de fuentes fiables, de modo que se cultive un pensamiento que trascienda la adhesión acrítica a un grupo y la aversión hacia otro. Citando una oración del final de la Introducción (p. XVII), *Discursos polarizados* es "la respuesta desde la academia a la preocupación social que genera el aumento considerable de la polarización social e ideológica en el discurso público."

OBRAS CITADAS

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BOOK REVIEWS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Investigating Attention to Form and Individual Differences: Research with EFL Children

Maria del Pilar García Mayo, ed.

Springer. 2025. 303 pp.
ISBN 978-3-031-80923-1
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Aprender la gramática de un segundo idioma siempre ha sido un desafío, especialmente para quienes comienzan en edades tempranas. Durante años se ha creído que los niños carecen de la capacidad para asimilar la gramática de manera clara y directa. Sin embargo, el libro *Investigating Attention to Form and Individual Differences: Research with EFL Children*, editado por María del Pilar García Mayo, desmonta esta idea y nos ofrece una mirada renovada sobre cómo enseñar eficazmente la gramática a estudiantes jóvenes.

La obra reúne once estudios que exploran distintas estrategias para que niños entre los 9 y 14 años mejoren su comprensión y uso del inglés. Desde dinámicas grupales hasta reflexiones metalingüísticas, cada capítulo aporta hallazgos que iluminan el camino hacia una enseñanza más consciente y adaptada. El recorrido comienza con el capítulo de Barberán-Recalde y Basterrechea, quienes presentan una metodología basada en tareas colaborativas. Según sus conclusiones, trabajar en equipo ayuda a los aprendices a emplear correctamente estructuras como los determinantes posesivos *his/her*. La clave está en combinar estas actividades con explicaciones claras sobre la gramática, lo que incrementa la precisión en el uso. En la siguiente parada, Iglesias-Diéguez y Martínez-Adrián se preguntan si la capacidad analítica de los niños influye en la efectividad de estas explicaciones. Aunque los resultados no son definitivos, se observa una tendencia que invita a seguir investigando cómo las habilidades cognitivas interactúan con la enseñanza gramatical. Más adelante, Pladevall-Ballester y Puig-Mayenco comparan la preparación previa a las tareas y su impacto en el uso del presente continuo. Sus hallazgos sugieren que enseñar la gramática antes de la práctica mejora tanto la precisión como la conciencia lingüística. Otros capítulos nos llevan a terrenos igualmente interesantes. Fernández Fuertes y Gómez Garzarán analizan la adquisición de compuestos nominales y concluyen que la calidad de la instrucción dirigida pesa más que la duración de la exposición. Por su parte, García-Pastor estudia cómo los estudiantes reflexionan sobre los verbos modales de obligación en secuencias colaborativas, demostrando que, cuando se les da espacio para centrarse en la forma sin intervención directa, resuelven problemas con notable eficacia.Además de todos estos interesantes temas, la obra también aborda el proceso de la retroalimentación. Milla y García Mayo comparan la corrección escrita con la autocorrección y descubren que, aunque las diferencias no son abismales, quienes reciben feedback directo logran mejores resultados en la producción escrita,

especialmente en la tercera persona del singular. Continuando con la lectura del texto, encontramos estudios como el de Luquin, que analiza el efecto de los textos modelo en la producción oral, y el de Obanos-Gil y Villarreal, que destaca el valor de la escritura colaborativa y la reflexión metalingüística. Ambos refuerzan la idea de que los enfoques integrados y cooperativos son esenciales para avanzar en la enseñanza de la gramática. Después de los estudios sobre escritura colaborativa y reflexión metalingüística, el libro nos presenta el capítulo firmado por Kopinska, Guerrero-Gómez y Orcasitas-Vicandi. Este profundiza en cómo las diferencias individuales, como la motivación, la confianza y la disposición para cooperar, influyen en la calidad de la escritura conjunta. Los resultados revelan que la colaboración no es uniforme ya que algunos niños se benefician más que otros, lo que refuerza la necesidad de adaptar las dinámicas grupales a las características personales. A su vez, Calzada y Azkarai, analizan la evolución del compromiso lingüístico en tareas interactivas a lo largo del tiempo, demostrando al público que la implicación no es estática, sino que varía según la familiaridad con la tarea y la confianza adquirida. La investigación subraya que mantener la motivación y la atención requiere estrategias sostenidas, especialmente en contextos prolongados. El libro concluye con una aportación especialmente significativa, como no podia ser menos, la de Udry y Berthele en su evaluación del aprendizaje de estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales. Este capítulo subraya la importancia de estrategias inclusivas que consideren la sensibilidad gramatical y la dimensión afectiva, recordándonos que la enseñanza debe adaptarse para que todos tengan la oportunidad de brillar.

En su conjunto, esta obra ofrece una visión rica y matizada sobre cómo enseñar gramática a niños en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera. Su diversidad metodológica, la atención a las diferencias individuales y el enfoque práctico la convierten en una referencia imprescindible para docentes e investigadores que buscan optimizar el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje dentro de las aulas.

BOOK REVIEWS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Child L2 Writers: A Room of Their Own

Amparo Lázaro-Ibarrola

John Benjamins Publishing Company. 2023. 203 pp.
ISBN 978 90 272 1292 4

Research into children's acquisition of a second language (hereafter L2) writing skills remains rather scarce, particularly in comparison to other areas of foreign language learning such as oral proficiency or reading development. This scarcity presents significant challenges not only for scholars but also for practitioners in the English as a Foreign Language Teaching field. As Zhang et al. (2015, 307) argue, "such a gap in the literature may create obstacles for professionals and practitioners who wish to identify effective strategies to specifically promote children's early writing skills." Without a stronger and extensive base of empirical evidence, educators are short of clear guidance on how to support learners' L2 writing development.

The lack of research is particularly pronounced in early educational contexts. On this note, Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2017, 35) highlight that "much less attention has been given to ways in which early writing skills are supported or promoted in these classrooms," suggesting that pedagogical approaches to writing are often under-theorized and under-examined at this critical stage. Given that early writing experiences can lay the foundation for later academic success, the limited focus on writing in L2 settings represents a significant oversight in the field of applied linguistics.

In addition to the above, methodological challenges further complicate research into children's L2 writing development. As Ambridge and Rowland (2013, 149) note, "it is impossible to investigate children's knowledge directly, and that this must be somehow inferred from observable behavior." Researchers must rely on written output as an indirect measure of linguistic competence, which may not fully capture children's underlying knowledge or potential. Such constraints may partly explain why the study of children's L2 writing remains relatively underdeveloped compared to more observable domains such as speech or vocabulary acquisition.

While there is increasing recognition of the importance of early writing development, the field still lacks comprehensive research into how children acquire and refine writing skills in a second language. Bridging this gap is essential if educators are to be equipped with evidence-based strategies to foster effective L2 writing instruction for children.

Child L2 Writers by Amparo Lázaro-Ibarrola addresses a largely underexplored area in second language acquisition (SLA): children's writing in a second language. The book focuses on learners aged 9 to 12, a group whose cognitive and developmental characteristics are often overlooked when research designed for adults is generalized to younger populations. By drawing attention to this gap, the author highlights the urgent need for more research specifically focusing on children and their L2 writing skills.

Throughout the volume, the author is consistent in stressing the scarcity of empirical studies on child SLA. As she states: "Children are under-researched in SLA in general, and they have been particularly under-researched in the context

of L2 writing" (Lázaro-Ibarrola 2023, 165). This need for more extended research positions this book as a significant contribution to filling that void.

In addition to reviewing existing studies, the book opens the reader's eyes to the methodological limitations and fragmented nature of current research. Each chapter concludes with a clear summary, which helps consolidate the main ideas and guide the reader through the argument. The text is enriched with concrete examples and visual resources, such as comprehensive tables of previous studies, which make complex information more accessible and illustrate key points effectively. The final two chapters extend beyond review by discussing pedagogical implications and practical applications. Overall, *Child L2 Writers* offers a valuable synthesis of research, delivered in a structured and visually clear manner, while persistently calling for further investigation into the writing development of child L2 learners.

Focusing on a more detailed summary of each chapter, Chapter 1introduces children as L2 writers, emphasizing the importance of their cognitive development—reasoning, self-regulation, and working memory—in shaping their ability to engage with writing tasks. It highlights the need for balanced feedback and recognition of effort, while stressing that, though demanding, L2 writing is both achievable and beneficial at this stage. Writing supports language learning, cognitive growth, and expression, making it a vital component of elementary education. The chapter also notes the scarcity of SLA research with children, calling for further studies, and concludes by outlining key L2 writing tasks and advocating for an interdisciplinary approach.

Chapter 2 highlights the promise of collaborative writing as a learning tool, while also acknowledging the gaps and contradictions in current research. It calls for more comprehensive studies to explore both collaborative and individual writing, ensuring that the full potential of each approach can be better understood and applied in language learning contexts.

Chapter 3 examines the role of written corrective feedback (WCF) in L2 learning, stressing that feedback is only effective when children understand their errors and how to address them. While existing studies indicate that WCF can be beneficial, the chapter highlights significant methodological and participant-related limitations that restrict broad conclusions. The author ultimately calls for further research to clarify the impact of WCF on young learners and to refine approaches that make feedback both accessible and effective.

Chapter 4 explores task repetition (TR) in children's L2 writing, noting its recognized role in learning but also the mixed evidence regarding its effectiveness. While some studies suggest TR enhances young learners' writing, others find little benefit, and outcomes appear to differ from those observed with adults. The chapter concludes that further research is needed to clarify its impact.

Chapter 5 highlights the crucial role of motivation in children's L2 writing, showing how motivation shapes how learners approach tasks and influences both performance and long-term development. While studies show its positive impact, research remains fragmented, and the chapter calls for further work to understand how motivation interacts with task design and learner progress.

Chapter 6 synthesizes the knowledge developed in the earlier chapters, highlighting the main findings on collaboration, feedback, task repetition, and motivation. At the same time, the author states that although progress has been made in characterizing child L2 writing, the field remains underdeveloped and suggests directions for future research.

Finally, Chapter 7 offers practical teaching recommendations, stressing realistic expectations, the integration of different writing approaches, and the value of cross-curricular tasks. It provides clear guidelines for implementing L2 writing in classrooms, positioning pedagogy as the link between research and practice.

Amparo Lázaro-Ibarrola's *Child L2 Writers* succeeds in drawing attention to a field of SLA that has long been overlooked. By focusing on learners aged 9 to 12, the book demonstrates how cognitive development, motivation, and social dynamics shape children's engagement with writing tasks and highlights the pedagogical value of integrating writing meaningfully into elementary classrooms. The consistent use of summaries, examples, and visual aids makes complex research accessible, while the discussion of methodological limitations offers a realistic picture of the challenges inherent in studying this age group.

The volume's greatest strength lies in its dual contribution: it consolidates existing knowledge while persistently calling for more child-focused L2 research. Although the evidence reviewed is often fragmented or inconclusive, the book does not frame this as a weakness but as an opportunity for further investigation. By combining theoretical insights with practical guidelines, *Child L2 Writers* provides a valuable reference for researchers and teachers alike, making a strong case for granting child L2 writers, as the title suggests, "a room of their own."

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BOOK REVIEWS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Multiliteracies, Multimodality, and Learning by Design in Second Language Learning and Teacher Education

Agustín Reyes-Torres, María Estela Brisk, and Manel Lacoret, eds.

Routledge. 2025. 243 pp.
ISBN: 9781032620510 (hbk)

The edited volume *Multiliteracies, Multimodality, and Learning by Design in Second Language Learning and Teacher Education,* compiled by Agustín Reyes-Torres, María Estela Brisk, and Manel Lacoret, is part of Routledge's *series Multiliteracies and Second Language Education.* This series has a focus on the integration of the multiliteracies framework in L2 teacher pedagogies, particularly on the Learning by Design approach. The main aim of the editors of this particular volume in the series is to provide pre-service and more experienced teachers with both accessible theoretical background and practical ideas and resources to help them embed multiliteracies and multimodal teaching paradigms into their everyday professional practice. In order to achieve that purpose, throughout the volume, they provide well-articulated theoretically informed insights and practical frameworks for addressing the multifaceted language and literacy needs of learners across multilingual contexts all over the world.

Since the New London Group (1996) explored the scope of multiliteracies pedagogies and Learning by Design (henceforth, LbyD), there have been a considerable number of publications about this instructional framework, emphasizing its potential in L2 learning contexts (Kern, 2003; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Zapata, 2022). In recent years, scholars like Coyle and Meyer (2022) have also taken some of the main tenets of this approach, such as the importance of transfer, to the sphere of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which serves as further proof of its relevance as well as its potential in a variety of contexts and educational frameworks. Nevertheless, adopting new teaching methodologies presents challenges for educators nowadays in their new roles as "mediators and as active co-constructors of knowledge

whose main objective is to design a learning pathway that leads students to make use of ideas, sensations, feelings, and images that they draw from their on linguistic, literary, and previous experiences to create new thoughts" (Reyes-Torres, Brisk and Latorre 2025, 1).

In this demanding context, the volume by Reyes-Torres, Brisk and Latorre contributes as a key text to the dissemination of the LbyD model by providing guidance to experienced and pre-service educators so they can confidently face the demands of an educational ecosystem in constant (r)evolution.

In the introduction of the volume, the editors provide an overview of the concept of Literacy from a multidimensional and multimodal approach, providing highly clarifying explanations for concepts that are reiterated throughout the different chapters, including the idea of teaching as a process of design and the components of the Knowledge Processes Framework (Cope and Kalantzis 2015): experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying. This introduction, therefore, offers a valuable foundational perspective that enhances comprehension of the volume as a whole.

The book is then divided into three sections, in line with the purposes described earlier in this review. The focus of Part I is to deal with theoretical aspects. In the three chapters of this section, the authors map out the main principles of Multiliteracies and Learning by Design using examples of multimodal resources. Tara McIlroy and Christian Ludgiw (Chapter 1, 3-28) delve into the idea of born-digital literature and its multimodal and interactive nature. They present a study carried out with higher education Japanese students enrolled in an L2 language and literature class, concluding that "integrating born-digital literature into education can provide a rich and multifaceted learning experience for students while preparing them for the digital age" (25). Furthermore, Cristina Boccia (Chapter 2, 29-46) presents the LbyD framework from an experience using Photo-Stories from Instagram. Boccia argues that Photo-Stories are a great source to explore both technical and semiotic aspects of text construction within specific social contexts, as they provide insights into the attitudes and values of a particular community. In the last chapter of this section, Idoia Elola and Ana Oskoz address the Hheritage Language/L2 writing curriculum from an awareness that any genres need to match students' future real-life needs whilst ensuring that they also master the traditional academic genres.

Part II of the volume moves on from the theory into pedagogical applications. In Chapter 4 (67-85), Beatrice Dupuy and Tara Hashemi present a case study research based on the use of Infographics by French L2 students at a U.S. university. They argue that one of the aspects participants highlighted in their feedback was that having to design an infographic improved their synthesis, organizational, and communication skills in general, aspects that are key both in professional and academic environments. In contrast, in Chapter 5 (86-102), Kathy A. Mills, Alinta Brown and Amanda Gutierrez consider the great potential of virtual reality with L2 young learners (9-10 year olds) at an elementary school in Australia. Through virtual painting experiences, students were able to discuss the use (and misuse) of public space for artistic expression, negotiate meaning through colors and textures, and explore their differences as well as their shared identities "without judgement" (97). Of particular interest in this chapter is Massey's notion of "throwntogetherness" (97). Chapter 6 (103-121) continues exploring multimodality and multiliteracies to enhance children's L2 learning, in this case, literary vocabulary through the dialogue that occurs when discussing stories and allowing students to make use of their full linguistic repertoire by employing translanguaging techniques, for instance. As the authors state, "much significant literary vocabulary is found not *in* narrative texts, but in the words use to *talk about* these stories, especially words to describe characters' traits and emotions. Another is that children can learn many more words […] when they focus not on *definitions* but on *usage*" (103). They present a variety of practical pedagogies, such as scaffolding vocabulary network techniques. Chapter 7 (122-138), by Laura Flores, is a case study in Latin America with a focus on "the relevance of a teacher's role as a multimodal scaffolder and mediator to generate learning opportunities for all students" (126). An EFL curriculum cycle based around World Famous Paintings is presented as an example of this mediator role through an exploration of oscillations in three exchanges of classroom dialogue. This part of the book concludes with Chapter 8 (139-161), by Len Unsworth, Phung Tien Nguyen and Thu Ngo. The pedagogical experiences in this chapter take place in very different contexts. The first one is based in Vietnam, with highly fluent university students of English. The research explores students' ability to recognise, interpret and express nuance attitudinal meanings. By using multimodal resources and scaffolding techniques, students managed to consolidate and extend their evaluative repertoires as well as develop metalanguage, which the authors claim can help even lower-achieving students. The second pedagogical experience takes place in Australia, with 9-10 year olds. The children use a comic creator software to explore moral dilemmas for which they have to use judgement expressions. Again, researchers employ scaffolding techniques and metalanguage to enhance the learning experience. The authors highlight that "the approaches described here epitomize the pedagogic axiom of seeking to ensure that students are simultaneously learning language, learning through language, and learning about language" (157).

The volume's final section, Part III, engages with the importance of L2 Teacher Education, an underlying topic throughout the book, since it is not possible to apply changes to pedagogical environments without well-trained teachers. There are four chapters in this section. In Chapter 9 (165-181), Christelle Palpacuer Lee, from her experience in the United States, reflects on the value of teacher collaborative practices. She presents the outline and tasks of the World

Languages Methods course for graduates. Through an analysis of artistic representations, students develop "professional identities and trajectories as multiliterate and multilingual educators committed to social justice and equity" (170). Even a campus strike serves as an opportunity for what the author describes as "to cultivate a sense of agency" (178). In Chapter 10 (182-199), Kate Paesani explores a model in U.S. postsecondary language departments, where the author identifies a lack of professional development training that is having an impact on students' learning experiences. Against this background, Paesani argues that LbyD can be "a solution to the language-content divide" (186). In Chapter 11 (200-219), Agustín Reyes-Torres presents a didactic sequence assignment for Spanish pre-service teachers that "provides them with an opportunity to step into the role of L2 educators and engage in reflective practice" (204). Furthermore, through a case study methodology with three pre-service teachers that took the course, Reyes-Torres concludes that, whilst participants in the study were aware of LbyD's impact on their readiness for a globalised professional world, there is a need to further explore "the long-term impact of multiliteracies pedagogy on student outcomes and the demands of the lesson preparations" (217). In his final remarks, Reyes-Torres highlights the importance of ongoing professional development programmes and mentoring schemes. The book concludes with Chapter 12 (220-237), where Sandra Stadler-Heer introduces a German course on Artificial Intelligence for pre-service teachers with a multimodal, LbyD approach. As previous authors in Part III of the book, Stadler-Heer supports the need for quality, well-designed ongoing professional programmes for teachers, who constantly have to adapt to the challenges of a profession which is so intertwined with societal shifts and advancements.

In conclusion, this volume offers a repertoire of second language learning and teacher education experiences around the world with a focus on the development of Multiliteracies that employ multimodal texts and are structured through the pedagogical approach Learning by Design. This is done so from an awareness of the key agency of teachers, particularly in EAL/L2 environments. This is well-linked with current trends in foreign language education, such as Piccardo and North's reconceptualization of the learner as a social agent in the CEFR Companion Volume, emphasizing that language is fundamentally a social practice. Rather than passive recipients, students are seen as active participants who co-construct meaning, mobilize their full linguistic repertoires, and engage in authentic communicative tasks within diverse social contexts. Within this framework, this volume constitutes a landmark contribution to provide sound theoretical grounding as well as a variety of practical approaches and course design ideas for both current and pre-service teachers.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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A Nation, not a Parish. The Homewhere-s and Elsewhere- of 1930s Irish Culture

Asensio Peral, Germán, Madalina Armie and Verónica Membrive, eds.

Peter Lang. 2005. 266 pp.
ISBN 978 1 80374 848 1

The present volume, carefully edited, forms part of the longstanding and influential *Reimagining Ireland* series (Peter Lang), inaugurated in 2018 with a volume by the series editor, Eamon Maher. Encompassing more than one hundred contributions, the series provides a rigorous interdisciplinary forum for the study of Irish identity, culture, and history, foregrounding the negotiation of national narratives in the context of social, political, and postcolonial transformations. The editors of this volume, Germán Asensio Peral, Madalina Armie, and Verónica Membrive, are distinguished scholars at the University of Almería whose expertise significantly enriches the study of Irish literature. Dr. Asensio Peral has published extensively on Flann O'Brien and Irish literary traditions; Dr. Armie is recognized for her work on contemporary Irish short fiction, including *The Irish Short Story at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge 2023), and *Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature: Wounds of the Body and the Soul* (Routledge 2024), also co-edited by Dr. Membrive, whose research focuses on Irish literature and Hiberno-Spanish cultural relations. Collectively, their scholarship demonstrates a sustained engagement with themes of identity, gender, and cultural transformation in Ireland, an engagement that aligns seamlessly with the series' objectives.

A Nation, not a Parish offers a nuanced and well-supported re-evaluation of 1930s Irish culture, challenging earlier insular interpretations that confined it to insular nationalism. "Ireland's coming to terms with its own identity and position in the convoluted global context has been definitely a challenging and painful process," the editors state (Asensio et al. 2025, 2). Through the initial invention of Irish identity in the revolutionary period (Kiberd 1995) and its reinvention during the Celtic Tiger (Kirby et al. 2002), the commodification of Irishness intensified—a process incisively analysed by Joe Cleary in *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (2007), which illuminates how late-capitalist dynamics reshaped national self-representation. However, closer introspection reveals that Ireland inhabits the unpredictability and Protean nature of borders and limits. As the editors affirm, citing Fintan O'Toole's: "Emigration means […] that the people and the land are no longer coterminous" (O'Toole 1998, 4).

Grounded in this paradoxical notion that Ireland has evolved within and beyond the nation-state, the volume foregrounds the dynamic interplay between domestic and international influences—what the editors term '*homewhere-s*' and '*elsewhere-s*' (Asensio et al. 2025, 4)—on Irish cultural production. This conceptual framework facilitates a more complex understanding of how Irish writers and artists engaged with global political movements, artistic trends, and transnational networks. As noted in the introduction, the book aims to "rebuild the milieu of the 1930s by observing the dialogues between the *homewhere-s* and *elsewhere-s* where Ireland's cultural legacy and cultural products have been shaped" (4). This approach not only enriches our understanding of the period but also addresses a notable gap in Irish cultural studies, given that the 1930s have often been overshadowed by more canonically prominent decades.

In this sense, *A Nation, not a Parish* performs a necessary bibliographical intervention. While earlier works such as *R. F. Foster's Modern Ireland:1600–1972* (1988) and Terence *Brown's Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922–2002* (2004) established influential frameworks for modern Irish history, they tended to subsume the 1930s within broader national narratives and to privilege political over cultural analysis. The present volume revises that historiographic tendency by foregrounding the decade's transnational exchanges, aesthetic experimentation, and the interplay between local and global currents. In recent decades, studies such as Joost Augusteijn's *The Irish 1930s: New Perspectives (1999)*, John Brannigan's *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Context, 1890–1970* (2009), *Paige Reynold's Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle (2007)*, and Joe Cleary's edited *Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism* (2017) have begun to re-evaluate the cultural complexity of interwar Ireland. Yet, *A Nation, not a Parish* extends these revisionist efforts by integrating literary, historical and cultural methodologies within the conceptual frame of the 'homewhere-s' and 'elsewhere-s.' In doing so, it resonates with the transnational and postcolonial perspectives articulated in David Loyd's *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity, 1800–2000* (2011), further consolidating the shift from insular to interconnected readings of Irish modernity.

The chapters collected in the volume are diverse yet cohesive, addressing a wide range of genres and topics. Several explore the influence of European modernism on Irish artistic practices and the impact of political events on cultural production and international networks. Others examine intellectual life and film culture, and the presence of Irish women writers in the global literary marketplace. The essays consistently integrate close textual analysis with attention to intertextual, cultural, and historical contexts. Among the most engaging contributions are those addressing anti-fascism and the gothic; Irish poetry's dialogue with other literary traditions; the attempted censorship of jazz music and dance; and the question of internationality and literary Irish-language translation. Of particular relevance for readers interested in the Irish-Spanish connection and anti-fascist activism are the chapters on transnational radical networks in the 1930s, on Máirin Mitchell, on Peadar O'Donnell, and on Dorothy Macardle. The volume will undoubtedly appeal to academic researchers working in diverse areas of Irish cultural studies, while its breadth of scope provides a comprehensive view of the multiplicity and non-linearity that characterised Irish culture in the 1930s.

Significantly, *A Nation, not a Parish* succeeds not only in theorising an identity of 'homewhere-s' and 'elsewhere-s' beyond monolithic narratives but also, through its very structure—complex, heterogeneous, and yet coherent—embodies the conceptual framework articulated in its introduction. Its organization mirrors the polyphonic and interconnected cultural field it sets out to reconstruct, as the chapters move fluidly between literary criticism, historical contextualization, and cultural theory. Rather than grouping essays according to disciplinary boundaries, the editors have opted for a flexible, dialogic sequencing that invites readers to trace resonances and dissonances across sections. This design encourages an interpretive mode that mirrors the book's own central thesis: that Irish identity in the 1930s, was not a fixed entity but a network of dynamic relations extending beyond national borders—like the authors in the volume themselves.

The intellectual density of the volume does not compromise its readability. Each contribution is written with clarity and precision, and the editors' introduction provides an effective conceptual roadmap that orients readers through the diverse case studies and voices. In this sense, the collection achieves an appreciated equilibrium between academic rigour and accessibility.

In evaluating the book, it is evident that the editors have achieved their purpose of broadening the scope of Irish cultural studies by curating well-researched essays that contribute to ongoing debates about the intersections of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and gender. The collection's methodological rigour, theoretical sophistication, and transnational reach establish a substantial contribution to Irish Studies. It will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and postgraduate students interested in the transnational dimensions of Irish cultural history.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The Hollow Half: A Memoir of Bodies and Borders

Aziza, Sarah

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ISBN 9781646222227

1. Introduction

Palestinian-American journalist, translator, and essayist Sarah Aziza, with family roots in ʻIbdis and Deir al-Balah (Gaza), has published award-winning work in *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Paris Review*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *Best American Essays*, among others. A former Fulbright fellow in Jordan and a recipient of multiple Pulitzer Center grants, she brings to her debut memoir a rare combination of political urgency and literary experimentation. Published by Catapult, a press noted for amplifying marginalised voices and hybrid genres, *The Hollow Half: A Memoir of Bodies and Borders* situates itself within a growing corpus of memoirs that bridge the personal and the geopolitical.

The book intertwines Aziza's struggle with anorexia and the diasporic dislocations of her Palestinian family. Rather than presenting a unified narrative of self, the memoir insists on fracture. This formal choice is not arbitrary but stems from the very condition of embodied subjectivity. As Aziza writes, "[t]he body is our first field of knowledge, said Ngũgũ wa Thiong'o, and I see how mine is contoured by imaginations not my own" (2025, 338), the self is never singular or self-contained but always already shaped by cultural inscriptions and the gazes of others as the fractured form of the memoir mirrors this ontological reality rather than an aesthetic whim. This notion of embodiment as always-already shaped by others resonates with the emphasis of memoir studies on the relational and performative nature of life writing (Smith and Watson 2001, 48). Aziza's memoir exemplifies this claim by refusing to stabilise identity, allowing the vulnerabilities of the body to stage subjectivity itself. Memoir studies scholars have also highlighted how autobiography is never simply a transparent window onto a stable and pre-existing self but rather the staging of selfhood in narrative (Eakin 1999, 4). Aziza's refusal of closure echoes this theoretical insight; the memoir does not reveal an essence of self but enacts the continuous negotiation between memory, body, and history. At the same time, her work intersects with what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory, which is the transmission of trauma across generations (Hirsch 2012, 6). This transmission is not only thematic but also structural as silence, gaps, and fragments replicate the unspeakability of exile and dispossession. In this sense, *The Hollow Half* not only recounts personal illness or inherits absences, but also turns the absence into its central aesthetic principle.

My argument in this review is that Aziza's memoir makes a distinctive contribution to contemporary life writing by embodying fracture, silence, and transgenerational affect as both theme and form as literary strategies. While its lyrical

style may risk aestheticising suffering as a perennial tension in the ethics of representing trauma, the book expands the boundaries of memoir and provides valuable insights for scholars of life writing, illness narratives, and diaspora studies.

2. Body

2.1. Content and Structure

The Hollow Half does not unfold chronologically. Instead, it braids together Aziza's near-fatal hospitalisation for anorexia in 2019, the silences surrounding the displacement of her family from Gaza, and her ongoing negotiations of identity as a Palestinian-American. She writes, "All summer, as I lay in the hospital, Gaza trembled and burned" (Aziza 2025, 200). Here, the simultaneity of bodily collapse and geopolitical violence underscores the inseparability of the intimate and the global. Besides, family memory surfaces in fragments. Aziza recalls her grandmother and father's ties to Gaza: "My grandmother never saw my father's dream-plot of Gazan land. My father visited the site only once, in 1996" (Aziza 2025, 304). Elsewhere, childhood lessons entwine with diaspora identity: "Daddy is from a place called Palestine, he said in a lesson captured by my mother on the family's camcorder" (Aziza 2025, 58). These moments highlight how silence and naming, or their absence, structure diasporic inheritance. This compositional strategy mirrors what Eakin (1999, 43) terms the "relational self," which is an autobiography that is always situated in networks of family, culture, and history. The fragmentary structure of the memoir resists the restitution model of illness narratives, enacting instead the incompleteness of memory and identity.

2.2. Comparative Framework: Memoir Studies and Similar Works

Aziza's memoir can be placed alongside other diasporic and feminist life writing. Najla Said's *Looking for Palestine: Growing Up Confused in an Arab-American Family* (2013) also situates individual coming-of-age within Palestinian displacement, but adheres more closely to chronological convention. Elif Shafak's *Black Milk: On Writing, Motherhood, and the Harem Within* (2007), while not diasporic in the same way, engages the female body in crisis yet moves toward resolution. Aziza, by contrast, refuses neat closure, aligning more with Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015), which similarly embraces fragmentation as form and ethic. In this case, Arthur Frank's typology of illness narratives, such as restitution, chaos, and quest, clarifies Aziza's innovation. *The Hollow Half* refuses restitution and does not resolve into quest; nor does it collapse into chaos. Instead, it insists on fracture as permanent condition as the voice of the memoir continually circles back, weaving silences into the text rather than seeking their resolution (Frank 1995, 27).

2.3. Illness, Embodiment, and Politics

By presenting anorexia as both personal pathology and political symptom, Aziza complicates the illness memoir. The memoir suggests that hunger cannot be detached from the geopolitics of blockade and displacement (Aziza 2025, 308-9). This perspective recalls Susan Bordo's reading of eating disorders as "central ills of our culture" inscribed on women's bodies (Bordo 1993, 139), but extends the analysis beyond gendered culture to the national and transgenerational. Within this context, *The Hollow Half* also resonates with Judith Butler's account of bodily precarity under conditions of political violence (Butler 2004, 29). Aziza's body emerges as doubly vulnerable to the biological effects of starvation and to the inherited silences of exile. The memoir thus foregrounds the entanglement of personal vulnerability with collective histories.

2.4. Postmemory and Silence

Also, Hirsch's (2012) concept of postmemory illuminates Aziza's focus on familial silence. The absence of speech, what is not told of Palestine, becomes itself a form of inheritance. In this sense, Aziza's refusal to eat parallels the unspoken grief transmitted across generations. Her memoir attempts to give literary form to this unsayable. Leigh Gilmore (2001, 3) has noted the impossible demand for "truth telling" that memoirs often bear. Aziza resists this demand, privileging affective truth: "Sometimes, for an instant, the colours shift together and knit something like joy. In these moments, I am made dense. A pool reflecting stars I know but have not seen" (Aziza 2025, 269). By weaving dream, vision, and embodied perception into her narrative, she challenges conventional claim of the memoir

to factual transparency.

2.5. Evaluation: Strengths and Limitations

Aziza's purpose in writing the book seems to be to articulate how personal illness and familial displacement are inseparable, and to turn silence itself into a literary strategy. In this respect, she largely succeeds. The strength of the memoir lies in its capacity to enact, rather than only describe, fracture and silence. Its lyrical style immerses the reader in disorientation, enacting what Smith and Watson (2001, 64-5) describe as contested identities and shifting truths of autobiography. The refusal of closure is not a weakness but an ethical stance, mirroring the irresolvable nature of trauma and displacement. At the same time, the density of metaphor in the work like its reliance on poetic rather than expository style, may distance readers outside literary studies. Some passages risk aestheticising suffering, raising ethical questions about representation. Also, while political context is evoked, particularly regarding Gaza, it is not always developed with historical or analytical depth. Readers seeking sustained geopolitical analysis may find this dimension underexplored.

3. Conclusion

The Hollow Half is a daring and necessary work of contemporary life writing. Its hybrid form, refusal of restitution, and entwinement of anorexia and diaspora place it at the forefront of memoirs that expand the possibilities of the genre. The memoir contributes in two ways as it illuminates the intersections of personal illness and geopolitical displacement, and it models memoir as a form that can embrace incompleteness and silence as truth. For scholars of life writing, trauma, and diaspora, Aziza's text offers a notable case study in how memoir can embody the unsayable.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Narrar la herida: deudas con la memoria en la narrativa contemporánea de mujeres

Barba-Guerrero, Paula, ed.

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ISBN: 978-84-1118-565-3 (PDF)

Introducción

En un mundo globalizado caracterizado por lo que diversos autores denominan "la era de las crisis" —desde migratorias, económicas, culturales, bélicas y ambientales—, el libro colectivo *Narrar la herida. Deudas con la memoria en la narrativa contemporánea de mujeres*, editado por Paula Barba Guerrero, surge como una propuesta crítica y plural para enfrentar los desafíos que plantea la contemporaneidad respecto a la memoria, la subjetividad femenina y la representación cultural.

Desde el inicio, Barba Guerrero define claramente el marco teórico del volumen, abordando el impacto del neoliberalismo sobre la precarización de la vida, los retrocesos en políticas de género y la aparición de discursos antifeministas en el espacio público (Butler, 2024; Brown, 2006). En este contexto, la literatura escrita por mujeres se configura como un espacio de resistencia, capaz de documentar la "cotidianidad de la crisis" (Berlant, 2011) y de articular voces que cuestionan la feminidad normativa y reclaman autonomía en la representación.

El concepto de "deuda con la memoria" es el núcleo de análisis. De acuerdo con las ideas de Marianne Hirsch (2008, 2019) acerca de la posmemoria, el texto sostiene que la literatura femenina no solo recupera vivencias pasadas, sino que también enfrenta los olvidos colectivos y cuestiona relatos dominantes. Se propone descentralizar el Estado-nación como marco de referencia desde una visión global (Jay, 2010; Fishkin, 2005), comprendiendo cómo lo local y lo global se intersecan en narrativas que reflejan las tensiones esenciales del presente (Cvetkovich y Kellner, 1997).

La tesis principal sostiene que narrar la herida no es únicamente un acto testimonial: es un espacio de visibilidad y reparación simbólica donde las creadoras reconfiguran memorias, cuerpos y discursos. Los capítulos, que abarcan desde la literatura afroamericana y las memorias indígenas hasta la música pop o la fantasía neovictoriana, componen un mapa diverso y necesario para los estudios actuales de memoria y género.

Heredar las crisis: la etnicidad en la memoria cultural norteamericana

Los dos primeros capítulos tratan sobre las herencias traumáticas en el entorno estadounidense. La novela *What We Lose*, de Zinzi Clemmons, es examinada por María Jennifer Estévez Yanes como una meditación acerca del legado materno y la posmemoria afroamericana. La pérdida íntima de la protagonista, según su lectura, se vincula con una memoria colectiva caracterizada por la violencia racial y se defiende la escritura como un acto de reparación ante la invisibilidad histórica de las mujeres negras.

Por su parte, Celia Cores Antepazo se enfoca en *The Night Watchman* (2020) *de Louise Erdrich*, colocando la memoria dentro del marco de las comunidades indígenas americanas. La novela de Erdrich se transforma en un testimonio ficticio que visibiliza la explotación de las mujeres indígenas, además de retomar el enfrentamiento entre los Chippewa y las políticas de terminación del gobierno estadounidense. La resiliencia de las mujeres se presenta como una táctica política y narrativa en respuesta a siglos de deshumanización.

Ambas contribuciones evidencian la memoria como deuda heredada, donde lo personal y lo colectivo se funden. En línea con Eyerman (2001) y Jacobs (2023), el volumen tiene razón al ubicar la etnicidad en el centro de la memoria cultural contemporánea.

Encarnar conflictos: la crisis del testimonio y la narración del trauma

La segunda parte expande el panorama hacia relatos de genocidio, represión y guerra. Daniel Escandell Montiel examina los recuerdos de María Luisa Elío—exiliada del franquismo—y de Lucie Soullier—reportera de la guerra en Siria—, proponiendo un análisis de la mediación del trauma a través de soportes diversos, incluidos los videojuegos, lo cual complica la transmisión del horror más allá del testimonio escrito convencional.

Viorica Patea, por su parte, investiga la poesía testimonial de Ana Blandiana, poniendo particular atención a los poemas que fueron censurados en Rumanía durante el comunismo. La autora destaca la dimensión ética de la poesía, entendida como resistencia ante la represión política y como vehículo de denuncia a través de los cuerpos femeninos silenciados.

Por último, Sara Casco-Solís examina el testimonio de Clemantine Wamariya sobre el genocidio de Ruanda desde una perspectiva feminista y poscolonial. Su análisis revela cómo la memoria individual se convierte en un acto de visibilización de violencias estructurales y en una herramienta para reconfigurar la identidad colectiva.

Este bloque es particularmente valioso debido a su diversidad geográfica (Rumanía, España, Ruanda y Siria) y al hecho de que promueve el testimonio como un espacio de agencia y resiliencia. De acuerdo con Whitlock (2015), Gilmore (2001) y Edkins (2003), el testimonio de mujeres no solo documenta, sino que transforma y reclama reconocimiento.

Reescribir el pasado: el mito en crisis desde una perspectiva interseccional

La última sección del libro trata sobre la relectura de mitos culturales desde géneros no tradicionales. Ana Tejero Marín analiza la novela *A Natural History of Dragons*, de Marie Brennan, en el contexto de la literatura neovictoriana. Su estudio revela que la fantasía es capaz de reconfigurar el arquetipo de la "Nueva Mujer," cuestionando los estereotipos de género y defendiendo el rol que las mujeres tuvieron en la ciencia y la sociedad durante la época victoriana.

Por otra parte, al examinar el mito de Lolita en la música pop de Belén Aguilera y Lana Del Rey, Alejandro Sánchez Cabrera presenta un capítulo novedoso. Aquí, la intermedialidad es fundamental: la música pop, como una esfera cultural de gran alcance, se transforma en un medio para reinterpretar relatos complejos relacionados con la sexualización de las mujeres, proporcionando nuevas lecturas que varían entre el empoderamiento y la mercantilización.

Estos capítulos son probablemente los que tienen más riesgo en el volumen, ya que se alejan de los marcos más convencionales de la investigación sobre la memoria. No obstante, representan una valiosa inversión para expandir los géneros y los medios en los que se reescribe la memoria de las mujeres. El diálogo entre lo popular y lo literario evidencia la vivacidad de este ámbito de estudio.

Evaluación crítica

La fortaleza de la introducción teórica y la variedad de los casos analizados son las principales virtudes de *Narrar la herida*. Paula Barba Guerrero contextualiza la obra en el cruce entre género, globalización y neoliberalismo, estableciendo un marco transnacional que es crucial para comprender las narrativas de mujeres contemporáneas. El libro adquiere mayor relevancia académica al incorporar voces diversas y al apostar por la interseccionalidad.

El volumen también se distingue por su interdisciplinariedad, ya que fusiona poesía, novela, ensayo, testimonio y canción. Esto lo transforma en una obra que no puede faltar para quienes investigan temas de memoria, estudios de género o literatura comparada.

No obstante, la amplitud temática conlleva algunos riesgos:

En primer lugar, la ausencia de un diálogo explícito entre los capítulos puede causar una fragmentación. La obra ofrece una amplia gama de casos, pero es responsabilidad del lector establecer vínculos más profundos entre ellos.

En segundo lugar, a pesar de que la perspectiva transnacional es evidente, la atención limitada al mundo hispánico, excepto en el caso de María Luisa Elío, contrasta con el predominio de ejemplos globales y anglosajones. El proyecto habría ganado en coherencia si se hubiera incluido a más autoras contemporáneas de España o Latinoamérica.

A pesar de estas limitaciones, el volumen se establece como una contribución importante al campo, dialogando con obras anteriores como *Women Mobilizing Memory* (Hirsch et al., 2019) o *Postcolonial Life Narratives* (Whitlock, 2015).

Conclusión

Narrar la herida es, en definitiva, una obra colectiva que consigue articular las múltiples deudas que la sociedad mantiene con la memoria de las mujeres. A través de la literatura, el testimonio, la poesía y la cultura popular, los capítulos del volumen muestran cómo las narrativas femeninas desafían los regímenes de inequidad y recuperan experiencias silenciadas.

El libro ofrece una visión plural y transnacional, que, si bien podría beneficiarse de un mayor diálogo interno, constituye una contribución indispensable para quienes investigan la intersección entre memoria, género y representación. Su mayor logro es demostrar que la herida no es solo trauma, sino también posibilidad de reconocimiento y de esperanza, como señala Ahmed (2017): una invitación a imaginar futuros más justos.

En definitiva, *Narrar la herida* es una obra en conjunto que logra expresar las numerosas deudas sociales con el recuerdo de las mujeres. Los capítulos del volumen demuestran, mediante la poesía, el testimonio, la literatura y la cultura popular, cómo las narrativas de las mujeres confrontan los regímenes de inequidad y rescatan vivencias que habían sido silenciadas.

El libro proporciona una perspectiva plural y transnacional, la cual, aunque podría enriquecerse con un diálogo interno más extenso, representa un aporte esencial para aquellos que estudian la intersección entre género, representación y memoria. Su principal éxito consiste en demostrar que la herida no es únicamente un traumatismo, sino también una oportunidad para el reconocimiento y la esperanza, tal como lo indica Ahmed (2017): una invitación a imaginar futuros más equitativos.Recomendado para investigadores, docentes y estudiantes de literatura contemporánea, estudios de género y memory studies, *Narrar la herida* confirma la importancia de seguir escuchando y narrando las voces de las mujeres que, desde la herida, construyen memoria.

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(Re)Escribiendo el pasado: genealogías feministas y relecturas neovictorianas en tiempos de crisis

Borham-Puyal, Miriam, ed.

Colección Encuentros: Culturas y Literatura.
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El cuarto volumen de la colección *Encuentros: Culturas y Literatura* —serie dedicada a difundir investigaciones punteras sobre literatura y cultura decimonónicas desde una perspectiva multidisciplinar— nos vuelve a ofrecer una obra de gran impacto académico dentro de los estudios interdisciplinares de las culturas y literaturas anglófonas del siglo XIX: *(Re)Escribiendo el pasado: Narrativas feministas (neo)victorianas ante tiempos de cambio y crisis*, editado por Miriam Borham-Puyal. Profesora titular en la Universidad de Salamanca e investigadora principal del grupo iLAC (*Intersecciones: Literatura, Arte y Cultura en el Limen*), Borham-Puyal enmarca el volumen en un ambicioso proyecto de "recuperación de escritoras y sus obras, así como de voces femeninas olvidadas" con el objetivo de "reconstruir una historia literaria y cultural sesgada" (Borham-Puyal 2024, 9). En este volumen, Borham-Puyal reúne a ocho académicos y a un traductor en torno a la idea de dar visibilidad a sus investigaciones novedosas y multidisciplinares sobre textos y autoras anglosajonas del siglo XIX cuyas vidas y obras siguen resonando en la realidad social, cultural y literaria de nuestros días.

El volumen se inscribe en varias tendencias críticas que han cobrado relevancia en la última década. En primer lugar, la reivindicación de una historiografía literaria feminista "politemporal," en la que el pasado se reconfigura desde el presente "a través de la interpretación de estos vestigios y su reconfiguración en una narrativa histórica" (Browne 2014, 51). En segundo lugar, la consolidación de los *estudios neo-victorianos* como espacio de análisis del siglo XIX en su intersección con las preocupaciones contemporáneas (Heilmann y Llewellyn 2010, 4). Sin embargo, como la propia Borham-Puyal señala, aún persiste la necesidad de recuperar voces femeninas invisibilizadas, no solo rescatando sus textos sino también releyendo su impacto cultural más allá de los márgenes en los que la crítica canónica las relegó. En este sentido, este volumen dialoga con trabajos previos como los de Kaplan (2007), Kolke (2020) y Gerzina (2003), ampliando la conversación hacia nuevas intersecciones disciplinarias.

La obra se articula en dos secciones: la primera, "Redes femeninas decimonónicas: construyendo narrativas de cambio," se centra en autoras y activistas del XIX que resignificaron su tiempo; la segunda, "(Re)visitando las crisis que nos crearon: (re)escribiendo miedos patriarcales desde el siglo XIX hasta nuestros días," explora los ecos de estas genealogías en la literatura y cultura contemporáneas, especialmente a través del prisma neovictoriano.

Explorando los paralelismos entre las redes espiritistas y las primeras ecofeministas que surgieron a partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, el capítulo de Clara Contreras Ameduri nos presenta a la medium femenina como un espacio de agencia interespecie y de cuestionamiento de la jerarquía patriarcal. Examinando la obra de autoras ocultistas y activistas vegetarianas como Sophia de Morgan, Florence Marryat, o Anna Kingsford, Ameduri nos muestra como la "verbalización mediumística" (2024, 31) puede ser considerada como una renegociación de "las fronteras interespecie para señalar dinámicas de poder que excluían las voces femeninas y alterhumanas del discurso histórico" (32). De esta manera, Ameduri muestra cómo estas autoras espiritistas se convirtieron en precursoras de discursos antiespecistas que asentaría las bases de futuros movimientos pro-derechos de los animales y ecologístas, siguiendo la línea de pensamiento de Carol J. Adams (1990).

Isabel González Díaz traza una genealogía de "aguafiestas" (2024, 48) en torno a las figuras de Emma Goldman y Djuna Barnes, subrayando cómo sus vidas y escritos pusieron en crisis las categorías de género y sexualidad. La autora recurre al prototipo de la "Nueva Mujer" de finales de siglo para problematizar las narrativas hegemónicas del sufragismo, mostrando la capacidad de estas mujeres para abrir camino a los márgenes de la feminidad a través de prácticas vitales alternativas, que cuestionaron "los estereotipos y las categorías de género" (65) y contribuyeron en "la creación de las redes de apoyo que conformaron las comunidades de mujeres modernistas" (55). Aquí el volumen contribuye a un debate central: la necesidad de superar las lecturas heteronormativas de las reivindicaciones sufragistas de la primera ola feminista, integrando perspectivas queer y racializadas (Rabinovitch-Fox 2017) que habían sido obviadas previamente por la crítica.

El ensayo de Juan Pedro Martín Villarreal aborda la representación del suicidio femenino en la cultura decimonónica, desmontando el fetichismo patriarcal que transformó la figura de la suicida en icono estético —desde la Ofelia shakespeariana de Bachelard hasta las "fallen women" de la pintura prerrafaelita (2024, 72). El autor cuestiona cómo esta estetización oscurece las causas sociales y políticas del sufrimiento femenino, reivindicando las escrituras de la "Nueva Mujer" como respuesta crítica "para denunciar en qué medida la representación artística de las mujeres respondía a la proyección de los miedos y anhelos masculinos" (87). Su análisis se enlaza con las lecturas de Bronfen (1992) y Showalter (1985), pero aporta un énfasis particular en la operatividad política de la representación enmarcada dentro del discurso reivindicativo de la "New Woman Writing" en relatos como el de *The Cold Embrace* de Mary Elizabeth Braddon.

Laura Monrós-Gaspar y Sarai Ramas Cedres, quienes fueron autoras del primer volumen de la colección, *Mujer y entretenimiento en el hogar victoriano* (2023), examinan el teatro sufragista de L. S. Phibbs, destacando cómo los clubes femeninos y las asociaciones políticas, como la AFL, NUWSS o la WSPU (2024, 94), utilizaron las artes escénicas como herramienta de concienciación ya que "utilizan el teatro como vehículo conductor de su protesta social" (96). La inclusión de traducciones al español de *Reunión de madres* y *La pierna de Jim* (201-211), a cargo de Miguel Teruel Pozas, constituye un aporte fundamental, pues abre a la comunidad hispanohablante a textos poco accesibles hasta ahora, que se pueden encontrar en los dos últimos capítulos del volumen que conforman el anexo.

En la segunda sección, Marta Bernabéu Lorenzo vuelve a analizar cómo la "Nueva Mujer" sigue operando como figura transgresora en narrativas contemporáneas, partiendo desde un análisis de *Rebecca* de Daphne du Maurier, a la vez que explora paralelismos con obras decimonónicas y canónicas, como son *Jane Eyre* y *Villette* de Charlotte Brönte, hasta reescrituras neovictorianas recientes, como es la de *La Señora March* de Virginia Feito (2024, 124). Su planteamiento se alinea con los estudios neovictorianos al señalar que el prototipo de la "Nueva Mujer" que opera en estas obras se debe interpretar "como una crítica, incluso sátira" en oposición "hacia el modelo de feminidad restrictiva y en hipervigilancia que ostenta la protagonista" (120), lo cual subraya la persistencia de los miedos patriarcales ante estas mujeres avanzadas para su tiempo, y como estos son problematizados por las propias protagonistas femeninas.

Andrea Gutiérrez Ricondo se centra en la serie *Queen Charlotte* (2023), problematizando la manera en que Julia Quinn y Shonda Rhimes reescriben la identidad racial de la reina Carlota de Mecklenburgo. La autora apunta, de manera muy acertada, hacia un dilema que problematiza esta reescritura racial de la reina como una forma de inclusión forzada basada en especulaciones históricas sobre el polémico retrato realizado por Allan Ramsay, que a su vez exlipsan "el legado histórico y cultural de la reina Carlota" (2024, 142), dando una imagen frívola y superficial de su figura. Si bien estas ficciones amplían la representación de mujeres de color en el imaginario histórico, lo hacen a costa de simplificar y distorsionar el legado cultural de las figuras afrobritánicas del XIX, como las de Anne Osbourne o Elizabeth Dido Belle (165), quienes representaron la realidad de las mujeres de color de la época.

Con respecto a la cuestión de la relación entre ciencia, arte y naturaleza, y que ha sido tema central de la reciente exposición y posterior publicación de «Ellas Ilustran Botánica» (Real Jardín Botánico, Madrid, 2024), Rosario Arias propone una lectura neovictoriana desde la teoría del ensamblaje (Deleuze y Guattari 1987; Latour 2005), mostrando cómo las obras literarias neovictorianas "son ensamblajes donde la literatura, el arte, la ciencia, la dimensión humana y lo no humano entretejen relaciones y aportan significados múltiples y polivalentes" (176). La "visión binocular" (2024, 178) de las obras literarias neovictorianas, como *The Botanist's Daughter* (2018) y *A Quiet Tide* (2020), conecta pasado y presente, proponiendo nuevas metodologías críticas a la hora de analizar "la interrelación entre la humanidad y lo no humano, que se traduce en modos no jerárquicos de compromiso con el mundo" (2024, 195). Al mismo tiempo, se reivindica el rol de las artistas botánicas como agentes culturales de transformación y cambio en el mundo de la ciencia actual.

Si el propósito del volumen es demostrar que las escritoras decimonónicas narraron para reivindicar cambios sociales y que sus genealogías literarias siguen interpelándonos en tiempos de crisis, este se cumple con creces. El libro ofrece un mosaico interdisciplinar en el que confluyen literatura, historia cultural, estudios queer, ecofeminismo y teoría crítica contemporánea. Entre sus mayores logros destaca la recuperación de voces marginales (espiritistas, dramaturgas amateurs, activistas, ilustradoras), así como la traducción de textos inéditos en español. También sobresale su capacidad para tender puentes entre el XIX y el XXI. Incluso dentro de las dos grandes temáticas que conforman los dos bloques que dividen este volumen, los propios capítulos parecen conversar entre ellos de manera paralela. Así se puede dislumbrar en los capítulos de Ameduri y Arias en torno a la íntima conexión entre mujer y naturaleza en la obra de escritoras ocultistas y artistas botánicas, y cómo esta conecta con la creación y los inicios del activismo ecologista en la actualidad. O, de forma más evidente, los trabajos de González Díaz, Martín Villareal y Bernabéu sobre la influencia del legado de la figura de la "Nueva Mujer" tanto en la literatura como en los feminismos de la segunda y tercera ola.

No obstante, podrían señalarse algunas limitaciones. La mayoría de los capítulos se centran en autoras y tradiciones anglófonas, y en su mayoría, mujeres blancas de clase alta y media, lo que deja abierta la posibilidad de establecer comparaciones transnacionales más amplias. Asimismo, aunque el volumen alude a la interseccionalidad, algunas contribuciones podrían haber profundizado más en la articulación entre género, clase y raza. Esto es algo que se señala de manera sutil en los capítulos de Monrós-Gaspar y Ramos sobre la relación entre el teatro sufragista "amateur" y la conciencia de clase en la obra de L.S. Phibbs, en particular en su análisis de "La pierna de Jim." Por otro lado, la investigación de Gutiérrez Ricondo sobre la problemática reescritura de la figura histórica de la reina Carlota como una mujer de color en la obra literaria y su adaptación a la gran pantalla en *Queen Charlotte* podría haber profundizado más en el análisis de las figuras afrobritánicas que menciona. En general, en este volumen se echa en falta la inclusión de tener algunos capítulos dedicados a un análisis más exhaustivo sobre otras voces no occidentales de la época dentro del imperio anglosajón del XIX, como pueden ser aquellas procedentes de las periferias coloniales, indígenas o afrocaribeñas, para así ofrecer una visión más interseccional de la figura femenina neovictoriana desde una perspectiva crítica emergente y alternativa.

En conclusión, el volumen *(Re)Escribiendo el pasado* constituye una aportación imprescindible a los estudios feministas y neovictorianos, especialmente en la introducción de obras y autoras desconocidas dentro de los estudios anglosajones en los países de habla hispana. Su carácter polifónico, su rigor crítico y su apertura a nuevas metodologías lo convierten en una obra de referencia tanto para especialistas como para lectoras interesadas en comprender cómo las genealogías femeninas del siglo XIX siguen modelando narrativas culturales actuales. Al recuperar y reinterpretar voces olvidadas, el volumen no solo enriquece la historiografía literaria, sino que invita a pensar el presente como un espacio de reescritura constante del pasado. En un momento histórico como el actual, el cual está marcado por crisis múltiples —sanitaria, ecológica, política—, estas narrativas nos recuerdan que la literatura puede ser, aún hoy, una herramienta poderosa de resistencia y transformación.

BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Samuel Beckett y el humor

José Francisco Fernández, ed.

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José Francisco Fernández, editor del libro *Samuel Beckett y el Humor*, es catedrático y profesor de literatura inglesa en la Universidad de Almería. Asimismo, ha desarrollado una extensa carrera profesional dedicada al estudio, análisis y traducción de la obra de Samuel Beckett. Sin embargo, tal y como él mismo señala, este libro representa un nuevo enfoque respecto a los estudios realizados hasta el momento sobre el autor.

> No existe en español ningún estudio específico sobre el humor en la obra del premio nobel irlandés, lo que indica que nos encontramos ante una ausencia que era necesario cubrir. (12)

Fernández, junto a otros especialistas en la obra beckettiana, se propone profundizar en un aspecto que, a su juicio, ha recibido poca o escasa atención por parte de la crítica en español: el humor en Beckett. Una revisión de los trabajos publicados muestra que la mayor parte de los estudios en español que otorgan cierta relevancia al humor en Beckett no aparecen hasta entrado el siglo XXI y son bastante escasos. Entre ellos destacan, por ejemplo, el Cuaderno Pedagógico elaborado por el Centro Dramático Nacional en 2012, que presenta a *Esperando a Godot* como una "tragicomedia en dos actos" (11), o el artículo publicado en *ABC* titulado "La Risa en Beckett", que analiza la puesta en escena de *Happy Days* y resalta cómo su directora "exprime el humor que contiene el texto de Don Samuel (ABC, 22 Oct. 2007)." Más recientemente, Manuel Díaz, en su trabajo "Una risa carente de alegría: sobre el humor beckettiano," ofrece un recorrido biográfico por la obra de Beckett y desglosa los elementos que considera fundamentales para comprender su particular uso del humor.

En el ámbito anglosajón, sin embargo, ocurre todo lo contrario: numerosos investigadores han dedicado trabajos a analizar cómo se manifiesta el humor en Beckett. Entre ellos se encuentran Ruby Cohn, quien ya en la década de 1960 publicó Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut, y, algo más tarde, Laura Salisbury con *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing*. Ambos son considerados por Fernández como referentes fundamentales en los estudios sobre el humor en Beckett (11). Surge así el interés de Fernández por ofrecer al panorama crítico español un estudio sobre el humor en Beckett que pueda situarse al nivel de los existentes en el mundo anglosajón, objetivo que logra alcanzar con este libro.

El libro reúne a diversos especialistas, tanto nacionales como internacionales, que analizan las distintas facetas que Samuel Beckett cultivó. Además del teatro, Beckett también realizó importantes incursiones en el mundo de la narrativa (novela, relato corto y diarios) y la poesía (13). Nos encontramos, por tanto, ante el primer monográfico dedicado al autor en el que el humor se analiza a lo largo de todas las facetas de su obra, lo que convierte esta publicación en una aportación de gran relevancia para los estudios beckettianos.

No obstante, el libro no se dirige exclusivamente a un público especializado. Cualquier lector con una mínima curiosidad por conocer la trayectoria literaria de Beckett hallará en él una valiosa fuente de información, pues, además de recorrer su teatro, que le otorgó fama mundial, se detiene también en su narrativa y en su poesía, destacando aquellos elementos claves

que permiten comprender cómo se manifiesta el humor en cada una de estas expresiones artísticas. Este monográfico, se presenta, por tanto, como un punto de partida para quienes deseen adentrarse en la faceta del humor en Beckett, al tiempo que aporta herramientas para comprender por qué, después de tantas décadas, su obra sigue resultando actual y continúa despertando el interés de crítica y público.

El libro se inicia con la introducción de Fernández, que sitúa al lector y le explica como el humor en Beckett ha sido un elemento clave pero tremendamente olvidado por la crítica. Fernández también adelanta lo que será el enfoque general de la obra: el humor en Beckett no surge de chistes fáciles o enredos, sino que posee un componente mucho más oscuro, destinado a confrontar al espectador con sus propios miedos y limitaciones.

> Frente a la idea de la carcajada sana y liberadora, el humor en Beckett es problemático e inquietante, un humor que a duras penas y a regañadientes tiene que encargarse de todo, que no nos ofrece consuelo y nos deja peor de lo que estábamos. (11)

Vienen a continuación los tres primeros capítulos, dedicados al teatro. Cabe destacar el ensayo de Shane Weller sobre la ética de la comedia, que analiza tanto el propósito que persigue Beckett con el humor como los mecanismos que emplea para lograrlo. Weller señala que para Beckett no solo es importante el lenguaje, sino también la elección de los personajes y sus historias aparentemente inconexas. Todos estos elementos contribuyen a crear una atmósfera donde la risa nace como la última expresión del ser humano, la única forma de afrontar su propia finitud, y en última instancia, la muerte. Cuando ya no queda esperanza, lo único que resta es reír. En palabras del propio Beckett: "Nada tan divertido como la desgracia" (10).

Nuria Santamaría, por su parte, incide en la presentación del cuerpo humano en el teatro de Beckett y cómo sus personajes se caracterizan fundamentalmente por el deterioro físico y la falta de movilidad.

> La precariedad física de los personajes es también un lugar común en los estudios beckettianos sobre el que merece la pena volver solo para recordar, primero, el sarcástico empleo al que son sometidos (…) -y, en segundo lugar, el hecho no menos relevante de su sufrimiento físico y moral. (59)

Se trata de un concepto compartido por otros autores de este mismo libro como Shane Weller o María Jesús López, que ven en los personajes de Beckett una representación de lo que Henri Bergson denominaría "lo mecánico."

> La tesis principal de Bergson es que lo cómico deriva de lo mecánico insertado en lo vivo; es cómico cualquier incidente que hace que el cuerpo de una persona se comporte como el de una cosa o máquina. Sin duda, esa es una dimensión cómica que Beckett explota sobremanera, (…) y que ha llevado a la comparación de los personajes de Beckett con los del cine mudo de principios de siglo XX (…), con un énfasis importante en la debilidad del cuerpo, en los gestos repetitivos y los movimientos mecánicos. (86)

Claudia María de Vasconcellos cierra este bloque con su ensayo sobre la dificultad de definir las obras de Beckett como comedias o tragedias dado que poseen características propias de ambos géneros sin llegar a encajar en ninguno.

En la sección dedicada a la narrativa, María Jesús López analiza *Molloy* y *Malone muere* a través de distintas teorías sobre el humor, destacando la dificultad de los personajes "para relacionarse y comunicarse con otros seres humanos de manera equilibrada y normal" (88), un factor clave para provocar la risa. La mayoría de los personajes de Beckett se definen por sus carencias, tanto físicas como morales, lo que a menudo pone de manifiesto la crueldad del ser humano (93).

Manuel Díaz, también en el ámbito de la novela, reflexiona sobre la trilogía de Beckett, compuesta por Molloy, Malone muere y El innombrable, y subraya que en Beckett la novela adquiere una clara dimensión metalingüística. Más que contar historias, el autor utiliza a sus personajes para reflexionar sobre el propio acto creativo y sobre las limitaciones y la artificialidad del lenguaje a la hora de transmitir ideas. Se hace particularmente evidente en la tercera de ellas, donde juega con un narrador omnisciente al que el resto de personajes interpelan y describen dentro de la misma obra.

En la sección dedicada a la poesía, Lucas Margarit analiza "Whoroscope," el poema que le llevó a ganar un premio literario. Margarit nos hace partícipes de que la poesía de Beckett, al igual que el resto de su obra, está marcada por una mezcla de humor, melancolía y reflexión existencial.

> un texto donde predomina el tono grotesco, donde la humorada tiñe la situación que está desplegando en el poema y donde la muerte se transforma -en ese marco intertextual- en un hecho estético más atravesado por una pizca de humor. (128)

La última parte incluye ensayos de Vanesa Controneo y John Pilling sobre la narrativa de Beckett. Controneo examina una faceta menos conocida del autor: sus denominados *Diarios Alemanes*, en los que este recogió sus impresiones sobre

el país germano. La autora muestra cómo estos cuadernos se convierten en una fuente de inspiración para el resto de su obra, ya que su estancia en ese país le permitió entrar en contacto con el arte y la filosofía, pero también con la degradación y el horror de la guerra. Pilling, por su parte, analiza algunos relatos cortos del autor como ejemplos del característico humor beckettiano. Son historias donde la parte más oscura de la vida se mezcla con el humor y donde la manera de afrontar la muerte es la risa.

> El humor, desde el punto de vista de Belacqua (o por extensión, al menos, desde el punto de vista de Beckett), es una parte de la armadura emocional de cada uno, por muy a la deriva que nos encontremos en un océano de problemas o creamos estarlo. (154)

El cierre del libro corresponde a John London quien ofrece un posfacio centrado en la recepción del teatro de Beckett en tres grandes ciudades europeas: Madrid, Londres y París, y donde recoge cómo las mismas obras no han tenido reacciones similares por parte del público que asistió a verlas.

En resumen, podemos afirmar que el humor en Beckett se presenta como un tema particularmente complejo, sobre el que aún queda mucho por explorar. Los autores de este libro han abierto la puerta al diálogo y la reflexión, dando paso a que otros investigadores continúen profundizando en esta ardua labor. Tras la lectura, la impresión que también nos queda es que leer a Beckett no resulta sencillo: su particular forma de escribir, que combina elementos de filosofía, literatura, historia y experiencias personales, exige del lector una gran dedicación. Asimismo, no se puede esperar en absoluto que su humor se asemeje al de las comedias tradicionales. Todo lo contrario, lo que nos transmiten estos autores es que el humor de Beckett nace de una curiosa mezcla de amargura, comicidad e ingenio, que pocos autores han llegado a manejar como él.

Por todas estas razones, el libro *Beckett y el humor* constituye una lectura recomendable para cualquier investigador que desee adentrarse de lleno en el mundo de Beckett, ya que ofrece una base crítica muy bien elaborada, con amplias bibliografías y análisis ordenados de sus distintas facetas: teatral, narrativa y poética. Del mismo modo, el lector curioso que nunca se ha aproximado a Beckett encontrará aquí un buen punto de partida, puesto que, además de encontrar referencias a sus obras más importantes, se le proporcionan herramientas de análisis que facilitan el acceso a su obra de una manera más comprensible. Se trata, por tanto, de una lectura imprescindible para quienes deseen profundizar en la obra del nobel irlandés.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Travel and Colonialism in 21st Century Romantic Historical Fiction: Exotic Journeys, Reparative Histories?

Paloma Fresno-Calleja and Hsu-Ming Teo, eds.

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Travel and Colonialism in 21st Century Romantic Historical Fiction: Exotic Journeys, Reparative Histories? (2025), edited by Paloma Fresno-Calleja and Hsu-Ming Teo, offers a timely and thoughtful contribution to ongoing debates in Romantic studies. The volume, published by Routledge, examines how contemporary romantic historical fiction revisits the intersections of travel, empire and memory. As the editors note, "Romantic fiction often involves stories of travel" (Fresno-Calleja and Teo 2025, 1) and within these stories, "'romance' habitually translates into encounters with 'exotic' places and peoples" (1). When history is introduced, "the past itself is exoticised… and treated as 'other' to the present to serve the purposes of romanticisation" (1). For that reason, the editors claim that these readings can be incomplete or controversial (1). Such statements frame the volume's central question. Can travel narratives offer reparative possibilities or do exoticism and romance ultimately hinder such restoration?

The essays collectively demonstrate how twenty-first-century romantic historical fiction reimagines journeys across spaces where power struggles and collective memory converge. The volume focuses on different locations, such as Africa and the Caribbean, and pays particular attention to liminal spaces like ports, colonies and borderlands. The chapter on East and Southern Africa examines how metropolitan discourses continue to shape popular fiction. Such chapter draws on critiques such as Binyavanga Wainaina's *How to Write About Africa* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's notion of the "single story." It shows how bestselling novels can slip into an "Africanist" mode, constructing African settings as timeless, spectacular, and often dark, while demonstrating how readers must actively resist these colonial tropes.

The volume is particularly strong in its attention to voice and narrative perspective. Rather than reducing the terrain to a binary of exoticism versus ethical repair, many essays trace moments where perspective is a key fact. The editors link travel to traumatic pasts such as "war, conflict, colonial exploitation or post-colonial political struggles" and show that romance can coexist with ethical memory, which functions as a space for memory-work (Fresno-Calleja and Teo 2025, 1). Consequently, it can be noticed that there are moments in which pleasure and pain coincide. In fact, the texts

themselves navigate the aforementioned contradictions. Indeed, the chapters on the Caribbean bring these tensions into sharp relief. In chapter 3, the author opens her chapter with Jamaica Kincaid's vivid description of Antigua, portraying it as a place of almost unreal beauty, where the sea displays an impossible range of blue tones that seem too perfect to exist in reality. This striking passage is not merely decorative. It prompts readers to ask whether the lush settings celebrated in romantic fiction can also reflect histories of racialized labor and resource extraction. In this chapter, it is noted that historical accuracy is often compromised but not entirely erased. In these narratives, eccentric heroines emerge as figures who seek to confront and reconcile with colonial legacies.

In the Pacific context, Paloma Fresno-Calleja's chapter "'The Most Romantic Place on Earth': Exoticism, Militourism, and Romance in Women's Historical Fiction of the Pacific War" critically examines how the superlative "most romantic" functions as a militarized tourist slogan, highlighting how exoticism encodes political power and invites readers to become "neocolonial, neo-Orientalist cultural voyeurs as well as voyagers" (Fresno-Calleja and Teo 2025, preface). Similarly, essays on Europe and the Mediterranean, including an analysis of Menorca during the Spanish Civil War and post-dictatorship "Pact of Forgetting," examine female itineraries across islands as a test of what "repair" can mean under constrained historical memory (142). Furthermore, the volume emphasizes genre as a key analytical category. Tropes of the picturesque—the plantation estate, panoramic beach, safari horizon—amplify the experience of romance while also revealing the risks of exoticism. The analysis of Jennifer McVeigh's *The Fever Tree* and *Leopard at the Door* shows how the novels' storytelling can veer into fetishization, reproducing colonial tropes even as they aim to center women's agency.

Methodologically, the volume is transparent about the tension between archive and invention, acknowledging that romantic fiction "can be conducive to reparation and healing, but not without certain social, political or historiographical costs" (Fresno-Calleja and Teo 2025, 1). Some essays suggest that these costs outweigh reparative possibilities, while others identify small formal choices—moments of hesitation, contrapuntal subplots, narrative scruples—as spaces for critique. The aim is not to redeem the genre wholesale but to show that careful reading practices themselves can be reparative.

In addressing this question, the volume is not only valuable for scholars with specialized knowledge. Its clear structure and explanations make it particularly useful as a teaching resource in undergraduate or graduate classrooms. While some specific concepts may be challenging for less experienced readers, the essays provide rich examples and clarifications that make the readings understandable.

Within the broader field, the book addresses a notable gap. Neo-Victorian fiction has been widely studied for its engagement with nineteenth-century legacies; by contrast, Romantic afterlives—particularly in popular and women's historical fiction—remain relatively under-theorized (Carroll 2010, 176). The volume's comparative framework—spanning romanticized piracy and Caribbean plantations to Pacific militourism and Balearic memory politics—resists flattening the specificity of each context and allows for nuanced readings of genre, perspective and historical engagement.

Finally, *Travel and Colonialism in 21st Century Romantic Historical Fiction* is a timely and insightful contribution to Romantic studies, women's writing and postcolonial memory studies. Its central achievement is foregrounding romance as a visual and affective framework, prompting readers to consider who sees, who is seen and under what conditions. The essays identify when texts rely on scenic exoticism, reveal tensions where they exist and recognize the complexities and costs of moments of repair. The volume's clear structure, cohesion and openness about its limits make it particularly useful for teaching, while its comparative framework and close attention to perspective provide valuable tools for research. By showing how the same narrative devices can serve either critique or concealment, the collection successfully fosters critical engagement with contemporary romantic historical fiction and the histories it represents.

OBRAS CITADAS

CARROLL, Samantha J. 2010. "Putting the 'Neo' into Neo-Victorian: The Neo-Victorian Novel as Postmodern Revisionist Fiction." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3, no. 2: 172–203.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Mujeres silenciadas. Traducciones bajo la dictadura franquista

García Sala, Iván; Ortega Sáez, Marta y Gora Zaragoza Ninet, eds.

Editorial Dyckinson, 2024. 200 pp.
ISBN: 978-84-1070-540-1

El volumen *Mujeres silenciadas. Traducción bajo la dictadura franquista* acoge entre sus páginas nueve contribuciones en las que se aborda el tratamiento que la censura de la dictadura franquista otorgó a distintas obras literarias y cinematográficas a lo largo de los años, atendiendo especialmente a textos, bien escritos por mujeres, bien protagonizados por personajes femeninos. Se inserta de esta manera en una tendencia investigadora que se ha ocupado de los estragos editoriales causados por la intransigencia del autoritarismo franquista así como de la "guerra al libro" emprendida por el régimen con el objetivo de ampliar y ejecutar un poder absoluto sobre la población española tras la Guerra Civil. Adhiriéndose a la ingente y fundacional labor realizada por críticos como Manuel Abellán, *Censura y creación literaria en la España franquista 1939-1976* (1980) o Fernando Larraz, *Letricidio español. Censura y novela durante el Franquismo* (2014), este libro tiene como objeto de análisis la censura sufrida por textos extranjeros, primordialmente provenientes del ámbito anglosajón, cuyas traducciones fueron evaluadas por las instancias censoras y sufrieron, en consecuencia, sus modificaciones o prohibiciones.

El libro está dividido en dos secciones en función del tipo de traducciones y obras que se analizan en los capítulos que lo componen. Así, el primero de estos apartados está dedicado a la censura editorial y a su vez se subdivide en otras dos partes que corresponden a la etapa histórica en la que se publicaron, o al menos se intentó conseguir su publicación. La otra gran sección del libro está dedicada a la censura cinematográfica de películas extranjeras y las dificultades o vicisitudes de distribución de este cine bajo el control del régimen franquista.

El capítulo que inaugura el volumen pertenece a Mireia Domínguez López y en él encontramos un análisis de tres personajes femeninos de la novela *Grandes esperanzas* de Charles Dickens que contravienen el modelo de feminidad victoriana. Debido a la coincidencia entre el modelo femenino promovido por el franquismo y el victoriano, la autora realiza un estudio del tratamiento por parte de la censura que tuvo la traducción al español de la novela de Dickens que fue presentada a los organismos de esta institución de control en 1944. Primeramente, se establece una comparación convergente entre los dos modelos de feminidad para después explicar de qué manera rompe con ellos la obra dickensiana. Al estudiar el informe de censura de la traducción citada, la autora comprueba que apenas obtuvo cambios ni modificaciones. Sin embargo, sí es reseñable el aparato crítico que el traductor incluye para su publicación, en el que se justifica la temática de la novela siguiendo los preceptos del régimen y el apunte respecto al

censor responsable del informe analizado. Se trata de Leopoldo Panero quien es conocido por su carácter permisivo y su vinculación con la tradición británica, de tal manera que priorizaría la difusión de obras literarias de calidad sobre los criterios censores.

El segundo capítulo, a cargo de Cristina Gómez Castro, se ocupa de la traducción de la obra de Mary W. Shelley en España a lo largo del siglo XX. Como explica la autora, Shelley tuvo durante su vida muchas dificultades para publicar su obra y ser reconocida como autora, tanto en su contexto original, como en otros. Si bien su texto más conocido, *Frankenstein*, ha gozado siempre de una gran difusión y recepción, el resto de sus trabajos han quedado en un segundo plano y no han sido traducidos al español hasta casi el siglo XXI. En lo que respecta al tratamiento que la censura otorgó a la obra de esta autora, existen 17 expedientes en los que Gómez Castro ha encontrado un informe que obligó a censurar algunos fragmentos por su contenido anticlerical en una reedición de 1956. Por lo demás, la obra más conocida de Shelley ha obtenido históricamente una muy buena acogida con sucesivas reediciones tanto a lo largo de la dictadura, como después. El resto de sus textos que fueron traducidos y presentados al aparato censor en los años 60 obtuvieron informes favorables sin la necesidad de eliminar o modificar nada.

La contribución de Gora Zaragoza Ninet está dedicada a la obra de Margaret Lane una periodista, escritora y biógrafa poco estudiada debido a que su producción pertenece a la literatura *middlebrow*, considerada menor. Tal y como explica Zaragoza, resulta complicado encontrar menciones a esta autora en las historias de la literatura de entreguerras, periodo al que pertenecen sus textos más relevantes. Así, dos de sus obras fueron traducidas al español y presentadas a la censura con cierta cercanía a su publicación original, lo cual indica el interés que despertaba en los años 40 y 50. A pesar de que una de ellas fue aceptada sin problemas, en la otra tuvieron que eliminarse todas las referencias a la homosexualidad que presentaba la novela para poder garantizar la difusión de la traducción. De esta manera, Zaragoza muestra el tratamiento que obras distintas, aunque pertenecientes a una misma autora, recibían por parte de la censura al mismo tiempo que reivindica la importancia de estudiar literatura considerada no canónica.

Javier Figueroa Granja, en su capítulo, se ocupa de la identificación de posibles fenómenos de autocensura en la novela negra en su traducción al español durante el año 1966, específicamente la que afecta al tratamiento de los personajes femeninos. Para ello, el autor conforma un corpus de novelas traducidas y presentadas a la supervisión de la censura a lo largo de ese año, en las que pueden encontrarse personajes femeninos que no se adecuan a los preceptos de género impuestos por el franquismo y, por lo tanto, sufren la censura. Específicamente, se identifican tachaduras de fragmentos que deberían ser modificados o eliminados directamente cuando hay referencias sexuales o religiosas en este tipo de textos. De esta manera, Figueroa Granja plantea la necesidad de ahondar en la investigación de esta producción con el fin de saber si hubo nuevas traducciones y qué tratamiento pudieron haber recibidos por parte de instancias censoras que anteriormente habían denegado su publicación.

El capítulo de Pilar Godayol Nogue consiste en un análisis comparativo del tratamiento censor de dos ensayos feministas presentados para su aprobación en los últimos años del franquismo. Se trata de las obras de Lidia Falcón, *Mujer y sociedad* (1969) y *La dialéctica del sexo* (1976) de Shulamith Firestone. La obra de Falcón consiguió ser publicada tras pasar por dos informes de censura en los que se exigía la eliminación y modificación de algunas páginas para poder ser aceptado por las instancias censoras. La obra de Firestone, por el contrario, fue traducida y presentada a la censura por la editorial española Kairós en 1974, tan solo un año antes de la muerte del dictador, pero no fue publicada hasta 1976 pues en aquella ocasión los censores que emitieron sus valoraciones denegaron su publicación.

Por su parte, Claudia González Barriada, en su contribución, se preocupa por la presencia femenina en las obras pertenecientes al movimiento beat traducidas al español, tanto en el contexto original, como en sus traducciones al español en las décadas posteriores. Así, la producción de los escritores beat canónicos fue traducida al español y al catalán, y publicada, poco tiempo después de que apareciera en su lengua original. Entre las escritoras vinculadas a este movimiento, la autora establece una clasificación entre las precursoras, las cuales no se insertan claramente en esta corriente, pero actúan como puente entre las generaciones anteriores y esta; las musas, mujeres vinculadas personalmente a escritores conocidos y las escritoras, que habitualmente suelen relacionarse a su vez con otras tendencias literarias. En general, la obra de estas escritoras es escasa y es todavía más reducida su traducción y difusión en España, por lo que González Barriada señala la importancia de emprender este tipo de análisis.

Cierra esta sección dedicada a la censura editorial el capítulo de Sara Llopis-Mestre en el que se aborda tanto el tratamiento de la censura como el aparato paratextual alrededor de la obra *The Auhobiography of Alice B. Toklas* de Gertrude Stein. Específicamente, se atiende a la manera en la que se entendió tanto en la época en la que se presentó a la censura la traducción del texto en 1967, como en las sucesivas traducciones hasta el año 2021 de la relación lésbica entre la autora y la propia Alice B. Toklas. Como comprueba Llopis-Mestre, tras su análisis y repaso tanto de informes de censura, los paratextos de distintas ediciones y las referencias en prensa a la publicación de este texto, en todas las ocasiones se menciona una "amistad íntima" entre las dos mujeres lo cual se entiende como un mecanismo que sirve para invisibilizar el lesbianismo tanto de Stein como de la obra.

La segunda parte del libro la conforman dos trabajos en los que se analiza la censura sufrida por la traducción y difusión cinematográfica de adaptaciones de dos novelas decimonónicas: *Anna Karénina* de Lev Tolstoi y *Cumbres borrascosas* de Emily Brontë.

Iván García Sala se ocupa de la censura a las versiones fílmicas de *Anna Karénina* que se rodaron y emitieron durante la dictadura. Concretamente se centra en las adaptaciones de 1935, que a pesar de que fue estrenada antes de la guerra civil española, tras la victoria franquista, y debido a una campaña de persecución por parte de instancias eclesiásticas, que tenían derecho a una censura privada, consiguieron que fuera retirada y prohibida en 1940. Pese a varios intentos de conseguir un informe de censura favorable y a las modificaciones propuestas, la película no volvió a estrenarse en cines españoles hasta 1974. La versión de 1948 corrió con más suerte pues, aunque también tuvo que pasar un por un largo y difícil proceso de censura, finalmente fue autorizada, tras varios recortes y cambios en 1950.

Cierra el volumen el trabajo de Marta Ortega Sáez en el que se analiza de forma comparativa el distinto tratamiento que obtuvieron las versiones literarias y cinematográficas de *Cumbres borrascosas* durante las primeras décadas del franquismo. Así, mientras que las traducciones e incluso reescrituras teatrales que surgieron durante los años 40 fueron autorizadas por la censura sin mayores dificultades, la adaptación cinematográfica en la misma época tuvo que someterse a varias inspecciones en las que se exigía la supresión de escenas, modificaciones en el doblaje y varias prohibiciones, hasta que, finalmente, obtuvo el visto bueno en 1944. Como explica Ortega Sáez, tras la obtención del informe favorable, sin embargo, la película y sus distribuidores tuvieron que hacer frente a la crítica y publicidad disuasoria por parte de la Iglesia católica y otras asociaciones vinculadas a esta que se dedicaron a desaconsejar su visionado por distintos medios.

En definitiva, el libro constituye un acercamiento variado e interesante al tratamiento censor de obras anglosajonas y europeas, tanto editoriales como cinematográficas, aportando análisis y documentación que nos ayuda a completar la realidad compleja y multifacética de la censura franquista. El haberse centrado, además, en figuras femeninas, tanto autoriales como en personajes, es relevante puesto que presenta un testimonio interesante que recoge el control social que quería implantar el régimen y que afectaba de una manera particular a las mujeres. Razón por la cual habría sido relevante tener en cuenta en algunos de los análisis el objetivo y contexto de recepción de las obras. No obstante, pocas de las contribuciones se centran en esta cuestión y podría haber ayudado a completar y ensanchar alguno de los trabajos.

BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The Jaguar / *El jaguar*

Sarah Holland-Batt. Traducción de Natalia Carbajosa

Madrid: Vaso Roto. 2024. 245 pp.
ISBN: 978 8419693839

En su tercer libro, la autora australiana Sarah Holland-Batt compone una obra de una belleza inesperada, elegante incluso cuando duele o incomoda. Escrito en torno a la muerte de su padre tras veinte años de lucha contra la enfermedad de Parkinson, *El jaguar* se suma a exploraciones recientes del duelo familiar como *The Father* de Sharon Olds o *Obit* de Victoria Chang, aunque enseguida impone su propia cadencia entre el detalle y la contención, entre la emoción y la forma. A lo largo de sus cuatro partes, Holland-Batt alterna versos extensos con cortes secos, intensificando la emoción, y teje un imaginario de animales, flores e insectos destilado en metáforas y símiles. Se trata de una obra de madurez vital y literaria que permite a la autora abordar la representación del dolor con finura, pero sin tapujos.

Esto se hace patente desde el comienzo en unas líneas de "The Gift," situado en la primera parte del libro, donde se narran los días anteriores y posteriores al fallecimiento del padre. Allí, Holland-Batt escribe lo que parece ser una confesión que la libera tanto a ella como a sus lectores:

> *I'm having a bad day, he says, and tries again.*
> *I'm having a bad year. I'm having a bad decade.*
> I hate myself for noticing his poetry—the triplet
> that should not be beautiful to my ear
> but is.
>
> *Tengo un mal día, dice, y lo vuelve a intentar.*
> *Tengo un mal año. Tengo una mala década.*
> Me censuro por reparar en su poesía —el terceto
> que no debería sonar bien a mis oídos
> pero así es.

En este hallazgo de lo poético en medio de la tragedia se anuncia el camino de la colección: una elegía atenta al detalle que no rehúye lo insoportable. Como ha declarado la propia autora, "el acto de estos poemas es mirar cuando mirar es difícil."

Holland-Batt trabaja esas imágenes con precisión: breves, nítidas, capaces de ser brutales o frágiles, a veces abiertamente sensuales, pero nunca exageradas. En ese registro, *El jaguar* concentra lo que Winckelmann llamó "noble sencillez y serena grandeza": energía contenida, belleza sin exceso. Esta estetización alcanza su ápice en una de las mejores piezas del libro, "Nessun Dorma," una forma híbrida de écfrasis, recurso que atraviesa varias secciones de un libro marcado por la música y las artes plásticas. Emerson llegó a escribir que incluso un cadáver posee su belleza, y ese gesto de contemplación es el que articula el poema: el primer encuentro con el padre ya fallecido y la memoria de las últimas noches, cuando él veía en bucle la imborrable performance de Pavarotti como Calaf en la representación de *Turandot* en Los Ángeles en 1994. Holland-Batt convierte esa actuación en materia lírica, reproduce el crescendo del aria y lo traslada a la escena

mínima de la vigilia. El resultado es un poema de gran intensidad, capaz de sostener a la vez la brutalidad de la muerte y el pathos de la ópera, con el padre en el centro como actor principal.

De forma coherente con esa poética, la autora ha explicado en entrevistas que el cuidado atraviesa su trabajo y que este libro también sostiene públicamente esa ética: "no hay tarea más importante que cuidar, ni acto más valioso que sostener la dignidad de otro ser humano." En los últimos años, Holland-Batt se ha convertido, además, en una voz pública en defensa de las personas mayores, con intervenciones y denuncias que dieron visibilidad a negligencias en residencias. Esa convicción se enlaza con su testimonio sobre el trato a las personas mayores en Australia ("The Gurney," "The Kindest Thing") y con una zona del propio volumen que funciona como microensayo poético sobre el Parkinson: poemas como "Terminal Lucidity," "Substantia Nigra," o "Neurostimulator" incorporan información clínica sin derivar en prosa técnica; el dato entra por el oído, convertido en ritmo, fraseo y corte de verso.

La segunda parte se desarrolla alrededor de recuerdos del padre, pero también de la madre, en piezas como "Light Years," "Kneeling Figure," "Pikes Peak," o "The Grip." En este último, Holland-Batt compara al padre con un cangrejo, un procedimiento que ya asoma en el texto que abre el libro, "My Father as a Giant Koi Fish." Ese hilo animal prepara el contraste con "The Jaguar," que ocupa un lugar central: el jaguar aparece una vez por sección a lo largo del volumen, pero solo aquí nombra un coche y no al animal. Allí se narra cómo, tras el diagnóstico, el padre se compra un automóvil de lujo y lo va modificando hasta dejarlo inservible. La escena invita a buscar una clave simbólica para el título; el poema, sin embargo, corta de plano esa lectura y niega la alegoría:

> Finally his modifications
> killed it, the car he always wanted and waited
> so long to buy, and it sat like a carcass
> in the garage, like a headstone, like a coffin—
> but it's no symbol or metaphor. I can't make anything of it.
>
> Al final todos sus cambios
> acabaron con el coche que siempre quiso y que tanto
> esperó para comprar, y quedó como un animal muerto
> en el garaje, una lápida, un ataúd…
> no es un símbolo ni una metáfora. No consigo extraer la moraleja.

Lo que aquí se declara opaco se convierte en clave silenciosa: el coche sin moraleja y el jaguar que ronda cada parte del libro fijan el límite y la persistencia de su enigma.

En la tercera sección, el motivo reaparece de forma más elusiva —como "aliento" en la sensual "Ode to Cartier"— dentro de un conjunto centrado en amantes ("Instructions for a Lover," "Classical Allegory") y el lujo, no sin cierto humor ("Parable of the Clubhouse"). Aunque han descolocado a muchos lectores, leídas desde la poética del volumen, estas piezas no son un paréntesis, sino el reverso hedonista de la conciencia de finitud: estudios de color y de ritmo, escenas de brillo aristocrático y de lujo decadente ("Cipriani") sostenidas por un registro melancólico. A la vez, estos poemas registran otra clase de pérdida: desfilan relaciones fallidas —incluido el rechazo de una petición de mano en "The Proposal"— hasta que, en "Serious Moonlight", desde lo alto de Lipari, la voz vuelve a *La isla de los muertos* de Böcklin y se reparte con el amante los papeles del cuadro —somos el que rema y el que es llevado—; ella misma se nombra el ataúd, y cierra: "And I know that wherever I am going (…) / I am going alone" ["Y sé que, adondequiera que vaya (…) / iré sola"].

Aunque la tercera parte nunca se desconecta del duelo, la cuarta y última retoma con más claridad al padre como eje e incorpora el motivo del viaje sugerido al final de la anterior. La sección se arma como una serie de estampas de destinos como España en "A Handful of Oranges," Italia en "Monopoli," Egipto en "Sketches from the Nile," o México en "Quetzalcóatl," con la misma finura de detalle y elegancia que en el resto de los poemas. Aquí, la búsqueda del padre en la memoria se vuelve geografía: la voz recorre en "Great North Road" o "Worthing Beach" puntos que marcaron la vida del padre y del abuelo, y que funcionan como citas con una presencia que, de cualquier modo, está en todas partes. En la playa de Worthing, la voz confiesa que el "fantasma conocido de mi padre, / (…) ahora está en todas partes y en ninguna," y ese reconocimiento ordena el cierre del libro.

Si bien toda la colección funciona como elegía expandida, el poema final, "In My Father's Country," arma su despedida en once secciones que miran al padre desde ángulos distintos: presencia, declive y legado. Pasa por páramos y setos ingleses, por las playas de Worthing y las carreteras de infancia; recupera las lecciones de cálculo en el coche y el ingenio seco del padre, detalla la cirugía y el temblor, roza los años de guerra y la intemperie, y vuelve a cruzar biografía y paisaje con la misma precisión sensorial del libro. La imaginería ancla la herencia del padre en el paisaje inglés y convierte a Inglaterra en el territorio de la herencia y del ajuste de cuentas elegíaco. El libro no concluye con

moraleja ni con exaltación lírica, sino con una sensación desnuda: “I cannot get warm” [“No consigo entrar en calor”]. Ese frío es literal y figurado, corporal y existencial a la vez, y encarna la pérdida como dato irreductible, sin metáfora ni consuelo.

La traducción de Natalia Carbajosa, conocida por sus destacados trabajos con las obras de T. S. Eliot y H. D., opta por una fidelidad literal que conserva el potente imaginario de Holland-Batt y favorece la claridad narrativa. En contadas ocasiones, echo en falta la cadencia y la piel sonora del original, ese lustre discreto que se logra también por la elección exacta de cada palabra. No lo leería como un fallo, sino como la condición de toda traducción: cada elección resuelve un sentido y deja ir una textura. En cualquier caso, los lectores en castellano podrán reconocer plenamente la grandeza del libro, prueba de que incluso con esas pérdidas inevitables la traducción logra sostener su fuerza.

BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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El Estudio del Artista en la Literatura del Siglo XIX

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El género literario de la novela de artista, también conocido por el término alemán *künstlerroman*, se ha caracterizado en la crítica anglosajona por una compartimentalización entre las novelas artísticas escritas por hombres y aquellas escritas por mujeres. Desde los años sesenta, estudios como el archiconocido *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (1964) de Maurice Beebe o *Voyage Into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman* (1992), de Roberta Seret, han concebido el género literario como exclusivamente masculino. Aunque posteriormente las investigaciones feministas han puesto de manifiesto el rol de la mujer en las artes, como es el caso de Linda Huf en su *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* (1983), o de *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime* (2002), de Evy Varsamopoulou, existe una nueva corriente de pensamiento, encabezada por Orla Shiobhán Flock en *The Dual Artist Novel: Subverting Genre and Gender* (2023), que concibe a los artistas más allá de los binarismos de género.

El estudio del artista en la literatura del siglo XIX, escrito por Manuel Hueso Vasallo y editado por Publicacions de la Universitat de València, se enmarca en esta última tradición crítica al analizar seis novelas de artistas escritas por autores de ambos géneros y de diversas nacionalidades, donde el estudio del artista cobra un papel fundamental. Incluido en la colección "Encuentros: Culturas y Literatura", Hueso Vasallo se hace eco del espíritu de la colección y proporciona un original análisis multidisciplinar de este espacio literario e histórico a través de la crítica de la liminalidad, la fenomenología y la teoría del ensamblaje. En la obra, el autor entiende los estudios de los artistas del siglo XIX desde una perspectiva totalmente pionera, como "espacios liminales, es decir, a medio camino entre un hogar y una oficina, una frontera entre el mundo privado y el público […] que reflejan […] los grandes cambios de sus correspondientes contextos históricos" (Hueso Vasallo 2025, 15). Es en estos espacios donde los y las artistas pueden articular una serie de discursos que se oponen a las rígidas normas de la sociedad que habitan, o que muestran las limitaciones de esta. A lo largo de cinco capítulos, Hueso Vasallo muestra, de forma rigurosa y con una prosa clara y concisa, las múltiples posibilidades que este espacio doméstico ofrece, precisamente, para cuestionar las estructuras de la casa victoriana, el rol del hombre y la mujer y las convenciones socioculturales del momento.

Así, Hueso Vasallo comienza el primer capítulo "El estudio del artista: Un espacio propio" haciendo un detallado recorrido por el espacio doméstico tradicional del siglo XIX. Partiendo de las ideas de Gaston Bachelard en *La poética del espacio* (1957) y de Virginia Woolf en *Una habitación propia* (1929), el autor expone la importancia de poseer un espacio dedicado a la creación artística y cómo esto supone un desafío al ideal de la casa decimonónica. Esta estaba concebida de tal forma que los hombres y las mujeres que la habitaran tuvieran un espacio definido dentro de ella, reflejando también la separación de las esferas que caracterizaba al periodo victoriano. El estudio del artista supone, pues, un cuestionamiento de estas normas, al no encajar en las categorías de lo público y lo privado y al permitir tanto a hombres como a mujeres expresar sus deseos artísticos de maneras distintas a las que la sociedad espera de ellos. Debido al carácter poroso de este espacio y a su capacidad de resistirse a las doctrinas hegemónicas, el autor se aproxima a él a

través de la crítica de la liminalidad, articulada por Arnold van Gennep y posteriormente adaptada por Victor Turner, junto con la fenomenología *queer* de Sarah Ahmed, que permite a los individuos reorientarse hacia nuevas formas de entender la realidad.

Teniendo en cuenta estas ideas, el segundo capítulo, "El estudio de la mujer artista", ilustra cómo la artista que posee tal espacio "rompe con la tradición del *ángel* en el hogar y se mueve entre las esferas públicas y privadas para desarrollarse como individuo al margen de las expectativas sociales" (79). A través del análisis de *La inquilina de Wildfell Hall* (1848), de la escritora británica Anne Brontë, y *El fauno de mármol* (1860), del estadounidense Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hueso Vasallo muestra cómo poseer una habitación propia permite a las mujeres gozar de independencia económica y desprenderse de los encorsetados roles de género a los que estaban sometidas. Mientras que la novela de Brontë, considerada por el autor como protofeminista, anticipa las ideas de Virginia Woolf sobre la emancipación femenina, la obra de Hawthorne presenta "dos modelos distintos de feminidad que no caen en la subyugación patriarcal ni, especialmente, en la celebración inconsciente de dicha subyugación" (127).

Como contrapunto al capítulo dos, el tercer capítulo, "El estudio del artista y la masculinidad disidente", propone que los lugares de creación artística permiten expresar formas distintas de vivir la masculinidad, especialmente al oponerse a la figura del *paterfamilias*, que se erigía como el ideal de la sociedad decimonónica. De esta forma, "el hombre que rechazaba, cuestionaba o simplemente no encajaba con los criterios normativos de masculinidad podía llegar a convertirse en un agente transgresor similar a aquellas mujeres que rompían los binarismos domésticos" (134). Para ilustrar estas ideas, el autor comienza contextualizando la situación legal de la Inglaterra del siglo XIX, en especial el papel de la enmienda Labouchère, que condenaba cualquier signo de homosexualidad. Posteriormente, Hueso Vasallo procede a ejemplificar cómo los estudios de los artistas que aparecen en *La musa trágica* (1890), del estadounidense y posteriormente naturalizado británico Henry James, y *El retrato de Dorian Gray* (1890), del irlandés Oscar Wilde, sirven como un lugar de expresión de masculinidades no convencionales.

A continuación, el cuarto capítulo, "El *künstlerroman*: el estudio del artista como ensamblaje social" se aleja de la atmósfera anglosajona y acerca al lector al continente europeo y a la corriente naturalista del siglo XIX. A diferencia de los capítulos anteriores, este se centra en obras que encajan dentro del género literario *künstlerroman*, pues trazan el desarrollo creativo de un artista a lo largo de su vida. En este caso, Hueso Vasallo concibe el estudio del artista como un ensamblaje, siguiendo el concepto de Gilles Deleuze y Claire Parnert, de los distintos engranajes (por usar la terminología que emplea el autor) que conforman la sociedad finisecular. Así, el estudio del artista permite "crear una especie de engranaje diferente con el que podemos ver y analizar los otros engranajes a través de las formas en las que convergen en este espacio literario" (195). Tomando como ejemplo *La obra* (1886), del francés Émile Zola, y *La quimera* (1905), de la española Emilia Pardo Bazán, Hueso Vasallo pone de manifiesto el papel del estudio como herramienta para criticar diversos aspectos de la sociedad decimonónica, como los estándares sexuales, la salud mental y el dilema de la mercantilización del arte frente a los ideales artísticos.

Finalmente, en el quinto capítulo, "Conclusiones: el estudio del artista y el siglo XIX", el autor reitera el valor del estudio artístico como un lugar transgresor que permite articular temas candentes como "la independencia femenina, el papel de los hombres en la cultura heteropatriarcal y la crítica a la ubicuidad de los mandatos sociales frente a la individualidad artística" (243). Estas ideas, contrarias al régimen del momento, sirven para "redirigir las miradas de los lectores y de los personajes hacia otras posibilidades" (244). El autor propone, por tanto, un revolucionario enfoque con el que observar este conjunto de obras decimonónicas al mismo tiempo que muestra cómo el potencial transformador del estudio del artista sigue latente en un gran número de obras contemporáneas.

En resumen, *El estudio del artista en la literatura del siglo XIX* se inserta en una tradición crítica muy consolidada, pero, mediante el análisis de obras canónicas de este periodo, Hueso Vasallo propone perspectivas totalmente innovadoras, centrándose en uno de los aspectos más reseñables de la vida del artista, su estudio, pero que ha sido, sin embargo, uno de los más olvidados. Además, su carácter novedoso reside también en su exhaustivo estudio de las novelas de artistas, al ofrecer un análisis no solo de las obras de referencia en torno a las que gira el libro, sino también al dar cabida a otras muchas novelas artísticas que han pasado más desapercibidas por la crítica literaria, como *Lésbia* (1890), de Maria Benedita Bormann, *Tonio Kröger* (1903), de Thomas Mann, o *La búsqueda de la bien amada* (1897), de Thomas Hardy. Por su carácter ecléctico, diverso, paritario y, sobre todo, transgresor, *El estudio del artista en la literatura del siglo XIX* se convierte, pues, en el libro de referencia no sólo para aquellos interesados en el género literario del *künstlerroman*, sino también para cualquier experto en el siglo XIX, en los estudios espaciales, el feminismo, los estudios *queer* y las nuevas masculinidades.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Spanish Perspectives on the American West in 21st-century Literature, Cinema and Culture

Amaia Ibararan-Bigalondo, ed.

Peter Lang. 2025. 288 pp.
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According to Susan Kollin, "the popular Western emerged in the nineteenth century and developed out of the dime novel tradition, which provided the formula for its plots and characters. The stories were usually situated in lands that extend west of the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast and typically took place between 1865 and 1900, roughly the time Turner set as the closing of the frontier" (5). In the words of Daniel Worden, "rooted in a particular historical imaginary—the closing of the frontier, the tensions between the rule of law and individual freedom, the shift from the nomadic cowboy to the modern farmer and industrial worker—" the Western is characterized by a set of "recognizable tropes" (111-2). Among the most habitual plots, "stories about the building of the railway, tales of ranch life, narratives about the cattle empire, revenge tales, the cavalry and Indian story, and narratives about the clash between the outlaw and the marshal" are usually highlighted (Kollin 5).

Emphasizing the significant international influence that popular Westerns had on the general European and, particularly, Spanish public, the work edited by Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo aims to explore *Spanish Perspectives on the American West in 21st-century literature, Cinema and Culture*. From iconic Hollywood films by John Ford and others, Spaghetti/ European Westerns, popular television series like *Bonanza, The Virginian,* and *Little House on the Prairie,* Spanish Western dime novels, and comic books like *Zorro* and the Franco-Belgian *Lucky Luke,* the popular Western became a familiar and well-liked presence among Spanish audiences throughout the second half of the twentieth century. For the citizens under the authoritarian Francoist regime, the foundational mythologies of the American West proved to be a powerful form of escapism. By means of these Western stories, the Spanish public was granted the opportunity of fantasizing about the idea of possessing autonomy, exercising individual freedom, starting fresh, and acquiring potential wealth, in an idyllic rural landscape with an abundance of natural resources.

Taking this sociocultural background as a point of departure, the Spanish authors and proud members of the REWEST (EHU) research group, draw from their personal, genealogical, and transnational connections to bring a new light onto the study of the twenty-first century reiterations of the genre. Structured in three different parts, this volume focuses on contemporary American—the first and second part—and Euro-Spanish artistic depictions and "re-interpretations" of the American West—the third and final part. Beginning with the analysis of the postwestern literary and cinematographic works of white Anglo-American authors, the first part of the volume, by taking a majorly postcolonial and ecocritical

standpoint, explores the different realities of the West. Firstly, Maja Daniel, adopting an ecocritical and political ecological perspective, provides a thorough overview of the link established between the unsustainable modes of production and consumption of the local economy and the degradation of the natural environment in Annie Proulx's neo-Naturalist Wyoming ecofiction. Secondly, Martin Simonson and Jon Alkorta put forward a very convincing argument about the influence of Western literature on Ursula K. Le Guin's fantasy series. As the authors contend, through the employment of different Western motifs, Le Guin delivers an interesting Taoist critique of the Myth of the West.

Next, Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz presents how the unexpected pairing of a white girl raised by Kiowa people and an aged veteran itinerant news reader in Paulette Jiles' *News of the World* revitalizes the traditional Western formula; nevertheless, it is important to point out that the fact that the narrator follows Captain Kidd's perspective almost exclusively hinders the accurate portrayal of the multiple perspectives of the Texan Western landscape. Subsequently, Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo, through the study of Kelly Reichardt's *Meek's Cutoff*, explores whether something like a revisionist feminist Western exists. Following Maureen Schwarz's criteria "by which a Western film can be considered feminist", the author determines that in allowing a pioneer woman like Emily emerge as a leading voice and favoring the unnamed Cayuse Indian captive's character over "the representative of the Western self-made man"'s the movie successfully challenges the dominant white male discourse, establishing as a feminist and decolonial work as a result. Lastly, Ibon Robles examines the evolution of the cowboy image by focusing on Western representations of the Black cowboy and African American experience in the West. From stereotypical roles to cowboy heroes that often avoid making explicit reference to their Blackness, Robles argues that the growing participation of Black actors in Western movies opens the way for more realistic African American representations in the West.

To continue, the second part of the book of essays examines other artistic representations of the West by otherized and racialized groups of people, as well as more unconventional artistic forms. By conducting an overt defense of the combination of diverse indigenous forms of creativity, Silvia Martinez-Falquina highlights the power of intermingling visual images with the written word through the case study of *Not (Just) (An)Other:* a collection of short comics that combines the literatures of contemporary North American Indian writers with imaginative American and Canadian illustrations. To follow on, Amaia Soroa-Bacaicoa discusses the reconstruction of the American West as a Latinx, queer, and female space through the portrayal of formative journeys to the West in new Latinx Queer works like Gabby Rivera's young adult comics and novels. Later, Gorka Braceras traces Western influences in Watcher, Untamed Land, and Wafarer Norwegian and American Black Metal bands, and studies how the Myth of the West has informed their music. Next, Amaya Fernández Menicucci offers a Western reading of the science fiction shows *Altered Carbon* and *Raised by Wolves.* Her research identifies emerging postwestern trends in the incorporation of Western conventions into diverse thematic genres. In this case, the author parallels the American Frontier with ever-changing alien frontier lands, which give way to the exploration of posthuman and postcolonial hybrid identities. Lastly, Monika Madinabeitia, through the study of Basque artistic practices in the American West, revalues artistic meaning-making practices like arborglyphs or murals, as they are essential in processes of identity formation and for strengthening emotional and ethnic ties; in the same way, the author urges us to partake in processes of personal and cultural self-discovery through experimentation.

To round off, in the last part of the volume, the authors study Spanish and European artistic representations of the American West. In the first place, Ángel Chaparro Sainz brings the case of Spanish Kids Television to the fore while emphasizing the benefits of consuming representations of other cultures during childhood. Nevertheless, as the author warns, the company of an adult is key in the adoption of a Western revisionist position when being exposed to the reminiscent colonial and racist undertones of the more conventional Western tropes. In the second place, Jesús Ángel González discusses how the traditional Western formula was adopted and adapted by Spanish cinematographic productions to celebrate the Spaniards' Hispanic identity and explore national conflicts like the social, cultural, and political climate before and after the Spanish Civil War. In the third place, David Rio highlights the transnational dimension of the West by focusing on the representation of frontiers in contemporary Spanish drama. In *Arizona,* Juan Carlos Rubio offers a poignant critique of extremist xenophobic practices that encourage hyper-vigilance and violence against migrants in vulnerable situations. After that, Maite Aperribay-Bermejo analyses the case of *narcocorridos de batea,* a recontextualization and Galician Spanish derivation of Southwestern American and Northern Mexican *narcocorridos.* As the author explains, while both musical manifestations share the same musical structure and drug-trafficking frontier setting, they mainly vary in their geographies, funding, and political viewpoint: while the *narcocorridos* glorify drug-trafficking, the Galician variant stays critical of the associated political corruption. To finish with, Francisco Sáez de Adana studies the evolution of the Western genre in comics. Given that from the 1950s onward the genre remained relevant primarily in Europe, it comes as no surprise that new themes—such as the Western experiences of women, Native Americans, and African Americans—were tackled in European comics such as *Ken Parker*, *Buddy Longway*, and *Marshall Bass*.

All things considered, we could assert that this volume makes a substantial and multilayered contribution to the study of contemporary artistic representations of the American West. Ranging from more conventional Western works of fiction to revisionist, post-Western, fantastic, hybrid, and multidisciplinary artistic manifestations, the book successfully

encompasses some of the most relevant forms of expression of the American West. Nonetheless, the book might have benefited from a clearer structural division, as both the first and second sections bring together articles examining conventional, fantastic, and postwestern representations of the West by white and racialized authors across different artistic media, which makes the reasoning behind the separation of the parts unclear. Despite that, the book's depth and range make up for its structural inconsistencies. By covering such a wide spectrum of perspectives and artistic forms, it not only captures the evolving portrayal of the American West but also pushes readers to rethink fixed ideas of genre, identity, and regional representation. In short, this volume is a valuable resource that opens up new avenues for discussion and research, making it an important read for anyone interested in the shifting cultural landscape of the West.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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La casa de las orquídeas

Phyllis Shand Allfrey, au.

Lourdes López Ropero. ed.
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El mundo hispánico se siente muy vinculado al espacio caribeño, particularmente por los lazos afectivos y culturales existentes con Cuba, la República Dominicana y Puerto Rico. También Colombia y Venezuela se asoman al Caribe, y lo incorporan a su imaginario colectivo, dando el salto a todo el mundo de habla española.

Sin embargo, culturalmente el Caribe es mucho más diverso, porque ha habido épocas históricas en las que era posiblemente el lugar del mapa más disputado por las potencias europeas. España, al optar por las islas mayores, no puso demasiado interés en ocupar las de menor entidad, a pesar de dar nombre a varias de ellas (San Cristóbal, Granada, Antigua, Dominica). En el caso de Trinidad acabó por perderla a manos de los británicos. Ese desinterés español llevó incluso a algunos países europeos, menos conocidos por su actividad colonizadora, como Dinamarca, Suecia y Holanda a ocupar los territorios más pequeños. Esta fragmentación política del mapa se observa hoy en día, de manera sorprendente, en San Martín, una isla que no alcanza los cien kilómetros cuadrados y que debe compartir su soberanía entre holandeses y franceses, una verdadera anomalía histórica.

Lourdes López Ropero nos acerca, a través de la literatura, a la realidad de este microcosmos, a través de una de estas islas, Dominica. Lo hace rescatando la memoria de una autora como Phyllis Shand Allfrey y su novela *La casa de las orquídeas.* En una cuidadísima edición en Cátedra, con numerosas ilustraciones que reflejan diversos aspectos de la geografía, historia y la sociedad caribeña, las notas a pie van desgranando algunos de los aspectos del mundo caribeño que nos pueden resultar más distantes. De este modo, conocemos los nombres y las características de plantas como bromelia, cocuyo, árbol del viajero, mamoncillo tabonuco o el tamarindo, así como una diversidad de especies animales, alguna tan exótica para nosotros como el roedor agutí. Las notas son tan exhaustivas que la editora no tiene inconveniente en dedicar media página a la explicación del vestido criollo antillano o la tradición religiosa metodista. También se ofrecen con detalle aspectos de la realidad social como calipso o rumba, e igualmente se desgranan las múltiples alusiones dentro de la novela a obras de autores del canon artístico británico y europeo como Thackeray, Hans Christian Andersen, Goethe, Jane Austen o Wagner.

López Ropero acierta en su estudio introductorio al delimitar los marcos que servirán de referencia en la lectura de la novela. En primer lugar, señalando que en Phyllis Shand Allfrey estamos ante una figura injustamente olvidada en el canon caribeño. En este sentido, podemos señalar cómo en una obra de referencia para la literatura anglófona como es *Caribbean Literature in Transition* (Cambridge UP, 3 volumes) se otorga este estatus preferente a autores como Walcott, Naipaul, Lamming o Rhys, nombres que se repiten en cualquier revisión bibliográfica sobre el tema. La editora proporciona una amplísima referencia al tratamiento de Phyllis Shand Allfrey por parte del mundo académico, para acabar concluyendo que la historia la ha situado precisamente a la sombra de Jean Rhys.

López Ropero centra el significado de la figura de la autora de *La casa de las orquídeas* en su condición de mujer de raza blanca que se encuentra en la encrucijada de pertenecer a un grupo hegemónico (en términos de raza) pero, al mismo tiempo, subalterno (por género). Al igual que Jean Rhys, la escritora efectúa una descripción del escenario caribeño como

locus de conflicto y violencia asociados al colonialismo y la esclavitud. Ambas escritoras harán retratos magistrales de la decadencia de la vieja aristocracia caribeña, de la caída del régimen colonial y la implantación de un nuevo orden social en el que otros grupos raciales y clases sociales reivindican y obtienen cuotas de poder.

Precisamente la trama de *La casa de las orquídeas* viene a sintetizar la crisis personal de la autora, paralela a la de su país, Dominica, y la propia familia protagonista. El narrador principal de la historia es la niñera de la casa, lo que aporta una posición de proximidad a los hechos, pero hace que parte de la crítica se pregunte si es una narradora confiable, un planteamiento que nos recuerda a la polémica en torno a la figura de Nelly Dean, el ama de llaves que cuenta la historia en *Cumbres Borrascosas.*

Alguno de los personajes, particularmente Joan, una activista política en Londres que regresa al hogar caribeño, nos recuerda las peripecias de la propia autora. Resulta particularmente interesante indagar en la preocupación social de Phyllis Shand Allfrey, que merecería de hecho un capítulo propio más extenso, por lo extraordinario de su recorrido. Su identificación con causas progresistas, el feminismo y la descolonización, así como su participación activa en política suponen un hito en la sociedad caribeña de su época. Es significativo que hubiese sido nombrada ministra de Asuntos Sociales en el efímero gobierno de la Federación de las Indias Occidentales, un proyecto político fallido que podría haber reunido definitivamente en una única entidad estatal a las islas anglófonas. También se involucró en la política local, fundando un periódico y un partido de orientación socialista, aunque fue pronto apartada por sus compañeros, probablemente porque no todos aceptaban su origen social, ni su condición como mujer de raza blanca (Paravisini 1997: xvii). Estas circunstancias equiparan a la autora con las de tantos caribeños, igualmente en lucha agónica por encontrar una identidad o un encaje dentro del abigarrado mestizaje social, cultural, lingüístico e incluso religioso. Un caso paradigmático sería el de Derek Walcott, que reclama tener ancestros tanto africanos como escandinavos, y busca sus referentes culturales en la antigüedad grecolatina. Igualmente, V.S. Naipaul, que se distancia del universo caribeño en busca de otras identidades que tampoco encuentra en la tierra de sus ancestros, India, o en el país de acogida, Reino Unido. Phyllis Shand Allfrey no es ajena a este conflicto, aunque es consciente de que el futuro como ciudadano postcolonial solo se asegura si se resuelven las contradicciones derivadas del status colonial (Lassner :175).

La descripción del paisaje en la novela nos sitúa ante el debate abierto sobre este tema en la tradición literaria regional. La crítica ha señado cómo algunos autores se inclinan hacia el retrato del estereotipo tropical, como lo ha definido Laurence A. Breiner (1998: 102), o bien hacia la mera imitación de la convención estética europea, expuesta por críticos como Gilkes (1986: 6), Donnell (2006: 64) o Tiffin (2005: 200). En el caso de Shand Allfrey encontramos una recreación del espacio original, cargada de simbolismo (los invernaderos de orquídeas, como metáfora de un mundo criollo congelado en el tiempo), que posiblemente ha influido a Jean Rhys en *Ancho mar de los Sargazos*.

Esta reseña estaría incompleta sin hacer una mención particular a la cuestión lingüística. En cualquier obra caribeña anglófona nos encontramos con la coexistencia del inglés estándar junto a variedades criollas diversas, que en la mayoría de las ocasiones sirven para delimitar las clases sociales. Pero es que, además, Dominica, como ocurre también en Santa Lucía y otros países del área, presenta una extraordinaria convivencia del inglés y el criollo francés (Kwéyòl), como consecuencia de la alternancia en la soberanía entre Gran Bretaña y Francia. Este hecho que, sin duda, enriquece los textos literarios complica enormemente la labor de editores y traductores. En esta edición, la magnífica traducción de Ana Bustelo Tortella sortea sagazmente los aspectos más problemáticos, con una abundante colección de notas. Por su parte, Lourdes López Ropero ofrece igualmente, en sus anotaciones a pie de página, diversas precisiones de tipo lingüístico, complementando eficazmente la tarea de la traductora.

La novela resultará de interés para todos aquellos que se sientan atraídos por el mundo de las plantaciones caribeñas, por las turbulencias de la transición desde la esclavitud a la emancipación, y de la colonia a la independencia. No en vano, en la actual sociedad global, el microcosmos caribeño representa un anticipo del mestizaje al que se encamina el mundo. El abundante aparato crítico que sustenta a esta edición nos aproxima al escenario del Caribe y ayuda a sugerir nuevas perspectivas para el análisis y la comprensión de una autora que se rescata ahora de un injusto olvido y se ofrece al público de habla hispana en esta magnífica edición de editorial Cátedra.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Lowlife Tales

M. G. Sanchez

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En 2022 el prolífico escritor gibraltareño M.G. Sanchez publicaba la novela de formación *Marlboro Man*, un esclarecedor relato sobre los años más intensos del contrabando de tabaco y otras sustancias estupefacientes en aguas del estrecho de Gibraltar. En *Marlboro Man* leemos cómo este tráfico afectó las vidas de cientos de jóvenes de clase trabajadora de la zona, ansiosos de ganar dinero rápido en un entorno económicamente complejo que de otro modo les ofrecía escasas oportunidades. Tres años después, Sanchez saca a la luz *Lowlife Tales*, una colección de once relatos que vuelven a diseccionar la cultura gibraltareña hasta sus recovecos más íntimos, como lo viene haciendo la ya considerable obra de esta magna figura de la literatura británica. En efecto, narrativizar Gibraltar es lo que ha hecho M. G. Sanchez a lo largo de sus 15 trabajos de ficción y no ficción, ninguno de los cuales se aleja temáticamente de las particularidades este sensible y en muchos sentidos proceloso microterritorio de la península Ibérica (ni siquiera su *Bombay Diary,* de 2017, donde de manera indirecta y por comparación también se ilustran importantes aspectos de la cultura del Peñón). Escritor entregado y perseverante, inasequible al desaliento que le hubiese podido producir el sistemático desdeño de su importante trabajo por parte de las autoridades gibraltareñas en materia cultural, Sanchez ha publicado ya seis novelas (2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2021, 2020, 2022), varios volúmenes de corte autobiográfico (2016, 2017, 2019a) y otras tantas colecciones de cuentos (2006a, 2007, 2008, 2019b). También ha compilado sendas antologías de literatura sobre Gibraltar (2006b, 2012).

El primero de estos volúmenes, *Rock Black: Ten Gibraltarian Stories*, publicado en 2006, ya inauguraba la preferencia del autor por los tipos marginales, económicamente irrelevantes, oscuros en su *performance* e influencia social y en sus cábalas internas, profundamente vulnerables y humanos. Es la tónica que unifica también los magníficos cuentos compilados en *Lowlife Tales*: el asombroso descubrimiento, relatado minuciosamente, de las glorias y las sombras que tiñen la profunda incongruencia de la existencia humana. En este caso se trata de un selecto muestreo de *existencia humana* transcurrida en Gibraltar, pero cuya dimensión, ese trato a un tiempo profundamente crítico y tiernamente compasivo que nos regala el autor también en este nuevo libro, es profundamente universal –sin que por una vez nos tenga que asustar el uso de esta vertiginosa palabra–.

Según explica el propio Sanchez, el número once es un guiño a la colección *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* (1962) de Richard Yates, y como aquella, esta colección proporciona una espectacular revisión de territorios humanos densos, oscuros, complejos, sensibles, y, por todo esto, como decía, extrañamente enternecedores. Los protagonistas de estos relatos son siempre masculinos, un rasgo que se puede afirmar es característico de la narrativa sancheziana, así como lo es la profusión de narraciones en primera persona (un total de cinco, esto es, casi la mitad). Antes de comentar brevemente alguno de ellos, vale la pena incidir en un tema esencial de la literatura gibraltareña (que en diversas ocasiones he dado en llamar "*GibraLit*"): la cuestión del lenguaje. En un alarde de coraje, sin duda avalado por su madurez como autor, y también por el momento de reconocimiento que la idiosincrasia lingüística de Gibraltar está experimentando –reflejado, por ejemplo, en la publicación de la antología de autobiografías lingüísticas recientemente coeditada por el propio Sanchez (Seoane *et al* 2022), reseñada en un número anterior de esta revista (Rico Pérez 2025), así como la afinada revisión del estado de la cuestión que llevaba a cabo Elena Seoane en el mismo número de *Nexus* (Seoane 2025)–, Sanchez ha decidido en

esta ocasión ofrecer una versión de sus cuentos osadamente bilingüe, en inglés y llanito, cuya lectura está, por tanto, restringida a unos cuantos miles de personas. Entre esta selecta minoría nos contamos, afortunadamente, la mayor parte de lectores de *Nexus*, además, por supuesto, de buena parte de la restringida población de Gibraltar, y de unos cuantos miles de lectores británicos, bastantes más americanos, y algunos más aquí y allá. Existe también una edición del libro exclusivamente en inglés (un oportuno desdoblamiento lingüístico que Sanchez ha puesto también en práctica con *Marlboro Man* y con su novela anterior, *The Fetishist*, de 2021), pero será una pena que opte por ella quien tenga un mínimo dominio de inglés y de español, porque la alternancia de ambas lenguas y su deliciosa convergencia en la singularidad del llanito dialogado, son una fiesta. Y es que, si el territorio lingüístico de Gibraltar ya es de por sí atractivo, la pericia y el ritmo de su textualización en la pluma de Sanchez, lo convierten en sencillamente memorable. Un ejemplo:

> '*Escucha*, Dad,' Jordan said some minutes later, pulling his father to one side while his mum was in the loo. *'No voy a ir con ustedes a la casa de Tita Anita esta noche. Voy a ir instead a* Both Worlds. *Tengo un amigo allí que me ha pedío varias veces que vaya al* party *que está dando. No te importaría darme un* lift *allí, no,* Dad*?'*
>
> *'Tá seguro de que no quieres ení con nosotros a casa de tu tía Anita?'* Jordan's father asked, the 40-watt ceiling light adding an unhealthy sheen to his balding crown. *'Tus primas Angela y Lorena van a está allí con sus novios. Les alegraría mucho verte.'*
>
> 'Under other circumstances, *me encantaría verlas también. Pero este colega mío*, Dad,' he said, not exactly uttering an untruth, 'well, this guy is a bit of a lost soul, *sabes lo que te digo*, Dad, *y creo que* he'd appreciate having *gente con él en* New Year's Eve, *me entiendes?*'
>
> '*Bueno*, in that case*, vete a despedir el año con tu amigo, Jordan; le hará bien pasá una noche como esta con gente alrededó de él*.' (Sanchez 2026: 96-97)

Aunque en toda lógica cada lector se inclinará por uno u otro de los once relatos, todos mantienen una sostenida calidad narrativa. Vale la pena destacar tres grupos temáticos, aunque es cierto que estos y otros temas se entrecruzan en prácticamente cada una de las páginas del volumen. En primer lugar, algunos cuentos son particularmente impactantes por la profunda ternura que despiertan, teniendo en cuenta que este, como decía, es un signo definitorio de toda la colección. Destacaré tres entre ellos: en primer lugar, el propio cuento que abre la colección, "Shot," que relata la desafortunada caída de un muchacho que era promesa del atletismo y su consecuente entrada en el mundo del contrabando como única alternativa en un universo de limitadas posibilidades económicas y vitales. Junto a este, el titulado "Jimmy Cavanna" nos permite ser testimonio del implacable determinismo social que arrastra al epónimo protagonista. La prístina sensibilidad de este chaval (intuida por el narrador, que teje una singular amistad con este silencioso personaje pasando con él largas jornadas de pesca aislados en el océano), merecería una delicada educación humanística. En cambio, su entorno lo condena a un destino marcado por la filiación familiar, más bien dudosa en cuanto a actividades y ética, que él había intentado esquivar sin conseguirlo. Y para cerrar este grupo temático, en "Paulie and the Pulpo" conocemos a otro joven gibraltareño, esta vez un chico obeso y marcado como diferente por tener solo tres dedos en la mano derecha, y que también encuentra alivio para su marginación en la pesca, en este caso submarina. No quisiera desvelar finales, pero sí enfatizar que en todos los casos las conclusiones con que Sanchez remata sus *Lowlife Tales* son sorprendentes y magistrales. Sé que estoy alabando esta colección sin recato. Sencillamente, lo merece.

Como segundo núcleo temático, vale la pena destacar el modo en que varios de estos relatos ofrecen una crítica punzante y divertida –así, siempre constructiva– sobre el establishment político y cultural gibraltareño. Aquí destacarían los relatos "Diestro Maestro," donde un político local al que le gustan los toros es pillado *in fraganti* en una corrida en España, a lo que siguen unas divertidas peripecias con un final irónico e hilarante; "CJ Interruptus," que nos presenta la por el momento ficticia figura del *Laureate Poet* de Gibraltar, con sus más y sus menos y, de nuevo, una conclusión regocijante; y "Patriotic Eric," todavía más ácido, y no menos irónico. Ahora bien, este último ciertamente no es nada divertido en el desasosegante final, que desenmascara lo absurdo de los rituales nacionalistas capaces de potenciar la más pavorosa hipocresía social

Como adelantaba, vamos comprobando en las breves notas sobre los cuentos que los protagonistas de estos *Lowlife Tales* son invariablemente masculinos. En este sentido, una marca de esta colección sería, además, la exploración de formas de relación entre hombres. Podemos hablar, por tanto, de un bloque tercer temático que refiere a la relacionalidad de las masculinidades gibraltareñas, a las formas de amistad, complicidad y, en definitiva el *male bonding* en el territorio. Aquí entrarían "Best of Both Worlds," "Cabrón x 2" e "In Paradisum," tres relatos sobre la amistad masculina o, en algún caso, sobre sus problemáticos sucedáneos. Volvamos referirnos también a ""CJ Interruptus" aquí (el relato sobre ese imaginado *Poet Laureate* al que os referíamos antes, una figura que ojalá puede convertirse algún día en una realidad, para hacer justicia al excelente trabajo producido en la península por poetas como Giordano Durante), en cuanto que retrata una relación sentimental entre hombres. Este es un tema que no abunda en la literatura gibraltareña, pero que está asomando con firmeza, como lo subraya la publicación de la valiosa novela de Humbert Hernandez *Luciano* (2023), de la que valdrá

la pena hablar en otra reseña.

Se me ocurre que la colección *Lowlife Tales* podría estar graciosamente dedicada (graciosamente aquí empleado en el sentido inglés del término) a aquellas personas que siguen creyendo que la literatura gibraltareña –"*GibraLit*"– no existe. Mientras que la extraordinaria cantidad y calidad de la obra de M. G. Sanchez lo señala como una figura absolutamente sobresaliente de las letras gibraltareñas, su perseverancia ha conseguido abonar un terreno que, junto con él, están haciendo florecer otros excelentes narradores y poetas como los mencionados Humbert Hernandez y Giordano Durante, pero también otros muchos (tras la estela de Sam Benady y Mary Chiappe, siguen Rebecca Calderon, Gabriel Moreno, Jonathan Teuma…). A la vista está que quienes siguen afirmando que la literatura gibraltareña no existe (pues "haberlos, haylos," aunque cueste creerlo) están muy, pero que muy equivocados.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Fantasía, aventura y sociedad. Perspectivas contemporáneas

José María Mesa-Villar, Mariano Urraco-Solanilla, Mario Ramos Vera y Benoît Filhol, eds.

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Introducción

Actualmente, el género fantástico –sea en términos literarios o cinematográficos– reconoce de múltiples y casi infinitas ramificaciones que trascienden el ámbito de lo meramente artístico o de la industria del entretenimiento. Tras el indiscutible éxito mundial de sagas como *El Señor de los Anillos* de J. R. R. Tolkien o *Harry Potter* de J. K. Rowling (con sus respectivas adaptaciones a la gran pantalla), así como el fenómeno de *Juego de Tronos* (adaptación de HBO de *Canción de Hielo y Fuego* de George R. R. Martin), el género permanentemente se reinventa con nuevas creaciones como *La Rueda del Tiempo* de Robert Jordan (adaptada a serie por Amazon Studios) o *Nacidos de la bruma* de Brandon Sanderson, entre otros muchos títulos de carácter tanto *mainstream* como alternativos. Sin embargo, más allá de la reconocida capacidad creativa y el desarrollo de una industria cultural en apogeo, los fundamentos y los límites de lo fantástico encuentran su radicación en un diálogo con diferentes narrativas y/o contextos sociopolíticos en los que la evasión se intercala con la deliberación y la crítica.

Bajo esta premisa, la obra colectiva *Fantasía, aventura y sociedad. Perspectivas contemporáneas* presenta un novedoso espacio de reflexión e indagación acerca de las dimensiones y significados sociales que definen el género de fantasía y sus diferentes implicaciones sociológicas, antropológicas, filosóficas, políticas y estéticas. Editado por un equipo interdisciplinar (José María Mesa-Villar, Mariano Urraco-Solanilla, Mario Ramos Vera y Benoît Filhol), este libro colectivo reúne y desarrolla una serie de contribuciones al *III Congreso Interdisciplinar sobre Literatura e Imagen: "Revisiones de la fantasía y la aventura en la literatura y las artes visuales,"* organizado por el Grupo de Investigación "Literatura, Cultura y Lenguas Modernas" de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad Católica de Murcia (UCAM) en febrero de 2024.

A este respecto, la obra colectiva se presenta como una continuidad de las conversaciones del encuentro internacional, profundizando en el diálogo y la reflexión humanística en torno a la relevancia actual de los géneros de fantasía y aventura, de explícito carácter multiforme y con potencial capacidad didáctica, tal y como se reconoce en publicaciones previas, dedicadas a otros géneros, como *Imágenes distópicas: representaciones culturales* (2022, Los Libros de la Catarata). En este sentido, si bien manteniendo su propia coherencia interna, *Fantasía, aventura y sociedad. Perspectivas contemporáneas* propone una aproximación similar a los modos de entender y problematizar un género de actual carácter popular donde caben diferentes miradas, tanto académicas como de la crítica cultural. Una aproximación que, además,

se da desde la constitución de una lectura accesible, pero rigurosa, a temáticas previamente exploradas por la teoría literaria (Mijaíl Bajtín, Theodor Adorno, Tzvetan Todorov, David Roas, etcétera) y los estudios culturales (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, etcétera), con espacios de publicación y divulgación especializados como *Brumal. Revista de investigación sobre lo Fantástico* o el Festival Internacional de Cine Fantástico de Elche (FANTAELX). De este modo, se podría afirmar que *Fantasía, aventura y sociedad. Perspectivas contemporáneas* representa una contribución clave al campo de los estudios culturales sin descuidar sus puntos de apoyo en los estudios literarios, entre otras disciplinas.

Composición y aspectos relevantes de la obra

Según David Roas (2011), lo fantástico consiste en un extrañamiento de la realidad y una interrogación acerca de los límites de lo (im)posible. A su vez, otros teóricos como Roger Caillois (1970) o Tzvetan Todorov (2005) señalan que, si bien la fantasía interpela a una susceptible ruptura o desafío con los fenómenos que caracterizan lo real, es erróneo considerar la fantasía como un método de evasión o huida en un sentido estricto, tal y como preconizan determinados puntos de vista escépticos con la "función" de lo fantástico.

Estas percepciones convergen con el que sería el fundamento o primordial idea-fuerza por la cual se vertebra *Fantasía, aventura y sociedad. Perspectivas contemporáneas*, en tanto que "[…] La fantasía exige la combinación creíble entre realidad e irrealidad […], ambas son permeables: la una lleva a la otra" (p. 18). Por tanto, compuesto por un total de diecisiete capítulos firmados por autores/as de diferentes disciplinas humanísticas y científico-sociales, este compendio se interroga sobre los elementos que hacen de lo fantástico –y su relación con lo mítico, lo heroico y otros (sub)géneros de ficción– un espacio de reflexión y deliberación acerca de los modos por los cuales se constituyen narrativas donde tanto la fantasía como la aventura encierran significados más profundos y con afán didáctico en torno a problemas sociopolíticos y epistemológicos actuales.

A este respecto, si bien la composición del libro carece de una estructura formal por bloques o apartados delimitados, se aprecia una organización interna que transita entre la identificación de narrativas o sagas formativas al estilo de *Bildungsroman* (capítulos 2, 3, 8, 12), nuevas tipologías de lo heroico (capítulos 3, 14, 15), reinterpretaciones fantásticas de lo mítico o lo folclórico (6, 7, 9, 17) y transgresiones del proceso creativo y el mensaje político inscrito en lo fantástico (capítulos 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17). De este modo, salvo el primer capítulo–"Correlatos del imaginario sobrenatural: mito y fantasía," por José Manuel Losada, de eminente componente teórico y eje de interrogación sobre los modos de relatar lo mítico y lo fantástico–; el resto de los capítulos interpela a diferentes dimensiones donde fantasía y aventura se enhebran e hibridan con otros géneros, formatos y estilos narrativos. Este sería el principal hilo conductor de la obra colectiva a la hora de establecer diálogos y reflexiones en torno a temas donde la fantasía es más bien un complemento que un aspecto central de diferentes tramas, si bien sin renunciar a la característica coherencia interna y plausibilidad de cada universo (Le Guin, 2018).

Esto se advierte, por una parte, en ejemplos como en los que el *retelling* desde una perspectiva fantástica otorga no sólo continuidad a mitos o cuentos tradicionales, sino que se yergue como posibilidad de nuevas interpretaciones y perspectivas críticas –como, por ejemplo, *topoi* patriarcales–, tal y como se aprecia en los capítulos séptimo ("Otra vuelta de tuerca: reescritura y análisis comparativo de los cuentos de hadas «La dama de la casa del amor» y «En compañía de lobos," Angela Carter," por Laura Martínez Gimeno) y décimo ("Medea en el cómic: una relectura postmoderna del mito," por María Ruiz Sánchez). Asimismo, según se aprecia en el análisis de diferentes obras y universos de fantasía oscura o fantasía gótica, tal y como abordan los capítulos quinto ("*Sandman*, de Neil Gaiman, como fantasía shakespeariana," por María Consuelo Forés Rossell) y noveno ("Reescribiendo el mito de Psique y Eros: intertextualidad entre el gótico femenino y relatos de la mitología clásica en *La cumbre escarlata*, de Guillermo del Toro," por Marta Miguel-Baldellou), lo fantástico sirve de entramado de confluencia de diferentes recursos y estilos narrativos que posibilitan historias donde la crítica social se encuentra con historias de resistencia y emancipación tanto individual como colectiva, describiendo procesos psico-sociológicos al modo que propone la poética realista o naturalista al mismo tiempo que aúna elementos góticos y románticos.

Por otra parte, y según esta estructura flexible, diversas aportaciones como los capítulos undécimo ("La fantasía del 'fascismo fascinante'. El caso de *El Hobbit: la batalla de los cinco ejércitos* (Jackson, 2014)," por Marcos Jiménez González) y décimo tercero ("*Credere, obbedire, combattere*: de la obediencia al rechazo del fascismo del niño de verdad en *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio* (2022)," por Anita Diana Rescia) indagan en los modos por los cuales se reproducen prototipos y símbolos de índole autoritario en las producciones fantásticas, tanto tradicionales como recientes, definiendo espacios de lucha en torno a los modos de (re)interpretar la realidad. Este aspecto sería uno de los puntos más destacables del libro al adentrarse en la reflexión en torno a cómo la obra de arte, tal y como apuntaban diversos autores de la Teoría Crítica (Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, etcétera), es copartícipe de procesos político-sociales donde se modulan y (des)legitiman determinadas subjetividades y, por extensión, se refuerzan tanto axiomas como

superestructuras ideológicas, llegando la obra a ser un símbolo en sí mismo. Un claro ejemplo, además del caso de estudio del citado capítulo undécimo, sería cómo el octavo capítulo ("Autoafirmación personal y derrota del maltratador emocional en el filme *Dentro del laberinto* (1986), de Jim Henson," por José María Mesa-Villar), se adentra en la deliberación acerca de las ambivalencias de determinadas producciones fantásticas, susceptibles de ser leídas desde una perspectiva de clásica *Bildungsroman* y/o como (re)creaciones que desbordan lo estrictamente fantástico. Esto también acontece en los capítulos segundo ("Atravesar el límite de lo real: dimensiones alternativas y heroísmo juvenil en *Stranger Things,*" por Mario Ramos Vera y Mariano Urraco Solanilla) y tercero ("De Harry Potter a Katniss Everdeen: el camino hacia lo heroico en las narrativas juveniles," por María José González Dávila), donde se señala la dimensión instructiva y la promulgación de un determinado arquetipo de héroe juvenil en tiempos de zozobra.

A este respecto, la actualidad del género fantástico no elude los problemas definitorios del mismo, tal y como apuntan Callois o Todorov –donde, a veces, se confunde con lo maravilloso del realismo mágico o lo grotesco del género distópico–, sino que hace suyos estos límites imprecisos donde la fantasía converge con la ciencia ficción (véanse los ejemplos del universo *grimdark* de *Warhammer 40,000* o *La Rueda del Tiempo*) y/o el género de terror, según se advierte en el sexto capítulo del libro ("¿Cuento o pesadilla? Revisiones de Hansel y Gretel en el cine de acción real contemporáneo," por Carmen Pérez Riu), entre otros ("*Elden Ring* y Necrolimbo: análisis del impacto poético-narrativo y simbólico en el jugador," por Francisco José Francisco Carrera). Por lo tanto, más allá de elementos conformadores de un particular estilo, *world-building* o *setting* narrativo, normalmente de tintes (post)medievales, el género fantástico se desarrolla en la actualidad fuera de unos marcos donde la magia o "tradicionales" criaturas sobrenaturales como dragones, elfos, enanos, orcos, trolls, etcétera no son constitutivas de por sí de un canon concreto ni, mucho menos, de una interpretación inequívoca acerca de su presencia o ausencia, ni siquiera definitorias de una maniqueísta (pen)última batalla del Bien contra el Mal, según se advierte en el decimoquinto capítulo del libro ("Descubrirse como ser lilithiano: la transformación de Sergio Mendhoza en lobo en la saga *El libro de los héroes*, de Antonio Malpica," por Ana Fortoul Tapie). De hecho, la fantasía se puede erguir como metanarrativa con una orientación explícitamente crítica a la par que recreativa, tal y como se muestra en los capítulos cuarto ("La visión imposible de Terry Gilliam: desafíos en la producción de *Las aventuras del barón Munchausen* (1988)," por Miguel Ángel Martínez-Díaz y Sergio Albadaladejo-Ortega) y decimosexto ("Una aventura de piratas fantástica: aportaciones de *Monkey Island* al imaginario popular y a la narrativa intermedial," por María Fernández Rodríguez).

En este sentido, *Fantasía, aventura y sociedad. Perspectivas contemporáneas* reúne una serie de reflexiones que rehúyen clichés de diverso tipo y, sobre todo, ensancha la investigación interdisciplinar acerca de lo fantástico, ahondando en aspectos relativos a su proclive transtextualidad, su claro carácter hipertextual y su cada vez más frecuente desarrollo inter y transmediático.

Conclusiones

La lectura de *Fantasía, aventura y sociedad. Perspectivas contemporáneas* ofrece un conjunto de propuestas heterodoxas acerca de cómo puede analizarse el género de la fantasía y de la aventura desde diferentes puntos de vista que resultan complementarios más que contradictorios. Si bien el texto requeriría de una mayor contextualización acerca de su producción y objeto final, la lectura íntegra del mismo da cuenta de un diálogo implícito entre las diferentes contribuciones, proporcionando (contra) argumentaciones y reflexiones provocativas. En este sentido, la obra da cuenta de un compendio analítico de enorme interés tanto para públicos expertos como *legos* en el ámbito de los estudios culturales y/o literarios sobre el género fantástico. De hecho, este libro constituye por sí mismo una puerta de acceso a un mundo donde la divagación se encuentra con la materialidad de la crítica, cerrando ese círculo que define las discontinuidades entre lo real y lo irreal donde el poder de lo fantástico radica, precisamente, en la capacidad de elaborar una detallada figuración de la realidad.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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In (M)other Words: Writings on Mothering and Motherhood 2009-2024

Andrea O'Reilly

Coe Hill, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2024. 533 pp.
ISBN: 978-17-72585-27-8

In 1975 the American critic and intellectual Adrienne Rich opened the conversation on mothers with her foundational publication *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* Accompanied by personal experiences that are recounted through a captivating lyrical tone, it is considered the first and most relevant theoretical resource on mothering. Since the appearance of this seminal publication, multiple scholars, such as Susan Maushart, Elizabeth Podnieks and Fiona Joy Green, have continued Rich's conversation, thereby proposing ideas, theories and perspectives that have significantly expanded her initial discourse. Yet, if there is anyone that deserves special recognition for conducting extensive research on mothering, that is Andrea O'Reilly. This researcher stands out for founding in 1998 the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM), which evolved in 2010 into the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI).[1] Besides, in 2006 O'Reilly founded Demeter Press, the first refereed editing press on mothering, as a means to help launch and develop the academic field that she coined that same year as *Motherhood Studies.* Even though O'Reilly has published more than fifty writings on mothering, including articles, chapters and monographs, her recently published *In (M)other Words* is, by far, the most rigorous publication that theorizes the many diverse aspects that comprise this research area.

In this volume, Andrea O'Reilly collects 25 chapters on this topic, rendered as articles, essays and conversations, that she published from 2009 to 2024. The opening section, which ensues from Joy Green's exquisite foreword, starts by revisiting Rich's pioneering feminist text. As other scholars in the field have done, O'Reilly is not an exception in developing her discourse from Rich's prominent distinction among women's potential relationship to their reproductive powers and the patriarchal institution that dictates and defines what mothers should be (Rich 2021, 7). These contrastive concepts serve as the foundation upon which O'Reilly builds all the ideas presented in her volume. Moreover, the writer's introduction constitutes a concise autobiographical writing in which she presents her main achievements and goals, leading to the subsequent chapters by pointing out the need for a refreshed discourse on

1 MIRCI is a feminist organization centered on mothering that runs several parallel associations, forums and programs that explore this topic from an inclusive perspective. MIRCI also manages Andrea O'Reilly's *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* (JMI).

mothers that values its pleasures while accepting its challenges (O'Reilly 2024, 17). Through these texts, O'Reilly examines mothering in all its possibilities and provides a timeline that helps readers locate the main contributions that have been done within the field. Both the detailed reference lists and its intersectional perspective, among other factors, invite anyone interested in mothering to rely on this collection, As Dr. Motapanyane argues (2024), *In (M) other Words* gives us "a lens through which to view motherhood not as it has been prescribed, but as it is lived" (quoted in O'Reilly 2024, n.p.).

Even though Andrea O'Reilly delves into many aspects related to mothering, an essential chapter that needs to be read to understand her investigation is the one focused on what she coined as *matricentric feminism*. This concept, deeper developed in her previous *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice* (2016), stems from her desire to "do feminism as a mother and do mothering as a feminist" (O'Reilly 2024, 51). Considering the physical and psychological impact that mothering has on mothers, the researcher introduced this idea, inspired by Elaine Showalter's gynocentrism (a woman-centered feminism) (O'Reilly 2024, 52), as a feminism specifically for and about mothers. Given that O'Reilly understands mothers as anyone who engages in this experience, she provides a compelling perspective on mothering by challenging the traditional insight that sees it as necessarily having to entail blood bonds. On the other hand, something that cannot be disregarded about O'Reilly's matricentric feminism is her undeniable success in refusing the conventional idea that sees mothering as natural and essential to women; by understanding this experience as something that may or may not occur, she thus sees it as a practice rather than as what defines women's identities.

Another relevant idea presented in *In (M)other Words* is what the writer calls *empowered mothering*, which, as she explains, consists in introducing mothering practices that diminish the discrimination that the patriarchal institution engenders on mothers (O'Reilly 2024, 96). O'Reilly also introduces the notion of *feminist mothering* to refer to mothering modes that conform to feminism (2024, 98). As it can be seen, one mothering type may lead to the other, since implementing feminist practices that contribute to transforming social conventions also entails reclaiming mothers' power. In parallel to these progressive ideas, many scholars, such as Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, have explored Adrienne Rich's insight into matrophobia, which is seen as the fear for repeating one's mother's negative practices or behaviors (2021, 240). Yet, Andrea O'Reilly provides a deep analysis on Gina Wong Wylie's innovative response to Rich's idea through what she calls *matroreform,* meaning that some mothers engage in practices that deviate from their mothers' mothering (2024, 99). There is no denying that O'Reilly's volume can be considered an inflectional point when examining matrophobia on the grounds that she demonstrates through Wong-Wylie's proposal that mothers may not be phobic to mothering but unwilling to accept and engage in mothering experiences that reinforce social conventions. What is more, this thorough investigation of Wong-Wylie's concept helps understand mothering as an individual, political and diverse experience, inasmuch as relying on empowered and/or feminist mothering enables mothers to transform their experiences through matroreform.

Among the many ideas that Andrea O'Reilly considers in her last-published collection, one that must be mentioned is the daughter-centric perspective that characterizes the writings and analyses focused on the mother-daughter relationship. Even though it is interesting to listen to daughters' emotions and experiences when being mothered, the volume highlights the scarce active representation that mothers have had in literature, as Rich already noted in her inaugural text. In order to change this, *In (M)other Words* claims for matrifocal texts, meaning mother-centered writings that give women writers the chance to control their lived realities as mothers and their representations in the text (O'Reilly 2024, 463). As claimed by the researcher, mothers have been expected for ages to love and sacrifice themselves for their daughters, thereby pointing at mothers' ambivalence as an unnatural feeling (O'Reilly 2024, 469). However, having divergent emotions toward mothering and, as a result, toward mothers' daughters has been an explored issue in the recent years by scholars such as Rozsika Parker, Fiona Maccallum and Agne Raneberg. They thus encourage women writers to voice this ambivalence through matrifocal texts in which the mother's voice, as Marianne Hirsch claims, moves "from silence to speech" (1989, 16). Without the slightest doubt, O'Reilly's volume raises relevant questions about the conducted research on mothers and daughters in that it invites mothers to give voice to the challenges they find in this dyad beyond the daughter-centric perspective that distinguishes the existent literature. Recent scholars, such as Allison M. Alford and Jessica P. Lougheed, have engaged in innovative research on daughters' real experiences and roles in the mother-daughter dyad. Though relevant, one might contend that it is crucial to avoid falling into the usual mother-blaming perspective that characterizes this research and to continue giving voice to mothers' actual feelings and experiences in this bond.

In the end, it shall be pointed out that this collection focuses on many other aspects related to mothering that have not elicited much critical interest yet, perhaps due to their still ongoing inclusion in the field. In these chapters, O'Reilly examines some mothering types that tend to be criticized, on occasions by mothers themselves, and deemed as inadequate. An example can be young mothering, which tends to be considered dangerous for mothers and daughters. However, O'Reilly well notes that this extended assumption not only understands that all young mothers are uncareful and deviant, but it also disregards the diverse positive and fulfilling experiences that other young mothers live (2024, 269). In

essence, it could be said that this generalization intensifies the treatment that young mothers receive as Other mothers.2 As claimed in the volume, research has evidenced that "to be a young mother is almost by definition to be a bad mother or an unfit mother" (O'Reilly 2024, 268). On the other hand, academic mothers also tend to be criticized for wanting to "'have it all': an education, a career, and a family" (O'Reilly 2024, 407). As explained in the volume, PhD mothers face three competeing factors that shape their experiences: their status as post-second wave beneficiaries, a demanding career that implies accepting exhaustive academic expectations and, at last, the societal requirements that good mothering, also called intensive mothering by Sharon Hays, entails (O'Reilly 2024, 409). Hence, the writer's collection conveys an evident need for an institution that understands the brutal contradictions that it puts on mothers and points out that academia, which is designed to be progressive, should demonstrate a more empathetic treatment for mothers. O'Reilly's volume is, for sure, an outcry for mothers' inclusion in any space.

On the whole, *In (M)other Words* has proved to be a rigorous analysis on the research that has been conducted on mothering(s) so far, thereby becoming a field-defining publication that opens the door for future research. The thorough examination of each topic and the rich referencing to existent scholarship on the field invite anyone interested in mothering to engage in O'Reilly's compelling publication. Beyond all doubt, her ambition to redefine mothering and her success in finding the inclusiveness missing in previous research make this volume the deepest and most avant-garde resource on this topic. As O'Reilly hints throughout her publication, this collection gives us the *(m)other words* to engage in an innovative, feminist and humane discourse on mothers.

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2 It needs to be clarified that, in this case, the concept *Other mothers* does not refer to what Patricia Hill Collins coined as *other mothering* in reference to Black mothers' inclination to care, either through an established agreement or by nature, for other mothers' children (2000, 180). In contrast, here I use the term *Other* mothers, with an emphasis on their treatment as the Other, to allude to mothers that are excluded from the mainstream discourse on mothering. Other examples included in this concept may be disabled mothers and lesbian mothers.

BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Cinema of/for the Anthropocene: Affect, Ecology, and More-than-Human Kinship

Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Andrea Ruthven, eds.

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The Anthropocene is an intricate and often elusive concept, as the diverse attempts to define it as our current geological epoch testify. In this regard, *Cinema of/for the Anthropocene: Affect, Ecology, and More-than-Human Kinship* takes a clear position: we are indeed living in an era in which the effects of human actions on the environment are increasingly hard to ignore. This twelve-chapter volume examines how cinema—both narrative and documentary—represents and resists these consequences through close readings of films across genres and traditions. Edited by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Andrea Ruthven as part of Routledge's *Advances in Film Studies* series, the collection assembles a diverse group of scholars in film and environmental humanities to interrogate cinema's role in shaping affective responses to ecological crises. In doing so, it contributes to the growing scholarship in environmental media studies.

The interrogation of cinema's ecological dimensions has been growing since the mid-1990s, notably initiated with the criticism of the culture-nature division in Jhan Hochman's *Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel, and Theory* (1998). The publication of *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (Rust, Monani, and Cubitt 2012) framed cinema as "a form of negotiation, a mediation that is itself ecologically placed as it consumes the entangled world around it, and in turn, is itself consumed" (1). The volume argued for ecocritical perspectives of films not merely as cultural artifacts, but also as material technologies which affect our imagination of the world and, potentially, our actions towards it, while also acknowledging cinema's direct ecological footprint. Importantly, it showed that ecocinema scholarship was not limited to films with explicit environmentalist messages, but rather encompassed a wide spectrum of cinematic productions, from Hollywood to independent avant-garde film.

Subsequent publications like *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film* (Willoquet-Maricondi 2010), *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Ivakhiv 2013) and *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (Weik von Mossner 2017) focused on the ways in which cinematic forms mobilised affects to 'move' audiences and explored how cinema connects materially to the world through cognitive processes of perception and emotional appeal. More recent genre-specific works, such as *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*

(Tidwell and Soles 2021), have also paid attention to how cinema can appeal to audiences' responsibility towards nature. Despite differences in approach, these works converge in understanding cinema as a representational mode whose affective appeals are not merely aesthetic but also active forces shaping spectators' perceptions of ecological threats and their potential responses. *Cinema of/for the Anthropocene* stands as a substantial contribution to these discussions, adding to their ethical, political and aesthetic dimensions.

A crucial strength in this collection is its commitment to Indigenous perspectives, queer ecologies and gender dynamics. It proposes cinema as an aesthetic and ethical force that can either reinforce anthropocentric, patriarchal and colonialist worldviews or help imagine alternative futures. In this respect, the volume succeeds in expanding environmental media studies through its attention to aesthetics, affect and minoritised cinematic traditions. Although it leaves some areas underdeveloped—most notably, critiques of corporate-industrial responsibility for the climate crisis, and a more sustained antispeciesist perspective—the book deserves wide readership among scholars and students of ecocinema, environmental media studies, ecocriticism, affect theory and cultural studies, due to its wide-ranging case studies, theoretical interventions and reflections on cinema's potential to challenge entrenched hierarchies. Its approachable tone makes it an accessible resource for both experts and beginners, without compromising its analytical quality.

The volume opens with Salma Monani's foreword, which situates the volume within Indigenous approaches to ecocinema, environmental media studies, affect studies and cognitive ecocritical reading, which highlights cinema's affective power. Paszkiewicz's introductory chapter situates the Anthropocene—and its reformulations, such as the Capitalocene—as not only a geological epoch but also a discursive construct shaped by colonial histories, gendered hierarchies and the nature–culture divide. This framing sets the tone for the entire book, which does not aim to resolve the conceptual debate but instead asks whether cinema can challenge the cultural logic that produced the ecological crisis and how scholarship can approach these challenges without reproducing settler-colonial discourses.

One way in which these colonial discourses can be reinforced is through Euro-American approaches to the Anthropocene as a new concept, which neglect longstanding Indigenous scholarship on human–nature relations. Missy Molloy's chapter, discussing New Zealand Māori filmmaker Nova Paul, argues that Indigenous storytelling disrupts the colonial/Eurocentric dichotomy between culture and nature, offering alternative models of ecological relationality.

Libe García Zarranz's and Andrea Ruthven's chapters focus on the cinematic representation of land as an animated entity, exploring the idea of land agency. García Zarranz applies her concept of 'willful aesthetics' to analyze two animated short films where cinematic forms might help promote ethical and social justice. *The Bear Facts* (Wright 2010) represents the landscape as an animated entity with its own agency to resist settler colonialism, while *Twenty-Something* (Corbin 2021) highlights that environmental justice must contend with racial and gender dimensions. Ruthven, in turn, employs the concept of Terristory to investigate how two Canadian short films represent the land and its nonhuman inhabitants to question the settler-colonial landscapes and try to reclaim them. By challenging the Eurocentric nature-culture binary, these chapters encourage reconceptualizing territory not as passive but as possessing narrative and agentive potential.

Another contribution examining land focuses on the gendered politics of outdoor adventure cinema. Virginia Luzón-Aguado notes that outdoor spaces have historically been coded as masculine realms of conquest and exploration, often excluding women. Her comparison of the feature-length films *Wild* (Vallée 2014) and *Tracks* (Curran 2014) shows how the female protagonists claim mobility and agency in nature, yet it leaves the anthropocentric assumptions underlying these journeys largely unexamined. While gender bias is persistent in adventure films, anthropocentric biases often underlie narratives in which humans trespass into nonhuman territories. This echoes Val Plumwood's famous encounter with a crocodile in Kakadu National Park in 1985: was her incursion into the natural space an empowering journey, or a reckless anthropocentric invasion? A post-anthropocentric analysis here would further complicate the genre's emancipatory narratives, lest landscapes remain objectified as sites for human fulfillment.

Two chapters stand out regarding human–nonhuman animal encounters. Marta Segarra's text critiques anthropocentric assumptions in cinematic portrayals of nonhuman animals. It highlights animistic and shamanic cinema that attempts to stage trans-species dialogues, treating animals as coexisting agents rather than passive spectacles. Its attention to nonhuman subjectivity and more-than-human modes of relationality significantly enriches the volume's focus through its post-anthropocentric approach. Kornelia Bockzowska's chapter examines experimental films where humans and horses intertwine, integrating the animal turn in film studies with queer and trans ecologies. While demonstrating avant-garde cinema's potential to challenge gender and species binaries, the chapter could have further addressed the commodification of nonhuman animals—such as using horses for riding—as a central feature of anthropocentric frameworks contributing to the climate crisis. A critical examination of the connections between patriarchal heterosexism and the speciesist commodification of nonhuman animals would provide enriching nuances

to the analysis of the proposed films, pointing to how more hopeful futures based on liberation and justice are also necessary for nonhuman animals.

The question of hope and justice is addressed in Alexa Weik von Mossner's chapter on climate-change documentaries through the lens of 'hopeful storytelling.' Positive emotions, she argues, may mobilize audiences more effectively than negative or fear-inducing narratives, which risk paralyzing them. Von Mossner introduces the concept of 'slow hope' as an antidote to despair, emphasizing individual agency. Yet by highlighting individual interventions, there is a risk of obscuring the structural culpability of corporate and governmental actors in environmental harm. At the same time, the tension between the need for inspiring narratives and the structural constraints of distribution and reception recurs as a central problem for ecocinema, as Von Mossner identifies when acknowledging the films' limited distribution to small audiences in the Global North, which affects their success.

In contrast, other chapters demonstrate the productive potential of catastrophic storytelling. Galyna Maleeva and Camil Ungureanu compare Jeff VanderMeer's novel *Annihilation* and Alex Garland's 2018 film adaptation: while the novel enacts an affirmative posthumanism, portraying alien nature as monstrous yet generative, the film reframes events around individual psychological conflict, reinstating an anthropocentric perspective. Verena Andermatt Conley examines our contemporary 'viral culture' characterized by speed, hyper-connectedness and global flows that intensify vulnerability to disease. She highlights ecohorror films that anticipated the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular attention to *Contagion* (Soderbergh 2011). By highlighting capitalism and industrial farming as virulent agents alongside the virus itself, the analysis connects pandemic cinema to broader critiques of ecological devastation and suggests that catastrophic scenarios in such films can enhance reflections in rebuilding more just, ecologically attuned futures.

The collection successfully balances attention to mainstream and minoritised cinema, encompassing fiction and nonfiction, feature-length and short films, and historical breadth. William Brown's chapter exemplifies this by juxtaposing *The Navigator* (Keaton 1924) with *Kaliya Mardan* (Phalke 1919): whereas Keaton's adventure reaffirms colonial and anthropocentric hierarchies, Phalke's film envisions more blurred, reciprocal relations among humans and nonhuman animals, revealing early non-Western cinematic aesthetic of relationality that disrupts binary power dynamics. This shows how non-Western film histories can unsettle the conventions of Western environmental storytelling. Western blockbusters, however, can also challenge such conventions. Drawing on Mark Deuze's (2012) idea of living 'in' media rather than 'with' media, Ignacio Bergillos analyzes *The Truman Show* (Weir 1998) as an allegory of life under technologically mediated environments, highlighting the need to consider cinema's material infrastructures alongside its narrative and aesthetic aspects.

Considering the volume as a whole, the editors aim to connect environmental media studies with affective and intersectional approaches that challenge humanist and colonial assumptions. In this respect, the collection succeeds by presenting a wide range of case studies that demonstrate cinema's capacity to provoke ecological thinking. While the diversity of cases could have risked losing thematic focus, the editors effectively unify the analyses around decentering the human, amplifying minoritised voices and interrogating media's affective dimensions. The wide variety of cinematic genres makes it a pertinent contribution to analysing ecocinema beyond the usual focus on dystopian films. By including discussions on animated, documentary, experimental, adventure, and science-fiction films, among others, the volume departs from the tendency to focus on gloomy, apocalyptic visions of environmental catastrophe cinema. Instead, it demonstrates the richness of applying an ecocritical lens to a diverse array of genres, many of which do not address climate change directly. Its interdisciplinary scope makes it a significant contribution to ongoing debates in ecocriticism and film theory. Its main limitations—the limited critique of corporate and supranational actors driving ecological destruction, and a relatively brief engagement with antispeciesist perspectives—suggest directions for further scholarship rather than diminishing the volume's achievements.

In conclusion, *Cinema of/for the Anthropocene* demonstrates that cinema's ecological significance lies not only in representation but in the affective experiences it enables. By interrogating the Anthropocene as a culturally mediated concept, the contributors reveal how film can either reinforce anthropocentric hierarchies or open up more relational ways of imagining ecological futures. The collection's diversity of case studies, theoretical frameworks and critical complexity make it an essential resource for studying the power of artistic imagination to either disrupt or reinforce dominant paradigms of human–nonhuman relations in our ecological crisis.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The Routledge Companion to Literatures and Crisis

Silvia Pellicer Ortín, Julia Kuznetski and Chiara Battisti, eds.

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The word "crisis" encapsulates one of the major cultural and critical paradigms of the present era. Over the last three decades, the arts and academia have addressed multiple historical crises and devised reparative approaches through thinking, writing and organizing. The rise of trauma studies in literature in the early 90s encouraged debates about the aftermath of the Holocaust in collective memory, as well as the ethical implications and limits of representing historical catastrophes (see e.g. Luckhurst). At the turn of the century, concerns about the effects of late capitalism on social life and the impact of 9/11 were expressed by cultural and political thinkers, advocating for a global perspective on conflicts that had previously been approached from a Western viewpoint (see, e.g., Alexander; Butler). Meanwhile, the turn to affect in cultural studies, propelled by feminist and queer theorists, attended to ordinary and intimate experiences of political, economic or sexual crises (see e.g. Berlant; Cvetkovich). Over the last decade, a proliferation of narratives of crisis worldwide—past and present—has expanded the existing archive to include new unconventional voices, genres and media. Accordingly, these narratives call for complex theoretical approaches that account for their diversity in terms of space, time and experience. In addition, such multiplicity also encourages a variety of perspectives working together to interpret these emerging narratives and reframe past ones within contemporary perspectives.

In this context, *The Routledge Companion to Literatures and Crisis*, edited by Silvia Pellicer Ortín, Julia Kuznetski and Chiara Battisti, provides an overview of the main questions and debates around crisis and its reflection in literature and the arts. An edited collection comprised of forty-two chapters by scholars from over twenty countries, the volume does not make a general statement about how crisis permeates literary production. Instead, it lets the contributors raise multiple questions and engage in dialogues with each other. At the same time, the chapters are articulated around a few common ideas: the immanence of crisis to human experience and relations; its timeless character, as well as the particular texture of its contemporary realizations; how often thinking about crisis invites intersectional and transnational perspectives and resists absolute, one-size-fits-all approaches; and finally, how it has often inspired – even urged – particular, often experimental ways of literary representation. Ultimately, a thesis that is explored, advocated, and sometimes questioned, throughout the volume is that of literature's capacity to provide new languages and copying mechanisms for experiences as extreme and increasingly commonplace as war, exile, poverty, illness and the multiple situations and affects implied in experiences of precarity.

One of the volume's major strengths is the way it integrates a solid theoretical basis with a wide range of case studies. The introduction provides a complex, well-organized literature review of the study of crisis and its literary representations. In it, two perspectives of the notion are outlined: first, an ontological view of crisis as both a point of disruption and an opportunity for change and reconciliation between agents; and second, a political view that highlights the need for an intersectional reading of crisis that decenters Western, patriarchal and anthropocentric perspectives. These perspectives are alternated throughout the book's tripartite structure. The first section, "Addressing crises through literature," opens with "Theoretical approaches to crises" and continues with "Literary genres and crises," which explores the possibilities of different genres and conventions like poetry, drama, memoir and graphic novel. The second section comprises a large number of case studies, mostly from contemporary world literature, organized through five thematic subsections: "Political and ideological crises in a historical perspective," "[w]ar, migration and violence," "[v]alues and identity crises," "[e]nvironmental crises and biopolitics," and "[t]echnological crises and posthumanism."

The volume's first theoretical block, "Theoretical approaches to crises," deserves special mention, since it provides a complex and comprehensive map of crisis and literature. The first two chapters, by Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega, open the conversation about the need for literature and its unique potential to vindicate ethical approaches to memory and relationality in times of crisis. The five following chapters add some nuance by exploring how literature works in contemporary scenarios of crisis. Michael C. Frank revisits the case of 9/11 as a paradigmatic historical event that inspired both official and subaltern discourses about danger, recovery, nation and community. In their respective chapters, Merve Sarikaya-Şen and Sue Vice address the recent literature on migration as a vehicle to, respectively, devise ethical relations with the Other and construct a "refugee imaginary" that gives voice to extreme experiences and resists seeing assimilation as a happy ending. In their coauthored chapter, Lisa Baraitser and Laura Salisbury argue for literature's recreation of Derek Winicott's notion of "depressing time," in which a process of reflection on one's own vulnerability substitutes for action. Finally, Gala Arias Rubio introduces the climate crisis while providing a detailed chronology of cli-fi narratives. This initial block combines analysis with theoretical investment to give an insight into some of the concerns explored through the rest of the volume.

Throughout the following sections, the companion explores a diverse range of genres, themes and cultural contexts, some of which recurrent. While most of the texts analyzed are narrative fictions, life writing and poetry occupy an important place in the book. In her chapter, Silvia Pellicer-Ortín addresses the development of crisis in autobiographical writing, noticing the connections between the genre's experimental drifts and new conceptions of the self as vulnerable and affected by crisis. This analysis offers a complete literature review with a plethora of contemporary cases from both hemispheres, an archive that is later enlarged by contributors like Noelia Núñez Preza and Izabel Brandão, respectively approaching novels by Spanish and Brazilian women authors, which can be read through autobiographical lenses as texts testing the limits of identity, embodiment and genre. Meanwhile, Charles L. Armstrong examines the evolution of the most canonical poetic traditions—from Sapho to Auden via Wordsworth—looking at their recreation of visceral and vulnerable responses to personal and historical crises. Later, in the chapters by Ilya Kukulin and Piret Vives, poetry is explored in its more contemporary and fluid forms, such as song lyrics and punk poems, as a vehicle to shape discourses of domination and resistance in today's war-stricken Russia and Estonia. In addition, the companion also manages to contextualize present-day global crises in larger, long-standing geopolitical conflicts. Events like 9/11, the recent migrant crises in Europe and Brexit are analyzed through polyphonic accounts that confront Western narratives with subaltern voices, thus drawing a political outline around experiences of precarity. Finally, climate change is also presented through two modern crises, simultaneously approached through local and global lenses. Significantly, the chapters by Barbara Arizti and Eugenia Ossana approach the ecological injustice and their effects on the indigenous and precarious populations of Australia and Africa, both defined by an attempt to restore nature and identity through (re)writing.

If there is a single conclusion throughout this volume, it is that no lens or theory is more suitable than other to approach the complexity and global diversity of crisis. Maybe the major challenge involved in such a timely and extensive project is doing justice to the many stories about crisis that continue to emerge all over the world. While the companion does not include analyses about the Israeli genocide in Gaza, the Civil War in Sudan or the intensification of violence by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under the present Trump administration, it does provide very valuable material to invite further critical and ethical engagements with the narratives of this world and the worlds to come.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The Persephone Myth in Young Adult Fiction: From Girl to Woman

Cristina Salcedo González

Bloomsbury Academic. 2024. 231 pp.
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The Persephone Myth in Young Adult Fiction: From Girl to Woman, by Cristina Salcedo González is an innovative work based on the author's doctoral thesis, *Perséfone Renacida. El mito de Perséfone en la literatura juvenil anglosajona del siglo XXI. Un estudio desde la Mitocrítica y la Recepción Clásica* (2022). As Salcedo González explains in Chapter 5 of her thesis and Chapter 4 of this book, Persephone "experienced a remarkable resurgence and reexamination during the nineteenth century within Anglophone arts and culture" (32). Consequently, numerous retellings have been published, many of which incorporate a gender perspective. As Susan Gubar points out, Persephone and her mother are the most reviled figures by modern feminists (1979, 302). Thus, this myth and its reception sparked the interest of several researchers, such as Elizabeth T. Haynes (1994), Christine Downing (2001) and Margot K. Louis (2009) and inspired many undergraduate and master's theses. In *The Persephone Myth in Young Adult Fiction: From Girl to Woman*, Salcedo González offers an original approach to studying the reception of the Persephone myth by focusing on Young Adult literature and employing myth criticism and classical reception as methodological tools.

The book is composed of thirteen chapters divided into two main sections: "Part One: The Revaluation of Classical Mythology: The Multiple Faces of Persephone from Antiquity to Modernity" and "Part Two: Persephone Adapted for Young Adult Readers: The Young Woman's Journey into Adulthood." Preceding them is "Chapter 1," which functions as Introduction, establishing the importance of studying Young Adult literature and, in particular, the representations of Persephone. Salcedo González also introduces the six novels analyzed in the second part of the volume: Margaret Mahy's *Dangerous Spaces* (1985), Louise Tondeur's *The Water's Edge* (2003), Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009), Laura Ruby's *Bone Gap* (2016), Lynn Freed's *House of Women* (1985) and Lia Block's *Psyche in a Dress* (2006). These Young Adult novels use the classical myth of Persephone to explore thought-provoking themes that "will likely resonate with young people, including mental health, gender violence or suicide," deviating from the tendency of "romanticizing Persephone's relationship with Hades, which is prevalent in other Young Adult fiction" (5). Besides that, the author clarifies that all these reworkings of the myth are women-authored, deriving from various Anglophone cultures and contexts—New Zealand, United Kingdom, and East, Weast and South Coasts of North America, but sharing similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Chapter 1 also presents the methodological framework, a combined approach rooted in myth criticism and classical reception, with the latter playing a more dominant role. Myth criticism is used as a tool to explore and understand the specific "survival patterns of the myth" (6) and the structural and symbolic aspects of the narratives. Meanwhile, classical reception theory is employed to construct a model on which the analysis of reworkings in the second part of the volume is based. This reception analysis is adapted from the one proposed by Lorna Hardwick in *Reception Studies* (2003) and is rooted in two phases. The first one serves to identify the mythemes employed in each

reworking, how the ancient text is received and reimagined by the writer, and how it relates to the source. The second phase is aimed to determine the purpose of the new work and the "factors outside the ancient source [that] contribute to its reception and introduce new dimensions" (8).

Chapters 2 to 4 are included in Part One. This section examines how the Persephone myth has been portrayed throughout history. Specifically, Chapter 2 is dedicated to studying the classical Persephone, including the origins, names and the various classical sources. Salcedo González also identifies and defines the mythic structure or mythemes, classified as "Abduction" (17-18), "The search" (18), "Demeter in Eleusis" (18), "Persephone in the Underworld: the mother uses her power to bring her daughter back / the famine on earth / the intervention of Zeus / eating the pomegranate seeds / Zeus' compromise solution" (19) and "The return of Persephone: a mother-daughter reunion / Persephone's new situation" (19-20). Chapter 3 offers an overview of medieval Persephone and its transition to romantic Proserpine. On the other hand, Chapter 4 focuses on the treatment of the Persephone myth in nineteenth- and twenieth-century English literature, offering examples of various artists—J. Ruskin, J. Ingelow and E. Glasgow in the nineteenth century, and D. H. Lawrence, A. Rich, C. A. Duffy and A. Ostriker in the twentieth century. The last part of the chapter also explores the feminist appropriation of myth, with Persephone's myth specifically being discussed.

Part 2 encompasses chapters 5 to 12. Chapter 5 examines the contemporary revival of Persephone in popular media and Young Adult literature. This chapter is the core of Salcedo González's study, as it focuses on the reception strategies employed in reimagining classical myths in Young Adult literature, as well as the trends in Young Adult retellings of the Persephone myth. The chapter emphasizes that "Persephone's story serves as a backdrop for exploring the infernal experiences young women often face in contemporary society" (59). Chapters 6 through 11 analyze rewritings of the Persephone myth by applying the methodology introduced in Chapter 1. Brief descriptions of the novels are provided, as well as the author's background and a concise conclusion about the results of the reception analysis. These narratives approach the myth from very different perspectives. *Dangerous Spaces* (Chapter 6) and *The Water's Edge* (Chapter 7) address "the difficult subject of losing a parent during the likewise difficult time of transitioning into adulthood" (91), but the second novel also "explores the possibility that the Underworld is within oneself" (110). This is also mentioned in *Wintergirls* (Chapter 8), but, as opposed to the previous one, "experiences the sudden onslaught of a ferocious disease" (164)—anorexia. *Bone Gap* (Chapter 9), *House of Women* (Chapter 10) and *Psyche in a Dress* (Chapter 11) have in common that they "portray contemporary societies as adopting hellish characteristics" (127). Moreover, their main characters "are victims of gender-based violence" (164), namely kidnapping (Chapter 9), an abusive arranged marriage (Chapter 10) and psychological violence (Chapter 11). Chapter 12 offers a detailed summary of the female rites of passage and the underworld journeys that the analysis previously identified. The Persephone myth is about journeys and changes, and, specifically, in Young Adult literature, it is used to structure "journeys of maturation" (165). This chapter also describes hellish experiences. They are mostly depicted as a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood: "After their descent into the Underworld, they evolve into mature, experienced, resilient and wise women" (171). The author also explains how these reworkings are linked to the feminist revision of classical mythology.

Chapter 13 provides a variety of conclusions, findings and potential applications. First, it summarizes the usability of the methodology. Then, the conclusions related to the reception process, focusing on the mechanisms and strategies detected in the rewritings. Salcedo González concludes by emphasizing the importance of studying Young Adult literature and the Persephone myth in today's world.

Through a double methodological approach, Cristina Salcedo González not only affirms the value of Young Adult literature but also explores how the Persephone myth was perceived as "a significant rite of passage for women, symbolizing their transition into adulthood" (25). Unlike other critical approaches to studying this myth, focusing on Young Adult literature allows us to understand the interests of this audience and how the myth is adapted to address their concerns. This is evident, for example, in the representation of Demeter. This character is usually employed by female writers to address the subject of "potential motherhood" (Gubar 1979, 303). Conversely, in Young Adult literature, it is usually depicted as an "overbearing mother, jeopardizing Persephone's journey of maturation and self-discovery" (57), reflecting the tumultuous relationship between young people and their parents and enables the target audience to connect with the story.

Moreover, the chapters' organization allows readers to engage with the material dynamically and informatively. It enables understanding the novel's context and Persephone myth usage without reading the reworkings.

In conclusion, *The Persephone Myth in Young Adult Fiction: From Girl to Woman* is a significant and original contribution to the study of Persephone myth within the expanding corpus of classical reception scholarship, as a result of the focus on Young Adult literature and its double innovative methodological approach. This method enriches the literary analysis by employing myth criticism, classical reception strategies and a gender perspective. Salcedo González consistently shows that myths continue to reach a wide target audience by not only reflecting and reshaping the world in antithetical ways, but also offering, through contemporary literature, a safe space where young people can discover themselves and explore their identities.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Culinary Discourses in Asian-Australian Writing Masticating Multiculturalism

Astrid Schwegler-Castañer

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The critical study of food goes back a long time, even though it is not until recently that Food Studies has been developed as a consolidating academic field (Albala 2013, XV). Within this context, several areas of study that focus on the specific role of food in literature have gained momentum. These studies examine the way literature actively participates in the cultural construction of food practices and identities. As Tigner and Carruth put it, "literary texts do not just transmit or depict food cultures and food practices: they also help to structure them" (2018, 1). Reflecting on this idea is particularly important in the works of migrant and diasporic communities, as they are compelled to renegotiate their identities amidst the challenges of resettlement and cultural integration (Leong-Salobir 2019, 2-4). First published in 2025, *Culinary Discourses in Asian-Australian Writing - Masticating Multiculturalism*, by Astrid Schwegler-Castañer, contributes to this debate with a compelling and substantial analysis of the intersections between food, identity, and race in twenty-first-century Asian Australian literature. Starting from the premise that food is not only a material necessity but also a metaphorical resource for grappling with abstract and often fraught human experiences, Schwegler-Castañer demonstrates how culinary imagery becomes a powerful lens for interrogating national identity, multiculturalism, and the lived realities of racial difference in contemporary Australia. To do so, the volume opens with an introduction, followed by four chapters and a conclusion. This clear structure enhances the force of the volume's argument, dividing the information into well-organised parts.

The introduction situates the subject matter within broader debates on gastronomy and cultural identity. Schwegler-Castañer starts by pondering on the importance of food when it comes to human life, pointing out the way it has historically been used as a tool of control. The multifarious ways in which food can be studied is also reflected in this first approach, highlighting that, as Schwegler-Castañer puts it, "it is precisely because of this complexity that food is a particularly useful lens through which to study topics such as identity, racism, social class and (national) belonging. The focus on the Asian diaspora in Australia in particular is also justified in the introduction; based on several studies that examine the potential of culinary discourse when it comes to decolonising in contexts such as Haiti, Chile or Zimbabwe, the volume narrows the focus down on the Asian diaspora in Australia. In particular, she points out the importance of critically thinking about (Asian-)Australian cultural identity, particularly in the context of this country's façade of a multicultural society. The author mentions how certain terms, such as the banana metaphor, are detrimental to the construction of this cultural identity, and how even the term Asian Australian reflects the reaffirmation of Anglo-

Australian values and identities. All in all, the volume depicts how, despite its official multicultural discourse, Australian society is still shaped by inequality and racism. More specifically, it analyses culinary discourses that directly question these issues.

As for the following chapters, the first one investigates how national boundaries are articulated through food discourses, showing how immigration narratives become entangled with questions of taste, belonging, and exclusion. Particularly effective is the discussion of multicultural feasting, which reveals how the rhetoric of inclusion often masks deeper anxieties about assimilation and difference. The second chapter turns to literary case studies, with close readings of Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon* (2005) and Simone Lazaroo's *Sustenance* (2010). These works foreground the (in) digestion of the Asian other, a concept that captures how what seems like acceptance can be questioned and turned to rejection, especially when there is an oversimplification and commodification of what is consumed. The analysis shows how literary representations may unsettle the celebratory discourse of food as a universal bridge, and how it is necessary to identify superficial acceptance so that it is possible to achieve real inclusion. Schwegler-Castañer concludes that both texts are optimistic when it comes to human connection beyond borders. The third chapter explores the role of food in narratives of Asian Australian adolescence, mainly focusing on Alice Pung's *Laurinda* (2014) and Benjamin Law's *The Family Law* (2016). Here, food metaphors are used and analysed to reflect the tensions between class, casual racism, and the post-racial rhetoric of contemporary media. The former does so by highlighting hopelessness, while the latter relies on humour. In the fourth chapter, the focus shifts toward more experimental and speculative texts, including Julie Koh's *Portable Curiosities* (2016) and Shaun Tan's dystopian narratives. These works highlight the dehumanizing and alienating aspects of capitalist consumption, while also imagining possibilities of conviviality and empathy. Particularly striking is the discussion of Shaun Tan, whose visual storytelling is shown to offer remedial empathy by envisioning alternative worlds of solidarity. Finally, the conclusion ties these analyses together, arguing that culinary metaphors in Asian Australian writing both expose the superficiality of Australia's official multiculturalism and open imaginative pathways for cross-cultural understanding. In doing so, the volume makes a significant contribution to studies of literature, food, and race, particularly in an Australian context but with resonances for postcolonial and diaspora studies more broadly.

Overall, the volume is a highly valuable addition to the field of Asian Australian literary criticism and food studies. It combines literary analysis with cultural theory, focusing on a wide array of texts that illustrate how food is a powerful metaphor that can both reinforce and challenge racial hierarchies, ultimately reimagining community and belonging. In fact, one of the most compelling features of the volume is this interdisciplinary reach, including not only novels and short stories, but also television and digital media. This leaves the door open for future research into these emerging texts, making the text valuable for scholars and researchers of fields such as food studies, cultural identity, migration and diaspora, psychology, sociology, to name but a few. Lastly, even though the analysis focuses on a select number of authors, the volume definitely succeeds in foregrounding the complex symbolic work that food performs in negotiating identity and difference in the context of the Asian diaspora in Australia.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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William Shakespeare. 50 sonetos / 50 sonnets

Ángel-Luis Pujante, trad.

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In the prologue to his seminal 1540 treatise *Manière de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre*, French humanist and printer Étienne Dolet systematically outlined what he considered the essential qualities of a good translation, namely: a thorough understanding of the source text; a proficient command of both the source and target languages; the attempt to convey the meaning and purpose of the original rather than a word-for-word rendering; and the ability to produce a fluent, harmonious version in the target language (Dolet 1540). Almost three decades later, in 1579, English translator Thomas North added a compelling dimension to this discussion. As he argued, "the office of a fit translater, consisteth not onely in the faithfull expressing of his authors meaning, but also in a certain resembling and shadowing out of the forme of his style and the maner of his speaking" (North 1579, sig. [★vijj]r). In essence, North seemed to advocate for what we might now call, to a certain extent, a *foreignization* of the translation—one that evokes or subtly echoes the tone and rhythm of the original language.

Both Dolet and North, whether consciously or not, were echoing Horace's well-known injunction in his *Ars Poetica* against literal translation: "nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus / interpres nec desilies imitator in artum" (Horace 2002, 196). This tension—between faithfulness and freedom, between the domestic and the foreign—would go on to shape the work of later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century translators such as George Chapman, Nicolas d'Ablancourt, or James Mabbe.

Yet throughout these varied approaches, certain core principles endured: deep knowledge of both languages and their respective cultures, and the ability to convey ideas and emotions in a new linguistic and cultural context, producing a text that resonates with readers from a different time and place. Interestingly, these same principles are as vital in literary translation today as they were in the sixteenth century (Chaudhuri 2012, 593-598) and they are clearly present in Ángel-Luis Pujante's recent translation of Shakespeare's poetry, *William Shakespeare. 50 sonetos / 50 sonnets* (Espasa, 2025).[1] In this volume, Spain's foremost translator of Shakespearean drama turns his attention to a representative selection of the sonnets, once again demonstrating his mastery as a Shakespearean scholar and translator.

1 Following the traditional order established in the standard 1609 edition, the fifty sonnets selected by Pujante are: 1, 3, 8, 12, 17-19, 21, 23, 25, 28-31, 33, 34, 44, 49, 53-56, 60, 62, 64-66, 71, 73, 75, 81, 86, 87, 90, 94, 97, 98, 100, 102, 104, 106, 116, 121, 129, 130, 138, 144, 146, 147, 149.

Pujante's rendition of these fifty Shakespearean sonnets demonstrates a keen awareness of *dynamic equivalence* in literary translation. In other words, his translation seeks to transfer the essence of the original literary structure into the target language, while preserving the equivalent effects and emotional resonance achieved by the original text. In this sense I am persuaded that Pujante's work aligns with what Jacques Derrida describes as a relevant translation. For Derrida, such a translation is grounded in an economy, which he defines in two ways: first, as a law of property, where the translator strives to transport the original text's meaning into the target language in the most appropriate manner possible; and second, as a law of quantity, which dictates that the translation should remain quantitatively equivalent to the original (Derrida 1998, 425–432).

These concepts seem to be particularly pertinent when translating a strictly regulated literary form like the Elizabethan—or Shakespearean—sonnet. Pujante chooses to employ a combination of the Elizabethan (quatrain distribution) and Spanish/Italian sonnet (hendecasyllabic and absolute rhyme). Through this choice, Pujante's *50 sonetos* achieves what Derrida suggests any good translation should strive for: it is both an "appropriating" translation—one that is transparent and faithful to the source text in the target language—and an "appropriate" one—adequate to the structural and stylistic demands of the original (Derrida 1998, 423–430). In short, the goal of literary translation is to find a balance between these two principles, without distorting the integrity of the source text. Pujante's translation of Shakespeare's fifty selected sonnets accomplishes precisely this, maintaining fidelity to both the content and the form of the original.

Any brief history of the Spanish translation of Shakespeare's sonnets should begin by noting that by the time his poetry began to appear in Latin America and Spain, Shakespeare was already well-known in the Spanish-speaking world through his drama. This has been particularly well examined by Pujante himself in his insightful 2009 article, "Shakespeare's Sonnets in Spanish. Rescuing the early verse translations." In short, and just to give some of the most relevant examples, the translation of Shakespeare's sonnets into Spanish began with the first prose renderings by the Cuban-born Matías de Velasco y Rojas, who translated a selection of thirty-seven sonnets in 1877, followed by Astrana Marín's complete prose translation in 1929. Later, Angelina Damiáns's pioneering verse translation of all one hundred and fifty-four sonnets in 1944, and more recently, Luciano García's 2013 translation of the *Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* into rhymed alexandrine verses. Over the years, there have been numerous attempts to render Shakespeare's poetry in Spanish, employing various approaches: prose translations, verse translations, and, when in verse, the use of the sonnet form. Translators experimented with rhyme—perfect or imperfect—and explored different metrical structures: irregular forms, alexandrines, thirteen-line verses, and hendecasyllables, to name the most prominent ones.

This variety of approaches underscores why I consider Ángel-Luis Pujante's translation to be so significant. Pujante has taken on what could be considered a most challenging task, both appropriating and appropriate in the Derridean sense: a verse translation that preserves rhyme scheme (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG) and the sonnet form, rendered in the Spanish hendecasyllable. This decision plays a key role in the success of the translation, as it respects Shakespeare's original form—both the sonnet (if not the rhyme) structure and the rhyme scheme—while also staying true, in Spanish, to the rhythm of the original and with absolute rhyme. Indeed, the Spanish hendecasyllable is the closest equivalent to Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, making it an ideal choice for capturing the essence of the original while adhering to the demands of the Spanish language, both in terms of the transmission of content, the musicality and the distribution of the stress.

Translating poetry as poetry is a complex endeavour, and today, prose translations—such as those by Luis Astrana in the late 1920s—would be almost unthinkable for Shakespeare's sonnets. The decision to translate poetry in verse inevitably involves a series of difficult choices; among these, very notably if the translator chooses absolute, perfect rhyme (the Spanish *rima consonante*) as is the case here, a very careful lexical selection. As already argued, opting for Spanish hendecasyllabic lines rather than the more comfortable fourteen-syllable Spanish alexandrine (or, for that matter, prose renditions) introduces the added challenge of fitting the nuanced, often intricate thought of Shakespeare into a language with considerably longer lexical items, such as Spanish. However, Pujante appears to have been fully aware of the inherent risks posed by the use of longer lines in Spanish—especially the danger of wordiness or, even worse, creating a surplus in meaning. Rather than shy away from this challenge, he has expertly navigated it by confining his lines to the eleven syllables typical of the Spanish sonnet. In doing so, he has preserved both the rhythm and meaning of the original, proving highly effective in managing the constraints of the form.

The decision to employ perfect rhyme in the translation adds another layer of complexity, as it carries the risk of falling into trite, superficial rhymes—Spanish *ripios*. The danger of forced, empty rhyme is ever-present, but Pujante—as could be expected—has brilliantly avoided this pitfall. The results, as one can easily appreciate, are remarkable, maintaining both the integrity and musicality of the original while ensuring that the translation resonates as poetry in its own right.

Pujante's *50 sonetos/50 sonnets* begins with a *Prólogo* (11-20) and a very brief *Nota preliminar* (21-24). The Nota succinctly explains editorial decisions regarding spelling and punctuation: modernized orthography and punctuation, and the capitalization of the first letter of the first line of each stanza. These choices, though subtle, seem designed to assist the non-specialized reader. Visually, the layout of the sonnets is also well-considered, with the three quatrains and the final

couplet clearly delineated on the page, making the structure accessible even to those without a scholarly background. The presentation of the book as a mirror edition is one particularly interesting decision—this one likely aimed at the Shakespearean scholar— as it allows readers to compare the source and target texts side by side. This feature is invaluable for anyone working with both languages, as it facilitates immediate, easy comparison.

In the *Prólogo*, Pujante briefly covers a wealth of pertinent information. He begins by making a compelling case for Shakespeare's continued relevance; summarizes Shakespeare's deep engagement with poetry; and provides an overview of the sonnet sequence. He explains the canonical division of the collection into three parts: Sonnet 1 to 17, Sonnet 17 to 126, and Sonnet 126 to 154, noting a certain thematic progression (although as he explains we cannot be sure this was the order intended) and the characters. Remarkably, in just a few pages, Pujante addresses the major key topics that any reader may be interested in. These include the contributions of Wyatt, Surrey, and Sidney to the development of the Shakespearean sonnet, the ambiguity surrounding the identities of the three major figures (the dark lady, the rival poet, and the young man), and the mystery of the true begetter of the poems, also dealing with a slightly more controversial aspect such as the presence and treatment of homosexuality, misogyny, and eroticism in the sonnets. Perhaps most importantly, he discusses the enduring significance of the poems, highlighting their profound exploration of such themes as the passage of time and the transcendence of art, life, death, and, above all, the omnipresence of love. The book concludes with a helpful index of the selected sonnets and their first lines (127-131), making it easy for the reader to navigate the collection.

There are few tasks as easy—and as unfair—as criticizing a translation. Translation involves risks, decision-making, and inevitably, every choice is open to scrutiny. In this regard, it seems clear to me that Pujante's translation is not only brilliant but also a landmark in the history of the *sonetos shakesperianos* in Spanish.

That said, this does not mean that in this work, as in all works, there is no room for some minor improvement. The strict adherence to the hendecasyllabic line—as previously noted—inevitably carries the risk of having to omit certain nuances. These instances are very rare, but one example might be found in the famous Sonnet #18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"), where the second quarto reads, "Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines." Here Pujante opts to leave the reference to frequency ("Sometime") out, rendering the line as "El gran ojo del cielo nos abrasa." Interestingly, Pujante skillfully and at least partially compensates this omission by introducing "o" (for "and" in the original) in the following line, creating this way a sense of alternation and solving—it may be argued—this minor problem. There also is what to a non-specialized reader may appear as one potential, apparent, error: in Sonnet #102, the first line of the couplet, "Therefore, *like her*, I sometime hold my tongue," is translated as "Por eso *igual que él* calla yo me aguanto" (my emphasis). However, the translator seems to be correctly alluding to the male gender of Philomel (the nightingale in classical narratives), although the previous use of "his" ("his pipe") as opposed to "her" ("her mournful hymns," "like her") and the absence of translation notes may make this rendition a little confusing for the nonspecialized reader.

In short, this is arguably one of the finest Spanish translations of the *sonnets* to date—certainly, given the metrical and rhyming choices made, the most ambitious one. The reader cannot help but admire the exquisite musicality of lines like "Ansiamos que procreen los seres bellos" (Sonnet #1) or "¿Qué sustancia es la tuya, cuál tu esencia?" (Sonnet #53, with a magnificent distribution of the stresses); the precision of "¿Que te compare a un día de primavera?" (Sonnet #18, with the fortunate choice of translating the Elizabethan summer as "primavera" for historical reasons) or "Ni el mármol ni las tumbas fastuosas" (Sonnet #55); and the simply superb "No admita yo ningún impedimento" (Sonnet #116).

To conclude, and although this is undoubtedly a subjective observation, let me, on a personal note (probably because "my days are past the best"), highlight Pujante's translation of the intricate Sonnet #138, with its seemingly untranslatable pun on "lie" and old age—an issue familiar to every Shakespearean scholar—as a prime example of this translator's extraordinary powers of expression:

Cuando mi amada jura que no miente,
la creo, aunque no ignore que ella engaña;
le haré el papel de un joven inocente
que no ha visto en el mundo intriga o maña.
Pensando en vano que me cree un mozuelo
pues sabe que perdí mi lozanía,
oigo su falsa lengua sin recelo;
esconde su verdad, y yo la mía.
Pero, si ella es infiel, ¿por qué lo niega
y yo niego mi edad con mis engaños?
Ah, el amor sabe aparentar su entrega;
si no es joven, no quiere oír sus años.
Así, yaciendo juntos nos mentimos,
ufanos con deslices que encubrimos.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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ídem lo mismo [selección de piezas breves. teoría]: Textos de Gertrude Stein

Gertrude Stein, au.
Andrés Fisher y Benito del Pliego, eds. y trads.

Krill er71 Ediciones. 2025. 234 pp.
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A lo largo de su recepción, la obra de Gertrude Stein ha sido calificada de inagotable, desconcertante, exageradamente minuciosa y, en pocas palabras, sumamente compleja. Quizás, en parte, sea por esto por lo que su acogida en España haya sido notablemente tardía, aplazada por la censura del primer franquismo y finalmente retomada en 1967 con la versión inaugural en español de *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (trad. Carlos Ribalta). En el panorama actual, tal y como apunta Carillo del Saz en su reciente ensayo sobre las traducciones españolas de la autora, el legado de Stein sigue sin haber calado hondo en nuestro sistema, en gran parte debido a la peculiaridad y dificultad de su estilo literario (2025, 52).

En una primera aproximación, el maximalismo de Stein puede parecer opaco a ojos de quien observa: su lenguaje, sin embargo, carece de ostentación alguna, acercándose a lo cotidiano de forma casi fotográfica. A este respecto, decía André Maurois que no es posible encontrar una escritura más directa que la suya, ya que no existe un solo pasaje en toda su obra que no pueda ser inmediatamente comprendido "por una colegiala de dieciséis años" (citado en Van Vechten 1946, xi). Pese a esta afirmación, tan demostrable como irónica, la tarea de traducir a Stein sigue siendo una de gran calibre. Un siglo después de sus primeras publicaciones, la autora del ampliamente citado "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" ("Rosa es una rosa es una rosa es una rosa") continúa desorientando al público contemporáneo, haciendo resonar, una vez más, el eco de la innovación modernista.

Como es sabido, Stein no solo contribuyó de manera singular a las vanguardias de los años veinte del siglo pasado, sino que también ejerció como su matriarca y mecenas, recibiendo en su salón de París a nombres de la talla de Hemingway, Pound, Picasso, Matisse o Juan Gris. En este espacio compartido con Alice B. Toklas, su compañera y musa, Stein desarrolló la mayor parte de su ecléctica producción, sin llegar a gozar nunca de un éxito excesivo entre la comunidad general de lectores y, muchas veces, tampoco entre la crítica. De hecho, cabe resaltar que su libro más reconocido, la *Autobiography*, es también el menos formalmente ambicioso. No deja de ser curiosa e inteligente, pues, la decisión de Andrés Fisher y Benito del Pliego de obviar este título en su selección, dando protagonismo así a otras piezas que, si bien podrían decirse menos accesibles, describen sustancialmente mejor el espíritu rompedor de la palabra de Stein.

ídem lo mismo [selección de piezas breves. teoría] se constituye como la única antología en castellano de miscelánea steiniana hasta la fecha, comprendiendo tanto algunas de las composiciones más cortas de la autora, como varios fragmentos de sus extensas obras sobre geografía y dos de sus más célebres ensayos, "Composition as Explanation" y "Poetry and Grammar."

La selección de los traductores, en general, es tan ecléctica como acertada, capaz de replicar formalmente la avidez absoluta de Stein a la vez que de proporcionar un repaso breve pero panorámico de su producción.

silbido

Si dirigimos nuestra mirada hacia los "Objetos" de *Tender Buttons* (1914), tal y como lo hacen Fisher y del Pliego en la primera sección de *ídem lo mismo,* nos toparemos con un conjunto de poemas relativamente cortos, cuasi-cubistas en el sentido más amplio del término. Los objetos aquí descritos parecen no tener fondo más allá de su silueta: las palabras escogidas son extremadamente corrientes y, a su vez, aparentemente inaccesibles por medio de la semántica y la gramática convencionales. Acometer la traducción de cualquier tipo de poesía significa, inevitablemente, hacer una serie de sacrificios: sacrificar la musicalidad por fidelidad al texto original, sacrificar el contexto por el adecuado fluir de las palabras. Afrontar la traducción de Stein a menudo implica una renuncia mayor: aquella de sacrificarlo *todo* en favor del silbido, discordante pero persistente, de la palabra-objeto. Y es que si algo es constante en Stein es, justamente, la sonoridad, un atributo que John Cage siempre comprendió[1] y al que Fisher y del Pliego intentan hacer justicia, en la medida de lo posible, emulando el movimiento oscilante de los originales a través de la traslación de las aliteraciones del inglés al castellano.

Si comparamos, por ejemplo, la versión inglesa de "Glazed Glitter" con su traducción, "Brillo vidriado," veremos que "There is no gratitude in mercy and in medicine" (30) se convierte en "No hay gratitud en piedad y en pediatría" (31), una apuesta clara por el sonido que, si bien no mantiene la significación inicial de las palabras, sí respeta la poética del ritmo tan representativa de la mayoría de las composiciones steinianas. Veamos otro ejemplo incluso más perspicaz, esta vez procedente de los "Retratos":

> **Guillaume Apollinaire**
> Give known or pin ware.
> Fancy teeth, gas strips
> Elbow elect, sour stout pore, pore caesar, pour state at.
> Leave eye lessons I. Leave I. Lessons. I. Leave I lessons, I. (68)

Para Stein, escribir el momento presente significa, sobre todo, *seguirlo*, continuar su movimiento y transcribir, con palabras insuficientes, el oscilar de una mente y un mundo que se desbordan. Casi emulando la fase inmediatamente anterior al sueño, Stein colma la página de imágenes y códigos que juegan entre ellos y se entrelazan de las maneras más insospechadas. El poema experimental, en palabras de la poeta Lyn Hejinian, "es una mente," un ente autoconsciente y homólogo a la psique humana (2000, 44):

> Guillaume Apollinaire
> Guiñol a por linier.
> Diente elegante, gas tirante
> Codo coge, rancio recio poro, poro césar, pon estado a.
> Dejo ojo instruyo yo. Dejo yo. Instruyo. Yo. Dejo yo instruyo, yo. (69)

Como bien explican los traductores en el prólogo, poder traducir a Stein exige tomar las riendas de la composición y reescribirla, reinterpretarla para conseguir un resultado cuyo efecto sea mínimamente parecido al del original. El producto conseguido con este poema es admirable: desde el juego sonoro con la onomástica, pasando por la jocosa rima conseguida en el segundo verso, hasta la acertada solución para el juego de palabras con "I" y "eye" (que no se resuelve, pero que se rehace en "instru*yo yo*"), la propuesta de los traductores es notable y consigue transmitirnos la cadencia del *presente continuo.*

visión

Pese a que pueda parecer paradójico, la poesía de Stein no es consciente de ser un artefacto diseñado para la lectura. En el universo vanguardista steiniano, la composición, que no la poesía (aunque cualquier término es lícito para definir una escritura que pretende abarcarlo todo, utilizarlo todo) es entendida como "lo visto" (194), como la *cosa* vista: "Nada cambia de una generación a otra generación salvo lo visto y lo que crea una composición", reza la traducción de

1 La música experimental y aleatoria de John Cage a menudo se inspira en la escritura de Stein, trasladando gran parte de sus estrategias compositivas al plano musical.

"Composition as Explanation" (191). Las composiciones de Stein (especialmente las más narrativas, pues son también las más centradas en la óptica), piden ser observadas mucho antes que leídas, visualmente aprehendidas en lugar de interpretadas. La innovación, así, radica en la imagen, en lo contemplado: si se pretende mantener su poder sensorial, la traducción de estas imágenes vistas debe ser realizada con sutileza y precisión:

> Cuanto más mojada el agua más lirios son tubos y rojas son las hileras de arroz. Una pequeña escena y un alto abanicador y una flor una flor para el pelo y un zapatos y un zapatos botas y basura
>
> […]
>
> Un pequeño vientre un pequeño vientre frío, apura cosas, cosas parecidas, camisas y cabras parecidas y levantadas y tendidas carcasas. (150)

Como ejercicio de atención, leer a Gertrude Stein requiere que nos preguntemos por nuestra propia vida, que consideremos cómo es el mundo en que vivimos mientras leemos su obra y cómo podríamos, quizás, ser capaces de transportar esa percepción a la palabra escrita. El pasaje anterior, extraído de "En la hierba (Sobre España)", funciona como un cuadro impresionista en tanto nos proporciona pinceladas de color, trazos sueltos de la visión que se unen para componer una suerte de caleidoscopio. Ante la imposibilidad, esta vez, de mantener las constantes aliteraciones del original ("The more the wet is water the more lilies and tubes and red are rice rows"), la traducción opta aquí, pertinentemente, por conservar intactas las imágenes. No alteran así los traductores la cosa vista, prefiriendo que la composición siga evocando sus tonalidades primigenias.

insistencia

Además de su innovadora y heterogénea utilización de la puntuación, una de las características inherentes a la poesía y prosa de Stein es la "insistencia," una forma de repetición que no lleva implícita la copia, sino el interés sostenido en uno, o varios, asuntos. Es posible que este sea uno de los elementos más complejos para la tarea de traducción, ya que implica el replanteamiento de innumerables juegos de palabras: la insistencia rara vez se trata de duplicar, sino de reiterar, incorporando modificaciones muy sutiles que dan cuenta del ingenio de la autora:

> They cannot.
> They dote.
> They cannot.
> They as denote.
> Miracles play.
> Play fairly.
> Play fairly well.
> A well.
> As well. (96)

Extraídos de la parte final del "Retrato completo de Picasso", estos versos se adentran en un poderoso juego fónico entre "cannot," "dote" y "denote," primero, y en un desafío polisémico con los tres significados de "well" en inglés (i.e. "bien," "pozo" y "también"), después. Todo esto, unido a la ausencia de linealidad y a la insistente incidencia en palabras concretas, hace que la labor de los traductores se convierta en una misión de escritura creativa. En este caso, como en tantos otros, Fisher y del Pliego resuelven el entuerto de manera ejemplar:

> Ellos no.
> Ellos dotan.
> Ellos no.
> Ellos como denotan.
> Milagros dan.
> Dan bastante.
> Dan bastante bien.
> Dan de beber.
> También. (97)

Consiguiendo un ritmo muy similar al de la versión inglesa, la primera parte de este extracto sustituye un complicado "cannot" por un simple "no," manteniendo la esencia básica de la contracción a la vez que respetando su contundencia y resonancia, de otra manera imposible si hubiésemos de ajustarnos a su traducción literal por un "no pueden." De manera

análoga, la segunda mitad del poema resuelve fácilmente una situación que, de entrada, semeja cuanto menos intrincada. Reemplazar el verbo "play" por "dar" es una decisión categórica que rompe parcialmente la asociación de estos versos con el juego, pero subsana, de forma muy inteligente, la inviabilidad de traducir "pozo" por algo que suene remotamente parecido a "bien." Así, "a well" se convierte en "dan de beber," sosteniendo tanto la idea del agua como la aliteración en una reinterpretación que, aunque no libre de controversia, resulta perfectamente operativa.

término

La obra de Gertrude Stein oscila entre la referencialidad y la abstracción, la imagen y el sonido, el humor y la teoría. Realizar una traducción perfecta de algo tan plural, sorprendente, e inconsistente en sí mismo requeriría, pues, de una comprensión integral del lenguaje y del mundo interior y exterior de la autora, lo que no solo es inasumible para la mano que traduce, sino también disparatado en tanto que sencillamente utópico. La versión que aquí nos presentan Andrés Fisher y Benito del Pliego es plenamente consciente de las limitaciones de su cometido y, sin embargo, no duda en proponer soluciones diversas (y a menudo, muy ocurrentes y acertadas) a la infinidad de problemas que se le plantean. El fruto de esta aproximación honesta es también un libro honesto, plenamente alineado con la fuerza rítmica de Stein y respetuoso en todo momento con su ecléctico estilo. *ídem lo mismo,* en resumen, acomete la tarea ingente que es traducir a la autora vanguardista, y lo hace con el ímpetu, la atención y la destreza lingüística que requieren los originales.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Clasicismo e identidades contemporáneas. Recepciones clásicas en la cultura de masas

Luis Unceta Gómez and Cristina Salcedo González, eds.

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Recent critical trends in English Studies provide fertile ground for situating *Clasicismo e identidades contemporáneas. Recepciones clásicas en la cultura de masas*. Scholars are paying increasing attention to digital culture, adaptation and intermediality, examining how classical texts are reshaped in film, television, video games and online remix practices. Adaptation studies has highlighted this "re-telling of old stories" or "remixing of the classics" (Sullivan 2023: 105) as a central mode of cultural production. Equally significant are race, postcolonial and global approaches, which foreground how classical receptions intersect with histories of empire, racial formation and transnational circulation; many English programmes now prioritise these perspectives, signalling what contemporary English literary criticism is doing: novels such as Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018), Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne* (2021) or Natalie Haynes' *Stone Blind* (2022) are becoming central to discussions of myth re-visioning, gender or voice. Within current conversations in gender studies, classical reception has become a key arena for interrogating patriarchal traditions and amplifying marginalised voices. These recent female-authored retellings of myth—ranging from narrative reimaginings of Medea, Penelope, Medusa, Ariadne or Atalanta to contemporary feminist rewritings across poetry, film and television—foreground questions of gender, power and agency.

By examining how women writers and creators reappropriate and transform classical narratives within mass culture, *Clasicismo e identidades contemporáneas* aligns itself with feminist criticism and with broader efforts in English Studies to recover silenced perspectives and reframe cultural memory through gendered lenses (Hauser and Taylor 2025). Affect, emotion and performance studies also shape current debates, emphasising how audiences experience, embody and emotionally respond to classical motifs and myths in mass culture. At the same time, ecocriticism and "more-than-human" approaches have expanded reception studies by tracing connections between antiquity, environmental imagination and material culture, from landscapes to myths of resource extraction. Finally, a strong turn toward public humanities, fandom and reception studies reflects growing interest in how audiences participate in shaping cultural memory, with

new institutional centres and archives consolidating this work. Taken together, these currents show how classical receptions are not merely aesthetic reworkings but key sites where questions of ecology, affect, cultural politics and identity are negotiated.

Clasicismo e identidades contemporáneas. Recepciones clásicas en la cultura de masas explores the presence of Greco-Roman antiquity in the present day, specifically examining how contemporary receptions—particularly in popular culture—allow us to uncover concerns and anxieties characteristic of the third decade of the third millennium. This process is approached from an increasingly necessary and relevant interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and multimodal perspective. The polyhedral nature of the book's content and its ability to build strong bridges between multiple disciplines is ensured by its editors, Luis Unceta Gómez and Cristina Salcedo González, who, from Classical Studies and English Studies respectively, competently coordinate the diversity of the thirteen chapters that comprise it. It represents the natural and, to a certain extent, logical continuation of the previous volumes *En los márgenes de Roma. La Antigüedad romana en la cultura de masas contemporánea* (2019) and *En los márgenes del mito. Hibridaciones de la mitología clásica en la cultura de masas contemporánea* (2022) published under the auspices of the Project "Marginalia Classica" funded by the Spanish Research Agency. Together, they provide a broad and profound epistemological perspective on the intricacies of creative decisions concerning the projection of the classical world onto contemporary mass culture and its refracted forms, as well as the broader ethical and aesthetic corollaries of this process.

Luis Unceta's Introduction lays out the book's central concern—how classical Greco-Roman references persist in and help shape contemporary identities—and establishes the theoretical framework by defining "identity" (2024, 20–26) in its individual, collective and digital dimensions, positing that cultural reception operates not simply as passive inheritance but through layered reinterpretations and remediations of earlier receptions. The volume is then divided into three explicitly defined parts, each consistent with the overarching framework that guides and structures the monograph: the concept of identity and its ubiquity across cultural, social and political discourses, and how the Greco-Roman world contributes to shaping, questioning and even subverting them. In Anglophone contexts, commentators or politicians keep invoking classical figures, 'Rome' or 'empire' to justify, critique or frame national decisions, as was observable during discussions around Brexit. This connects to the volume's broader point about how classical reception participates in identity construction and ideological framing.

The first section, titled "Individual Identities," raises questions and problematises issues of gender, sexuality and race. Anastasia Bakogianni's chapter "*¿Quo vadis*, Electra? El problema de la venganza femenina en la tragedia griega y en la cultura popular contemporánea" analyses how Electra has had a long Anglophone reception in drama (e.g., O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*), film and novels. Studying how contemporary culture reinterprets her allows English Studies scholars to connect classical myth to modern narratives, themes and characterisations. By examining Electra in comics, film, digital media or fanfiction, the chapter provides models for analysing English-language popular culture. This extends English Studies beyond canonical texts into multimodal and transmedia storytelling.

The second section, "Collective Identities," focuses on national, globalising, religious and even corporate or business conceptions. Ana González-Rivas Fernández's "Nosotras somos las monstruas: el mito clásico y lo monstruoso-femenino como discurso de empoderamiento" is particularly relevant to English Studies. It examines how classical female monsters—such as Medusa, Circe and the Furies—have been reimagined in contemporary narratives as symbols of female empowerment. González-Rivas argues that these figures, traditionally marginalised and demonised, are now being reclaimed to challenge patriarchal norms and assert female agency through "un discurso en el que las mujeres se apropian de lo monstruoso-femenino como marca de identidad que las empodera en su lucha contra la hegemonía masculina" (2024, 158). Aligning with key themes in feminist and gender studies, González-Rivas Fernández's analysis offers a framework for exploring how the reappropriation of classical mythology intersects with modern identity politics, providing insights into the ways literature and media can subvert traditional narratives and contributing to ongoing discussions in English Studies about the role of myth in reshaping and reflecting societal values and identities.

Finally, the third section examines "Digital Identities" through the multifactorial lens of social media, the so-called cybercommunities and the paraphernalia of the fanfiction phenomenon. Cristina Salcedo González's chapter, titled "Mitos clásicos y comunidades virtuales. Perséfone y la fanfiction en español," is also particularly pertinent to English Studies, especially within the realms of digital humanities and fan studies. Although it offers a compelling exploration of how the myth of Persephone is reimagined and remediated (2024, 224–238) within Spanish-language fanfiction communities, by focusing on the Spanish-language context Salcedo González's work invites comparative studies with English-language fanfiction communities, enriching the

understanding of global digital storytelling practices and the universal appeal of classical mythology. She also examines how these digital narratives serve as a platform for identity construction, allowing authors and readers to engage with themes of transformation, autonomy and the negotiation of power dynamics. This approach underscores the dynamic interplay between ancient myths and contemporary digital cultures, highlighting the adaptability of classical stories in reframing modern identities.

In sum, *Clasicismo e identidades contemporáneas* offers approaches both directly and indirectly relevant to English Studies, particularly in exploring how classical figures and myths are reinterpreted across contemporary media and providing a framework for analysing how they are not only preserved but also transformed in digital spaces, offering insights into the ways in which ancient narratives continue to resonate with and influence contemporary audiences. For example, analyses of Electra in comics and film, Hector as a corporate archetype (in chapter 5) or the online construction of identity in *World of Warcraft* videogames (chapter 12) can inform studies of Anglophone literary and cinematic adaptations, while explorations of Lycaon/werewolf myths (chapter 4) and the monstrous feminine intersect with English Gothic, horror and feminist criticism. Chapter 8's focus on classical references in journalism highlight their rhetorical and ideological use, applicable to Anglophone press and political discourse, and studies of Persephone and Sappho (chapter 11) in digital fan communities suggest parallels in English-language online fandom, fanfiction and queer or feminist reinterpretations. Overall, the volume demonstrates how reception studies can bridge classical sources and contemporary Anglophone literature, media and digital culture. While the book is in Spanish and often refers to Spanish-speaking culture (e.g., Spanish press, national identity, Catalonia referendum, etc.), the approaches are clearly generalisable. The case studies outside pure Spanish contexts (or those that touch on transnational/Anglophone culture) provide solid models that English, cultural and comparative studies scholars can adapt. *Clasicismo e identidades contemporáneas. Recepciones clásicas en la cultura de masas* stands out for the richness of its contents and the breadth of its perspectives, offering readers an engaging and eclectic array of approaches that not only illuminate its subject from multiple angles, but also underscore the vitality and relevance of the field today.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Entrenching Anomalous Pronunciations through Euphonic Chunks

Supervisor: Dolores Porto

Sound parallelism is a significant feature of the English language, yet it is universally ignored in EFL classrooms. In a dozen or so quasi-experiments Frank Boers, Seth Lindstromberg and June Eyckmans have shown how alliteration can have a mnemonic effect when L2 speakers try to learn MWUs in an English-as-a-foreign-language context. However, it has proven much more difficult to demonstrate any practical applications for assonance, the most widespread figure of euphony in English.

My thesis is that euphonic MWUs, especially assonance, can be used to entrench anomalous pronunciations. I am referring to words that have to be learned individually–such as 'ache,''choir' or 'lose'–because they do not follow any rule. So, for instance, I believe that a title like *Little Women* could be used as a micro-context to entrench the correct pronunciation of the plural of 'woman' because the vowel sound in the stressed syllable in 'women' repeats the vowel sound in the stressed syllable in 'little.'

Quasi-Experiment

To this end, I set up a quasi-experiment involving four groups of C1 students in their second year at the University of Alcalá de Henares. To reduce the likelihood of interaction, the two morning classes were used as a control group, and the two afternoon classes were taken as the experimental group. All four groups were originally of a similar size; however, 50% more students in the morning/control groups completed the process compared to the afternoon/experimental groups.

First, all the groups were given a printed 30-question multiple-choice test to establish their pre-instruction knowledge of the pronunciation of these anomalous words. Both the order of the questions and the order of the four possible answers to each question were randomized. A pre-test T-test confirmed that there was no significant difference in the variances or the means. So, the experimental and control groups were equivalent in the pre-test.

Five and six days later, each of the four groups received one hour's instruction on the pronunciation of 40 anomalous words. All four groups were taught using illustrative slides that included information on the phonemic transcription, rhyming words and, where they existed, homophones. However, the experimental groups were, in addition, given micro-contexts consisting of euphonic multiword units that included the target pronunciation.

Nine and ten days later all the students received an unannounced post-test to see how their ability with anomalous pronunciations had improved. The same test was used but, again, it was fully randomized.

Results & Conclusions

All four groups improved their scores between the pre- and the post-test, with a higher improvement for both experimental groups. Nevertheless, the significance value (0.417) was greater than 0.05, so the observable difference (17.65 vs. 16.96) may well be due to chance. There are significant differences intra-groups. In other words, the intervention had an effect in both experimental and control groups. However, there are no significant differences inter-groups, so we cannot conclude that the intervention was not more effective on the experimental group.

To wit, we cannot assert that euphonic micro-contexts can improve the entrenchment of anomalous pronunciations. This lack of success could be attributed to several factors. One is, of course, the null hypothesis: elaboration on anomalous pronunciations does lead to entrenchment but euphonic micro-contexts do not offer an advantage in this process. However, it is also possible that a larger sample size would lead to statistically significant results.

To test this, I undertook a subsequent power analysis. This found that–with basic assumptions, such as 0.05 as the significance level and only one tail (i.e. we assume improvement in the variable)–the experimental group and the control group would each have to contain at least 88 learners for the results to be statistically significant.

More generally, the structure of the quasi-experiment is highly artificial and does not reflect a standard learning process: instruction on forty anomalous pronunciations one after the other is intense and potentially confusing.

Further Study

To overcome these caveats, I have proposed the inclusion of a similar type of assessment in the teaching of at least eight university English classes of different levels over a semester. The instruction on the pronunciation of the words in question will be incorporated more gradually into their lessons and be used in response to specific mispronunciations that occur spontaneously in class.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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The Enregisterment of Late Modern Essex Dialect

Supervisor: Javier Ruano-García

Under the light of third-wave sociolinguistic studies, the concepts of enregisterment (Agha 2003) and indexicality (Silverstein 2003) have proven useful in investigating the connections between language and identity. As in other similar studies (Cooper 2013; Ruano-García 2020; Schintu 2022), my thesis intends to place literary representations of the Essex dialect under the framework of enregisterment and indexicality. Firstly, I plan to shed some light on the history of the Essex dialect which, unlike other regional varieties, remains unexplored. Secondly, I intend to determine the pattern of enregistered linguistic features employed to represent this dialect in literature.

To accomplish these aims, the analysis draws upon a corpus of Essex texts published during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century that have been gathered with the help of *The Salamanca Corpus* and other bibliographical sources. The corpus comprises instances of both dialect literature (DL) and literary dialect (LD) (Shorrocks 1996) in order to ascertain whether the representation of phonological features reveals varying patterns that can be explained on account of the type of representation and thus the type of author and intended audience (i.e. native, non-native speakers of the dialect).

The methodology of the analysis follows Honeybone (2020), where respellings are treated as sociolinguistic variables that are quantified so as to measure the degree of salience of the phonological features they evoke. The objective of this methodology is not only to ascertain what phonological features are employed to represent the Essex dialect, but the extent to which they are represented (Honeybone 2020). Results suggest that the Essex dialect was circulated, represented, and therefore enregistered during the nineteenth century. However, the rates of respellings and pattern of representation suggest that locals and outsiders of the county would have perceived and understood this dialect differently. The PRICE and FACE lexical sets, for instance, are highly respelled throughout DL texts from the corpus. In contrast, these two diphthongs are rarely respelled in LD instances, suggesting that their dialectal realisations were not perceived as salient or distinctive features of the Essex dialect by outsiders.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Register Differences and Extra-linguistic Factors in Collective-verb Agreement

Supervisors: Javier Pérez Guerra & Paula Rodríguez Puente

Collective nouns play a significant role in the study of agreement in English, since the mismatch between their lexical plurality and singular grammatical number percolates to the agreeing verbs and pronouns, which can in turn take singular or plural forms. Most studies have focused on the impact of morpho-syntactic factors (Fernández-Pena 2020), the influence of semantics (Tieku 2020) or geographical differences (Levin, 2001), but little attention has been paid to register variation. Although prior research on both written and spoken data points to a higher frequency of plural agreement with collective nouns in oral discourse than in written text (Levin 2001), we still lack a fine-grained analysis of the phenomenon in different specific registers, such as academic texts, literary genres or official documents. In the same vein, in spite of the ever-growing number of spoken corpora available, extra-linguistic, speaker-related variables have largely been omitted from previous studies, the only relevant inclusion being Bailey's comments (1987) about the possible impact of age, a claim quickly contested by Fries (1988).

Bearing this in mind, my research proposes a corpus-driven analysis of verbal agreement with a series of collectives—*band*, *cast*, *family*, *crowd*, etc.—that considers both oral speech and written sources for a quantitative study of register differences and the relevance of sociolinguistic variables. Since hybrid verbal agreement with collectives is more frequently attested in British English than in other varieties (Levin 2001), the scope is limited to data from the UK. To this purpose, samples of each noun under consideration have been collected from the British National Corpus (BNC Consortium 2007) and the British National Corpus 2014 (Love et al. 2017) in order to carry out a diachronic analysis of the phenomenon and observe ongoing trends regarding verbal agreement. This comparison is possible thanks to the similarities exhibited by both corpora.

Preliminary research with a restricted set of nouns has shown a considerable increase in the frequency of plural verbal agreement over the last decades across most registers and speaker groups. Of particular interest are the fact that female speakers appear to exhibit higher percentages of plural agreement than male speakers and the low number of instances of plural agreement in academic texts.

This research has been conducted under the auspices of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (FPU grant; REF: FPU21-06186) and the AgreeinDiatopy research project (PID2023-146655NA-I00; sponsored by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and ERDF, EU).

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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A Longitudinal Examination of Individual Differences in L2 Pronunciation Learning

Supervisors: Francisco Gallardo-del-Puerto & Esther Gómez-Lacabex

Research on L2 pronunciation learning has highlighted the significant impact of individual differences on pronunciation outcomes. Although factors such as motivation, anxiety, learning strategies and attitudes towards native and non-native accents have been examined in the literature, their specific influence on pronunciation development in young learners remains insufficiently understood, as most studies have focused on adult populations. Additionally, while CLIL has been widely recognized for its benefits in enhancing various linguistic areas, its influence on pronunciation-related individual differences remains largely unexplored.

This study has two main objectives. First, it aims to analyse the trajectories of motivation towards L2 pronunciation, pronunciation anxiety, pronunciation learning strategies, and attitudes toward native and non-native accents in CLIL and non-CLIL learners over a two-year period. Second, it examines potential differences between CLIL and non-CLIL learners at the first and second data collection points.

A total of 320 primary education learners participated in the study, in third and fourth grade, and later in fifth and sixth grade. Data were collected using five-point Likert scale questionnaires assessing motivation towards L2 pronunciation, pronunciation anxiety, pronunciation learning strategies, and attitudes toward native and non-native accents. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare CLIL and non-CLIL learners at both time points, while paired samples t-tests were used to analyse individual differences over time.

The findings reveal significant differences between CLIL and non-CLIL learners, including higher motivation and a stronger preference for native accents among non-CLIL learners. Additionally, the results indicate distinct developmental patterns: while motivation declines over time in both groups, pronunciation anxiety decreases only among CLIL learners. These findings offer valuable insights into the impact of CLIL instruction on individual differences in L2 pronunciation learning, enhancing our understanding of pronunciation development in bilingual education contexts.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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The Syntax and Semantics of Prepositional Verbs Across English, Spanish and Russian

Supervisor: Isabel Oltra-Massuet

Prepositional verbs pose a challenge for linguistic theory due to inconsistent terminology and ongoing debates regarding their classification and properties. Studies on English tend to focus on the distinction between prepositional and phrasal verbs (Radford 1988; Seilhamer 2011; Thim 2012), given their formal similarities and the difficulty of classifying them. Unlike English, Spanish and Russian lack phrasal verbs. However, across all three languages, the precise classification of verb plus preposition constructions remains theoretically complex and underexplored. As Luque Nadal (2021, 25) notes, the phenomenon of prepositional verbs is not exclusive to Spanish, and comparing them with similar constructions in languages such as English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese can yield fruitful insights. Despite this cross-linguistic potential, studies that directly compare prepositional verbs across English, Spanish and Russian are still lacking—a gap this study aims to address.

The research focuses on the syntactic and semantic properties of prepositional verbs in English, Spanish and Russian—three typologically distinct languages from the Germanic, Slavic and Romance families. While Spanish and English have received substantial scholarly attention on prepositional verbs in works such as Santiago Guervós 2007, Zorrilla 2022, Campoy Cubillo 1997 and Silvestre López 2009, their classification and behavior in Russian remain less explored, particularly in contrastive and theoretical studies. The study hypothesizes that despite surface-level differences in case marking, word order and preposition stranding, prepositional verbs exhibit systematic syntactic and semantic patterns in argument structure and verb-preposition selection across English, Spanish and Russian.

The primary objective of this study is to define the notion of a prepositional verb in a way that applies across the three languages, while identifying key syntactic and semantic distinctions. Specifically, the study (i) examines the argument and event structure of prepositional verbs; (ii) classifies them systematically across languages; (iii) develops and applies a set of diagnostics—including pronominalization, wh-question formation, omission, iterability, coordination and the *do so* test—to distinguish prepositional complements from adjuncts; (iv) establishes a cross-linguistic typology of these diagnostics, identifying exceptions, limitations and language-specific patterns; and (v) explores the implications of these findings for second language acquisition, particularly in the teaching of verb argument structure and prepositional constructions. Methodologically, the study follows a synchronic approach. Data are drawn from large-scale corpora such as NOW, the Russian National Corpus and the Corpus del Español, as well as dictionaries, original examples and native speaker judgments.

Challenges include distinguishing prepositional verbs from other verb-preposition combinations, such as phrasal verbs in English and similar constructions in Russian and Spanish, handling language-specific syntactic constraints (e.g., preposition stranding in English, obligatory case marking for all noun phrases in Russian) and ensuring cross-linguistic comparability. Expected results include a refined cross-linguistic typology of prepositional verbs and insights into their role in syntactic theory and language learning. Ultimately, this study refines the cross-linguistic classification of prepositional verbs, offering insights into second language acquisition challenges, particularly in teaching verb-preposition constructions and argument structure in multilingual contexts.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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The Discourse of Far-right Parties in Spain and the USA: A Contrastive Analysis using Trump and Abascal as a Case Study

Supervisor: Ana Fernández Montraveta

Within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), manipulation in political discourse is a key element in understanding how politicians use language, both in written and oral media, to disseminate their ideas and maintain their political power (Van Dijk 2006, 52). Given the current increase in hate speech, it is essential to investigate the manipulation and power exerted by politicians over citizens. Such an analysis allows us to identify potential abuses of power and gain a deeper understanding of the messages being conveyed to the public.

To conduct this analysis, I have compiled two corpora. These corpora consist of thirty speeches delivered by each politician during the electoral campaigns of 2016 and 2019 in various cities across the United States and Spain. The speeches frequently addressed topics such as immigration, the economic crisis, terrorism, crime, drug trafficking, and street violence. One of the main challenges I have encountered in analyzing these politicians is that, despite addressing similar themes in their speeches, the structure of their discourse, the organization of electoral campaigns, and the dynamics of political rallies vary considerably. These differences are primarily due to distinct conceptions of politics in the United States and Spain. While electoral campaigns in Spain tend to adopt a serious and formal tone, in the United States, they are often framed as a televised spectacle designed to foster audience engagement and provide an entertaining experience.

The analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the quantitative analysis, I have used Sketch Engine (Lexical Computing CZ 2018) to examine the frequency of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs as well as the collocations of specific nouns and adjectives, nouns and verbs and also, verbs and adverbs. In the qualitative analysis, I aim to explore how this type of discourse relates to contemporary events following Trump's election. I expect the speeches to exhibit a predominantly negative portrayal of immigration, associating it with crime, drug trafficking, and street violence. Additionally, I intend to determine whether Trump and Abascal employ hate speech in their discourse.

This study contributes to the fields of political discourse analysis and right-wing populism by offering a comparative study of hate speech in the political rhetoric of two prominent leaders: Donald Trump (United States) and Santiago Abascal (Spain). Through a detailed analysis of their public speeches during the electoral periods of 2016 and 2019, the research identifies recurring discursive strategies that construct immigrants and minorities as threats to the nation.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Syntactic Patterns in English-Spanish Code-switching Sentences in Groups of Bilingual Adolescents in the Canary Islands and Gibraltar

Supervisor: Ángel L. Jiménez-Fernández

Our investigation aims to apply previous English-Spanish code-switching research (such as Guzzardo Tamargo *et al.*, 2016; Steuck & Torres Cacoullos, 2019; Hoot & Ebert, 2021, etc.) to the previously unexplored territory of English-Spanish bilingual communities in the Canary Islands and compare results with those obtained from Gibraltar. Our objective is to compare results on code-switching grammar preferences from these areas with those from more recognised bilingual communities such as Gibraltar in order to legitimise a newfound bilingual reality that could provide opportunities for similar research in the future.

We analysed intrasentential, interclausal code-switching grammar preferences with adolescents in both the Canary Islands and Gibraltar to establish patterns shared between the two groups. Subjects pertaining to more English-speaking environments were expected to favour constructions with more English elements, whereas more equitable bilinguals were predicted to produce grammatical preferences within EN-ES syntactic options that may be compared with research from Puerto Rico or other bilingual communities (Jiménez-Fernández, 2023). However, we also expected our Canarian subjects to be influenced by monolingual ideals and produce inconclusive results due to negative perceptions (based on Parafita Couto *et al.*, 2015) as, although they might code-switch amongst themselves, it is not a known phenomenon in their communities.

Using a 4-point forced choice Likert scale to rate code-switching sentences on grammaticality and preference, we found that the Canarian subjects produced similar results in relation to literature and to the Gibraltarian subjects regarding elements such as subordinator and subordinate clause language preferences. Canarian subjects showed unexpectedly high acceptability toward code-switching in general and preference toward constructions in which subordinator and subordinate clauses were in the same language (in line with Belazi *et al.*, 1994). Gibraltarian subjects showed higher acceptability towards constructions in general, which was expected from a code-switching community, and similar

patterns on grammar combinations to the Canarian informants.

We could not confirm preference toward Spanish-dominated constructions (based on theories on discourse neutrality in Torres Cacoullos, 2020), as subjects were more inclined toward predominantly English sentences (in line with Liceras *et al.*, 2016's theory on dominance and proficiency as significant factors in grammar preference, as both communities favoured English as a dominant language in our questionnaires on language preference). However, despite these positive results on English-dominated constructions, our statistical analysis showed that the highest rated language combination (Spanish main clause, English subordinator and English subordinate clause) held no relation to language preference as a significant factor.

Our findings support the integrationist perspective of the possible integration of two grammars into a single system since all of our informants accepted mixed language with no restrictions, which was orthogonal to our goal in this paper (see López, 2020 and references therein). We show that Canarian bilinguals produce similar results on grammar preference as the established code-switching community in Gibraltar and following literature (Belazi *et al.*, 1994; Liceras *et al.*, 2016). More importantly, we suggest that demographic changes in communities such as areas in the Canary Island with high levels of English immigration could influence grammar preferences amongst subjects (Antoniou and Katsos, 2017) as the generation of speakers that we used for this paper have experienced a new kind of multilingual reality that their older peers were not subjected to, due to immigration and tourism influxes in these areas.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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A Corpus-Based Study to the BE-Passive in Gibraltar English: A Variationist Approach

Supervisor: Lucía Loureiro-Porto

Gibraltar English (GibE, henceforth) is a lesser-known variety of English whose grammar remains largely underexplored, primarily due to the lack of appropriate data to rely on (Loureiro-Porto and Suárez-Gómez 2017). However, this situation has changed with the recent release of the Gibraltarian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-Gibraltar, henceforth ICE-GBR; Seoane et al. 2023). To help bridge this gap, this study examines the BE-passive in GibE (e.g., *The frontier fence was erected by the British in 1908*), a construction essential to information structure and academic discourse (Arnold et al. 2013; Biber et al. 1999), which has recently declined in frequency due to extralinguistic processes such as informalization, colloquialization, democratization (Farrelly and Seoane 2012; Leech et al. 2009; Seoane and Loureiro-Porto 2005) and Americanization (Gonçalves et al. 2018).

Thus, this paper explores the frequency and functions of the BE-passive in GibE, and the main objectives are: (i) to describe its linguistic behavior, considering text-type distribution, aspect, modality, *by*-phrase presence and subject animacy (following Hundt et al. 2023); (ii) to compare its frequency with British and American English; and (iii) to determine whether sociocultural factors influence its use. The methodology involves quantitative and qualitative analysis of data from the written component of ICE-GBR and using Jamovi software (2025). Results are also compared with ICE-Great Britain (ICE-GB) and ICE-United States (ICE-USA).

Preliminary findings suggest that while the grammatical features of the BE-passive in GibE align with descriptions in traditional manuals (Huddleston and Pullum 2002; Quirk et al. 1985), its frequency is considerably lower than in British English, though higher than in American English. This could be attributed to the above-mentioned phenomena of informalization, colloquialization, democratization and Americanization, but particularly to language contact with Spanish, where the passive is seldom used.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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A Speech Corpus as a Research Resource to Diagnose L2 English Pronunciation and Set Teaching Priorities: Introducing Usal-EP&P

Supervisor: Francisco Javier Ruano García

This paper presents the *USAL-EP&P* spoken corpus, a project that could turn a compilation of 1st-year university students' SFS-WASP recorded files into a resource for qualitative and quantitative analysis of speech accuracy, fluency and other sound aspects of L2 English learning / acquisition.

Non-native English speech corpora are far less common than written or native spoken ones (Raab et al. 2008), and their processing requires painstaking tagging before they can be processed by ASR systems for different purposes, like EFL pronunciation assessment (e.g. Chen 2023). Fewer still are those transcribed phonetically. Once given shape as such, the *USAL-EP&P* corpus would include statistics and visual interfaces, potentially suitable for machine reading. However, narrow transcription of the files and machine browsability are not in the scope of this project. Besides, legal and technical aspects must be sorted out first.

There were practically no precedents of a spoken corpus-based part in the examination process of English Phonetics and Phonology in Spanish universities, at least until 2012, when recordings started in the degree of English Studies at the USAL. After a pilot stage, students began to record readings of short scripts that year as a half-optional, conditional activity to have their L2 English pronunciation diagnosed, not disregarding fluency and intonation, which was a first for many.

Quite unintentionally, audio files with their spectrograms and marked scripts stockpiled for over ten years, reaching about 1700 when the activity ceased in 2023. Should all that information be shelved away, or disposed of like written exams? Or could that raw material become a researchable spoken corpus instead? If so, it must be defined in its attributes, analyzed, organized, broken down statistically, and then put to work.

Over a 10-year, 8-course period, hundreds of future teachers received detailed feedback on their L2 English pronunciation, gaining awareness of their key role. What were their shortcomings and strengths, and how could they improve? Is negative transfer from L1 to blame for all L2 deficiencies? What errors must be addressed in transitional pronunciation? Where is the borderline between accent colouring and plain inaccuracy? Can ASR testing outperform human raters? (Wester et al. 2001).

This project will try to answer queries like those by setting its theoretical foundations, supported by authorities, both present (Collins & Mees 2013 for one) and traditional, to continue with a contrastive analysis of segmental conflicts in the shift from Spanish to English (Mott 2011, Gómez González & Sánchez Roura 2016, etc.), illustrating them with pronunciation challenges in the corpus scripts. Next, there will be a description of the procedure followed to record and assess the audio clips that will eventually make up the spoken corpus. Finally, there should be some examples of how to browse this corpus and analyze features of interest.

The conclusions aim at revising conventions and misconceptions affecting teaching priorities, spoken models for EFL/ESL/EIL (Jenkins 2000, Lindsey 2019), and phonemic transcription.Once this unsought compilation reaches corpus status, it should remain as a teaching tool and an object of research at the University's discretion.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Relativization Markers in Gibraltar English

Supervisor: Cristina Suárez-Gómez

This study examines the use of relative markers in restrictive adnominal relative clauses in Gibraltar English. In English, adnominal relative clauses are introduced by *wh-* markers (e.g. *The researcher who wrote this*), the invariable *that* (e.g. *The study that she conducted*), or a zero marker (e.g. *The study ø she conducted*). Previous research shows that factors like the restrictiveness of the relative clause, the animacy of the antecedent, and the syntactic function of the relative marker within the relative clause influence marker selection (Guy and Bayley 1995, 150; Tottie 1997, 157-58; Biber et al. 1999, 608; Leech et al. 2009, 226-27).

More recent studies have noted a stylistic shift in the selection of relative markers in formal texts, driven by broader phenomena like prescriptivism and colloquialization in American and British English. This is reflected in the increasing use of *that* and zero markers over *which* (Hinrichs et al. 2015, 819-20; Xu and Xiao 2015, 829). A similar shift has also been observed in Asian and African Englishes (Collins et al. 2014, 136-37; Seoane and Suárez-Gómez 2020, 293; Kotze and Law Favo 2025, 14).

To address the impact of this shift on Gibraltar English, I will conduct a corpus-based analysis. The study examines the use of relative markers in spoken and written language, using data from the Gibraltarian component (ICE-GBR) of the International Corpus of English and contrasting it with the British component (ICE-GB). A preliminary analysis of academic and popular writing suggests a preference for *that* over *which* in Gibraltar English, particularly in subject position. Along with the beforementioned predictors, language contact may also condition the selection of markers (Loureiro-Porto and Suárez-Gómez 2017, 106-107). By investigating this, this study aims to show how individual factors and global trends of language change interact to influence variation in the relativization system of Gibraltar English.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Orthography Effects on Second Language Pronunciation: A Study of Young Learners in CLIL and EFL Contexts

Supervisors: Francisco Gallardo-del-Puerto and Esther Gómez-Lacabex

The current project, framed withing the area of second language acquisition, focuses on the influence of orthographic knowledge on the acquisition of L2 English phonology (Bassetti 2023; 2024). It aims at exploring whether type of instruction plays a role in the occurrence of orthographic effects (OEs) on Spanish schoolchildren's pronunciation. Also, it intends to explore whether individual factors such as gender, extracurricular exposure and the affective component mediate this influence.

To fulfill these objectives, an experimental design is proposed, where two groups of learners (Content and Language Integrated Learning [CLIL] and English as a Foreign Language [ELF]) are compared cross-sectionally and (pseudo-) longitudinally. To this aim, a reading-aloud task, an imitation task and a storytelling task have been selected from the data set of a larger project conducted by the "Learning English as an Additional Language" research group, which has involved participants from Cantabrian Primary Schools.

The selected data will be subject to auditory, acoustic and statistical analyses to answer the research questions. Given the vast number of grapheme-phoneme correspondences between the languages involved (English and Spanish), it may be necessary to define the scope of the study focusing on specific contrasts whose selection will take into account salient incongruences between the writing systems of these two languages (Hayes-Harb and Barrios 2021; Vokic 2011; Zampini 1994)"DOI":"10.1017/S0261444820000658","issue":"3","page":"297–326","title":"The influence of orthography in second language phonological acquisition","volume":"54","author":[{"family":"Hayes-Harb","given":"Rachel"},{"family":"Barrios","given":"Shannon"}],"issued":{"date-parts":[["2021"]]}},{"id":64,"uris":["http://zotero.org/users/local/VPBssWTv/items/W5U6HYW2"],"itemData":{"id":64,"type":"article-journal","abstract":"This study analysed the extent to which literate native speakers of a language with a phonemic alphabetic orthography rely on their first language (L1.

In agreement with the CLIL advantages attested in prior research (Dalton-Puffer and Bauer-Marschallinger 2023; Pérez-Cañado 2012), we hypothesize that OEs will be less evident in CLIL students' pronunciation, given the higher

amount of exposure they receive as compared to students in a traditional EFL setting. Therefore, it is expected i) to find an interfering effect of orthography in both groups; ii) to obtain empirical evidence to support a possible facilitative effect of CLIL instruction, mainly over time; and iii) to observe a mediating effect of some of the individual variables analyzed.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Comparing the Roles of English, Afrikaans, and Indigenous Languages in South African Higher Education Language Policies

Supervisor: Pedro Álvarez-Mosquera

With 12 official languages recognized by its government, South Africa's language policies aim at promoting multilingualism in all levels of society. Specifically, the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020) urges universities to lead South Africa's linguistic transformation into a multilingual society. Given the sociolinguistic conditions of the post-apartheid era, historically Afrikaans universities (HAUs) have had to make more adjustments than historically black universities (HBUs).

Considering that the insistence of multilingual practices in higher education institutions does not guarantee its successful implementation (Du Plessis 2006; Beukes 2009; Webb 2009; Coetzee-Van Rooy 2018) the hypothesis of this study is that the 2020 Framework's stated priority of developing indigenous languages' role in higher education is not expressed as emphatically in the universities' language policies. Following a critical discourse analysis approach (N. Fairclough 2001; I. Fairclough and Fairclough 2012), the case study is focused on evaluating the national framework and two HAUs' language policies and development plans, namely North-West University and Stellenbosch University, to examine the treatment of South African indigenous languages in official documents in relation to English and Afrikaans. Studying these written discourses will allow to provide a snapshot of the current situation of former Afrikaans universities in relation to the compulsory inclusion of indigenous languages as well as to identify in which part of the linguistic transformation process these institutions find themselves in.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the great number of published South African language policies requires the selection of a few key discourses, considering the other texts as part of the interdiscursivity analysis instead of main objects of study. The critical examination of the previously mentioned documents will likely show that the Language

Policy Framework (2020) reiterates the need for the development and strengthening of indigenous languages, whereas the specific Universities' policies are not as insistent on this matter.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Reimagining the American West: Space, Power, and Identity in the Works of Cormac McCarthy and Larry McMurtry

Supervisor: David Rio Raigadas

This project examines Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* and his Border Trilogy, as well as Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* tetralogy, focusing on their brutal portrayal of the American West. Despite their critical success, both authors challenge traditional Western narratives, exposing the violence that results from the hegemonic power abuses towards minorities. These are based on the racial and sexual discrimination that results from colonialist ideologies embedded in American history.

The central hypothesis of this study posits that McCarthy and McMurtry, through their representation of space and place, deconstruct foundational Western myths by exposing their inherent contradictions, imperialist legacy, and shifting power dynamics. Additionally, through the use of ambivalence and a dichotomous viewpoint, both authors criticize the colonial mindset of the United States and highlight the vertical power dynamics and their constant fluctuation of power in spaces of resistance. Its core objectives are to analyze how place and space shape narrative themes and character experiences, and how these authors contribute to a revisionist perspective of the Western genre.

Furthermore, the methodology employed combines place and space studies, community studies, and postcolonial and decolonial theory. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theories of the social production of space and Edward Soja's concept of the third space, this study examines how both authors portray landscapes as contested sites of power, identity, and resistance. Moreover, this analysis also draws upon Marc Augé's theory of non-places to explore how contemporary spaces of transience mediate identity, memory, and social interaction. Besides, this study contributes to community studies by employing the theoretical perspectives developed by Hillis Miller. This paper applies postcolonial theories

developed by Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, together with Maria Lugones' decolonial theories, to investigate how McCarthy and McMurtry critique hegemonic discourse and represent marginalized voices through third spaces of resistance. Finally, this analysis will utilize Gloria Anzaldúa's borderland theory to explore how the traditionally exclusionary border between the United States and Mexico gives rise to various processes of hybridity that embody the contradictions inherent in the authors' perspectives of the Old West.

Potential challenges include developing a distinct comparative approach from an outsider's perspective from previous academic studies. However, despite this challenge, this study aims to demonstrate that both authors evolved the Western genre, laying the foundations for revisionist and weird Westerns by subverting the hegemonic discourse and providing a voice to historically silenced minority groups.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.63182/Nexus-2025-2.4.12

The Babel Effect: Transparency and Linguistic Fragmentation in Contemporary English Fiction

Supervisor: Paula Martín-Salván

Transparency is a defining key word in contemporary societies, and literature is a privileged space for its critical exploration. This dissertation investigates the paradoxical nature of transparency and its mechanisms of resistance to modern imperatives, as depicted both thematically and stylistically in contemporary novels that reinterpret the myth of Babel (*Genesis* 11:1-9). The objective of this research is to identify, analyze, and critically examine modern representations of the Tower of Babel as a metaphor for the collapse of human communication and the fragmentation of language.

The dissertation focuses on how the concept of transparency informs contemporary narratives that emerge from post-Babelic ideas of language fragmentation as a marker of exclusion where dominant languages and discourses shape identities and power dynamics. The central hypothesis is that such representations are structured as narratives of power, (mis)communication, unity, division, and surveillance. The theoretical framework of this project springs from the field of Critical Transparency Studies. Moreover, the study draws from Narratology, Community Studies, Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies, Translation Studies and Philosophy of Language to explore how the interactions depicted in the novels reflect and problematize the dynamics and blurred lines between transparency and opacity at both interpersonal (community) and communicative (translation) levels.

The corpus of analysis is constituted by Samuel R. Delany's *Babel-17* (1966), A. S. Byatt's *Babel Tower* (1996), and Rebecca F. Kuang's *Babel* (2022). These works, which span across decades and genres, exemplify what Calinescu (1993:10) calls "fictions that derive from time-honored writings," as they all reimagine the Babel myth within a different literary and temporal framework: from speculative science fiction (*Babel-17*) to contemporary metafictional reflection (*Babel Tower*), and neo-Victorian fantasy rooted in colonial critique (*Babel*). Their notable differences offer fertile ground for examining how genre influences the reinterpretation of the Babel myth, and the crucial role that transparency plays in that process.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Narrating Palestinian Identity: (Dis)placement, Diaspora, Belonging, and Resistance in Salt Houses, Enter Ghost, *and* Out of It

Supervisor: Patricia Bastida Rodríguez

One of the central concerns in Out of It (2011) by Selma Dabbagh, Salt Houses (2017) by Hala Alyan, and Enter Ghost (2023) by Isabella Hammad is the impact of forced displacement and occupation on the construction of Palestinian identity. In these narratives, identity is portrayed as a dynamic process shaped by the experience of exile. The works highlight how Palestinians are formed across diasporic contexts, where belonging is negotiated within and beyond national borders. Diaspora, in this sense, is not merely a condition of exile but a generative space in which cultural memory, resistance, and reimagined notions of home are actively produced. Space thus becomes more than a physical setting. It is a site where identity is regulated and contested under shifting regimes of power. Engaging with critical frameworks such as necropolitics (Mbembe), non-places (Augé), and slow violence (Nixon), the research examines the spatial and affective dimensions of Palestinian displacement. Sites such as refugee camps, occupied cities, and border zones are approached not only as physical locations but also as political spaces where identity is continually shaped, challenged, and rearticulated. These works foreground how a constant (dis)placement—inflected by diasporic mobility, memory, and intergenerational trauma—structures both personal and collective experiences of loss, resistance, and continuity. The analysis considers how literature functions not only as a medium of cultural preservation but also as a form of political expression that challenges hegemonic narratives rendering Palestinian lives marginal or invisible. Ultimately, these novels offer valuable insights into the ongoing formation of Palestinian identity through the lenses of displacement, diaspora, and resistance. By employing complex narrative structures, multiple perspectives, and representations of affective solidarity, the authors construct alternative imaginaries that contest dominant geopolitical discourses and affirm the enduring agency and resilience of a people living under occupation.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Shifts: Scenes of Work in Eighteenth-Century Novels by Women Writers

Supervisor: Fernando Galván Reula

This project intends to trace the evolution of the portrayal of work and working people in English novels along the eighteenth century. It will address this evolution through the works of four women writers: Mary Davys (1674-1731), Eliza Haywood (1693?-1756), Sarah Fielding (1710-1768) and Frances Burney (1752-1840). The project's central hypothesis is that both shifts in the understanding of the novel genre and British economic and technological development will have an observable effect on depictions of work and workers in prose narratives, affecting key aspects of the novels in our corpus, i.e. narrative time, characterisation and plot structure.

To test this hypothesis, selected novels from all four authors will be analysed in order to build a comprehensive description of the changing depictions of workers and work scenes across time. This emphasis on diachrony poses a methodological challenge, since it multiplies the contextual variables necessary to understand each work and effectively compare it to others, complicating the already problematic issue of verifying historical/cultural relationships of causality, such as the one presupposed by my central hypothesis. This difficulty might be mitigated by the fact that the authors I have chosen to study share some similarities, such as the use of marriage plots in their writing, their engagement with genres other than the novel, and some first-hand experience in sustaining themselves with their own labour.

I expect my thesis to have implications not only for our understanding of the portrayals of labour in the four authors analysed, but also for the broader study of the different roles that depictions of work and workers played in the formation of the novel as a genre.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The (R)evolution of Vampires: From Mythical Creatures to Contemporary Icons

Supervisor: Patricia Fra

Monsters have always played a fundamental role in all societies, acting as cautionary figures that embody collective fears. Kaplan (2013) claims that monsters are created out of the threats they represent and that once these fears disappear, the monsters themselves become extinct.

The vampire, a recurrent figure throughout history, has experienced numerous transformations. From its early depictions in works like the *Odyssey* to its association with the Byronic hero and later its highly sensualized portrayal in Coppola's *Dracula* (1992), the vampire has continuously evolved. With the appearance of *Twilight* (2008) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009), the archetype shifted once more, embracing a 'romanticised' persona frequently featured in modern romance fiction. Additionally, the notion of 'hybristophilia'—the attraction to dangerous individuals—is still deeply embedded within vampire lore, reinforcing its connection to the serial killer archetype.

Rather than fading from mainstream media, the vampire figure has adapted to contemporary narratives, subtly integrating itself into modern characters and genres. This is particularly evident in male protagonists of popular young adult and romance sagas such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) and *After* (2019), where the allure of dominance and danger continues to reinforce patriarchal ideals. As Crawford (Crawford 2014, 23; italics in the original) states, "wicked individuals […] [are] attractive *because* of their wickedness," transforming Gothic romance villains into seductive 'demon lovers.' Given that these narratives are primarily authored by women and intended to a female audience (García Irlés 2012, 487; my translation) and within distinct sociopolitical contexts, it is essential to explore the vampire's ongoing evolution and its (re)integration into modern societies.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.63182/Nexus-2025-2.4.16

Reclaiming Black Womanhood in Long Nineteenth-Century English Literature and its Neo-Victorian Rewritings

Supervisors: Miriam Borham Puyal & Paula Barba Guerrero

The representation of racialised women in nineteenth-century England has oftentimes been shaped by stereotyped portrayals and forced exoticisms, resulting in the marginalisation or silencing of their voices within both the literary canon and historic archive. My research investigates the literary depiction of Black and mixed-race women in long nineteenth-century England and traces their reimaginings in contemporary Neo-Victorian adaptations.

Drawing on Postcolonial theory and Black Feminist Studies, this study carries out a comparative analysis that spans from early modern works– such as *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) and *The Jamaican Lady* (1720)– to the nineteenth century novels. Central to this inquiry is the study of novels such as *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *Belinda* (1801), *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), *The Woman of Colour* (1808), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Sanditon* (1817), *Owen Castle* (1823), *The History of Mary Prince* (1831) and *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole* (1857). These texts are studied and contested for the ways in which they construct and challenge notions of black womanhood, particularly where race intersects with issues of gender, property, femininity, class and empire. Rather than positioning these novels in a reductive binary, this analysis aims to foreground the nuanced and often contradictory representations of racialised women in the literature of the period.

The latter half of this research turns to Neo-Victorian rewritings, including adaptations like *Belle* (2013), *Sanditon* (2019-2023) *Bridgerton* (2020-present), *Queen Charlotte* (2023) and *Buccaneers* (2023-present) as well as novels like Vanessa Riley's *Queen of Exiles* (2023). These adaptations are critically examined to assess how contemporary culture reengages with, and oftentimes commodifies, historical representations of black womanhood.

Ultimately, this research seeks to foreground the voices of racialised women in the literary canon, challenging historical misrepresentations as well as underscoring the enduring impact of racialised narratives on contemporary perceptions of race and gender. Furthermore, by building a tentative bridge between historical texts and contemporary representations, my research aims at contributing to and enhancing the visibility of discussions in Black Feminist and Postcolonial studies, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of racialised women in long nineteenth-century literature and their cultural legacy.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Someone Else Coursing through their Veins: Queerness and Cannibalism in American Literature and Cinema

Supervisor: Amaya Fernandez Menicucci

Since the dawn of humankind and well into our modern age, cannibalism always appears as one of our recurring fears. Regardless of whether the stories in which it manifests had a moralizing goal aiding a larger ideological apparatus or a mere entertaining one, it is quite quaint how, for as many times as we encounter mentions of giants or colonized Others as the perpetrators of anthropophagy, more often than not, these flesh-eating deviants were also associated with queerness.

It is, therefore, the goal of this dissertation to study the representation and association in between cannibalism and queer identities in a variety of literary and cinematographic texts. The axis around which it will be structured being a comparative analysis of said texts thematically grouped with the aim to dissect, not only the interplay of queerness and cannibalism in them, but also, to explore why this recurring trope has been continuously deployed across the past two centuries, and the sociocultural impacts this entails. For the purpose of the aforementioned analysis, both gender studies and cultural studies will constitute key pillars of the chosen theoretical framework, which along with close reading, narratological analysis and adaptation studies will be the lenses through which the study will be conducted.

Regarding the corpus, the texts chosen range from late-nineteenth-century works by Herman Melville like *Typee* to contemporary shows, movies and novels, aiming, on the one hand, to highlight the studies already conducted around works which are seminal to this subgenre of horror—e.g. NBC's *Hannibal* or Tennessee Williams "Desire and the Black Masseur" and *Suddenly Last Summer*—while also broadening this analysis to encompass the seeming proliferation of cannibalism deployed as a key thematic element in queer texts during the early decades of the twenty-first century—like we can see in the success of series like *Yellowjackets* (2021-present) or movies like *Bones and All* (2022). This could be one of the project's limitations, as research into the topic is scarce and the fact that it has had a contemporary resurgence with very few studies devoted to it, limits the pool of previous knowledge from which to draw upon.

Nevertheless, it is expected to shed some light into the parallels to be found among these works, regarding who devours or is devoured, along with the colonial reminiscences that they draw from, which signifies an important gap in the state

of the art. This will aid to also further discussion around contemporary queer texts, and the ongoing debates surrounding "representation" of queer people in literature and the unwantedly correct roles they have been expected to fit in after centuries of negative depictions and stereotyping. Emphasizing a need for diverse queer texts and voices which help escape the good vs bad dichotomy and its binary limitations, and thus, cisheterosexual discursive practices.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.63182/Nexus-2025-2.4.18

Unveiling the Heroines: Representations of Women in Male-Authored Late-Victorian Fiction, 1880-1899

Supervisor: Sara Martín Alegre

The fin de siècle marks the zenith of imperial expansion, giving rise to a literary corpus set across global contexts. Tales by emblematic authors such as H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Joseph Conrad, set in Africa, India, the East Indies, and the isles of the Southern seas, provide a stage for men and boys. As this literary genre and the ethos of imperial masculinity reinforce each other, it is also a time entwined with the first wave of feminism in Britain. The "New Woman" of the period, in Gail Cunningham's words, whose "attack—in the 1890s at least—on the social and domestic constructs of marriage, the family, sexuality, constituted a subversion of the male power-base so fundamental," became a defining symbol of the era (Cunningham 94).

Current research, through the lens of Gender Studies, predominantly examines "men" or imperial masculinities in the works of the mentioned authors, whereas studies on "women" in late-Victorian literature often concentrate on the works of female writers. Systematic analyses of female representation in the writings of these canonical male authors, however, remain scarce, which is precisely what my project wants to address: how women, often considered marginalized or othered, are represented in male-authored late-Victorian fiction against the backdrop of the first-wave feminism.

My corpus includes Haggard's *She* (1887), *Kipling's The Light That Failed* (1891), *Stevenson's Island Nights' Entertainments* (1893) and *Catriona* (1893), and Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). This study primarily employs the theoretical framework of Gender Studies, incorporating perspectives from Postcolonialism and New Historicism to analyze these works. It examines the varied representations of women as submissive and subversive, colonial and colonized, and explores the metaphoricity of female orality, body, and naming in authors' construction of female subjectivity. It also investigates how gendered power dynamics are performed, both heterosexually and homosocially, and the extent to which the "New Woman" ideology, resisted by these male authors, shapes their characterization of women.

The preliminary thesis of this project asserts that, influenced by fin-de-siècle feminist discourses, male-authored late-Victorian fiction often portrays women as either submissive or subversive, reflecting varying degrees of male anxiety about shifting gender roles. This anxiety, frequently expressed through distinctly misogynistic undertones, is more pronounced in the works of Kipling and Conrad than in those of Stevenson and Haggard. This research avoids gendered ideological preconceptions and remains grounded in the texts, historical context, and life experiences of the authors, aiming to present an in-depth, impartial, and multidimensional panorama of male-authored late-Victorian perspectives on women.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Black Feminism in the American Gold Rush: A Sociocultural Journey through the Conquest of the West

Supervisor: Amaia Ibarraran Bigalondo

During the nineteenth century in North America, the members of the Thirteen Colonies expanded their settlements toward the western lands of what we know as the USA today. European American, African American and Asian Americans migrated to western territories attracted not only by the land, but also by its precious metals. The Gold Rush had started. The popular and romanticized illustration of the period represents a bearded-white man panning the precious golden nuggets in a river. However, this image excludes women in general, and Afro-American women in particular.

This dissertation aims at analyzing the presence of the Afro-American women during the Gold Rush and at observing their role outside the domestic space. The hypothesis that will be tested is that illustrating the narrative sources with visual art works provides a deeper and wider vision of the role of the protagonists in the American Gold Rush and emphasizes their significance. The study observes the lives and works of three Afro-American women: Mary Fields, Mary Ellen Pleasant, and Abby Fisher, who represent three social models quite distant from a feminine stereotype: the gunslinger, the financier, and the author. In addition, three art works that represent the three protagonists are analyzed to engage with the narrative texts and create a dialogue.

Furthermore, this paper analyzes the role of the black women in the conquest of the West from the perspective of the Black Feminism theory. It examines the three protagonists' biographies through a set of primary sources: literary sources, visual material, and transcriptions. Next, it observes three paintings that represent each woman. The artistic analysis connects the images directly with the literary texts. Through a comparative framework, this interdisciplinary study intends to make a contribution to the field of comparative literature, intermingling images and texts.

The current state of this work is focused on the investigation of the scrapbook as an artifact that blends word and image, as it proves to be a relevant source for the research of individuals in illiterate surroundings. Previous studies on this field like Ellen Gruber Garvey's *Writing with Scissors* (2012) and the article of Katriel and Farrell, "Scrapbooks as Cultural Texts" (1991) are breaking new ground and documenting data when a lack of primary and secondary sources exists.

Considering scrapbooks a literary genre contributes to enrich the investigation and present a broader perspective of the role of African American women during the Gold Rush in the nineteenth century.

The expected outcomes include promoting the visibility of the social roles of black women in the Conquest of the West and engaging literary and art works as essential components in an interdisciplinary study to provide a wider perspective and diffusion of the subject.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Unveiling the Perspectives of Domestic Servants and Other Marginalized Working-Class Women in Neo-Victorian Literary Pieces: Nelly Dean: A Return to Wuthering Heights *(2015)*

Supervisors: Gemma López Sánchez & Marta Ortega Sáez.

This dissertation aims to explore the marginalized voices present in Victorian literature through the analysis of neo-Victorian literary pieces. The hypothesis of this research is that, unlike Victorian literature, neo-Victorian literature succeeds at empowering past marginalized characters; thus, giving visibility to working-class women. Also, a potential challenge could be the multiple layers of narrative theory, considering the different time periods and contextual implications.

The principal objectives are to explore the perspectives present in *Nelly Dean: A Return to Wuthering Heights* (2015), to examine how new meanings and interpretations are created through the analysis of Victorian and neo-Victorian novels, to delve into the techniques employed in Victorian and neo-Victorian texts to identify how they influence the perception of the characters, and to investigate the adversities of the unheard individuals and how they are portrayed in the novels depending on their cultural background. In order to achieve these aims, my thesis contains an in-depth theoretical

framework which encompasses information relevant to intertextuality, narrative theory, new historicism, Marxist literary criticism, cultural materialism, and feminist theory.

Finally, this study provides the following innovative approaches: a deep understanding of Nelly Dean's character, how narrative structures and diverse focalization methodologies can alter the significance of characters, an understanding of how specific narrative structures are applied in neo-Victorian literary pieces, information about the importance of historical and cultural contexts, a class-conscious approach in which Victorian socio-economic dynamics are acknowledged, a critique of how Victorian norms had a tendency toward the marginalization of working-class women, and lastly, expertise about the understudied topic of Victorian working-class women lacking visibility.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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"Familia and Beyond:" Unpacking Family Dynamics in Latinx Young Adult Stories

Supervisor: Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo

In a moment when conversations around migration, queerness, and belonging are at the forefront of cultural and political discourse, Latinx young adult (YA) literature emerges as a powerful site for reimagining the family. This project explores how recent Latinx YA novels challenge dominant kinship structures by foregrounding chosen families, queer and intergenerational tensions, and the reconfiguration of familial roles across diasporic and transnational contexts. Despite the growing popularity of YA fiction, Latinx YA remains critically under-examined in academic spaces—particularly in terms of how it theorizes family, community, and survival.

Focusing on six novels—*The Inexplicable Logic of My Life* (Sáenz, 2017), *The Poet X* (Acevedo, 2018), *Dominicana* (Cruz, 2019), *Santiago's Road Home* (Diaz, 2019), *Fifteen Hundred Miles from the Sun* (Garza Villa, 2021), and *Ophelia After All* (Marie, 2022)—this study asks: how do these narratives complicate traditional notions of family, especially in the lives of queer migrant Latinx youth? What kinds of kinship networks emerge when biological ties are fractured or unavailable? And how do these novels use the genre of YA to offer politically resonant alternatives to normative family structures?

Using literary and thematic analysis, this research draws from queer theory, decolonial feminism, and cultural studies. The theoretical foundation of this research is informed by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, José Esteban Muñoz, Cherríe Moraga, and María Lugones, alongside abolitionist critiques of the family, particularly those advanced by Sophie Lewis and M.E. O'Brien. Across the texts, recurring themes—such as familial rejection, queer coming-of-age, migration-related rupture, and alternative caregiving structures—reveal how family becomes both a site of constraint and a space of radical possibility.

Importantly, this project resists reading Latinx YA literature solely through the lens of trauma. While many of these texts address pain, displacement, and systemic violence, they also foreground joy, resilience, intimacy, and creative survival. By highlighting chosen families, queer kinship, and the refusal of heteronormative expectations, these narratives contribute to a broader reimagining of what it means to belong.

This study argues that Latinx YA literature is not only a reflection of cultural shifts but also an active participant in reshaping discourses of family, identity, and care. It contributes to Latinx literary studies, queer studies, and youth culture by centering the voices of young people who challenge the limits of both genre and kinship.

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Resilient Voices: Two-Spirit and Queer Representations in the Oral Traditions of the Inuit, Mi'kmaq and Squamish Nations under a Cultural Genocide

Supervisors: Ana Isabel Zamorano Rueda & María Beatriz Pérez Cabello de Alba

The main objectives of my research are to identify representations of Two-Spirit or Queer identities, to analyse the impact of colonialism on these narratives and to examine how settler colonialism has disrupted, blurred, or transformed them, with particular attention to their resilience. Although my thesis compares representations in oral traditions and contemporary literature, as I am currently completing the writing of the section devoted to the analysis of oral literature, I will focus exclusively on preliminary findings from this specific section, centred on Two-Spirit and Queer representations in the oral literature of three Indigenous nations from the territory currently known as Canada—Mi'kmaq, Squamish and Inuit—and on their analysis from a decolonial perspective.

The methodology employed in my research combines the comparative analysis of oral sources with an intersectional approach, drawing mainly from Queer Studies, Queer Indigenous Studies and Decolonial Studies. The corpus under analysis includes English-language compilations of traditional stories collected between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by a missionary, an anthropologist, a writer and a physician, figures whose colonial perspectives represent both a limitation and a critical object of analysis, as well as widely recognised contemporary texts written by Two-Spirit authors in Canada.

One of the main challenges of this research has been the scarcity of primary oral records close to the beginning of the British colonial period, due first to a lack of interest and later to systematic cultural destruction. Further difficulties stem

from the cultural and linguistic complexity of the available sources, which require careful interpretation in line with Indigenous worldviews, as well as a critical effort to disentangle original voices from colonial filters.

Preliminary findings in the oral literature section reveal a range of narratives that include characters with non-normative gender roles, bodily transformations, relational identities that transcend binary categories and alternative family structures. These representations, although often subtle or veiled, reflect a deeply diverse precolonial understanding of gender and sexuality and show how many of these identities survived through storytelling in a context of cultural genocide. Despite the silencing imposed by colonialism, Two-Spirit and Queer voices continue to resonate in these stories as forms of resistance, memory and regeneration.

—This presentation was prepared within the framework of the 2024 UNED–Santander predoctoral research contract—

VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The Transnational Legacy of Cervantes: Transwriting in Robin Chapman's The Spanish Trilogy

Supervisor: Pedro Javier Pardo García

The fictional universe constructed by Cervantes in *Don Quijote* has been reproduced, transformed and even expanded by numerous authors and in several languages, vindicating its significance and influence beyond the pages of said book while reaching different cultures in different times. In this way, the relevance of Don Quijote and of his author is proved to also reside in their international impact through a process of transwriting (Gaudreault and Groensteen 1998, 65-80), the migration of diegetic universes between works.

Taking this into consideration, a range of possibilities arises depending on the various intertextual relationships that occur between the origin text and other texts (Genette 1982, 1-5; Genette 1997, 196-236; Saint-Gelais 2011, 10-16). These connections are evident in three novels by Robin Chapman. *The Duchess's Diary* follows the private reflections of María Isabel, Duchess of Caparroso, who discovers the evil portrayal of her created by Cervantes in his second part of *Don Quijote*. *Sancho's Golden Age* explores Sancho's experiences after the knight's death in his attempt to fulfil the pastoral life they shared in their journey home. Finally, *Pasamonte's Life* presents the picaresque autobiography of Ginés de Pasamonte, the criminal Don Quijote frees in Part I, where his past and adventures are detailed.

Through a narratological analysis, these works can be classified into two groups, corresponding to two of the vertexes of a triangular model of transwriting (Pardo García 2018, 53-59). *The Duchess's Diary* would be considered a rewriting, as it introduces transformations into the diegetic universe of origin while the other two works can be regarded as transfictions, because they expand said universe beyond what is possible in the original. From this study, it can be revealed that transwriting serves as a valuable tool through which Cervantes and his work's significance remains present in contemporary literature.

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VI DOCTORAL SEMINAR ABSTRACTS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Witches in Britain, from Folklore to Literature, Medieval to Modern

Supervisors: Miriam Borham Puyal & Ana Sáez Hidalgo

Throughout history, the witch has been a recurrent character in English culture. In many popular stories, she has been portrayed as the villain who desperately seeks for others' damnation. Whereas this figure was an evil old hag or a lustful young woman, she is part of a long tradition of female representations in western culture that should be studied to comprehend her significance in English literature and culture. It is important to study literary and artistic representations of the witch written by women who suffered religious persecution or reflected about the supernatural in their works. For this reason, this thesis focuses on studying the lives and work of Lady Eleanor Davies and Jane Lead, two women who represented in their works the cultural association between women and magic.

To this end, this thesis initiates revising the evolution of the witch in England, focusing on the development of this character from its origins in pagan folklore to her literary representations in the long eighteenth-century Enlightened circles. This theoretical framework aims to contribute to the study of literary influences, in a way that can be applied not only to the witch, but also to other cultural studies. Then, the work follows with two detailed literary analysis dedicated to each of the selected authors. In terms of methodology, all the different sections are supported by evidence from ecclesiastic manuals on heresy and witchcraft written between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. These texts will also be accompanied by registered cases of witchcraft accusations to foster a global understanding of witchcraft in England. Therefore, this project offers a diachronic revision that pursues to demonstrate how the witch has evolved in English literature from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

Although the main challenge has been to select the important information from all the available sources, while dealing with limited time to properly revise all the documents, the close reading of primary and secondary sources is already complete. The resulting study about the history of witchcraft and the analysis of the primary sources concludes in a detailed theoretical framework that revises the witch from Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon influences on her portrait in early modern period texts. Once the thesis will be finished, it is expected to provide significant data that will contribute to new theories on the study of European literature that can be applied to the practical analysis of selected literary works.

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IN MEMORIAM

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.63182/Nexus-2025-2.5.1

In Memoriam David Lodge: A Great Writer and a Generous and Honest Man

David Lodge, who died in January 2025, is one of the most celebrated and popular contemporary British writers. He has indeed left us a rich legacy: novels, short stories, plays, screen-play adaptations. He admitted that he enjoyed extending his range, learning new techniques and conventions and reaching new audiences (Lodge [1986] 1988, 76). Writing was his life and he always worked with the aim of improving as a writer. He claimed that by experimenting with different media and genres he was replicating his father's versatility as a musician, singer and actor (Lodge [2021] 2022, 4). But although his contribution to English literature has been varied, there is no doubt that the novel remained the form to which he was most committed: "As a novelist you are the moral owner of the work and wholly in control of it. The collaborative dimension of theatre, feature films and TV drama is stimulating, but it sometimes requires you to accept advice you don't really believe in, as a price of seeing the project through to completion" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 5).[1]

With his characteristic sense of humour, David Lodge describes his own work "in the spirit of 'Animal, Vegetable or Mineral'" as basically antimodernist, but with elements of modernism and postmodernism (Lodge [1981] 1986b, 16). His novels show his desire to achieve a compromise between realism and experimentalism: "I don't take up strongly defined positions. I am by nature a kind of compromiser, I suppose, looking to reconcile apparently opposed positions.

1 Lodge always emphasises the contrast between writing a novel, which is a private and solitary activity and writing and producing plays or making television drama, which is essentially collaborative and interactive (Lodge 1996, 216; 2006, 54).

As a critic I am a domesticator of more extreme types of continental criticism, and as a novelist I use certain experimental devices but in a way that is slightly tamed as compared to the kinds of books from which they are borrowed" (Lodge 1985b, 157). He insists that he writes basically traditional literary fiction with a few postmodernist tricks in it (Lodge 2013, 89). This "aesthetics of compromise" that has been underlined by most critics (Burden 1979; Parnell, 1979; Hidalgo, 1987; Galván 1988; Concha 1988; Bradbury 1994; Martin 1999; Oates 2001) has been beautifully described by Morace in his book on Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge: "Theirs, then, has been a caution that has consistently sought to extend fiction's reach and vitality by moving, somewhat hesitantly it is true, and somewhat sceptically, towards an ever freer and broader and more self-conscious use of the novel's inherently dialogical means, towards a plurality of voices and forms, while stubbornly holding on to-and alternately searching for-whatever is essentially novelistic and essentially human" (1989, 208). Lodge never loses his admiration for "that effect of recognition which the classic realist text can produce, that sense of fidelity to history and to social texture" (Lodge 1985b, 157). It is precisely Lodge's power to create "an efficient realistic illusion" (Lodge 2013, 86), which has allowed his novels, even his most experimental ones, to be enjoyed by all kinds of readers: "Yes, I obviously do write for an educated audience, and also for a peer group of academics and novelists, but […] I write layered fiction, so that it will make sense and give satisfaction even on the surface level, while there are other levels of implication and reference that are there to be discovered by those who have the interest or motivation to do so" (Lodge 1985b, 160). Morace has pointed out that Lodge's novels are not only more accessible, but "more importantly, far more open-ended that the doggedly indeterminate fictions of many contemporary writers" (1989, xv). In her review of *Therapy* Anita Brookner has also argued that "the sheer amiability of the author's style should not confuse the reader as to the novel's ambition" (1995, 40), while fellow Birmingham novelist Jim Crace asserts: "You can read his books for a while without realising the clever intellectual beast that are lurking beneath the surface […] He uses plot as the Trojan horse to smuggle in really interesting ideas" (In Wroe 2001, 6).[2]

This same accessibility defines Lodge's work of literary criticism. Although Lodge has affirmed that writing fiction has given him more satisfaction than writing literary criticism and that he agrees with those who value creative writing above critical writing (Lodge [1986] 1988, 77), the truth is that Lodge is considered one of the most important critics and theorists of the novel. He published several books of literary criticism, book reviews, articles and journalism of various kinds and what defines all of them is Lodge's desire to reach a wide audience, not merely an elite of academic peers. In fact, when in 1987 he took an early retirement from Birmingham University and became a full-time freelance writer, he realized that he had no desire to go on writing for an academic readership, but for a non-specialist audience. This change was partly due to the fact that it was becoming harder and harder to make a connection between academic criticism and the practice of writing because of the former's interest in using literary texts as a basis for philosophical speculation and ideological polemic (Lodge [2002] 2003, x). Lodge also emphasises how the arcane and jargon-ridden discourse (Lodge 1990, 178) used in academic criticism has led to the loss of a common language of critical discourse which used to be shared by academics, writers, literary journalists and the educated common reader (Lodge 1990, 14). For Lodge this gap between educated discourse inside and outside the academy generates an unhealthy situation, because, although literary criticism, like any other discipline, must use a certain amount of jargon, "since its subject is human eloquence it has a responsibility to maintain as much continuity as possible with human discourse" (Lodge [1971] 1986a, 41). Lodge firmly believed that criticism loses its *raison d'être* when it loses contact with the readers (Lodge [1971] 1986a, 286): "The intellectual and artistic life of a society requires a constant refreshment by new ideas, which are formulated by the intellectual avant-garde, and then permeate down through educated society by means of the media. In this process they are inevitably simplified, and perhaps vulgarized, but this is better than no ideas getting through at all, which is what seems to be happening now in this country" (Lodge [1986] 1988, 114-15). This explains why for Lodge it was vital to express his ideas and theories without paying the prize of incomprehensibility "to all but a small group of initiates" (Lodge [1981] 1986b, ix).

Lodge certainly achieves his aim of writing in a style intelligible to the layman and this aspect of his critical work has been praised by most critics. Parnell expresses his gratitude for the "clarity and pleasant personality" with which he presents his ideas in *Language of Fiction, The Novelist at the Crossroads and The Modes of Modern Writing* (1979, 8), whereas Bergonzi refers to the "lucidity" of his style (1995, 48) and Price describes him as a humane and lively critic who "writes a clear, urbane style that is capable of great delicacy in argument and analysis" (1966, 301) and is "incapable of being vatic, pompous, or arch" (1977, 258-59). Morace also emphasises how both his literary and critical work "has remained entirely free of the hermeticism that characterizes much academic writing" (1989, 8-9).

This readability of Lodge's critical work is clearly linked to the fact that as a critic he is also a compromiser, "a domesticator of more extreme types of continental criticism" (Lodge 1985b, 157). In his quest for a poetics of fiction that would be

2 Other critics have questioned the coexistence of tradition and innovative metafictional elements in his work. Ommundsen does not believe that we can think of Lodge's fiction in terms of a harmonious marriage of antimodern and postmodern tendencies (1990, 133), whereas Eagleton talks about Lodge's "sedate, commercially acceptable realism" (1988, 97) and Widdowson emphasises Lodge's conservatism and his defence of English bourgeois culture: "Progressiveness in their case is on the side of reaction" (1984, 6).

capable of describing all texts without denigrating any of them, especially the realistic novel, and before he discovered Bakhtin's work, Lodge modified his initial critical approach, making it more structuralist, but only "assimilating" those aspects of structuralism that could be used to improve the tradition of Anglo-American empiricism and liberal humanism (Lodge [1966] 1984, 279). With his characteristic sense of humour he explains that he has "domesticated" the concepts and methods of structuralism (Lodge [2002] 2003, ix) and that his book *Working with Structuralism* could have been called *Living with Structuralism* (Lodge [1981] 1986b, viii).[3] As a compromiser he wants to resist a literary politics of confrontation, to achieve a synthesis that will put an end to the clash of thesis and antithesis that defines contemporary criticism and embrace descriptively all the different kinds of writings (Lodge [1977] 1989, 52, 71). Moreover, Lodge's role as a compromiser is related to his personal preference for the realistic novel: "If the case for realism has any ideological content it is that of liberalism. The aesthetics of compromise go naturally with the ideology of compromise, and it is no coincidence that both are under pressure at the present time" (Lodge [1971] 1986a, 33). Haffenden goes even further asserting that the fact that Lodge acknowledges but does not subscribe to any critical camp or doctrinaire ideology is related to "the essentially humane cast of his fiction" (1985, 146).

Lodge's "amiable" approach to fiction and criticism is clearly related to his comic view of life. Lodge asserts that humour is a very serious matter (Sorela 1996, 31) and actually the title of the *Guardian* profile published in 2001 is "Seriously funny" (Wroe 2001). Carol Oates agrees that Lodge's comedies of contemporary manners and morals clearly show that tragedy is not more realistic or profound than comedy (2001, 21). Lodge believed that is more difficult to write a comic book than a tragic one (Sorela 1989, 38) and in this sense it is interesting the distinction that Berger establishes between solemnity and seriousness, rejecting the idea that we only learn the truth about life from serious works such as tragedies (1995, 18). In fact, when Lodge's good friend Malcolm Bradbury died in 2001 Lodge asserted that his "capacity to generate laughter and appreciate it in others was perhaps the gift for which he was most loved, and mourned" ([2021] 2022, 149),[4] thus making clear to what extent for Lodge a humorous attitude to life was vital. Moreover, in his crusade against the poststructuralist assault on the idea of the author as the originator and composer of the text, he argues that comedy is the genre that offers most resistance to post-structuralist aesthetics: "Things that make us laugh in books rarely happen by accident, nor are they produced by readers; they are constructed by authors" ([1986] 1988, 74). He warns that writing comic novels that entertain the readers does not necessarily imply vulgarization (Lodge 2013, 95). As Bergonzi points out, Lodge wants to amuse his readers, but also to challenge them (1995, 60) or, in Lodge's words: "The author writes with the intention of attracting and holding the readers' attention-moving them, making them laugh, making them think" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 1).

Like most comic writers, Lodge makes the reader laugh by exploiting the absurdities of life: "But it rests, too, on his ability not only to write serious fiction but to make serious use of the amusing and absurd materials he develops in his comic novels, to shift at appropriate points in his narrative to a serious, even moral tone" (Martin 1999, 165). Bergonzi argues that it is because of his constant fascination with the absurdity and untidiness of the human lot that as a comic novelist he belongs in a mainstream of English writing that goes back to Fielding (1995, 60), whereas Coe asserts that it is largely thanks to his work that the British comic novel remains in such good health (2025). Coe reproduces a line from Friedrich Dürrenmatt's novel *The Pledge*, which summarizes perfectly well what Lodge and other comic novelists have in common: "an awareness that 'the only way to make a reasonably comfortable home for ourselves on this Earth is to humbly include the absurd in our calculations'" (2025). Certainly, most critics have underlined that in his campus novels Lodge makes the most of what Mullan calls his "gift for observing absurdities" (2025), so that the academic world becomes a metonymy for the rest of the absurd world (Connery 1990, 128; Waugh 1984; Concha 1988). Lodge himself states that comedy is based on contrast, on incongruity (Lodge [1966] 1984, 250) and that it was from Evelyn Waugh the he learnt "how to generate comedy by a combination of logic and surprise, of the familiar and the incongruous" (Lodge 1996, 172). In this sense, he admits that in a novel like *Small World* one of the main sources of humour is the "delightful incongruity" that can be found in Waugh's early comedies (Lodge 1985b, 161). He confesses in his memoirs that his ability to spot "aspects of contemporary life ripe for parody or satire" derives from the humorous pieces he wrote for *Punch and The Tablet* at the beginning of his career. (Lodge [2015] 2016, 349). In *Writer's Luck* he gives the reader many examples of his "gift" for noticing the contradictions of life and one of the best ones is when he is asked by the British Council to do a tour in the south of France, lecturing on *Emma,* by Jane Austen. In the morning and in the afternoon he spoke about the novel, while in the evening he went to the cinema to watch hardcore porn, being aware "of the irony of pursuing this research in the evenings while lecturing on one of the most chaste and reticent novelists

3 Some critics argue that Lodge seems to work with structuralism not because he believes in it, but because he thinks this is what a literary critic should do: "The same could be said of Lodge's dealing with structuralism, that of an uneasy convert whose belief comes partly from working against all odds" (Norris 1982, 370). Carey is even more ironic when he affirms that for Lodge working with structuralism is like "Surviving with Sciatica" (1987, 237). Eagleton argues that for liberal bourgeois ideologues such as David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury traditional liberal humanism remains the only source of social critique and fundamental value (1988, 95). He considers that Lodge is merely defusing "otherwise disruptive European insights for the purposes of home consumption" (97).

4 Lodge always acknowledged that his greatest debt to Bradbury was that he encouraged him to develop the comic strain of humour that was present, but subdued, in his first two novels (Lodge [2015] 2016, 331, 361).

in the English literary canon by day" (Lodge [2018] 2019, 56). In fact, he explains that when he decided to deal in *The British Museum is Falling Down* with the tragic consequences that the Church's teachings on birth control had for many Catholics, he realized that the only way to engage non-Catholic readers was by writing a comic novel that would present "the ironies and absurdities of married life under the dispensation of the 'Safe Method' as one instance of the universal and perennial difficulty men and women experience in understanding, ordering and satisfying their sexuality" (Lodge [1965] 1985, 166; [2015] 2016, 360).

Actually, most critics agree that comedy celebrates and accept the incongruities and contradictions of life, or as Gutwirth puts it: "we laugh at the world for being so palpably a place of senselessness and absurdity, a cruel enigma whose solution is from day to day deferred" (1993, 186). Bakhtin, one of the theorists of the novel Lodge most admires, asserts that the parodic-travestying forms of Greece and Rome that prepared the ground for the impiety novel long before its actual appearance, introduced an element that proved to be of decisive importance: laughter. Laughter forced men to realize that reality is "always richer, more fundamental and most importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre" (Bakhtin [1981] 1992, 55; italics in the original). Sypher goes even further when he claims that the modern world with its concentration camps and big lies has shown that life is intrinsically absurd and that comedy, being the logic of the absurd, is better prepared to represent the irrational, the inexplicable, the nonsensical ([1956] 1980b, 195). Sypher admits that there is a comic road to wisdom, as well as a tragic one, but tragedy "needs a more single vision than comedy, for the comic perception comes only when we take a double view-that is, a human view-of ourselves, a perspective by incongruity" ([1956] 1980, 255). Morreall insists on the same idea when he affirms that comedy points out "incongruities, in language, in people's reasoning, and, more generally, in the established order of things" (1998, 342), because it encourages reframing, seeing situations and people from a different perspective. Both tragedy and comedy deal with the incongruities of life, but whereas the former embodies responses like anger and rebellion, comedy takes a certain delight in them (Morreall 1998, 335).

In an interview published in 1985, Lodge admits that his delight in comedy and the absurd may derive from "that little eighth of Jewish blood" in him (Lodge 1985b, 165). Years later he did some research into his ancestry and found out that he had no Jewish ancestors. He was very much disappointed, because he had always enjoyed Jewish humour and the work of Jewish-American writers: "I am flattered that my comic writing has sometimes been compared to Woody Allen's, and one of my best-known fictional characters, Morris Zapp, was created out of that empathy" (Lodge [2015] 2016, 7). Lodge's celebration of Jewish humour is highly relevant because most critics believe that humour has been a source of salvation for the Jews since it has allowed them to cope with the tragic nature of their lives: "At the risk of redundancy, it should be emphasized again that there is a unique tendency – cultural, religious, and ethnic – for the Jew to pick up on the terrible miseries of his/her life as well as its absurdities, to make jokes and laugh at them" (Saper 1991, 54). Ziv also believes that Jews have always used humour as a psychological defence mechanism to distort their tragic and threatening reality and make it laughable by seeing the absurd in it: "Laughing at the absurdity of reality as well as at themselves is an old tradition with Jews. Being the chosen people and living in the worst possible conditions, victims of pogroms and targets of hatred from their fellow human beings, seemed some kind of divine irony. One way of dealing with it was to adopt irony and use it to deal with reality" (1988b, 114). Howard Jacobson, one of the most brilliant contemporary Jewish writers, who claims that the ingenious, joking Jew is the Jew in essence, affirms: "over hundreds if not thousands of years of exile the Jew had grown emotionally bent instead of straight, contradictory instead of unified, and the clearest manifestation of this bentness was the highly wrought comedy with which he viewed his condition" (Jacobson 2001, 7). Jews make a permanent witticism of the imperfect, not to say contradictory, life they lead (Jacobson 2001, 7). Interestingly enough, Jacobson, like Lodge, not only argues that a comic writer is as serious as a tragic one (*Tablet* 2010) but insists that it is more difficult to make the reader laugh: "Maybe, but any fool can make you cry. If I want to see what a writer's made of, I say, go on, make me laugh then!" (Pearson 2003). Jacobson claims that comedy makes the tragedy of life more bereable and affirms that the more tragic the themes the more obliged he feels to exploit the comedy in them: "It's what Jews have always done in the face of affliction – joked. Not to make light of catastrophe, but to bring every resource of intelligence to bear on it, to understand it fully, and to affirm the energy of life in the face of horror. Laughter might, in the end, be the only cure for the poisoned heart of memory" (Mullan 2010).[5]

The coping function that laughter fulfils has been vindicated by most scholars: "Seriousness burdens us with hopeless situations, but laughter lifts us above them and delivers us from them. Laughter does not encumber man, it liberates him" (Bakhtin [1986] 1994, 134). It is precisely because humour allows us to step back and look at things from a distance and a new perspective that we are capable to transcending pain and suffering: "To be able to laugh at evil and error means that we surmounted them. Comedy may be a philosophic, as well as a psychological compensation. Whenever we become aware that this is not the best of possible worlds, we need the help of the comedian to meet the 'insuperable defects of actuality'" (Sypher [1956] 1980b, 246). As Berger has accurately stated, humour does not eradicate sorrow or sadness,

5 Alter points to the courage needed to laugh in the face of suffering and despair (1987, 36) and this idea is shared by Gutwirth (1993) and Hyers (1996).

but makes it more bearable (1997, 117-18). The comic spirit tries to deal with the daily difficulty of being and whereas tragedy transforms fear into awe, comedy is able to transcend misery into joy: "The comic dramatist's starting point is misery; the joy at his destination is a superb and thrilling transcendence. Given the misery of the human condition in general, what could be more welcome?" (Bentley 1964, 302).

It is obvious that in the novels by Lodge comedy fulfils this coping function. Lodge is capable of stepping back and seeing serious or painful situations from an unusual and unexpected angle and this allows him and the reader to transcend them. Bergonzi argues that in Lodge's novels comedy is interwoven with serious reflections on religion, society, literature and education (1995, 60) and some critics have emphasised that although novels like *The British Museum is Falling Down, Changing Places or How Far Can You Go?* are funny books, they all deal with serious issues (Hepburn 1975, 286; Galván 1988, 42; Morace 1989, 140). Lodge himself vindicates the power of comedy to deal with reality without trivializing it when talking about his campus novels: "The academic institution is a small world, a microcosm of society as a whole, in which themes like the operation of power, ambition, and sexual desire, can be studied in a comic and satiric rather than tragic manner" (Lodge 2009). In fact, he affirms that the reason his novels have become so popular in France is precisely because of the "combination of comedy and humour with serious themes and engaging plots" (Lodge [2018] 2019, 375). He describes beautifully how writing, and comedy is obviously part of it, has helped him transcend suffering: "Writing his journal, writing the dramatic monologues, above all writing his memoir of Maureen, Tubby becomes a more self-conscious and literary writer […] In the process he turns negative, subjective experience into something positive and shareable. That is what literature does, and it is the great consolation and reward of being a book-writer. Kierkegaard knew it was so; Tubby Passmore discovers it is so; I have certainly found it so" (Lodge [2002] 2003, 282). Tubby Passmore is the main character in *Therapy* (1995), one of Lodge's most autobiographical novels. As Lodge grew older he found himself prone to bouts of anxiety and depression for which there was no rational explanation (Turner 1995, 16) and he decided to write a novel about it and the diverse therapies that people use to cope with them. From the very beginning he was sure that he wanted to find some humour in Tubby's plight (Turner 1995, 13) and it is highly revealing that he explains that he achieved his goal by exploiting the absurdity of Tubby's behaviour: "Of course, the idea of a self-educated television comedy scriptwriter reading Kierkegaard […] is inherently risible, 'absurd' in the ordinary, not the existentialist sense. But that was very much to my purpose. I was determined from the outset to write a novel about depression that would not be depressing, and comedy was the best way to ensure that result" (Lodge [2002] 2003, 274). In fact, the review that Lodge appreciated most was one by Carol Angier that points out that although *Therapy* seems a comedy, it has the ingredients of tragedy: love and betrayal, good and evil, guilt and sin (Lodge [2021] 2022, 69).[6]

This need to use comedy to deal with issues that deeply hurt him is also present in *Deaf Sentence.* Like *Therapy* and most of his novels, it is based on his own experience. Lodge started losing his hearing in his late forties and this deeply affected him because communication became more and more difficult and he felt frustrated. In fact, although he always enjoyed going to conferences and literary festivals, they became a kind of ordeal since "impaired hearing made them something of a strain in public speaking, on-stage interviews and casual conversation" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 194). Even going to the cinema or the theatre was not a great pleasure any longer (Lodge 2009). The narrator of *Death Sentence*, Desmond Bates, a retired Professor of Linguistics at a provincial university in the north-east Midlands, suffers from what is called "high-frequency deafness", which makes it difficult to distinguish consonants (Lodge [2021] 2022, 190). The starting point for the novel was a sentence that Lodge had read or overheard: "*Blindness is tragic, but deafness is comic*" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 190; italics in the original). Lodge acknowledged that one of most difficult aspects of writing the novel was how to combine the comedy generated by Desmond's deafness with the serious exploration of the subject of mortality associated with it in the punning title of the novel (Lodge 2009). Lodge wondered whether he had succeeded in combining the predominantly comic mode of the beginning of the novel with the elegiac tone at the end, which includes the death of Desmond's father and a visit of Auschwitz, and according to most critics he certainly did. Brownrigg argues that *Deaf Sentence* is a funny and touching novel which deals with the comedy of deafness, but also with the real grief behind it (2008), whereas Kakutani beautifully states: "But he does a nuanced, affecting job of depicting Desmond's late-midlife crisis and his efforts to come to terms with age and mortality and the passage of time. He has written a novel that not only hits the bright comic notes of his best earlier fiction but also deftly downshifts to play the darker, more minor scales as well" (2008).[7] Interestingly enough, although the deaf community was not pleased with the book,

6 Berger argues that there are limits to tragicomedy, occasions when no one can laugh or should laugh (1997, 118) and Lodge is very much aware of it. Thus, the reason why in *Nice Work* Vic is not a Catholic is precisely because the adultery story which develops "would be overweighted with all kinds of theologically motivated guilt which would go against the style of the book, which although serious has an element of comedy about it" (Lodge 1989/90, 270). The same can be applied to *Changing Places*, in which we have double adultery between the four main characters. But one of the most touching examples is his decision to cut out of the story of *Small World* the character of a young Polish lecturer: "I realised that the plight of the young Polish academics I had met, and of the Polish nation at large, was too grim for incorporation into my light-hearted satire on the global campus" (Lodge [2018] 2019, 156).

7 See also (Mullan 2025) and Conradi (2008).

because they do not regard deafness as a disabling affliction, readers who were partially deaf themselves or had partners and other relatives who were, thanked Lodge "for rendering accurately, but also humorously, the stress that deafness causes in families" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 191).

But if fiction allowed Lodge to cope with painful issues, the writing on non-fiction sometimes fulfilled the same function and I believe that "The Year of Henry James; or, Timing Is All: the Story of a Novel" (2006) about the genesis and composition of *Author, Author* (2004) is the best example. Lodge confesses that he never enjoyed writing a novel more and publishing one less (Lodge 2006, 15). Several novels about or inspired by Henry James were published or written in 2004, but the one that brought him most discomfort was *The Master*, by Colm Tóibín, which appeared a few months before *Author, Author*. Lodge admits that writing about it allowed him to relieve his "frustration and disappointment at being scooped by Colm Tóibín" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 183). And the way that Lodge gives vent to his discontent is by exploiting the ironic and comic elements of the story: "No, I do not feel that I have been cursed, but rather that by daring to write imaginatively about Henry James I entered a zone of narrative irony such as he himself loved to create, especially in his wonderful stories (which are among my favourite works of fiction) about writers and the literary profession" (Lodge 2006, 39). He remembers an article by Michiel Heyns, whose book on Henry James never got published, in which Heyns reminds the reader that Henry James was hostile to literary biography and to any kind of exposure of his private life. Heyns concludes that maybe in his case James's curse is taking effect, to which Lodges adds with irony: "But if the outraged spirit of HJ *were* responsible, it is not obvious why Heyns should have suffered much worse luck than I, or why Colm Tóibín has enjoyed a seemingly trouble-free and favourable reception for *The Master* (unless being shortlisted for the Booker Prize but not winning it counts as a misfortune)" (Lodge 2006, 39; italics in the original). Lodge sometimes introduces laughter by emphasising how some of the situations he found himself in seemed to be created or written by James himself- "(As I was saying, Henry James might have made all this up)" (Lodge 2006, 75)-or were the result of James's curse: "As far as I was concerned, it was another episode in the history of *Author, Author* to be indexed under: 'Irony, zone of'. Or did I perhaps after all need another entry: 'James, Henry, curse of?'" (Lodge 2006, 84). He admits that the supreme irony of the whole story is that he was re-enacting the story of his own novel, that he had suffered the pangs of professional envy and jealousy that James must have felt when Du Maurier's *Trilby* became a huge success and his own play *Guy Domville* a great failure, the source of a great humiliation for him. "Colm Tóibín was my Du Maurier, *The Master* his Trilby, and *Author, Author* was my *Guy Domville*" (Lodge 2006, 94).

Lodge also tries to "soften" with humour certain embarrassing situations, like when he meets Tóibín again after eight years and feels ashamed because he does not recognize him. Tóibín used to have a dark curly hair and now he was bold: "(I am sorry to be so personal, but it is the only way I can explain what happened. I would gladly trade my hair for his ears)" (Lodge 2006, 47).

Lodge's honesty and self-aimed humour when dealing with his career as a writer and critic as well as his personal life is one of his most defining characteristics. In the foreword to *Varying Degrees of Success* Lodge explains that he was encouraged to write a candid and comprehensive account of his life, describing the moments of success, but also those of disappointment and frustration by the fact that "the word 'honest' occurs quite often in letters from readers writing to express their appreciation" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 2). Certainly, some critics have sometimes used the term "honest" to describe his work as a literary critic. On *Working with Structuralism* Peschmann writes: "but he confesses that working with Structuralism often means working alongside it […] This makes for an admirably honest, balanced and scholarly exposition" (1981, 26; italics in the original). Talking about Bradbury and Lodge, Morace asserts: "Far from disguising their liberal values and aesthetic, they put them under increasing and inevitable postliberal pressure in an effort to discover weather any of the tradition can be and should be maintained. In this sense, Bradbury's and Lodge's work as critics has kept them honest, has helped keep them free of that naivete, or bad faith, that characterizes so much Anglo-American fiction and criticism" (1989, 26).

Lodge does not hesitate to share with the reader in "The Year of Henry James" that he lied to Tóibín when he told him that he had bought The Master and was looking forward to reading it-"(*hypocrite lecteur*!)" (Lodge 2006, 93; italics in the original)-but is also ready to admit that when he read the novel he did it with pleasure (Lodge 2009). When asked to write a television adaptation of *Martin Chuzzlewit* he tells the producers with a great deal of embarrassment, but with the honesty that defines him, that he has never read the novel (Lodge [2021] 2022, 22). And when Ian McEwan tries to persuade him that he has no reason to worry about the publication of *The Master*, he declares with great humility: "Well, perhaps if you are Ian McEwan you can shrug off any competition, but didn't feel such confidence" (Lodge 2006, 77). He confesses that he avoids reading criticism of his novels, even when it is laudatory, because it is usually designed to show the critic's professional mastery over the text, but recognizes that "I do it myself when I write criticism!" (Lodge 2009). Lodge underlines that it is only human to want to be praised for one's work and with his characteristic sense of humour admits that the review he like most was one with the headline "Literary Genius Writes Masterpiece": "Unfortunately it was published in an English-language Hong Kong newspaper of very small circulation" (Lodge [2002] 2003, 102).

Even when he talks about his personal life, he has the courage to be honest. Lodge does not hesitate to share with the reader what he thought when the doctor told him and his wife Mary that their third child, Christopher, born in 1966, had Down's syndrome: "In those early days it crossed my mind, as I suppose it does with many people in such a situation, that it would be a blessing if the child died peacefully and painlessly, but there was no prospect of that" (Lodge [2015] 2016, 409).

Lodge's honesty is clearly linked to his comic view of life. As Morreall has accurately explained, when we recognize and laugh at our own failures and shortcomings we see ourselves more objectively: "Seeing oneself objectively is also important in being honest with oneself, rather than rationalizing one's shortcomings, and so humor can contribute to self-knowledge and integrity" (2010, 19). Morreall emphasises that only when "I can see myself as one human being in a world of others, and understand what it would be like to be others, am I capable of morality" (2010, 19). It is precisely this realistic and less egocentric view of the world that makes us more humble in moments of success and prevents us from getting an getting an inflate sense of our importance (Morreall 1983, 104, 128). In this sense, Smallwood's assessment of *Write On* is highly illuminating: "an apparently self-deprecating humour runs through it, and it is, in many ways, a confessional book about the novelist's failures and shortcomings, personal, literary-and pedagogic" (1990, 241-2). Lodge shows this humility at the end of the last volume of his memoirs: "I think I have had a successful career as a writer, without achieving the dizzy heights of fame […] However I am well aware that I have had a fortunate career as an author, and am duly grateful to those who have nourished it in various ways" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 203).

Lodge's candour and capacity to laugh at himself is related to his own generosity and compassionate heart. Morreall believes that humour makes us more understanding and tolerant of other people, more willing to forgive and more gracious (2010, 20). Meredith expresses a very similar idea: "You may estimate your capacity for comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love without loving them less; and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of you proposes" (Meredith [1956] 1980, 42). Bakhtin also asserts that the doors of laughter are open to one and all: "Indignation, anger, and dissatisfaction are always unilateral: they exclude the one toward whom they are directed, and so forth; they evoke reciprocal anger. They divide, while laughter only unites" ([1986] 1994, 135). Craig, who believes that the tragicomic novel must be poised between criticism and compassion, reminds us that Arnold Bennett not only criticizes those authors who show antipathy towards their characters, but defends that the greatest novelists are the greatest sympathisers (1989, 13, 82). Sypher expresses it beautifully: "At the radiant peak of 'high' comedy […] laughter is qualified by tolerance, and criticism is modulated by a sympathy that comes only from wisdom. Just a few writers of comedy have gained this unflinching but generous perspective on life, which is a victory over our absurdities but a victory won at a cost of humility, and won in a spirit of charity and enlightenment" ([1956] 1980b, 212). Hyers agrees that the highest form of humour is that in which we laugh with and not just at other people. This humour is opened up to sympathy and goodwill and therefore becomes the humour of humility, compassion and love (Hyers 1996, 78). We laugh at others, but also at ourselves and accept others in spite of their differences, devilishness and follies (Hyers 1996, 92).

Lodge's "benevolent comedy" (Haffenden 1985, 146) is clearly seen in the way he uses satire in his novels. Most critics have emphasised the lack of malice in his work (Galván 1988; Brookner 1995): "There is no savagery in his satire or real malice in his wit. Instead, his novels engender a flowing sense of fun" (Waugh 1984, 30). Oates has described his comedies as "deftly witty, satirical yet humane" (2001, 21), whereas Ableman claims that in How Far Can You Go? Lodge "manages to be funny about Catholicism […] without heresy or offence" (1980, 23-4) and Schreiber that the novel is full of Lodge's "energy, intelligence, wit, compassion and anger" (1982, 17). Ahrens also points out that in *Changing Places* and *Small World* Lodge's aim is not that of invective or subversion and that by combining satire with comic hyperbole he gently pokes fun at individuals and social institutions (1992, 279). In the same line, Dennis Jackson's affirms that "Lodge's treatment of academe is gentler, more the lighthearted raillery and ridicule of a member of the family" (1983, 474). Connery goes even further when he claims that *Changing Places* and *Small World* rather than satires are works written in the satiric mode. There is no urge to subvert or attack an institution and its members: "In contrast, Lodge's humour […] directs its aggression, if there is any, at an absurd world, for which there is no alternative and from which, therefore, there is no escape" (1990, 134). Interestingly enough, Lodge has described his approach to the academic world in similar terms: "It's not a censorious kind of satire, but I don't think that in good faith I could satirize in a destructive way an institution which I belong to. I think I can stand back from the academic profession enough to see its absurd and ridiculous aspects, but I don't think it's really wicked or mischievous. That's probably why the overall impression of *Small World* is genial: fun-poking rather than denunciation" (Lodge 1985b, 161). He argues that with *Changing Places* he just wanted to amuse his colleagues with no intention of being offensive or tasteless (Lodge [2015] 2016, 472). He agrees with Bakhtin that the function of literature is to question and mock institutional mystiques and orthodoxies (Lodge 1989/90, 268). Lodge defends himself from those who describe him as being cruelly satirical in his academic novels: "I don't think of myself as a cruel writer. I am generous sometimes to a point of sentimentality and I think that's a weakness I have to watch […] I'm certainly reluctant to put my characters through really harrowing experiences" (Kostrzewa 1993, 10).

This benevolent attitude towards his characters that Lodge is making reference to in this last quotation has been underlined by most critics: "Unlike many modern novelists who like to humiliate and torment their characters, Lodge

treats his creations with respect and affection" (Bergonzi 1995, 47). Haffenden also insists on Lodge's refusal to judge other people: "it seems to be your nature as a novelist to be tolerant and open, to show a decent acceptance of the way people behave (however meretricious they might be)" (Haffenden 1985, 151). Lodge believes that the ability novelists have to create characters and give a plausible account of their most intimate thoughts and feelings is what helps develop powers of sympathy and empathy (Lodge [2002] 2003, 42). He quotes from an article by Ian McEwan on the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001: "If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed…Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion and the beginning of morality" (McEwan 2001). It is precisely because Lodge does not judge his characters, but shows that they are human beings like ourselves with their lights and shadows, that he wins the reader's "sympathetic ear" (Martin 1999, 163). Even Morris Zapp in *Changing Places* proves to have a heart, which really worries him: "But it was good of him, uncharacteristically good of Morris Zapp. The truth of the sentiment struck him more and more forcibly […] He cast his mind back over the day-helping Mrs Swallow look for her husband's book, letting the Irish kid watch his TV, driving O'Shea around to his patients-and wondered what had come over him. Some creeping English diseases of being nice, was it? He would have to watch himself" (Lodge [1975] 1985a, 93; italics in the original). In fact, when some reviewers criticized the ending of *Paradise News*, Lodge admitted that he had been too attached and protective of the main character, Bertrand (Lodge [2018] 2019, 372).

Lodge's compassion and humanity defined also his personal life. His literary agent, Jonny Geller, describes him as a true gentleman, "warm, generous and kind" (quoted in Creamer 2025) and in his obituary Coe expresses himself in similar terms: "There was always a warmth and a wry wisdom to his characterisations, which was reciprocated in the affection he won from his readers. I witnessed this myself, especially on the occasions when I was lucky enough to appear with him at French and German literary festivals, where he was usually the guest of honour and always attract a bigger crowd than any of the other British writers" (Coe 2025). Lodge's generosity becomes clear when asked why he found it necessary to explain in the acknowledgments to *Author, Author* which events and details were invented: "I suppose also because I am a teacher by profession-or was-I like to explain. Some critics think I explain too much, but I want the person at the back of the class to understand!" (Lodge 2013, 100).

His empathy as a critic and reader has also been underlined by many. In his review of *Lives in Writing: Essays* (2015), Collini argues that Lodge often "reminds us what an acute and sympathetic reader he can be" (2015, 14). Collini refers particularly to an essay on Alan Bennett in which Lodge "responds tenderly to the pathos" of a very painful moment in Bennett's life: "It's a small example of the attentive reading, devoid of critical showiness, that Lodge at his best is so good at" (2015, 14-15). Martin has highlighted the respect that Lodge shows for the author in his reviews (1999, 86-87), an idea endorsed by Mullan: "His critical generosity and sound judgment made him a natural choice to chair the Booker prize judges in 1989" (2025). Lodge himself criticized how reviews in magazines and newspapers have become spiteful (Lodge [2002] 2003, 101) and defended that a responsible literary critic should always suspend his or her ideological principles and prejudices when assessing the literary merit of a text (Lodge [2018] 2019, 331).

Lodge also shows compassion for those who to a greater or lesser extent are in pain. Thus, when he goes to see his beloved friend, Malcolm Bradbury, who is very sick and depressed, he writes: "Imagining how enviably healthy and happy I must seem to him, and how I would feel in his situation, I pitied him from the bottom of my heart" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 148). He also feels for his "literary enemy" Tóibín when he does not win the Booker Prize for *The Master*. He is not a hypocrite and recognizes that he was relieved when the announcement was made, but at the same time he is sympathetic towards Tóibín because "recalling my own experience of being a 'losing' shortlisted author in 1984 and 1988, I could imagine how Colm would be feeling […] it is inevitably a let-down when the prize goes to somebody else" (Lodge 2006, 96). He once again shows his tolerance, his good-will when he affirms that he completely understands the fact that some Jews did not like the Auschwitz episode in *Death Sentence*, although he does not regret writing it: "Jewish people understandably regard the history of the Holocaust as a part of their heritage which cannot be fully understood or assimilated by gentiles, especially those like me who have no familial connections with the victims" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 193). But perhaps the most beautiful example of his compassionate heart is when he admits that Desmond's father in *Death Sentence* is based on his own father who in his late nineties was showing signs of encroaching dementia: "I tried to describe him as he was then, truthfully and humorously, but with love" (Lodge [2021] 2022, 192).

And now, gentle reader, allow me at this point to become personal not only to express my gratitude towards Lodge, but to highlight what a generous and benevolent man he was. In 1989 I was working on my PhD, *Aspectos metonímicos en la obra de David Lodge*, and I sent Lodge a letter asking for an interview. Although he did not know me, he answered immediately, accepting to meet me in London and "talk over a cup of tea" at the Royal Commonwealth Society. He was really nice and helpful and made me feel at ease. Two years later the University of La Laguna invited him to participate in a course on the "New European Novel" and I admired the patience and kindness with which he answered the students' questions. When *Therapy* was published, I told him that I thought it was an excellent novel and that I had enjoyed reading it. He was relieved and delighted to hear that, because he was afraid that I might have been offended by some of the rude comments the characters make about Tenerife, thus showing once again what a sensitive and humane man he was.

David Lodge always gives his novels, especially the comic ones, a "happy ending":

> My novels are comic, not only in the sense of being funny, but also in structure. The patterns of comedy, and romantic comedy in older literature, always attracted me and fascinated me. I was always interested in Shakespeare's romances and late plays for instance. I suppose this comes out in my novels. They're other open-ended, deliberately unresolved, or else they're rather optimistic. Although I can read and enjoy very different kinds of writing-total negativity and despair, as in Beckett-I could not possibly write like that. (Kostrzewa 1993, 10)

I believe that the best way to pay tribute to Lodge is by giving this article a happy ending. In *Write On* Lodge argues that the ultimate reason for writing is to "defy death, by leaving some trace of oneself, however slight, behind" ([1986] 1988, 78). Lodge has definitely achieved his aim, since he will be always remembered by the readers who will continue to enjoy his work. But this story has also a hopeful ending on a personal level. Lodge is finally reunited with Mary, the love of his life, who died in 2022. I am sure that they are having a great time watching us from above and laughing with generosity and compassion at our contradictions and follies.

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IN MEMORIAM

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In Memoriam: Prof Cora Kaplan (1940-2024)

A woman, an academic, a feminist, a socialist, an activist, a mother, a wife, a friend, a mentor, a critic… The figure of Professor Emerita Cora Kaplan (University of Southampton) defies the blank page that isn't able to hold her or her work because that would mean setting boundaries to the endless process of questioning and revision in which she was constantly immersed. A clear embodiment of intersectionality herself, Kaplan's work attests to the difficulties of trying to differentiate the person from the academic. It is therefore that this humble tribute is by no means complete or enough to celebrate Kaplan or her inspiring contribution to academia.

Born in the States, Kaplan was raised by parents deeply involved in the field of African American Studies; an area she also contributed to. In fact, her Inaugural Lecture at the University of Southampton in 1998 was titled "Black Heroes/ White Writers: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Literary Imagination," published by the *History Workshop Journal* in the same year.

Although many refer to her as specialist in Critical Theory, I cannot and will not attempt to place Kaplan in a specific academic field because it feels too reductive. I, for one, first came across her work while doing my PhD on the Brontës' fiction, and assume this may have been the case for many others. So, to me, Kaplan was at first a fellow Victorianist. In fact, throughout her career she published major academic works about Victorianism such as her edited and annotated volume *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (1978) or *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007), besides countless articles, papers and collaborations in the field.

However, her published contributions in the field of women's writing cover a large timespan, such as *Salt and Bitter and Good: Three Centuries of English and American Women Poets* (1975), *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History* (2005, Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, eds), *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830* (2007, Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, eds).

Indeed, her work is as prolific as her academic and personal interests. In the Introduction to *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (1968), Kaplan writes:

> because of the subordinated place of women within the ruling classes, and because sexual difference is constructed through the hierarchies of class and race — and vice versa — women's writing both articulates and challenges the dominant ideology from a decentered position within it. (3)

I believe it is safe to say that this short extract is a good example of the over-arching narrative and politics in Kaplan's work. Placing women and women's writing at the centre, Kaplan's approach was informed by Feminism, Marxism, and Race Studies. She also built extensively on Freudian theories and Psychoanalysis, Body Politics, Affect Studies and Material Culture. Hers was an inclusive, non-reductionist angle that has always foregrounded that the personal is political.

May her legacy continue to inform and inspire non-conformist scholars.

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