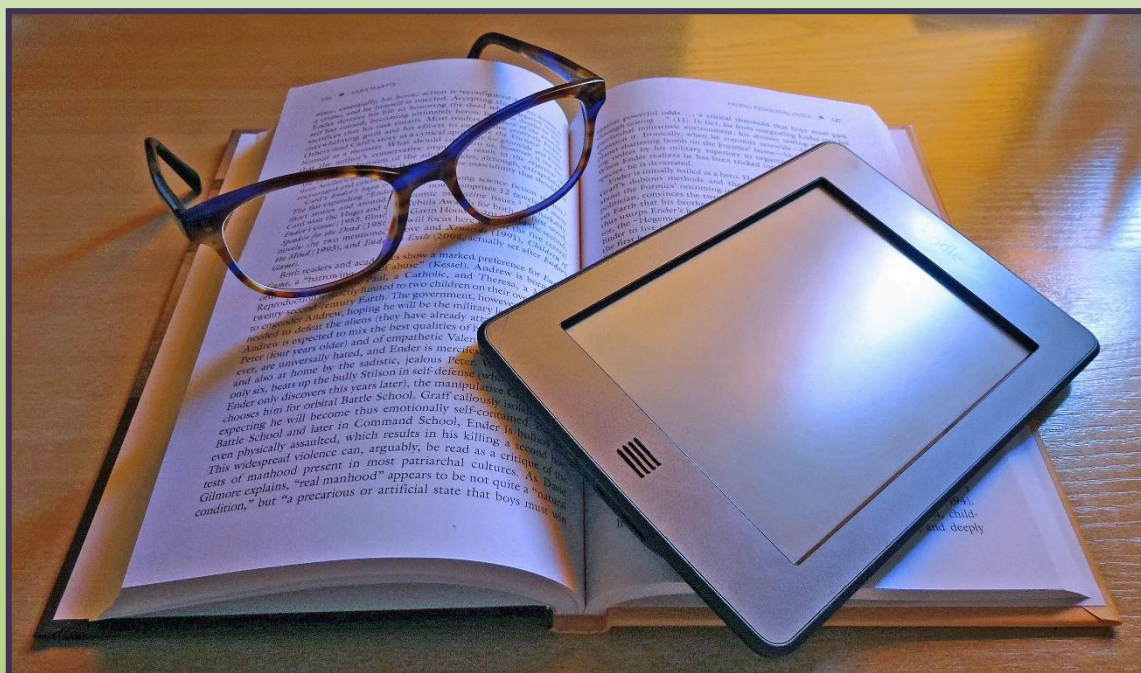


# THE JOYS OF TEACHING LITERATURE

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**PLEASE, NOTE:**

These are the posts published in my blog *The Joys of Teaching Literature* ([blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/](https://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/), since September 2010) between September 2018 and August 2019. The eight previous volumes are also available from <http://ddd.uab.cat/record/116328>.

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## 4 September 2018 / THEORIZING CHARACTER: A FEW POINTERS

I have suggested to one of my prospective doctoral students to consider studying the configuration of secondary characters (in *Harry Potter*) for his dissertation and, so, I have embarked on a small bibliographical search to see what is available generally speaking on characters. This post is a record of my failure to find much of significance and implicitly a call for your suggestions.

As usual, I have started with the MLA database, which to my infinite surprise carries no entry for a monographic or collective volume on 'character'. You get hundreds of entries, mostly journal articles, with analyses of this or that character but nothing systematic that can be used as a departure point to study this central concept. Next, I have turned to WorldCat, where I have found a couple of academic books with the title 'character'. They have turned out to be studies on moral philosophy within 'Virtue Ethics' ([https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch\\_virtue\\_ethics.html](https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_virtue_ethics.html)). Here 'character' is used in the sense of personal identity that needs to be fortified in order to make adequate ethical decisions. Interesting! And how Victorian!

Next, I have turned to the Spanish database Dialnet, in search of anything on 'personaje'. Here are some of the most relevant results:

- \**La construcción del personaje*, Konstantin Stanislavski, Alianza Editorial, 1999.
- \**El personaje novelesco*, coord. Marina Mayoral, Cátedra/Ministerio de Cultura, 1990.
- \**Más allá del personaje*, José Javier Muñoz, Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros, 1996.
- \**Teoría del personaje*, Carlos Castilla del Pino, Alianza Editorial, 1989.
- \**La condición del personaje*, Álvaro Salvador, Caja General de Ahorros de Granada, 1992.
- \**El personaje teatral*, Jesús G. Maestro, Universidade de Vigo, 1998.
- \**Personaje dramático y actor*, César Oliva Olivares, Universidad de Murcia, 2004.

What do we have here, then? Very little!! 20<sup>th</sup> century research, with one exception; books that are hard or impossible to find and, in any case, more of interest in the field of drama than of the novel. Marina Mayoral's collective volume gathers together the papers presented in a seminar and cannot be the type of systematic study that should exist but does not exist... but at least it is something...

Of course, E.M. Forster made a famous (or infamous) distinction in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) between flat and round characters and most specialists in Literary Studies are content to pass it on our students with no further thought. This is, however, a very limited impressionistic difference of little actual use. I may be completely off the track but it appears that the major academic book in English on characters is W.J. Harvey's *Character and the Novel* published in 1965, yes, +50 years old (see <https://ia801601.us.archive.org/31/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.459267/2015.459267.Character-And-The-Novel.pdf>). Its most recent edition is dated 1970, which gives an important clue about when the study of character went out of fashion. There is an article by Mark Spilka, Martin Price, Julian Moynahan and Arnold Weinstein called 'Character

as a Lost Cause' published in 1978 (*NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Spring 1978, 197-217) so, let's say, for the sake of the argument that 1980 marked a turning point.

The article by Fernando Sánchez Alonso, 'Teoría del personaje narrativo (Aplicación a *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*)', in *Didáctica* (10, 79-105, 1993, <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/DIDA/article/viewFile/DIDA9898110079A/19784>), offers in its abstract an interesting summary of the issue: (my translation and my italics) 'In this article, we try to explore our understanding of character as well as explain the reasons why its study has fallen into disrepute in *modern literary theory* in comparison to its prestige in Greco-Latin and Renaissance poetics; we examine character next in relation to *psychoanalysis* and *society* to finally explain how it is built and which kinds of character there are.' That is to say: in the 1980s stylistics lost ground to the forces of identity politics, whether on an individual basis (Freud and company) or in the context of representation (need I explain this?). Narratology, though, opened other ways to consider character, of which an example is Francisco Álamo Felices' article 'La caracterización del personaje novelesco: Perspectivas narratológicas' (*Signa* 15, 2006, 189-213), which I must recommend for its thoroughness in presenting the case. I must say, in any case, that his bibliography does not include any text dealing specifically with characters but mainly with narratology—as it should be expected from the title.

Here I open a brief parenthesis to note that I personally disagree with the application of psychoanalysis to the study of character, which was pioneered by Freud's reading of Prince Hamlet as an individual manifestedly suffering from Oedipus complex. A character is a construction, not a person. If we have to psychoanalyse anyone that should be the author, but this is not at all a strategy I would endorse. Now, being myself extremely guilty of exploiting character traits to endorse this or that aspect of gender representation, I must insist that it is precisely because I am researching representation that I find the gap in the study of characterization so worrying. We need to understand collectively much better what kind of stylistic device a character is to see how innovation is produced, hence contribute to a better kind of representation for specific identities.

It has finally occurred to me that the obvious place to find volumes about characters in fiction (and here I mean novels, short stories, drama, film, TV... all kinds) is in creative writing. Here's the list of 115 books with the words 'creating characters' in their title offered by WorldCat ([https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=ti%3A%22creating+characters%22&q=results\\_page](https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=ti%3A%22creating+characters%22&q=results_page)), and here's the shorter list (88 volumes) of 'Books for Writers' that you may find in GoodReads: [https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/13705.Books\\_For\\_Writers](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/13705.Books_For_Writers)

Allow me to highlight a few titles, with the word 'character' in them, though I think we can safely assume that all these books offer instruction about characterization (please do read Stephen King's *On Writing*):

- \**Characters and Viewpoint* by top science fiction and fantasy writer Orson Scott Card
- \**Creating Unforgettable Characters* by Linda Seger, a very well known name in the field of creative screenwriting
- \**Creating Characters: How to Build Story People* by Dwight V. Swain



\**Characterization and Sensory Detail* (Writing Active Setting #1) by Mary Buckham

\* *The Positive Trait Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Attributes* and *The Negative Trait Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Flaws* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi

\**Bullies, Bastards and Bitches: How to Write the Bad Guys of Fiction* by Jessica Page Morrell

Here's the daring thing to do: incorporating all this 'advice literature' to the academic study of character. I know that this is not as straightforward as I am suggesting here for, when read from an academic point of view, these volumes can be problematic. We are not used to their pragmatic approach, which clashes with our textual heuristic, etc. It might also be the case that, at least speaking for myself, I distrust this type of book because at heart I think that authors should know without being told how to build a character from reading other authors—and I know this is silly.

So far, I have only mentioned 'character' in general, without distinguishing between protagonists and secondary characters. This is one of my pet obsessions these days: that secondary characters reveal the true tensions in the text. But... what does secondary mean? Think, for the sake of argumentation, of Mercutio and Count Paris in *Romeo and Juliet*: neither is a main character like those in the title, yet we can see that Count Paris is of lesser importance because he has few lines. However, if you think about it, you could take Mercutio off the play and the plot would still work (you could have Romeo slay Tybalt for another stupid, macho reason), whereas if you eliminate Count Paris the plot collapses—his arranged engagement to Juliet is the reason why she marries Romeo secretly and in such a hurry, as she does not want to marry her father's choice. It makes no sense at all, as I'm sure you see, that secondary characters have been overlooked with such intensity in Literary Studies, with very few exceptions (the monographic issue of *Belphégor*, 2003, <http://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/31210>).

In drama a 'spear carrier' is the nickname that actors in walk-on parts with no dialogue receive. The film equivalent would be the character seen but not heard—poor Álex González made his Hollywood debut in *X: First Class*, part of the *X-Men* franchise, appearing in the credits as Janos Quested/Riptide though he had no lines. A glorified spear carrier, then. I amused myself by asking some literary colleagues what is the minimum we need in print fiction to define a character as such: is a name enough? There was no agreement... These are examples to make you see that the problem is not simply that we do not know how to approach fully developed characters—we don't even understand the spectrum of characterization connecting spear carriers and main characters, nor where to draw the line between kinds of secondary characters.

Plenty of work to do, then...

## 11 September 2018 / THE IDEA AND THE EFFECT: NOSTALGIA FOR THE 1980s (IN *READY PLAYER ONE* AND *STRANGER THINGS*)

I have just gone through the second season of the acclaimed series Netflix *Stranger Things* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4574334/>) and I'm currently reading Ernest Cline's SF novel *Ready Player One* (2011, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ready\\_Player\\_One](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ready_Player_One)), the object of a recent film adaptation directed by Steven Spielberg and scripted by Cline himself. This is the second time I try to read Cline's novel and if I'm trying again it is not because I enjoyed the movie version. Rather, the negative comments on the film by the novel's staunchest fans have inspired me with the patience I need to finish *Ready Player One*, if only for academic reasons.

My impatience with *Ready Player One* and also with *Stranger Things* is motivated by their second-handness, if that word exists, which is in its turn based on their (mis)use of the 1980s. Allow me to explain.

Cline's novel takes place in 2044 (Wade Watts, the 17-year-old protagonist, is born in 2027) and narrates the obsessive hunt for an Easter egg in the virtual environment of the OASIS (Ontologically Anthropocentric Sensory Immersive Simulation), a search which will grant the winner a formidable reward. Life on Earth is on the decline because an unsolvable energy crisis has pushed civilization to the brink of total collapse; instead of using their brains to try to redress this crisis, though, most people prefer to live a second life (if you get the allusion) in the MMOSG (massively multiplayer online simulation game) created presumably in the mid-2030s by James Halliday and Ogden Morrow, of Gregarious Simulation Systems. The late Halliday, obsessed with the pop-culture of his 1980s youth, has shaped the hunt for the treasure buried in OASIS with a string of obscure leads that only individuals with a vast knowledge of his preferred decade can follow. Wade is one among the many 'gunters' (egg hunters) that accumulate a vast erudition of 1980s pop-culture, supplemented by the videogame-playing skills which he needs to solve each of Halliday's riddles.

Ernest Cline was born in 1972, thus, he was 8 in 1980 and 18 in 1990. Indeed, only an original 1980s teen could have the detailed knowledge that Cline displays in *Ready Player One*: no research starting from scratch could be as convincing. Yet, this is what Cline supposes for Wade. The way US society is organized, children can choose to be educated in the virtual schools of virtual planet Ludus in the OASIS to receive a basic, compulsory education in a more orderly environment that presential schools can offer. This education also includes electives on the OASIS, the equivalent of teaching school children about current social media as part of the school curriculum. Except for the mandatory school time (and sleep), however, Wade spends all his other waking hours also in the OASIS but learning about the 1980s and interacting with other similarly obsessed people. He claims to have consumed basically all of 1980s videogames, popular films and TV, commercials, novels and music.

I was frankly amused by Cline's view of teen erudition for, although adolescents of the nerdish variety tend to be extremely well self-educated, they usually apply their efforts

to their own era. I have never ever met a nerd (and I consider myself one) interested in the culture of sixty years before, as is Wade's case. I stand corrected: yes, I have met many—they're called academics and can be found in the Humanities schools of our universities but not in secondary schools.

The *Ready Player One* Wikia claims that James Donovan Halliday was born in 1972, just as Cline, and died in 2039 so, again, it makes perfect sense that as a 1980s nerd he built all these references into the adventure that obsesses the 'gunters'. Now, I was born in 1966 and was a teenager through the 1980s, and one thing I can tell you is that young people in that decade were characterized by an abhorrence of seeming old-fashioned. That's how I recall it. There were 'retro' touches in the ubiquitous use of shoulder pads and in other matters but the idea of a 1980s teen obsessing with 1920s pop-culture (the sixty-year gap in *Ready Player One*) is totally preposterous. The 1950s were often a reference (in re-makes like John Carpenter's *The Thing* of 1982) but the general idea was increasing creativity and looking forward. You can see evidence of this trend in how spectacularly Carpenter's movie outdoes Nyby's *The Thing from Another World* (1951) in all fronts. This had nothing to do with the current obsession with recycling 1980s culture, too deferential to be truly innovative. I'm 100% sure that *The Predator*, a remake of John McTiernan's 1987 *Predator* to be released next week, will soon be forgotten as the mere copy it is.

There is then a contradiction embedded in *Ready Player One* signified by the very different cultural positions occupied by Cline/Halliday and Wade (and friends): the former makes sense, the latter is an absurdity. So absurd, in fact, that when Spielberg made the film, he eliminated the many references Cline makes to his own 1980s films (other references to the 1980s had to be abandoned because of the high cost of rights). If you think about it, Spielberg is the last director that should have tackled Cline's novel for, evidently, even he realized that he could hardly pay homage to himself! When I saw the movie with my husband, another 1980s teen, we went 'oh!' and 'ah!' every time we caught a clever allusion, yet at the same time I was bothered by a) how could the retro allusions make sense to the Millennials and to Generation Z?, b) I never played videogames in the 1980s (or now). Actually, many of the pop-culture achievements celebrated in *Ready Player One* as central to 1980s were products I absolutely hated; others, I simply missed. I saw *Heathers* (1988) only a few weeks ago, and Cocteau Twins rather than Thompson Twins (and I mean the Sheffield band, not Tintin's characters) blew my mind as a teen. There was not only *one* version of the 1980s but many, yet I see a canon being formed which excludes the original variety. I know that this is the same for all decades, but I am now living this process as part of my own personal biography, and I find it utterly reductive.

*Stranger Things*, created by twin brothers Matt and Ross Duffer, born in 1984, provokes another kind of impatience, that of the product that enjoys behind second-hand. The Duffer Brothers, as they call themselves (in allusion to the Blues Brothers?) were 1990s teens, and, so, I'll argue that *Stranger Things* is a series created by Millennials (born 1984-1999), enjoyed by Generation Z (born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) but actually inspired by the cultural experience of Generation X (born 1965-1983), mostly based on texts by Babyboomers (born 1945-1964). Stephen King, a major referent in *Stranger Things*, was

born in 1947; his novel *Firestarter*, a main intertext for the Duffers' series, was published in 1980 and filmed in 1984 (with a young Drew Barrymore). King was a favourite with my own generation, and we are responsible for taking him with us into (academic) respectability, of which we convinced the Millennials. They have enchanted Generation Z audiences with the tale of Eleven and her friends in the same way King enchanted us. But... the Duffers are not King, for, whereas they are King recyclers, King is as original as one can be.

I am bored stiff by *Stranger Things* precisely because I notice the recycling. One thing is the new version of *It* (2017), based on King's novel of 1986, and quite another matter is presenting pseudo-King as a great novelty. Generation Z audiences logically love *Stranger Things* because the plot is new to them and because kids like them are central to it. This pleasure, however, is not easily shared – we, 1980s relics, notice, rather, how Winona Ryder has aged from her days as Lydia in Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* (1988). Also, the moment I read the name Paul Reiser in the second season credits I shouted 'spoiler!' for the Burke of *Aliens* (1986) was bound to play a shifty scientist. The multilayered approach aimed at offering a series enjoyable by all family members results, rather, in a cacophony and creates a conversation at cross purposes with Generation Z. Notice that *Ready Player One*'s message is that the 1980s were an awesome generator of texts worth knowing first hand, as Wade does. *Stranger Things*, in contrast, appropriates the culture of the 1980s as its temporal background, but hardly mentions any names and titles. Do the kids in the series ever say that Eleven is like someone straight out of any of the King novels they must be reading?

What truly irks me about *Ready Player One* and *Stranger Things*, in the end, is that they aim at producing the same effect 1980s pop-culture had but by re-issuing the original ideas, hence their second-handness. The much more important matter is that they reflect, though it might seem the opposite, a lack of actual dialogue with the past. In Wade's future the OASIS works as a kind of universal multi-media library and, so, he can directly access any 1980s texts first-hand, which is the only way to be conversant with the past. Of course, the hunting of the Easter egg provides a major enticement to acquire a solid education in 1980s pop-culture—Cline does not explain what happens to the rest of literally unrewarding culture. I am sure that many Generation Z kids will be curious to know what inspires *Strangers Things* and, thus, enter that dialogue with the past but if the Duffer Brothers can get away with their parasitical stance, this is because there are no longer massively shared media that keep the 1980s alive. Generation Z does not watch TV, where you can still catch *The Goonies* now and then, and for reasons that I will never ever understand the healthy habit of the cinema re-release (and double-feature sessions) was lost some time in the late 1980s (wasn't it?).

My point is *not* that things were better in the 1980s – this is what texts like *Ready Player One* and *Stranger Things* claim! My point, rather, is that each generation needs their own culture and referents, and that this cult of the second-hand is counterproductive. I am not saying 'don't touch my Predator' (well, maybe I am!); what I am saying is, if you're interested in the 1980s, then see the McTiernan movie and read King's novels (don't forget Cocteau Twins!) but make sure you have a culture of your own that kids in sixty years' time can marvel at.

If this is happening, then I am happy for you, Millennials and Generation-Zers, but is it really happening...?

## 18 September 2018 / IRVINE WELSH IN TOWN, 25 YEARS AFTER TRAINSPOTTING

I had a truly weird experience yesterday attending Irvine Welsh's presentation of his novel *Un polvo en condiciones*, Francisco González's translation of *A Decent Ride* (Anagrama, 2015). This is the tenth novel in Welsh's long list, which also includes four short story collections and also plays. I decided to attend because I was meeting a friend, not because I'm a fan of the author. As happened, my friend arrived in time for the talk but after admittance to the auditorium was closed—that's 250 seats. So, there I was, surrounded by 249 persons in a packed house, wondering how many who had rejected the translation aid could really understand Welsh's Edinburgh brogue (and suspecting he was overdoing it...). About 15 minutes into the talk, two persons walked out, and then a few more—one a woman possible in her sixties, who did have the translation aid but, my guess, didn't know who Welsh was (some members of the public will attend any literary presentation) and had left... in disgust at the obscene humour? Yet, when I left, towards the end of the q&a segment, 75 minutes later, there were people still queuing. I didn't know Welsh had such loyal fandom.

Actually, I have a tale to tell. This was back in 2005 and Irvine Welsh came to Barcelona to present a new translation (Anagrama, which publishes his books, used to bring all prominent UK authors to the British Council thanks to the good offices of a now retired head of cultural affairs). The book was probably *Glue*—I'm not sure—but one thing I recall is that I had never seen, in years of attending, any presentation as crowded as that one... and with so many men!! In the q&a segment I did ask Welsh whether he saw himself as a writer specifically addressing men, and how he connected with his female readers—I don't recall the exact words but he replied something along the lines that he hoped women found his books anyway interesting. Like many others, women and men, I consider Welsh's first novel *Trainspotting* (1993) a great achievement. As a newly arrived PhD student in Glasgow, in 1994, I couldn't help noticing the black book with the guys in silver skull masks on the cover, so frequently seen on the metro and the buses in the hands of young readers. I was fascinated by the phenomenon and I was subsequently fascinated by the text (once I could make sense of the dialect!)—I do have a copy signed by Welsh on that day of 2005.

I also have a peculiar personal memory. The British Council kindly invited me to stay for dinner and I found myself sitting between Welsh and his new wife, Beth Quinn, a Chicago native. I suspect that Welsh does not care for academics and, so, the moment I was introduced to him was, more or less, the last moment he spoke to me, despite my efforts. Perhaps the man is shy. In contrast, I found myself deep in conversation with Quinn, who, embarrassingly for me, chose to discuss the very personal topic of whether she should have children immediately, wait, or never have them. Welsh was then 46 (he

was born in 1959); Beth, his second wife, 23. He had divorced Anne Antsy, his wife since 1984, and dedicatee of *Trainspotting*, in 2003. I was so enchanted young Beth and she was so absolutely full of very American charm and candour, that when we said goodbye, and I can't believe I did this..., I shook Welsh's hand and told him 'you take care of your wife, she's wonderful'. He said he would. The relationship has lasted for 15 years, until 2017—and they never had children.

So, yes, maybe I'm a bit prejudiced against Welsh because the social skills he displayed over that dinner were not top-notch, but, then, I trust that Beth Quinn was happy with him for a long time and, so, this is in his favour, absolutely! What makes me bristle at his novels is, rather, the glamorisation of a type of laddish masculinity that few women, if any, can abide. He is, clearly, still not thinking of his women readers, which is why his candid exposé of the dregs of the masculine underworld is, ironically, so useful to us: because we learn a lot.

Welsh is fully aware, as he acknowledged once more yesterday, that he occupies an extremely unstable position for, although he claims to be still surrounded by the working-class male friends of his youth, at the same time he is an educated man (with an MA) who makes a living writing novels—hardly a cultural product that interests men like his mates. No wonder then that, as he joked, they monitor him constantly for signs of his going soft (too middle-class), whereas he is transparently using his books to prove that he is in possession of a macho bravado that few, if any contemporary novelists, have. His presenter yesterday (Spanish novelist Kiko Amat) and most of the audience (except the grey-haired lady who left and yours truly) found it hilarious that *A Decent Ride* has so many penis jokes. I found the excitement with Welsh's gross prose quite boyish, which in this context is not a word of praise.

Welsh defined himself as a brand, and he is right—specifically, he is a one-trick pony: a writer stuck in his *Trainspotting* universe while he himself and his characters age. This is neither good nor bad. He lives and works, however, in constant tension to prove to the reviewers he claims not to care for that he is not a *literary* writer. In his logic, he cannot be one because he is too prolific (lack of time was the reason he invoked to justify his disinterest in the reviews) but, then, his books are clearly unique and belong in no known genre, except the sub-genre of the 'Irvine Welsh novel'. Anyone who has read *Marabou Stork Nightmares* can tell you that Welsh is an extremely ambitious literary novelist doing his best to undermine any possible reputation as such.

Thus, in order to prove to himself that he cannot be touched by the critics because he is not a literary writer of the kind that is shortlisted for the Booker Man Prize, Welsh spins increasingly delirious tales of men gone wrong and doing unspeakable things, or provoking them. The in-your-face scatology grows with each novel and is humorous if you're already interested in that kind of bodily, iconoclastic comedy but it also produces a feeling of déjà vu and a sad impression that Welsh refuses to grow up as a writer. His staunchest fans are actually loyal to the spirit of *Trainspotting* and will buy anything he publishes (or queue to see him in the flesh) but they do so in a spirit of mateship, so to speak, rather than of readerly pleasure.

I'm re-reading these days Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus series, now about to reach its 22<sup>nd</sup> instalment with *In a House of Lies* (to be published in October), and I was wondering how his Edinburgh and Welsh's Edinburgh overlap. Rankin's villain, Big Ger Cafferty, uses his taxi business as a cover for drug dealing at one point, and the protagonist of Welsh's *A Decent Ride* is a self-employed taxi driver. Does Big Ger know this Terry Lawson, I wondered? Has he at any point done business with Sick Boy? Has Rebus ever arrested any of the Leith crew in *Trainspotting*? How would Rebus fare in a Welsh novel? Has he read, perhaps, *Filth* and enjoyed the exploits of Detective Sergeant Bruce Robertson? Has Frank 'Franco' Begbie ever read a Rankin novel?

It's funny how we accept such separate literary universes as representation of the same city, and even of the same circles, and how authors highlight each other's strengths and foibles. After a dose of Rankin, Welsh seems dirtier than ever; after a dose of Welsh, Rankin seems over-polite. And it's funny how you have no doubts of who the bigger literary artist is. Rankin is very good at spinning convoluted plots held together by extra-thin threads—his Rebus novels are very clever spider webs—but in his novels the prose is limpid, and the main word-games are found only in Rebus' sometimes obscure banter. Welsh, in contrast, elevates to literary art the prose one finds in elevator and loo graffiti, while pretending he just has a good ear. It may not be to everyone's liking, not even the author, but Mr. Welsh you do write Literature. Please, note that Kiko Amat mentioned Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894-1961) as a referent to understand Welsh's work, and who doubts that Céline wrote Literature?

Amat also argued that perhaps it would be in Welsh's benefit to be as dead as the French author because then he would be a proper cult author for the reluctant critics. This was Amat's polite way of hinting that perhaps Welsh should have stopped writing once he published *Trainspotting*. After all, Emily Brontë only wrote *Wuthering Heights*—the *Trainspotting* of 1848— and then she died at 30 but look at her! Imagine, if you can, twelve more novels by Ms. Emily dealing with the same characters and environments, and you can understand Welsh's problem.

Another unsubtle thing Amat said is that if you don't enjoy the gross-out factor in Welsh's novels and his kinky humour this is because you're a prude, which barely concealed a misogynistic taunt, as he really meant 'a prudish woman'. This is a type of justification that admits no counter-argument because if you acknowledge your prudishness then you're done for in our heavily sexualized times, and if you reply that you're unprejudiced but just don't like vulgar humour, then you sound prissy anyway. As Stuart Kelly put it in his very negative review of Welsh's novel in *The Guardian*, 'The tired old rebuttal is 'it's a satire and you don't have a sense of humour'. But listen. What's that? It's the sound of no one laughing. There is a faint and distant sniggering, though. If anyone parts with £12.99 for this, they're being taken for a ride'. Not having read *A Decent Ride* yet, I cannot say whether it is indeed a scam perpetrated on pliant readers but, at least, I'm satisfied that not all men enjoy Welsh's kind of laddish, boyish or childish humour, whatever you prefer.

There's a slumming factor here at work that I need to unpack and that is verging on the dangerous side of snobbery. Welsh may be working-class originally, but he is, I insist, an

educated, middle-class writer reproducing in his works an idiolect conditioned by class and regional markers, with its peculiar humour. He has built his reputation on building characters that sound genuine and that you might recognize in certain areas of Edinburgh (perhaps as they used to be, not as they are now). He is doing, so to speak, literary-anthropological work for the benefit of his middle-class readers (perhaps mostly declassed readers with a working-class background) and presenting the 'life of the others' as humorous material.

I'm not about to suggest that this is cultural appropriation or politically incorrect in any way. What I'm saying is that Welsh's novels are yet further proof that the working-classes have not been yet given a dignified literary representation which is neither sentimental nor humoristic. I'll mention, however, William McIlvanney's novels *Docherty* (1975) and *The Big Man* (1985), as an example of how Scottish fiction can offer better portraits of working-class masculinity beyond Welsh's shenanigans. Incidentally, McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* (1977) started the Tartan Noir tradition from which Rankin's John Rebus descends (the first novel, *Knots and Crosses* was published in 1987). I cannot recommend enough McIlvanney's elegant *The Papers of Tony Veitch* (1983), with dour Inspector Jack Laidlaw.

I wish I could have asked the 249+ persons attending Welsh's talk with Amat why they were there. Perhaps in a city of 1,500,000 million, this is a tiny figure. I had an easy excuse: I'm a Literature teacher, and I have even taught *Trainspotting* (well, the film rather than the book, try to have second-language students read Welsh...). Was it celebrity? Was it the memory of handsome Ewan McGregor, no matter how Rent-onized? For, and this is one last nasty barb, if you think that reading Welsh in translation is reading Welsh at all... you're being taken for an (in)decent ride...

## 25 September 2018 / ROBOSEXUALITY: BETWEEN SCIENCE FICTION AND REALITY

[This is a sort of preview of the talks I'm supposed to give on 2<sup>nd</sup> October at the conference of the International Robotics Association and on 24<sup>th</sup> November at CatCon II. Same topic, different languages.]

My good friend Prof. Carme Torras has kindly invited me to be part of a forum connecting the Humanities and robotics, to be staged within IROS 2018. I'm not 100% sure how come I have ended up choosing the topic of robosexuality but, after all, I'm a Gender Studies specialist. So that must be it.

Part of my summer reading was Teresa López-Pellisa and Lola Robles' edited collection *Poshumanas: Antología de escritoras españolas de ciencia ficción*. One of the pieces, Nieves Delgado's award-winning story 'Casas rojas' (2015) had stayed with me, buzzing at the back of my head. This story supposes that there exists a large network of brothels (the 'red houses' of the title), staffed with CorplA's advanced sexbots, to tell a tale of anti-patriarchal retaliation, as some of the dolls have been attacking clients (and



particular owners). This inspired me to take the chance offered by Prof. Torras to take a peek at the current state of the debate on sexuality and robotics. The issue is much more urgent than I could have assumed, and certainly worrying. 'Casas rojas' might soon be a reality.

When I started preparing my presentation, I didn't know the word 'robosexuality'. I came across it in relation to a young French woman, called Lily (not sure about the surname) who is building a 'male' robot for her pleasure. She, among others, are vindicating the label 'robosexual' as a valid preference or identity. You might think that it's too early to speak of robosexuality in that sense but, at least, the foundations are already set.

Apart from Lily and her InMoovator (no idea what the name means), the anglophone press has been showing a strange penchant for Catalan engineer Sergi Santos and his sexbot Samantha. Santos owns, together with his wife, a small company that sells Samantha look-alikes, already more than a sex doll but still much less than a.i. animated robot. Let me clarify concepts: the Chinese, above all, are selling ultra-realistic sex dolls and these (or similar ones, produced elsewhere) are being used as the bodily basis for the application of a.i. technology and robotic mechanisms. Dr. Santos claims to be at the forefront of advances, explaining that Samantha is, in 'her' current programmatic version, capable of orgasms but also of rejecting the advances of his owner. I hardly believe this is the case but, then, I can't tell for sure. The RealDolls now being commercialized (at about 15,000\$ for a basic model) by RealBotix are also supposed to be robots but, again, I doubt they have gone too far down that road. RealDolls, by the way, also has plans to sell a 'male' sexbot called Henry, apart from Harmony and 'her' friends.

As you may imagine, the sexbots look hardly like ordinary women, taking, as they do, their anatomical referents from current porn. This has sparked a furious feminist reaction headed, among others, by Kathleen Richardson, Professor of Ethics and Culture of Robots and AI at De Montfort University in the UK (<https://campaignagainstsexrobots.org/>). Another valuable contribution to the debate, less militant but equally serious is the Dutch initiative, Foundation for Responsible Robotics. You might want to peruse their recent report 'Our Sexual Future with Robots' (2017) to understand at which stage we are.

The summary is simple: sooner or later there will be fully functional sexbots, which individuals will buy as they purchase cars or similar products. This will inevitably create complicated legal and emotional tangles (Dr. Santos claims that Samantha has saved his marriage but warns that he will divorce his wife if she has sex with a 'male' robot). There will also be, no doubt about it, a surge in misogyny, due to the presentation of women as passive sex objects through the sexbots, but also increased androphobia—as women like Lily will choose to (literally) embrace synthetic men made as they prefer rather than actual men. To my surprise, incidentally, the debate is narrowly focused on heterosexuality, which is reductive. To begin with, I'm sure that RealBotix will soon have gay clients for Henry—though I simply don't know whether Harmony appeals to lesbians. There is no reason, of course, why sexbots must have conventional sets of genitalia or

bodies, which means that there could be a market for intersex robots. Whatever fantasy dictates.

The line is drawn, though, and this very clear, at child sexbots. Some Chinese manufacturers are offering ultra-realistic child sex dolls, which, for instance in Britain, you may own but not import (I can imagine the black market thus generated). A lonely young man was recently judged for having imported one of these dolls and he claimed in his defence that he hadn't realized the 'female' doll was so small (only four feet) because 'she' had breasts. One needn't be too clever to detect the ambiguity of both the body and the purchasing operation. On the other hand, there is a Japanese manufacturer, who openly presents himself as a paedophile, arguing that his products (non-robotic child sex dolls) can be not only of therapeutic value but also a guarantee that prospective young victims are safe from the attentions of molesters and abusers. The specialists in these revolting areas of human sexuality—mostly male, let's be honest—are claiming that this is by no means true. As happens with the adult dolls, the child dolls invite users to display unrestrained sexual behaviour against real individuals, whom they come too see as doll-like, depersonalized objects.

I find it interesting that my search for science fiction about the child sexbots has failed, and led me instead to a story, 'BoyBot™', included in the collection by Irish writer June Caldwell, *Room Little Darker* (2017). Caldwell, reviewer Frankie Gaffney explains, shocks readers 'with a proud and wanton abandon' in her story about the use by a paedophile of Conor, a 'child-robot replacement therapy, assigned to him by the state, and designed to keep him away from human victims'. I haven't read Caldwell's grim tale yet, but Gaffney claims that 'The reader is made to dwell on the idea of how, in reality, such crimes are sentiently experienced by victims', turning the sick story into a valid cautionary tale. I shiver at how we have passed from Brian Aldiss' presentation of the child robot as a surrogate son (in 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long', 1969, filmed by Spielberg as *A.I.*, 2001) to this brutal, callous use of plastic replacements as sexual toys and victims.

Science fiction offers abundant examples of sexual relationships between humans and artificial persons, with variations that range from the purely robotic (*Westworld*) to the organic (*Blade Runner*) and even the virtual (*Blade Runner 2049*). There are, I think, two constants in this abundance: there is no middle ground between 'love' and (often violent) exploitation; and women users approach robots from a more romantic stance. If, so to speak, the protagonist manages to overcome the uncanny valley that makes us feel such evident discomfort before a humaniform robot, what follows can well be 'love' (if one can love a machine as we love a human person). In other cases, the sex/robot is the object of a sadistic violence intended for the human beings it replaces. You may see women disgusted with their male robots but not truly hating them, though I agree that often men have obsessive attachment to their artificial companions.

Since my talk cannot be encyclopaedic, I'm focusing it on the above-mentioned story 'Casas rojas' for a presentation of the feminist arguments but also on texts in which the robot user is a woman. There is a double standard at work: whereas the use by men of 'female' sexbots is presented both in sf and in real-life mostly as a despicable exercise

in misogyny even when it appears to be romantic, women's use of 'male' sexbots is presented as liberating (though also emotionally problematic). You might think that this is the situation mainly in feminist sf like Marge Piercy's novel *Body of Glass* (1991) but, no—to my surprise Isaac Asimov's *The Robots of Dawn* (1983) goes much further in analyzing the implications of a sexual relationship between a woman and her robot than many feminist readers and critics can imagine.

When I see the photos of Dr. Santos and Samantha I feel, as a woman, dismayed that (patriarchal) men are going that way. I refuse to get angry because I find the whole idea quite ridiculous. I actually wonder what type of client uses the LumiDoll surrogates available from at least one classy brothel in Barcelona (LumiDoll opened a separate establishment but soon closed). Yet, when I consider my own (hetero)sexual perspective I come to the conclusion that, as Asimov narrates, there could be a place in society for 'male' robots capable of keeping women company apart from offering sex.

Actually, I even think that in the case of women sex is of secondary importance—in the film *Marjorie Prime* (2017, based on Jordan Harrison's play of 2015), the titular character enjoys the company of a holographic reconstruction of her dead husband, Walter (she is in her 80s, he looks 40). This is not uncomplicated: in *Black Mirror's* 'Be Right Back' (2013), Martha, a young wife who loses her husband Ash to an accident, finds it easier to connect with him as a disembodied a.i. than as an embodied robotic reconstruction. I don't see much hesitation, in contrast, in the sexual use of 'female' robots in films such as *Ex-machina* (2013) no matter how harshly this is condemned.

*The Robots of Dawn* strikes, I should think, quite a good balance: Gladia Delmarre, a widow, is exiled far from her native planet and a kindly neighbour, Dr. Falstoffe, lends her his extremely advanced humaniform robot R Jander Parnell for company. One thing leads to another and Gladia discovers with Jander orgasmic pleasure she has never known with men—until someone 'kills' Jander. Gladia is never confused about her attachment to Jander, whom she regards as her husband, and she is very rational both about the beginning and the end of the relationship. She refuses to feel shame but also reaches the conclusion that she needs to re-learn sexuality with a human male to reach personal stability. This is not patriarchal, believe me.

I do know because, in contrast, Catalan author Montserrat Segura presents in her recent novella *El contracte Wong* (2017) a very confused protagonist, unable to accept, unlike Gladia, that sex with her 'male' robot works well because he is programmed to please. Gladia knows that robots cannot reciprocate feelings, which is why she can overcome her grief at losing Jander; Amèlia is, in contrast, too hurt by K-Dick's inability to truly desire her that she ends their relationship catastrophically. She is trapped by a hetero-normative romantic scenario in ways that Gladia never is.

There is an unwittingly gay passage in *The Robots of Dawn* which explains very well what the main problem is in any emotional fantasy of binding/bonding with a robot. The human man Bailey is happy to meet again his partner (in crime detection!): 'And then, little by little, he collected his thoughts and knew that he was hugging not Daneel but R. Daneel—Robot Daneel Olivaw. He was hugging a robot and the robot was holding him

lightly, allowing himself to be hugged, judging that the action gave pleasure to a human being and enduring that action because the positronic potentials of his brain made it impossible to repel the embrace and so cause disappointment and embarrassment to the human being'. Programming rejection in robots, as 'Casas rojas' defends and Dr. Santos claims he has done, makes as little sense as giving your Nespresso the choice to make you coffee... A robot is, after all, a machine, as R. Daneel understands better than Baley.

Since, however, we seem unable to control our feelings for humanoid robots perhaps the solution is not to make them. Jander's maker, Dr. Falstaffe, explains disingenuously that he gave his robot a set of genitals because he was inspired by the 'abstract problem of building a totally humanoid robot'. Current robotics engineers stress that a bodily shape that imitates humans makes sense if robots are to solve everyday situations connected with human life. Yet, both reality and fantasy suggest that 'humanoid' needn't mean a perfect copy. None would be lured into having sex with *Star Wars*' C3PO, no matter how nice he is, much less with R2D2. And that is, ideally, the way to go for everyone human.

As we know though, if there is a will, there is a way. Or, rather, if business opportunities loom, someone will provide the corresponding product. Who knows? Perhaps the household of the future will be composed of individuals and a harem of sexbots, which will double-up as servants. That is a picture I don't personally like (it reminds me too uncomfortably of Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives*) but, if it ever comes, I hope it excludes child robots. I'm sure you'll understand why.

## 2 October 2018 / DRIFTING APART?: LINGUISTICS, LITERARY STUDIES AND ENGLISH PHILOLOGY

Two weeks ago, I gave the inaugural lecture for the four-year BA in English Studies at the Universidad de Murcia. Actually, my lecture was intended to represent the Literature and Culture segment of the degree, and a colleague from the Universidad de Zaragoza, Dr. Iraide Ibarretxe Antuñano, offered a second inaugural lecture on Linguistics. She asked the students present how many had chosen the BA because of an interest in Linguistics and only a few raised their hands. She asked then the rest whether they were interested in Literature but, again, only a few hands were raised. The immense majority, then, had either no particular inclination or had not made their mind up yet. Or were confused—and no wonder!

Now bear with me...

Dr. Ibarretxe, though a graduate in English Studies has a Doctorate in Linguistics and works for the 'Departamento de Lingüística General e Hispánica' (not to be confused with 'Filología Española'). This is an interesting name for, as happens, in my university we have no Linguistics Department and, indeed, the Spanish Department—familiarily known as 'Hispánicas'—is the home not of this language speciality but of Literary Theory

and Comparative Literature. Linguistics belongs, so to speak, to the Catalan Department—at least, they are the ones in charge of the first-year compulsory course common to all language-based BAs. At the Universitat de Lleida, in contrast, Linguistics belongs to English Studies, and the corresponding unit is the ‘Departament d’Anglès i de Lingüística’.

Still with me?

Many Departments in Spanish universities which, back in 2009 or thereabouts started offering degrees called ‘English Studies’ (‘Estudios Ingleses’) or similar are, however, still called ‘Departamento de Filología Inglesa’. My university has Departments of ‘Filología Anglesa’, ‘Filología Hispànica’, ‘Filologia Catalana’ and ‘Filologia Francesa i Romànica’ even though the BAs are, apart from the above mentioned ‘English Studies’, ‘Spanish Language and Literature’, ‘Catalan Language and Literature’ and ‘French Studies’. The old degree in ‘Classical Languages’ (‘Filologia Clàssica’) has been integrated into a new BA called ‘Ciències de l’Antiguitat’ (‘Sciences of Antiquity’). This BA mixes classical philology, history and archaeology and is offered by the ‘Departament de Ciències de l’Antiguitat i de l’Edat Mitjana’. At the Universitat de Barcelona, in contrast, they have a ‘Departament de Filologia Clàssica, Romànica i Semítica’. And English is part of the ‘Departament de Llengües i Literatures Modernes i d’Estudis Anglesos’—not ‘Filologia’.

‘A rose by any other name would smell as sweet’, Juliet Capulet once said, trying to convince herself that Romeo Montague’s surname was of no significance. Her argument makes sense for the flower but not for her lover, as we know and she learned tragically, whereas we need to wonder what this confusing nomenclature signifies in relation to what we teach and who we are. I myself identify as a ‘filòloga anglesa’ because I have an official document from the Spanish State guaranteeing that I possess degrees (‘Licenciatura’, ‘Doctorado’) in ‘Filología Inglesa’ but, even so, I call myself a ‘cultural critic’ rather than a ‘philologist’ (a job description I connect with the analysis and edition of non-contemporary texts). For many in the anglophone world a ‘philologist’ is a sort of historical linguist, so see how confusing things can get.

In the tradition we come from, the study of a language and its Literature within a single degree is justified on the grounds that a language is the expression of a culture and its Literature the highest artistic manifestation in that tongue. Thus, the reasoning goes, if you want to know all about English, you’re bound to learn how each anglophone community contributes to the common language and how Literature expresses its most sophisticated uses. This is, however, a very old framework, established back in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Romantic Germany, which is why the two main areas of knowledge under the yoke of ‘philology’ as it is known in Spain are pulling away from each other. In Literature we have been gravitating towards Cultural Studies, and thus expanding the number and variety of texts in English available for study. In Linguistics, though I’m not sure I am using the word correctly, they tend towards a kind of ambitious theorization in which the English language is just one element of the general entity known as language (funny how the difference between ‘idioma’ and ‘lenguaje’ helps in Spanish but is lost in English!). Properly speaking, then, there are very few ‘philologists’ among us, English Studies specialists.

I am actually beginning to realize that, to be perfectly honest, I don't know what our Language and Linguistics colleagues do. What we do in Literature and Culture Studies is far easier to explain for we are classified by geographical area and/or historical period. A course called 'Scottish 18<sup>th</sup> century Poetry' is self-explanatory but what do mysterious labels such as 'Pragmatics' or 'Discourse Analysis' really mean? Is 'Historical Linguistics' the same as 'History of English' or is it a more theoretical area? I'm even told that the yearly conference of AEDEAN (Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos) is increasingly seen as a Literature/Culture event, for which there is some evidence (see the programme for Córdoba this year), though not any intentionality. Linguists, I'm told, prefer meeting at the conference of AESLA, the Asociación Española de Lingüística Aplicada (<http://www.aesla.org.es/es>), at least those inclined, logically, towards the applied aspects of Linguistics. This association, needless to say, goes far beyond English and you might well be a specialist in Mandarin Chinese and join it (after all, it's about Linguistics not languages). In the same vein, ASETEL, the Asociación Española de Teoría de la Literatura, welcomes all kinds of specialists but I don't think it has much weight within English Studies.

The centrifugal forces at work means that in some universities like Seville there are two separate Departments called 'Filología Inglesa', one for 'UK and US Literature' and one for 'English Language'. I know that other universities have considered this structure but splitting Departments goes now against the crazy fashion for grouping as many of them together as possible (for basic financial reasons). In my own Department, we have asked several times to be considered at least separate units, in the same way our colleagues in 'Filología Alemana' are a different section. However, the UAB tells us that as far as they're concerned, we are a single body, which affects negatively our chronically understaffed Literature/Culture section. If you think about it, an interesting solution might be the reshuffling of the language and Literature Departments into two macro-units: a Department of Language and Linguistics and a Department of Literature and Culture, but I can hear the groans already as I write this. There is a sort of conviction, odd as this may sound, that each Department's culture depends very much on the language named in our degrees and that, essentially, we in English Studies are a sort of 'foreign body' in habits and methods wherever we can be found. At least, I always have that impression.

Now think what it is like for a newly arrived students, like the ones I addressed a while ago in Murcia. They have most likely chosen English Studies with a vague idea that they like this particular language (this is the same all over Spain) and with very little actual knowledge of what the degree really means, much less of its tradition, and even of the meaning of 'filología'. Then, on the first day, they are given two examples of research in the field which could not be more different and unorthodox: Dr. Ibarretxe's invitation to consider the whole field of human language, not just English, and my own invitation to shatter the literary canon and bring even television series and videogames into their BA. If any of them originally registered to, say, study Shakespeare and learn English grammar, they must be wondering what hit them... And what hit them is, precisely, what I'm trying to pin down: the centrifugal forces of our study area.

At this point it is also necessary to raise the matter of how current ideas about science are also having an often unacknowledged impact in our midst. I have no doubt that Linguists are scientists and consider themselves so because they use method that can only be called scientific: data gathering, running experiments, and so on. Curiously, every time I tell a linguist that I'm not a scientist but a critic, s/he usually responds that I'm certainly a scientist, too, because I use a method. I do use a scholarly method of study, research and argumentation, which I also teach my students how to apply, and that is certainly based on gathering data (textual evidence from primary sources, ideas from secondary sources). I think, however, that there is an important difference: I don't use labs, nor run experiments as scientists do and, above all, I celebrate full subjectivity, which is not welcome in science. I'm actually far more comfortable with the German concept of *Wissenschaft*, which is practically impossible to translate but that I translate in my own style as 'the cultivation of wisdom', surely twisting the original word to suit my own ends. If you get the idea, I feel conceptually closer to Philosophy than to Linguistics and this a peculiar thought coming from a 'philologist'.

Any kind of re-arrangement affecting knowledge as produced and transmitted by (Spanish) universities is costly and cumbersome. The school I work for is called 'School of Philosophy and Letters' which may have made sense back in 1968 when it was founded but is a really eccentric name today: Why is Philosophy foregrounded? What is the meaning of 'Letters', except a reminder that we have lost 'Belle-lettres' to the passage of time? When I asked whether we could possibly be renamed 'School of Humanities' I was reminded that many colleagues would possibly prefer 'Human Sciences' and that, anyway, the current name is convenient enough. As, I should add, 'Departament de Filologia Anglesa' is convenient enough but, then, no longer descriptive. Or, I think, accurate.

Perhaps, in the end, I just feel a bit envious that the language colleagues can call themselves 'linguists' and be done with the problem of what a 'philologist' should be called today. Those of us in Literature and Culture are not faring that well for if you call yourself a 'literary critic' people will think you're a reviewer and I don't think I know anyone calling themselves 'literary theorist' with the confidence others use the word 'linguist'. Maybe I should give 'literary scientist' a chance... and, yes, I'm kidding.

And to the students in Murcia, and any other first-year students in language and Literature degrees: remember that scientists were once called 'natural philosophers' and don't forget that we used to train you as 'filólogos'. Yes, lovers of language in all its extension...

## 9 October 2018 / ROMANTICISM: DOUBTS AND QUERIES

Next semester I will be teaching again English Romantic Literature after a long lapse, spent teaching mainly Victorian Literature. I last taught Romanticism in the academic year 2004-5, which is really a long time ago—even though the 21<sup>st</sup> century produces this strange effect of making all yearly dates beginning with 20 seem just yesterday.

Although to the layperson it might seem that the literary periods of the past stay static, the fact is that they are in constant turmoil because of expanding research. What Romanticism was back in 1988, when Prof. Guillermina Cenoz so beautifully taught it to my second-year undergrad class, is not the same Romanticism I taught in 2004. 14 years later, in 2018, Romanticism is, once more, quite a different construction. Or is it?

The way to gauge the changes in how a particular literary period is apprehended is to read the introductions aimed at students. In my undergrad years I learned Romanticism from the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (volume 2) and the truly splendid *New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, edited by Boris Ford. The nine volumes are still in my office and I marvel at how dense they are—Ford and his collaborators assumed that undergrads were sophisticated readers, willing and happy to study what amounts to an extraordinarily long text. The last volume, if I am correct, was published in 1995 and put an end to a classic style of presenting information to students, before the emergence of theory seeped down to more basic levels and before identity politics wreaked havoc on the canon (or tried to). I'm not being nostalgic but just making a note of how academic fashions come and go.

We have been using as background reading for our second-year 'Victorian Literature' course Maureen Moran's guide, simply called *Victorian Literature and Culture* (Continuum, 2007). When I write 'using' I mean that students are expected to read it in the first month and then pass a quiz. I must confess that my colleagues and I had great fun preparing the multiple-choice questions, particularly the nonsensical option that should be discarded first (but that each year a handful of students do choose...). I have read, then, Sharon Ruston's introduction in the same series, called *Romanticism*, to consider whether we could use it in a similar way. I have enjoyed it very much but there are a number of issues that worry me and that I would like to address here. One is the very construction of the books called introductions and the other is the resilience of the canon.

I have already written here two posts about the sub-genre of the introduction. One in 2011, on British theatre (<http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/2011/03/09/like-a-crowded-party-reading-introductions-to-british-theatre/>); the other just last year, 2017, about Scottish Literature (<http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/2017/07/03/trying-to-catch-up-a-book-on-recent-scottish-literature/>). I may be repeating, then, some of the arguments, though this topic always takes a slightly different angle depending on the material. Thus, last September 27, I attended the presentation of the volume edited by Teresa López-Pellisa, *Historia de la ciencia ficción en la cultura española* at Llibreria Gigamesh and you can see that the presenter, Prof. Miquel Barceló, spent a good deal of his talk wondering how such a dense volume should be read (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzgkedREkig>). I myself intervened to question whether a book is the ideal vehicle for an introduction, guide, or history but seeing Teresa's concerned face (her publisher was in the room...) I quickly changed subject.

*Historia...* is very different from Ruston's *Romanticism* yet they present similar problems because these are books that need to be studied, not just read. Miquel Barceló referred to Teresa's excellent volume as a 'reference book' but this is not really what it is. His



own *Ciencia ficción: Nueva guía de lectura* (the 2015 new edition based on his 1990 classic) is, for me, a reference book: you can read it from end to end or just dip into it for specific information. Of course, this is what he meant in relation to the 14 chapters in *Historia...* but even if you take each chapter separately, you still need paper and pen to make notes or, as I did, keep your tablet close by to check whatever you need to check. And here's a problem (also with Ruston's *Romanticism*): when I read books that survey a literary field, I need to see pictures as a memory aid—of authors, book covers, places, arts, you name it... Whether this is a thick 500+ page book (like *Historia...*) or a slim 150-page volume like Ruston's, a survey which offers no illustrations is beginning to be problematic for me as a reader of the internet age. Imagine what the digital natives seating in our classrooms must think of so much print...

I'll leave the ambitious *Historia de la ciencia ficción en la cultura española* aside to focus on the introductions to literary periods for undergrads to claim that they should be offered, ideally, as hypertextual online resources most attractive to navigate. Now, the problem with the available resources (at least the ones I know of) is that either they are too basic, or too sprawling. Also, excuse me, antiquated. Look, for instance, at the very well-known Victorian Web. If you read the credits page, you will see that, basically the website's configuration dates back to the mid-1990s. It has been growing magnificently in number of documents and now it offers versions in Spanish and French. But, although it is listed as one of the resources we recommend to our students, I'm very sorry to say that it is not really useful to them—it can even have the negative effect of overwhelming them. It is not my intention to criticize in any way what is, I insist, a wonder of the academic world but to question the inexistence of truly adequate, basic level introductions to literary periods and schools that can be safely recommended to undergrads.

Let's see if I can explain myself better. Take Ruston's book, with its four sections: 1. Historical, Cultural and Intellectual Context, 2. Literature in the Romantic Period, 3. Critical Approaches, and 4. Resources for Independent Study (including a chronology, a glossary of key concepts, and a bibliography). This is about 125 pages of text (parts 1, 2 and 3) and about 30 for part 4—a reasonably brief text, of a size that would adapt very well to the website format. The moment I started reading, I could see where the links to other online resources could be placed and where the pictures should be inserted; their absence grew louder as I read on and what appeared to be basic information started thickening into a lovely but very thick broth.

Half-way into the book, I understood what the problem is: Ruston has a marvellous understanding of the Romantic period and an impressive ability to offer a synthesis, but she thinks as an expert academic and not as an undergrad student. Her introduction made perfect sense to me—as does Moran's to the Victorian Age—because I already know what she is writing about and can, thus, enjoy the new twists and turns she has introduced in the canonical story I was handed down back in 1988. But I'm sure that our second-year students approaching the Victorian age or Romanticism anew must be mostly baffled.

In Ruston's volume there is, also, a perceptible tension between what is relevant and irrelevant, which is part of *all* introductions. Thus, no matter how amazing the Lunar Society (a Midlands scientific league of the most advanced minds of the time) seems to the author, I doubt that our students find the 3.5 pages about it relevant to the study of Wordsworth and company. This tension is, of course, most palpable in Ruston's attempt to undo the vision of Romanticism as a period dominated by the poetry written by the six male geniuses (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats).

Our syllabus, as you may imagine, is focused on their poems (30% of the course) with the other two thirds devoted to celebrating women's fiction, with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Reading Ruston, however, I felt positively guilty that we strike such a poor gender balance in the poetry segment; then, at the same time I wondered whether I really want to teach Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Charlotte Smith or Joanna Baillie instead of any of the six men. We might correct this by including in our booklet more poems by women, but classroom time is awfully limited as it is. I realize that for others the real sin lies in not teaching Walter Scott's novels but, again, if we had one year instead of one semester, we might include one of his books. As things are now, neither Mary Shelley nor Jane Austen are replaceable (at least to me).

A problem, then, is that if we really follow the picture that Ruston draws of the Romantic period and we radically alter the syllabus we run the risk of giving our students an impression that would not agree with the standard view. I do realize that we are changing the syllabus all the time: *Frankenstein* would have seemed an odd choice for the 1988 course I took. At the same time, I doubt very much that students will criticize us for not telling them about Hannah Moore—and the other way round: the experiment last year consisted of including the anti-slavery autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) to emphasize that the Romantic period was a time of abolitionist agitation. From what I'm told, students failed to be enthusiastic.

In an ideal situation, I would have the 70 students in my Romanticism class produce their own study materials, not in e-book form (as I have done in other courses) but as a small, limited, accessible website. This, I know, is pure madness for it requires an investment of time and digital know-how that I simply lack—and also because, guess what?, the result would not count as a Ministry-approved merit for my CV. A friend told me recently that publishing an introduction in book form has many advantages because this is a kind of text often quoted. I must stress, however, that the Spanish Ministry of Education, or, rather, the ANECA agency, does not rate introductions as valid research. Two friends, each the author of a valued introduction to their fields, have confirmed this point after failing their personal assessment exercise.

We, then, simply need to make do with what we can purchase or check online—which is, besides, produced in the anglophone world with no consideration of whether it is adaptable to other cultures. And hope that this will do for our students.

## 16 October 2018 / READING LIVES: BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH (AND VD)

Back in 1994 I met one of the most delicious persons I have ever met in my life—it is very, very hard to encapsulate in just one adjective the vivacity, cheerfulness, zest for life that Prof. Lois Rudnick transmits with her presence. Now emeritus, Lois was that Spring a Fulbright visitor from the University of Massachusetts at Boston. She spent that semester teaching in my Department (also in the English Dept. at the Universitat de Barcelona). Lois gave me personally many wonderful moments to remember for ever, from our seeing together Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (Prof. Rudnick is Jewish) to teaching me why contemporary dance is more thrilling than classical ballet (it's about the freedom to create new moves, as pioneering US dancer Isadora Duncan demonstrated her whole life).

Prof. Rudnick's academic career has been focused mainly on researching the life of literary and artistic hostess Mabel Dodge Luhan. Several of the many biographical books she has devoted to Luhan are available from Amazon.com, if you're curious. I must say that, before meeting Lois, I had never heard of Luhan (1879-1962), a wealthy socialite from Buffalo (New York) particularly known for having chosen Taos, in New Mexico, as her home and having attracted there a long list of artists of all descriptions from 1917 onward. D.H. Lawrence and Georgia O'Keefe are usually mentioned among her guests, but the list is far, far longer. Incidentally, her beautiful Taos home is now a bed-and-breakfast establishment—though she hated tourists. Luhan, née Ganson, went through four marriages that gave her not only a long list of surnames to choose from but also a troubled private and public life. Her last husband, Tony Lujan (note the different spelling) was a handsome Pueblo Indian (today native American...) whom she married in 1923, at a historical period when very few interracial unions of this exceptional kind were celebrated at all. They stayed married for almost 40 years.

Lois Rudnick's latest book on Luhan is *The Suppressed Memoirs of Mabel Dodge Luhan: Sex, Syphilis, and Psychoanalysis in the Making of Modern American Culture* (2012). This is actually an edition of a number of autobiographical texts which Luhan did not include in her groundbreaking autobiographical tetralogy, *Intimate Memoirs* (1933-37), which she started writing at 45. In this 1600-page long, poignant text Luhan gave a candid account not only of her network of celebrity friends and acquaintances but also of her own personal life, with a sincerity that is to be praised. This woman was born in an American Victorian home, but her life ended the year before second-wave feminism erupted with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. In these 83 years she had to learn, at a great personal cost, how to break the tight rules she had been handed down as a girl while she and the rest of the international Modernist coterie(s) re-invented love, sexuality and identity. Not an easy task.

The 'suppressed memoirs' that Prof. Rudnick could not access before 2000 (there was an injunction placed by author's son, if I understand correctly, against their publication) deal specifically with the episodes in Luhan's life connected with sex, and more particularly with how the transmission of VD negatively affected her marriages and her many affairs. Indeed, the volume even contains a nicely-packed condom—a clever reminder that VD is still rampant, despite all we (supposedly) know about gonorrhoea,

syphilis and the rest. Also, a reminder that (though transmitted in other ways than VD) HIV and syphilis connect distant periods of heterosexuality in ways we hardly pay attention to.

The paradox in Luhan's life is that of her four husbands, three suffered from syphilis and, although she did all she could to avoid catching the feared disease (except, it seems, using condoms, for she wanted children) ultimately Tony's infidelity was the reason why Mabel was infected and their idyll radically transformed. I am very much reluctant to reading biographical material and I have a very prudish Victorian horror of intruding into the sex lives of persons who have not entrusted their confidence to me. Fiction is fine but real-life events are not so fine. You may imagine how befuddled I felt reading the passage in which Luhan describes that she knew simultaneously that her husband Tony was a) unfaithful and b) infected with syphilis, when she noticed the stain of bloodied semen on the otherwise pristine white sheet he used to wrap his body in.

I get Lois' point: Luhan gives unique evidence of how the Modernist sexual liberation of the 1910s-1930s was accompanied by the dark shadow of VD, so why not explore it? We do know that Victorian women (and their babies) were often the innocent victims of their husbands' secret lives but we have little information about how women of Luhan's generation coped with the reality of VD, once first-wave feminism introduced a certain measure of female sexual liberation. Fiction could not go very far: D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, published in 1929 (privately and in Italy) was the object of an obscenity trial in 1960 and could only be published in the UK after that date. And there's no mention of VD in it despite its frank sexuality! So, yes, I value and understand Luhan's painful, brave testimonial. Still, I'm somehow sorry that I need to intrude into the privacy of her bedroom to grasp a truth everyone in her time seemed to be hiding. I must thank Lois Rudnick, then, for bringing that truth to us while I wonder whether that is the only way to raise awareness. Possibly.

Having got that off my chest that, I have other issues to raise. You can, by the way, listen to Prof. Rudnick herself discuss her book here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibTHhgQ74ew>. One of these issues is that, obviously, only educated, upper-class women like Luhan were articulate enough to offer an insightful portrait of private life (and even so, she mostly wrote her texts for the psychologists and psychiatrists treating her all her life). The anger and disappointment with which she receives evidence of infection (and hence, of betrayal) must have also been part of the life of less privileged women but, then, we will never have their testimonial. They're just statistics, if at all.

Another issue is that, from what I gather, early 20<sup>th</sup> century women who, like Mabel, appeared to be liberated and even had a notorious reputation as men-eaters, did not really find much satisfaction in sex, which was not even the main point in their search for romance. Reading Luhan's account of the affair she had with Dr. John Parmenter during her first marriage, it seems that she fell in love above all with a certain patriarchal ideal of protective masculinity, paradoxical as this may sound. The pain which she felt when this idealized man turned out to be incapable of abandoning a wife whom he didn't love seems to come directly from the Romantic period rather than the 1910s. This

is Jane Austen with sex and not the post-second feminist wave accounts of bedroom misencounters we are used to now.

In fact, and this is what kept me reading—apart from Prof. Rudnick's manifest passion for her subject—the suppressed memoirs function as a chronicle of a lost struggle against infidelity. Decades into their marriage, and even though Mabel knows that Tony has had liaisons with other women, she feels again a deep Romantic pain caused by the budding relationship between her husband and a younger woman, Millicent Rogers. A celebrity in the circles of fashion and art, Rogers moved from Hollywood to Taos in 1947 intent on imitating the much admired Luhan, to the point of also obsessing with Tony. Luhan never acknowledges that she is in the same position as Dr. Parmenter's wife back in the first of the suppressed memoirs, either because she is mortified by the comparison or because she cannot see the parallelism. I don't mean that infidelity necessarily leads eventually to some kind of retribution but, rather, that Luhan must be one of the first modern women to describe how monogamy and sexual liberation clash—a situation we are very far from having solved.

Thus, the most painful memory Luhan narrates is not her chagrin at realizing that, despite her caution, she has syphilis but her realization that she can do nothing to stop Tony from loving this Rogers woman, the upstart whom Mabel so hates. Much more so because unlike Dr. Parmenter, who acts as a cowardly child with both wife and mistress, Tony assumes with all the serenity he can muster that he loves Mabel but also Millicent (she eventually left him for his nephew, Benito). Encountering that type of deep Romantic pain in a book about venereal disease gives Lois Rudnick's exploration of American Modernism a strange twist, for my impression is that in current discussions of sexuality love (which is what Mabel feels) occupies in the end little room. I may be ranting and raving at my worst today but, beyond the clichés of romance, is there any serious current attempt at considering love? Don't we talk too much about sexuality, too little about feeling? And how come I notice this void in a book about syphilis?

There is also a subtle subtext in *The Suppressed Memoirs of Mabel Dodge Luhan* which has to do with race and class. As a rich, white, female intruder in the Pueblo community Luhan is not particularly well-liked; her affair with Tony, which begins when both are still married, is less than welcome and she even more or less acknowledges that her money bought this Pueblo man just as she purchased Taos land. Eventually, Mabel convinces the Pueblo Indians indirectly through Tony (by then her husband) and, if I recall correctly, the intervention of John Collier—later Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in President Roosevelt's administration—to test the adult community members for syphilis. Among those who refuse to be tested is the husband of Tony's mistress, the woman who passes syphilis onto him. If you add two and two, Rudnick is hinting at a plot of revenge aimed at putting the Yankee interloper in her place. The impulse to do biographical research exposes, thus, patterns in History we might never be aware of.

I recall conversations with Lois, worried already in 1994-5, before the internet really exploded, about what would happen with documentation in the future and how biographers would work. Funnily, if Luhan were alive today, she would most likely be an influencer with a heavily documented life in the social networks. And/or perhaps one of

those novelists that write narcissistic auto-fiction, though I wonder whether there is a single grain of truth in the sub-genre. As for the truth we get from Luhan's 'suppressed memoirs' (and 'suppressed' here means both unpublished and self-censored), it is necessarily biased towards a *zeitgeist* obsessed with sex and very much reluctant to consider love—and the models we follow in our lives. At one point, Mabel throws a tantrum at her husband, she writes, not so much because she is uncontrollably angry but because she intends to seduce her man back into her arms as the heroines of romance do. Impassive, Tony responds coolly 'You're tearing my trousers' and the whole edifice of romantic seduction comes crashing down. At least, Mabel knows which model is failing her. As for us, how do we love (or fail to love)? I wonder.

By the way, you might be surprised to know that in the USA, 'During 2017, there were 101,567 reported new diagnoses of syphilis (all stages), compared to 39,782 estimated new diagnoses of HIV infection in 2016 and 555,608 cases of gonorrhoea in 2017', according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-syphilis-detailed.htm>). Just in case you thought syphilis was a thing of the distant Victorian past and not of post-modern sexuality.

## 24 October 2018 / ON PATRIARCHY AND CATALAN INDEPENDENCE

I have been trying to avoid the thorny subject of Catalan independence here, but the recent hullabaloo caused by the (supposed) misreading of Agustí Colominas' words on a television interview last 17 October might be useful to offer an alternative, gendered interpretation of the self-styled 'procés'.

My personal political opinion is simple enough: Catalan independence should be won in a legal referendum with at least 75% to 80% support for—as Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya has recently acknowledged and former Generalitat President Artur Mas also acknowledged—you cannot start a new state with only half the citizens' support. You risk in this way a terrible split, at worst a civil war (though I doubt this would happen here). The Catalan conflict is not really a matter of Spain versus Catalonia but of how the independentists are trying to rush the political process without a convincing discourse that entices hostile, reluctant or even just indifferent people to their cause. Argue your case with solid ideas, explain how a Catalan Republic would be much better than any top-of-the-world Scandinavian country and then let's vote. Legally, with UN and EU backing, if not with that of Spain, for who could stop a unified population absolutely convinced of what they want (which is not the case now)?

Colominas' unfortunate words raised the issue of violence, which had been so far more or less suppressed. I mean mortal violence—much has been said, of course, about the brutal, intolerable use of police repression on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017. Allow me to explain that Agustí Colominas is a historian and political theorist attached as major ideologist to Carles Puigdemont's Crida Nacional, soon to become a formal political party. This is why his words carry so much weight. Speaking on La Xarxa, Colominas was trying to celebrate

the fact that Catalan independentism has chosen a pacifist strategy. However, the way he defended this argument was most awkward (or a Freudian slip...): 'There were a number of naïve steps. No doubt. Above all, if you try to carry out this very Catalan experiment of trying to get independence without a single death'. He was asked whether people should die for an idea and he replied that 'so far, in all independences in the world people have died. In ours we have decided we don't want that. If you make that decision, then it takes longer. The process is far longer'.

Unsurprisingly, his ambiguous wording was interpreted as evidence that Colominas was asking for human life to be sacrificed if necessary for the sake of Catalan independence. The reactions on Twitter and other media were furious, including that of Esquerra's notorious member of Parliament, Gabriel Rufián. Not too elegantly, Colomina twitted back: 'You can see that Gabriel Rufián possibly does not understand Catalan. I'll translate [into Spanish Castilian] and simplify: 'the Catalan process does not want any dead and this why it will take longer to accomplish our aim'' ('el procés català no desitja morts i per això portarà més temps aconseguir l'objectiu'). Fair enough and happy to read so.

Now, here's a nasty surprise—last 24 August, Stanford University professor Joan Ramon Resina (the director of the Iberian Studies Programme) suggested in an interview published by VilaWeb that sacrificing Catalan lives could have helped defend the Republic, declared on 27 October but quickly suppressed for lack of internal and external support. Acknowledging that he is speaking from a position of complete safety (he lives in California), Resina describes a terrifying scenario, imagining that the Catalan Parliament could have been stormed and the Spanish State would have used then extreme violence, leading to fatalities. The cost of the 'collateral victims' (his own quotation marks) 'would have been too high for the European institutions' and, presumably, independence would have followed. Next, he adds: 'I have trouble understanding those who say that a people's freedom is not worth a single victim. Great causes have never been won with anaesthesia. Why should freedom be cheaper in Catalonia than in other places?' (<https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/joan-ramon-resina-entrevista-tardor-republicana/>).

Here's the answer: because Catalonia—like all civilized nations—should aspire to being a dignified post-patriarchal nation that respects human rights and lives, and not another patriarchal national aberration, full of pointless violence and bloodshed. Resina's suggestion that the death of some individuals hypothetically murdered by Spanish police, or troops, could be a desirable event in our history is disgusting, despicable, atrocious and, above all, deeply anti-Catalan. Even Colominas understands that.

I have always wanted to write a book about the gender issues connecting the quadrangle formed by the Basque Country and Catalonia, plus Ireland and Scotland. I won't do that because I'm too busy dismantling patriarchy in other projects (I'm currently writing about villainy) and, so, I'll use this post as a sort of summary of my project. I'll insist here on the central point of my theorization: patriarchy is *not* masculinity—as we can see, many men reacted in horror after (mis)interpreting Colominas' words as a call to take up arms and sacrifice life for a political ideal. Theirs is what I would call an anti-patriarchal position, one that defends argumentation and a pacific, legal struggle rather

than revolution—for this is 2018, not 1789 or 1917, and we know how bloody revolutions end. So this is what my imaginary book would discuss. Please, bear with me.

If you notice, what characterizes the case of Ireland and the Basque Country is that both had terrorist movements presenting themselves as political organizations for the defence of the homeland (following the chivalric scenario of the knights saving the damsel in distress). Fernando Aramburu's excellent novel *Patria* (2016)—now filmed as an HBO series—has done a very good job of dissecting the absurdity of E.T.A., which left in its gory wake 800 dead and hundreds of casualties, in a mad bid to attain the independence of the Basque Country. Today, the independentist option is peacefully represented by legal party Euskal Herria Bildu and growing, following the non-violent Catalan process.

Likewise, the I.R.A. (in its different incarnations and factions) killed hundreds and maimed hundreds more, before surrendering to plain reality and accepting that the Republic of Ireland and British Northern Ireland could not be unified by force. Brexit will perhaps manage the deed, probably with a good share of personal suffering but, hopefully, no loss of limb or life. A woman too often neglected, Mo Mowlam, was behind the Good Friday Peace Agreement of 1998, which brought much needed common sense and placed Sinn Féinn firmly within Northern Irish legality. Of course, another woman, Margaret Thatcher, was responsible for responding to terrorist patriarchal violence with even more patriarchal violence, coming from the state. But, then, this reinforces my notion that patriarchy is not masculinity but a way of organizing society and personal life through fear and violence.

My thesis is that in Ireland and in the Basque Country the independentist, national political struggle was coloured by gender values attached to classic patriarchal masculinity: glory, honour, duty. This is both the basis of militarism and of terrorism, which is why it is sometimes so hard to distinguish heroes from villains (what was Napoleon?). You are probably thinking that women were also part of E.T.A. and I.R.A. and that some are today ISIS supporters. The matter of the poor sex slaves, represented by the new Nobel Prize winner for Peace, Nadia Murad, should make it obvious to you that ISIS is an extremely patriarchal terrorist organization—far beyond any patriarchal European ideology and criminal band. At the same time, you should begin to see that all violence is based on the typical sense of patriarchal entitlement: I kill (or try to kill) you because I personally decide that your life matters less than my struggle, even though by using violence I undermine the justification for my own fight and cause state violence to grow accordingly.

Now, Scotland and Catalonia also had their own patriarchal terrorist movements—but they were small. Scottish author Ian Rankin refers in his novels to the 1950s/1970s proto-terrorist Sword and Shield, but this appears to be his own invention (is it?). The Scottish National Liberation Army (SNLA), a.k.a. the Tartan Terrorists, was formed in 1979—after the failed referendum for devolution—by one Adam Busby jr., a convicted terrorist since 2010. Mr. Busby preferred letter bombs and even parcel bombs—in the style of the infamous Unabomber—but does not seem to have caused major human harm. In Catalonia, Terra Lliure, formed in 1978, went much further than SNLA, injuring



many in a series of similarly misguided attacks and even killing a poor woman before its dissolution in 1995.

I'm not making the idiotic point that Scottish and Catalan terrorism was less effective (if that is a word that should ever be used in this context) than Irish and Basque terrorism because it lacked committed enough 'warriors'. The point I'm raising is that both Scotland and Catalonia were and are societies uninterested in political violence of any kind, including terrorism, because the classic patriarchal values are less appealing there and here. The counterargument I give myself is that the British Army (Scottish soldiers were always a mainstay of the Empire) and gang-related street violence, an endemic problem, have absorbed much patriarchal violence in Scotland. Yet, the fact is that the recent referendum and its aftermath have not generated any violent incidents. Catalan nationalists tend to claim that being subordinated to Spain has resulted in a constant need to negotiate and this is why violent confrontation is not part of our society—or the other way around: being mainly a trading nation, we understand the advantages of negotiation.

Let me recap: nations with a deeper patriarchal foundation may be tempted by terrorism and, generally, political violence leading to revolution, whereas nations with a shallower patriarchy (there is no nation with a wholly alternative social arrangement) abhor political violence and will not sacrifice human lives for ideas. The two World Wars, Vietnam, the Cold War, Iraq, the Balkans War and Syria today have done much to erode the appeal of the glory/duty/honour triad based on bloodshed. Neither in Scotland nor in Catalonia has the craving for independence resulted in personal clashes or rioting of any kind—though the image of the Catalan police almost losing the national Parliament last 1 October to a horde of violent protesters is certainly worrying.

Now, here's a problem. Few of the Catalan men and women that were scandalized and appalled by Colominas' words in the basic, immediate interpretation—and I hope they were 99%, though there are always lost souls—were aware that their reaction was anti-patriarchal, for the simple reason that we are generally ignorant of how patriarchy operates. Patriarchy is not, as radical feminism assumed in the 1970s, a terrorist system established to intimidate women into submission. It is certainly that but also, more generally, a social system based on using violence, against both men and women, to impose its own views.

In Resina's ugly vision, the Spanish Other is the violent patriarch and the dead would have been part of the gendered discourse of Catalonia as a victimized nation. Yet, this is not good at all: what Resina presents is the case of an abused wife who welcomes her husband's murdering one of their children because its death will free her... You can see this leads nowhere. A truly anti-patriarchal nation does not put its hopes into the acts of bullies or into male messianic leaders but into the ability of its male and female citizens to renew the jaded, 19<sup>th</sup> century scenario of national liberation. What is needed is a new approach based on a collective capacity to re-imagine the community as a forward-looking project (not a vague, dreamy utopia). For that, it is important that the men, above all, continue eschewing all violence and embrace an alternative way of being a (Catalan) man.

They are not doing so badly... I only know of one book about Catalan masculinity, the collective volume edited by Josep-Anton Fernández and Adrià Chavarria *Calçasses, gallines i maricons: Homes contra la masculinitat hegemònica* (2004). That wimps, chickens and faggots appear in the title as terms of pride rather than opprobrium says a lot about how unafraid Catalan men are of resisting hegemonic masculinity. Perhaps the strong reaction against Colominas' words, whatever he intended them to mean, shows that we are now ready to make anti-patriarchal policies absolutely central in our society. My suggestion is that this might be the way to build something truly new, even post-national, to replace the worn-out patriarchal stories we have been hearing for the last two centuries. Just an idea. Scotland, now headed by a woman First Minister, is continuing its non-violent path, as it educates its young men into abandoning street violence. And happily, in Ireland and the Basque Country peace continues.

Some days, I find there is hope for the world. Can we, please, set an example?

### 30 OCTOBER 2018 / ENJOYING BIBLIOGRAPHY LIVE! (AND CALLING FOR THE RETURN OF CONVERSATION)

Comparing the lists of works cited in pre-1990s bibliography and in recent academic publications, it is obvious that we are about to reach a critical turning point after which our secondary sources will overwhelm our writing. At least this is how I feel.

There are, I think, two justifications for the use of quotations in academic work. One is the need to prove that you know how to find the relevant sources—a task now made easier by digital databases but also more onerous, precisely because you can download in one afternoon a torrent of information that takes time you don't have to digest. The other is the need to show that your argumentation is in touch with current debates on your topic and that you're not rediscovering the wheel.

Beyond these two factors, it used to be the case that quotations were used to strengthen a point of your thesis or because the author in question expressed an idea with greater accuracy than you could muster. Now, every article begins with a barrage of increasingly short quotations and numerous parenthetical references to other sources simply alluded to by author's surname, before a thesis can be minimally discerned. This is usually offered but only developed, if at all, many paragraphs later into the article as the barrage of quotations and references continues. In contrast, pre-1990s articles often rely on a maximum of ten sources, often no more than six, leaving thus room for close reading—which is what we need to do—and more importantly, for the expression of new ideas in creative ways.

How have we reached this situation? It's simply a matter of numbers: the amount of English Studies specialists publishing new work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is simply staggering. This means that in order to produce a reasonable list of works cited that does not consume 50% of the paper, as researchers we need to invest an enormous time in a)

making a list of the relevant bibliography, b) reading as much and as fast as we can, c) taking notes. Then, once we have amassed about as many words as we can write (this happens to me every time), we need to start paring down all the information so painstakingly amassed in order to select the few precious words we can quote. I tend to write much more than I need for the limited word count we can fill in journal articles or collective books, which means that I need to weigh very carefully every secondary source I insert, hoping nobody will notice omissions. Needless to say, I try but do not always manage to read in depth all the sources I use, for there must be a balance between the time we consume in writing each piece and its importance in our research.

This issue of the proliferation of secondary sources is a problem affecting all topics, since there are specialists in all areas. I grant that more bibliography is generated on the canonical classics than on newer work but writing about some popular favourites—for instance, *The Hunger Games*—is also daunting. Basically, no matter what you want to discuss it takes much longer to combine your writing with the sources than to express what you wish to say. My student tutorees often complain that once they read the bibliography on their topic, they feel dismayed rather than encouraged, and almost crowded out of their dissertations by the many other researchers they need to name. This was one of the reasons why I started writing this very blog: to be able to express my ideas in a simple, direct way without the compulsory search for bibliography—here I just quote what I really need to quote—and the insertion of footnotes.

In Catalan Studies matters are, naturally, very different. The number of specialists is tiny in comparison to those in English Studies, which means that whole stretches of Catalan Literature are still unexplored (or neglected, depending on how you look at it). Last Saturday I presented the collective book I have edited, *Explorant Mecanoscrit del segon origen: Noves lectures* (Orciny Press, <http://www.orcinypress.com/producto/explorant-mecanoscrit-del-segon-origen-noves-lectures/>), which is a translation of the monographic issue published in English in 2017 by the online journal *Alambique* (<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/alambique/vol4/iss2/>). I still marvel that this is pioneering work—sorry to brag—despite the fact that Manuel de Pedrolo's best-known volume (he published 128!) has sold more than 1,500,000 copies since 1974 when it appeared and has been read practically by every Catalan speaker under 50. There was a gap to fill in, it seems, and I'm glad to have helped.

If you look at the works cited list for each of the six articles in the new volume, you will immediately see that the bibliography on Pedrolo is far more limited than that on his anglophone equivalents, such as Graham Greene or George Orwell. We (the six authors) have nonetheless used the whole bag of tricks to give each of our essays the expected list of 25/35 secondary sources, almost scrapping the bottom of the barrel and bringing in an assortment of tangential items (such as newspaper articles, documentaries and so on) into our work. I have enjoyed, for once, the certainty that the limited list of extant sources is all the available bibliography there is and relished my familiarity with most of the entries.

This is why last Wednesday 24 was such an exceptional day for me. I was invited to participate in the one-day conference at the Universitat de Barcelona, 'Manuel de

Pedrolo, una mirada oberta', and I had the immense pleasure to see in the same room most specialists in Pedrolo—almost the complete bibliography! In no particular order: Antoni Munné-Jordà, Víctor Martínez-Gil, Àlex Martín, Elisabet Armengol, Anna Maria Villalonga, Patrizio Rigobon, Francesc Ardolino, Ramon X. Rosselló, Jordi Coca and my co-authors Pedro Nilsson-Fernández and Anna Maria Moreno-Bedmar (who invited me, for which I'm very thankful). This may be a common situation for other researchers but, as a non-native specialist in English Studies I always have the impression that the inner circles of each area I'm interested in happen elsewhere, and this is the first time when I find myself not only part of a circle but in the presence of most of its members.

Beautiful as the meeting on Pedrolo was, it was also further proof that, generally speaking, textuality is overwhelming conversation by which I mean that, because the paper presentations were so many and so long, we had hardly time to debate the issues we had ourselves raised. This is always frustrating to me, to the point that once I considered with a friend the possibility of having a one-day conference organized on the basis of speed-dating, with academics actually talking to each other for a few minutes at least and reading the papers either before or after the event. The way we do things now, interaction happens too seldom and too hurriedly, which means that what we produce in writing is not as advanced as it might be.

Sometimes you need someone from outside to realize that things are far from ideal. A non-academic friend who attended the presentation of *Explorant Mecanoscrit del segon origen* was very much surprised to see that some of my co-authors were meeting then for the first time. He had assumed that a collective book springs from a series of previous conversations in which we draw a plan for the volume, then divide the tasks and next spend time debating each point in our corresponding papers. I explained that actually we tend not to read each other's work when we participate in a collective volume until this is published (at least, I always do that), and he was flabbergasted. In a way, so am I but, then, as I have just pointed out, not even seminars have room for debate.

I'm not the only one to be calling for a slowing down of academic life, of course, but the particular bee in my bonnet is, I insist, conversation. In our frenzy to produce texts than count as research, we have forgotten how to communicate with each other—we read and quote each other, but this is not real conversation. It might even be a sign of profound loneliness. In my days as a naïve undergrad I imagined that joining academia would mean enjoying whole afternoons of intelligent conversation once morning lectures were over, but this has never happened. I really believe in the traditional institution of the common room, but instead what we get is each researcher in their office answering e-mails. If we stop to talk, this happens mostly in the corridor, as we rush from office to classroom (or bathroom!). Conversation has the bad reputation of being idle chat, when it might solve the problem of how to slow down hectic academic life and produce less but better research. (And here I am, writing to whoever is reading me instead of discussing books with my ultra-busy Department colleagues...).

So, to sum up my sketchy argument today—easy access to what others write thousands of miles away is a miracle in comparison to my days as a pre-internet PhD candidate, yet digitalization and the very growth of English Studies has also generated the burden of

colossal works cited lists. Experiences like the recent Pedrolo seminar show me that, sometimes, small is much better than big but also that textuality carries too much weight in comparison to conversation. If only we could re-learn the almost lost art of conversation, academic life would slow down and we could produce better research. Less prolific, of course, but deeper. (But, then, would quoting from live personal communication in papers be valid?).

I wonder which Departments still have common rooms and whether they're ever used for truly meaningful academic conversation. Or has this never happened?

## 6 NOVEMBER 2018 / SLAP IN THE FACE, PUNCH IN THE GUTS (ON MACHIAVELLI AND TOLKIEN)

I was recently re-reading Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) in the elegant translation by Peter Bondanella (Oxford UP, 2008), when I came across this passage in 'Chapter XXX: Of Fortune's Power in Human Affairs and How She Can Be Resisted': 'I certainly believe this: that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because Fortune is a woman, and if you want to keep her under it is necessary to beat her and force her down' (86-87).

I'm still reeling from the force of the slap, for this was possibly three weeks ago and I can't stop thinking about these words. I didn't feel feminist indignation at Machiavelli's blatant misogyny, which should be any thinking woman's reaction, but a very strong sense of exclusion: I felt as if he was telling me to my face from his grave 'you are a woman and the words you are reading are not for you'. I also felt positively unwanted in the circles discussing *The Prince*, perhaps, above all, because Bondanella added no explanatory note to this rude remark (among the many, many devoted to much minor details).

He did explain, as editor, that Fortune was habitually represented as a woman—for, I'll add, Fortune is fickle and so are women. Bondanella also noted that, as I could check in his bibliography, very few women scholars have done work on Machiavelli; this comes as no surprise because they possibly felt the same rotund punch in the guts that I felt. Incidentally, Bondanella neglected to mention that Machiavelli was married (to Marietta Corsini) and he had six children. It took me a few clicks to get her name and the number of children, not out of idle curiosity but because I wanted to know whether Machiavelli could possibly be gay. I feel even more downhearted than usual when gay men support patriarchy.

Then, last week I was reading Humphrey Carpenter's selection of Tolkien's letters (published in 1981) and enjoying it very much until I came to a letter sent to one of his three sons, Michael, dated 6-8 March 1941. Tolkien was in the middle of writing *The Lord of the Rings* and, so, the female Elf Galadriel already existed, also Lúthien in *The Silmarillion*, both characters much praised by feminist critics. Incidentally, Tolkien also had a daughter, Priscilla, 13 at the time.

Tolkien theorizes in this letter to his son about how 'The sexual impulse makes women (naturally when unspoiled more unselfish) very sympathetic and understanding, or specially desirous of being so (or seeming so), and very ready to enter into all interests, as far as they can, from ties to religion, of the young man they are attracted to' (49). Um, I've always had my doubts about this fantasy of the Elf woman (Arwen) who gives up her mortality to marry a mere mortal (Aragorn). Tolkien continues in the same vein: women are not deceivers (what a relief!) but moved by 'the servient, helpmeet instinct, generously warmed by desire and young blood' (49).

As an Oxford professor, Tolkien had learned that women 'can in fact often achieve very remarkable insight and understanding, even of things outside their natural range: for it is their gift to be perceptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters than the physical) by the male. Every teacher knows that' (49). That possibly explains why so many male teachers see no difference between different types of fertilization in different rooms. Tolkien, not the kind to have affairs with his female students, explains himself further thus: 'How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp his ideas, see his point—and how (with rare exceptions) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a personal interest in him' (49). Learning for women, to sum up, is a love affair not with knowledge but with male teachers. I wonder what Tolkien made of female teachers and male students.

So, again the slap in the face, the punch in the gut, though neither Machiavelli nor Tolkien seem to understand, particularly Tolkien, that we women can read in their texts their candid revelations about masculinity. My message to all the feminist critics wasting their time in endless discussions of how empowered poor Eówyn is that they should look, rather, into how the villain Sauron's defeat matters less than Aragorn's 'legitimate' patriarchal entitlement to the throne of his ancestors. By the way: Tolkien engraved on his wife's tomb the name of Lúthien, the brave Elf she had inspired. Here's something the two women have in common: Lúthien, like Arwen, gave up immortality to marry a man; Edith, a fervent Anglican, became a Catholic to please the ultra-conservative Tolkien before they married. Lúthien never regretted her choice but Edith, Humphrey Carpenter informs us, raged and raged (she hated compulsory confession) until her husband allowed her in 1940 (they had married in 1916) to attend church as she pleased.

What I am describing is yet another case of noticing the idol's clay feet. I don't mean that either Machiavelli or Tolkien are my personal idols but that most texts, past and present, which are extremely relevant to how we think and read in Western culture exclude 50% of humankind. (Of course, silly girl!). Those reluctant to changing any rules of grammar concerning genre usually claim that 'man/men' is often a generic way of referring to all human beings, and that we women exaggerate when we complain against this usage. What I find, however, is that actually 'man/men' refers specifically to the male half of humankind and if you press me actually to its patriarchal top. Take the title of Damien Chazell's recent film on Neil Armstrong, *First Man*: what is the word 'man' doing there? Does it actually mean 'person'? Or is it, as I suspect, another neglectful way of telling us women, 'none of you have travelled to the Moon' (because we men didn't allow you)? One more slap... (Now check what the Mercury 13 programme was).

I'm trying to be fair here and think of how often women's writing excludes men, which is often, I'm sure, particularly in radical feminist works. The difference, I think, is that male readers (and please excuse my essentialism) are less likely to be caught unaware, as we are. If you read a feminist text you know where you stand. The problem with most patriarchal texts is that they tend to conceal their filiation not necessarily out of hypocrisy but because they assume that the whole world is patriarchal. Only when some kind of explanation is offered (e.g. Tolkien's letter) are the true colours of the man in question displayed. It is, I believe, far less likely for a feminist woman to avoid commenting on her own gender views. Even so, I just don't see a radical feminist making androphobic comments such as 'Destiny is like a man and he needs to be grabbed by the testicles to be controlled' or 'male students only learn if they feel erotically bound to their female teachers but, even so, their ability to learn evaporates the moment she shows disinterest'. Amazing how things sound when you reverse gender.

Reading recently Kameron Hurley's *The Geek Feminist Revolution* (a collection of lucid blog posts) I had to agree with her that it is very difficult to relax at the end of the day without being slapped in the face by patriarchy in any of the fictions and non-fictions we consume. I started watching a few days ago *1922*, a Netflix movie based on Stephen King's eponymous novella, and I stopped about 15 minutes into it when farmer Wilf James convinces his teen son Henry that they should kill his mother Arlette (she insists on selling the land they live off and move elsewhere). I did grasp that King and Netflix intended this crime to be a horrendous example of patriarchal abuse, and I knew that Wilf's and Henry's life would be destroyed by it—but is this what I want to see? How does this help male viewers be interested in undermining patriarchy? How many enjoyed the very graphic scene of Arlette's murder? The difference in relation to either *The Prince of The Lord of the Rings* is that I can ignore *1922* without feeling that my cultural capital is seriously diminished—but how can I ignore Machiavelli or Tolkien? I must read them, if only to better understand my own marginal position in a patriarchal world.

I think sometimes of what the world was like for, say, Mary Wollstonecraft, who understood so well her own marginal position 200 years ago and I wonder what it was like to know that, as a woman, you were not even a citizen with full rights. Some of us in a handful of Western countries have been told that we are equal to men, but we get these constant reminders that we are not. You may be thinking that it is very naïve of me to expect to connect with Machiavelli and Tolkien, as they are instances of very different times and ways of thinking but here's my question—how do we go on reading what we should read to be cultured persons without being constantly insulted as women? For we need to read men, right? It's not a matter of not reading *The Prince*. And I certainly don't want to ignore *The Lord of the Rings* (as I don't want any man to ignore *Frankenstein*).

Here's a riddle to finish: this is 2018 and no woman has travelled to the Moon yet—can we, then, say that the human species has reached our satellite? Will there ever be a film called *First Woman* about how the first human to step on Mars will be/was a woman? Deep sigh...

### 13 NOVEMBER 2018 / TOWARDS LIBERATION FROM EMPOWERMENT

I was watching last week the new wonder woman of Spanish music, Rosalía, in an interview on TV (in Pablo Motos' *El Hormiguero*) and she confirmed that, indeed, her new recording, *El mal querer*, deals with 'el poder femenino' (I'm not sure whether she means female, women's or feminine power). Rosalía herself is an example of sudden artistic empowerment that I don't quite understand, as I think that we're missing crucial information about her family background and her training as a musician. But that's not my point (to clarify matters: like millions of people around the world, I love what she does, it's so thrilling and refreshing!). My point is this: why do we speak of power rather than of liberation? When did liberation stop being a keyword for feminism?

The very accomplished article 'Empowerment: The History of a Key Concept in Contemporary Development Discourse' by Anne-Emmanuèle Calvès ([https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_RTMD\\_200\\_0735--empowerment-the-history-of-a-key-concept.htm](https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_RTMD_200_0735--empowerment-the-history-of-a-key-concept.htm)) offers a very useful overview of how this term became so widespread and why. She cites as a major inspiration 'the conscientization approach developed by the Brazilian theorist Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968'. According to Calvès, the 1970s were the time when 'the term formally come into usage by social service providers and researchers', particularly after Barbara Solomon's *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities* (1976).

The current popularity of 'empowerment', however, sinks its roots in the mid-1990s, when, Calvès explains, it firmly 'entered institutionalized discourse on women in development' thanks to feminist NGOs. Calvès highlights the UN's International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994) as one of the main events 'to give the concept international visibility'. Precisely, the article by Ann Ferguson 'Empowerment, Development and Women's Liberation'—one of the few publications linking the two concepts that interest me—appears in a book published by the UN's University Press, *The Political Interests of Gender Revisited* (Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Kathleen B. Jones, eds., 2009, 85–103. The article itself is not available online but you may easily find the volume's introduction.

I have serious doubts about the word 'empowerment' because it seems to be intrinsically patriarchal. If, as I am preaching, patriarchy is a form of hierarchical social organization characterized by its placing individuals in different ranks according to the power they wield, why is empowerment desirable? If you start from a position of oppression and you manage to empower yourself, you may end up in a higher position but how do you contribute to undoing the very system of power? Could it be that we use empowerment mistakenly and we actually mean 'liberation'?

Let me go back to Rosalía (born in 1993) to discuss next another young woman also born when the word 'empowerment' was become popularized, Malala Yousafzai (born in 1997).

As far as I know, Rosalía has freely taken all the decisions concerning her career and has not been the object of any patriarchal attempts to curtail her artistic creativity. In short,



she is enjoying the chance to develop her personal agency in freedom (within the legal and moral limits of current Spanish legislation) like any other young man of her generation and inclinations. Agency, incidentally, is a word that seems to have disappeared from the horizon, though it seemed to be ubiquitous just a few years ago. So, how's Rosalía a 'powerful woman' rather than a 'free' or 'liberated' woman? And how come 'liberated' has taken on this sexualized meaning? It seems to me that the 'poder femenino' she invokes and maybe embodies is a position, rather than a reality, a sort of pre-emptive strike against the patriarchal power that might limit her—it's a way of saying 'you can't touch me', even though, as we know, successful women like Rosalía attract much attention from misogynistic haters. Her 'power', then, is in how her popularity and public presence outdo the control that the patriarchal trolls would use, if they could, against her. It's not power to repress or control others.

Now take Malala, the 2014 winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace and, thus, also another example of empowerment—or is it liberation? Unlike Rosalía, Malala grew up in an environment dominated by an extreme patriarchal regime, that of the Taliban in her native Pakistan. Her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, was motivated by his personal and professional circumstances to become an anti-patriarchal activist, willing to sacrifice his own life to give girls in his community an education. His sisters never attended school, but he made sure that his daughter and other girls like her would have a school to welcome them: the one he himself ran. Malala learned her own educational activism from her father and almost lost her life in 2012 when a Taliban patriarchal terrorist shot her in the head. The family relocated then to the United Kingdom, from where both Malala and her father continue their task of empowering (or is it liberating?) other girls by providing, to begin with, the inspiration to demand an education.

Empowerment takes, then, as many forms as personal experience dictates and is supposed to act, as I was arguing, as a barrier against further oppression by shifting the relationships of power and introducing a better balance. This is where my misgivings resurface: if power is, say, a cake, the more I eat, the less you eat—which means that empowerment is necessarily finite and also that those in power will always resist giving any away. This is how things seem to be working so far: the oppressed demand a bigger share of the cake, which they seem to be getting but the ones who feel entitled to holding the whole cake under their control do not like the situation a bit (a bite?). Hence all the lashing out, from Taliban violence to online trolling, simply because we cannot all be empowered. In contrast, we could all be free, that is to say, liberated from the restrictions imposed by patriarchy if only we started thinking about who baked the cake and why we have to eat it at all for, you see?, you cannot have your cake and eat it, too.

Bob Pease writes that 'The challenge that confronts men is to find ways to exercise power without oppressing anyone. For men to change for the better, power must be redefined so that men can feel powerful while doing the tasks that are not traditional for men' (30 in Carabí & Armengol, editors, *Alternative Masculinities for a Changing World*), such as... rearing children, he adds. I think these words encapsulate much of what is wrong with empowerment: what does 'feel powerful' mean, whether you're a man or a woman? Isn't Pease himself suggesting that being powerful is the same as having the capacity to oppress others? How can you 'exercise power' without controlling

others? If you ask me, for men to change they should oppose the very idea of patriarchal power to liberate themselves and others from oppression—ask Ziauddin Yousafzai whether being powerful is a priority for him. He is the very example of what liberation is for men and for women under harsh patriarchal regimes. Why, then, knowing as we do that patriarchy survives because it appeals to men with a sense of entitlement to power, we want to empower women? Again: why not liberate everyone from the shackles of power?

Women who manage to choose how to live their lives, whether they're called Rosalía or Malala, are, to me, not instances of empowerment but of freedom. Power, as we see in patriarchal men, does not free you: it's the other way around—it enslaves you to living life as others dictate. If you're thinking that I'm wrong and that only enjoying a great amount of power guarantees your personal freedom then you don't mean power, you mean agency. Vladimir Putin has plenty of power and he's not using it for his personal liberation: he's using it to compete with other men for the title of biggest living patriarch. Angela Merkel also has much power—but isn't she the counterexample of women's liberation? Perhaps she'll feel truly liberated when she retires next year and can finally use her agency to help others rather than uphold, as she is doing, the status quo.

I think I've now hit on the key of my own personal philosophy of power, perhaps I should call it anti-power. If being powerful is being in a position to cause things to happen (and being powerless is being in a position in which you can't stop things from happening), then I can say that the only use I see in empowerment is an altruistic ability to make life better for others. Rosalía's 'poder femenino' should ideally translate into lending a hand so that other persons can flourish, as she is doing. Malala is more clearly following this path already, as are others. I don't mean Bill-Gates-style philanthropy (though this is much better than what he used to embody and now Elon Musk embodies) or charity, not even NGO activism but a rethinking of what power is for. If, as a teacher, I am in a position to use my (very limited) power to benefit the careers of others who will in their turn help others, this is how I should use it. This may sound endogamic but that's not at all what I mean. Patriarchy will be undone when we, men and women, ask ourselves 'how can I help?' rather than 'how can I dominate?'

I'll end by suggesting that empowerment is much more popular than liberation because the very idea of power is, regrettably, too glamorous. We also need to recall that empowerment is mainly a US export, *pace* Paolo Freire and NGO activism, and that in American culture the opposite of being powerful is not just being powerless but being a loser, which is even worse. Perhaps if we free ourselves from the obligation of being a winner that would be a step forward towards true liberation and the abandonment of the current obsession with power, which, trust me, is suspiciously patriarchal.

## 20 NOVEMBER 2018 / (NOT) TRAINING STUDENTS FOR JOBS: EMPLOYABILITY, TEAMWORK, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

I'll begin today with a semantic quibble about the presence of the word 'Bachelor' in the name of the degree 'Bachelor of Arts' or BA.

Pop etymology indicates that the Medieval Latin word 'baccalaureatus' derives from Latin 'baccalaureus', a portmanteau of 'bacca' (berry) and 'laurea' ('laurel'), because of the laurel crown awarded to graduates as if they were Roman victors. In Spanish this eventually gave 'bachiller', which refers to the man with a secondary education; 'bachillera' was used mockingly, since women were not educated to this level until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup>. The word 'bachillerato', still used for the two-year course after E.S.O. and before university has, then, that peculiar origin. For higher education, Spanish preferred 'licenciado', that is to say, the person who has a license to teach to others what he has mastered (note my sexist choice of pronoun), usually in a five-year course. Now we have 'graduado' in imitation of English 'graduate'. 'Bachelor' appears in English as an import from French meaning a young man in training, whether this is in arms or in academic knowledge, hence the eventual use of the word for the degree. Also, for the man who remained single for life, as, I assume, that was the case for many minor knights and scholars too poor to marry (besides, bachelors eventually took orders, or already belonged to them). So, ladies, think how funny it is that you claim to have a Bachelor of Arts degree.

This prologue is just the opening salvo for what I want to discuss today: what is the point of a BA in the Humanities, and specially in English Studies? Please, note that I mean the Spanish-style BA combining Language and Literature in a four-year course, not English in the Anglo-American sense of the study of the literary arts, though my argument also applies in many ways. My post today is specifically a very personal response to the assessment the degree I work for has gone through. We have passed it though not with flying colours because it seems we have shortcomings to solve in three areas, or, rather, types of skills: employability, teamwork and digital skills.

To understand what we're going through now, I need to mention that universities are Medieval institutions that have survived the vagaries of time because they are very slowly to change. In recent years, meaning within the timespan of my own personal memory, this change has been accelerated with very questionable results. I am constantly narrating here how as researchers we are constantly on the verge of burnout but hardly given any psychological support, much less reward. I won't go again through the tragedy of the chronically exploited younger staff. Rather, the focus is why we have degrees at all.

The old focus was that degrees exist to enhance the territory of knowledge, and, so, 'Filología Inglesa' first saw the light in 1952 in the Universidad de Salamanca because it was such a shame that English language and Literature were so woefully unknown in Spanish scholarly circles. The initial reason why 'licenciaturas' were established, then, was self-centred in the sense that the presence of the student body justified the tenure of the staff, so that they could generate knowledge mainly for scholarly use. The

students attended university to benefit from, so to speak, the fallout of academic life and perhaps enter it themselves. Students who did not pursue an academic career (95%) were supposed to get an education, not necessarily professional training. The education was supposed to give them general credentials to find a job beyond the specific knowledge they had earned. A 'licenciatura' in 'Filosofía y Letras' meant that you were competent, intelligent and capable of further learning.

The current model—established in 2009 after an intermediate period in which 'licenciaturas' were reduced to four years rather than five and before MA degrees were established in Spain—is radically different. Now universities need to justify their very existence depending on what they contribute to society via results, usually connected with the employability of students. Let me give you an example. Suppose you have, as we do, a German language and Literature unit, which contributes to our BA degree and to others in the Facultat. As long as student demand of German reaches a minimum, this section survives. If, as happened in Universitat Rovira i Virgili years ago, the demand dwindles dramatically, then the section is closed, regardless of the research it contributes. There is usually a time of transition during which the State will wait for the tenured teachers to retire and will hire no more staff (or only associates that can be dismissed). But, yes, whole segments of knowledge can be lost in this way, and I'm not talking about obsolete science.

In this market-oriented new model, then, teaching matters more than research when deciding which Departments you keep alive and, what is more, even though universities are formally research centres, the cost of keeping certain units open is calculated on teaching-related statistics. Now, here's the problem: we know that we're giving our students an education, but we do not know what it is for. Furthermore, if you think about it, BA degrees should not worry about employability because they exist as a bridge between secondary education and the advanced education provided by MA degrees and doctoral programmes. Technically, then, the burden of employability should fall on the MAs, which is not an exaggeration considering that old 'licenciaturas' were five-years long, thus the sum total of UK-styles BA and MA programmes (3+2 courses).

Employability is a very tricky question for a BA degree in English Studies: 75% of our students will end up being secondary-school teachers, whether they have a vocation or not, but 25% are open to other possibilities (jobs in management or in professions connected with publishing, translating, writing and so on). We cannot formally train our students to be teachers, for this task corresponds to the School of Education (though, paradoxically, they train mainly primary school teachers). So, we proceed on the basis that whatever our students learn will be later applied to their future profession through some intermediate stage, whether this is a formal MA or direct work experience.

As a Literature teacher, then, I train my students in skills that are 100% of direct scholarly application, should they decide to pursue an academic career, but that are supposed to be also of general applicability in any professional occupation requiring intellectual abilities (reading and interpreting texts, seeking sources, giving presentations, writing reports, and so on). I use a mixture of the traditional and the new model. I cannot, however, organize my teaching around the idea that I'm training students for

professions they don't even know they will have. As for teacher-training, well, I wasn't trained myself: I made a good note of what my teachers did and then copied what I think worked best. Other than presenting myself as a model to follow or not, I don't know how to train future teachers, thinking besides that they might teach secondary school, which I have never taught, and against a mid-21<sup>st</sup> century background with God knows what kind of classroom technology (and students!).

Teamwork is an obsession with current dictators of educational rules that in practice all students hate. This is why they don't like participating in class discussion, which is our basic, most uniformly used type of teamwork. I keep on telling my students that classroom work is collaboration and that I'm not there to lecture (only sometimes) but to guide them in collective discussion—if only for the sake of practising English. They do know that a class is a team which must work together but this is resisted every day in class. If I ask my students to work in pairs or in small groups of up to four and then walk around and talk to each little group that works well (though our classroom space is hardly designed for that). Ask them, however, to work in teams on a project and you have that typical situation: out of, say, five students, two do nothing, two do a little and one does everything, which ends up benefitting the lazy ones. Perhaps that is realistic training for actual job-related situations, but students tend to see teamwork as frustrating (at least in this little corner of the university where I work). This is why I have tried other kinds of teamwork: producing collective volumes as e-books (available from the digital repository). The problem, I'm told, is that this is not visible in the official syllabus. Well, it is not because I'm still experimenting (this year, for instance, I'm thinking of applying project-oriented teaching to second year teaching, rather than third and fourth).

Digital skills—here I feel like screaming...!!! Teachers born in the 1960s and before should be learning digital skills from the digital natives in their classroom and not the other way around. We have self-trained at each point since the internet first reached Spain (in 1996) to use e-mail, online catalogues and databases, blogs, websites and the social networks. I don't understand, then, why we should be made responsible for the digital training of our students—persons who often sit in class compulsively checking their cellphones rather than listening to us. Just let me explain that I do want to have my students collaborate in a booktube channel and produce basic documentaries to accompany papers or dissertations. However, when I asked my university for help to learn the required skills, they basically told me that they lack the budget and the facilities. I asked next the student delegation to find me a student with advanced audiovisual know-how who could train me and other students, supposing that we must have some vloggers in our classrooms. So far, no luck. I contacted then a professional company, but they asked for 1000 euros which with our ridiculous yearly budgets is an impossible quantity (we get now one fourth of the money I could use back in 2005-8 as Head of Department and that was already very little).

I am, in short, plain angry to be constantly judged, as a teacher and as a researcher, by standards that can never be met because they are fundamentally elusive. Also, the other way round: I have the suspicion that the standards chosen are elusive so that we can never be up to task. It's this constant feeling that you're working hard to run a 100-

metre race and when you get to the starting line than you're told that actually you must also compete in other events for which you didn't know you had to train. If you manage you get some inkling, by the next time you're assessed rules have, anyway, changed again.

The market, in short, wants to invest as little as possible in educating citizens, preferring instead to train workers that must have skills universally employable so that they can be moved around from one badly paid job to the next. The market wants, in addition, to have us, university teachers, assume the burden of passing on skills for which we have not been trained, while at the same time it undermines the respectability of the academic skills we do possess. I often feel that the message I'm being sent is that, as a Literature teacher, I am a useless luxury and, as such, society would be better off without me. And I'm not speaking here of myself personally but of all Literature teachers in the world.

I must, then, justify how what I teach trains the university's clients (are they still students?) for employability, teamwork and the use of digital technologies. Well, I have a double answer to that: a) obviously and b) not at all, depending on whether you are willing to value what we, Literature teachers do, or not. We can always improve our teaching in relation to our own subject needs, but we cannot turn critical scholarly work on William Shakespeare into skills generally needed for current jobs. It is the employers' responsibility to train employees, not ours, for we're educators—and that's a different set of skills. Don't make us, then, shoulder a burden which belongs to the market, not to the university.

## **27 NOVEMBER 2018 / RESEARCHING WOMEN'S WRITING: WHEN WILL INTEGRATION HAPPEN?**

Last week I gave a lecture in Bilbao within a cycle devoted to publicising women's work as scientists. My lecture was called "Women Scientists that Tell Stories: New Humanist SF Written by Women" which sounds worse in English than it does in Spanish ("Científicas que narran historias: Nueva ciencia ficción humanista escrita por mujeres"). You can see it on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/fTZqG0II-k>), and I hope you enjoy it!

Then two days later, I gave another talk, this time for the SF Catalan convention, or CatCon 2, on robosexuality as an emerging identity in real life and also about its representation in fiction (with a focus on 'male' robots). In the Bilbao lecture I spoke about Vandana Singh, Nieves Delgado and Carme Torras, whereas in the CatCon lecture I spoke again about Delgado and another woman author, Montserrat Segura, but also about a man: Isaac Asimov.

The strategies are, as you can see, quite different: a) publicising women's work, b) discussing a topic in relation to both women's and men's writing. This has set me thinking hard about which of these two strategies is better and I must declare that I cannot solve this riddle: I prefer mixing authors in the discussion of a specific topic but I

realise that we still need to make women much more visible. I wonder, however, why it is taking so long and whether we have collectively taken, as feminists, the right path. I'm afraid we have not.

I have been pondering this matter for a long time (you may check, for instance, "Hacia una nueva utopía en los Estudios de Género: El 'problema' del feminismo (en la ciencia ficción)", <http://ddd.uab.cat/record/176095>) but still feel stuck in the same dilemma. As a feminist woman, I feel that I do women writers a disservice by asking for an end to the separate study of their work. And so, for the same reason, because I'm a feminist woman, I take up all the chances that come my way to explain why women should be better valued and discussed separately to increase their visibility. I do not particularly enjoy discussing feminism and femininity so often but if you're a woman this is what you're invited to do. I recently heard SF author Becky Chambers say that she's happy discussing gender but she'd rather discuss spaceships and I sympathise, particularly because men are hardly ever invited to discuss gender and often monopolize the public discourse on spaceships (if you know what I mean).

Although the feminist approach to studying women's writing had been used long before, among others by Virginia Woolf, for convenience's sake I'll date the academic project of tracing back the presence of female authors in the History of Literature to Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1978). That project is already forty years old, then, with all the controversies it has generated but also with all the colossal tasks so far carried out.

We have now a variety of resources cataloguing practically all the writing women have produced from the dawn of times, perhaps only missing sixth- or seventh-tier authors. The effort to make their works available continues and will continue for decades. Let me suppose, again for convenience's sake, that it might take forty more years to fulfil the feminist utopia of bringing all neglected women back from the sexist past and into the limelight of a post-patriarchal future. Then what? Do we still continue writing monographs with the word 'women' or 'female' in the title? Or do we stop and start full integration?

I complained, perhaps too loudly, in the question time following a lecture on 18<sup>th</sup> century women's writing that the problem with the separatist strategy is that a) we don't have titles that refer specifically to men's writing, b) feminism has failed in its attempt to make the study of women's writing compulsory for male researchers. We may continue publishing volumes called *Women's Poetry of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, for instance, but this is self-defeating, for we don't have the equivalent *Men's Poetry of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. Instead, a book called *Poetry of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* written by a man is likely to be mostly about the male poets, though academic fashion, political correctness and perhaps the work of a female editor might result in the still token presence of a handful of women.

We should rewrite all the textbooks, then, for this is where the foundation for real change lies, and not only in the separatist line of feminist research. I must acknowledge, though, that when integration is fully achieved in an introduction, this produces a funny feeling. Perhaps a specialist in neuroscience should explain this to me but it seems that

once you pass the early stage as an undergrad when you learn the basics of the literary canon it is really hard to change your own vision.

Of course, this is enlarged as you learn more names and read more women writers. Yet, if you're asked about the main authors of a given period, your reply is likely to result in a string of male names. You need to stop and think, 'oh, yes, and then there were all those women'. The names of Austen, the Brontës, (George) Eliot or Virginia Woolf do come to mind because they have been canonical for a long time. But it is still easier to recall Anthony Trollope than Fanny Trollope, or Wilkie Collins rather than Margaret Oliphant. See what I mean? This is why, I insist, integration must happen at textbook level. The way I see it, that should be the focus of the feminist project.

Or, perhaps, I have all along misunderstood what academic feminism is about and integration is not at all its end. Yesterday I was interviewed by a fourth-year student of journalism and she told me that many young women involved in the current feminist movement in Spain do use feminism in the radical sense of reinforcing women's superiority over men. As I explained to her, that is precisely the reason why I tend to call myself these days anti-patriarchal rather than feminist (my feminism aims at achieving equality, not exchanging one type of inequality for another). But I digress. There is then the likelihood that part of the women involved in feminist academia are actively working in favour of gender separatism—and, yes, I'm sounding this silly and naïve on purpose, to make this choice sound the more suspect.

And, then, we have the men in Literary Studies, some truly pro-feminist and anti-patriarchal, some rabidly misogynistic and the rest carefully navigating the waters of, as mentioned, political correctness. One strategy is the one followed by Peter Boxall in a recent lecture I attended and in which he managed not to discuss identity at all, as if that was not necessary. He is one of the researchers constantly producing surveys and introductions which is why I was so aghast at the neutral tone of his lecture (which dealt with men and women writers, that's a comfort at least).

I simply don't see men like Boxall, or similar academic male luminaries, facing the issue of how to write specifically about men writers, for they needn't do that. We, women, being still subordinated in patriarchal society must consider how/why we write but men can still afford the luxury of not looking into their own masculinity and how they're positioned in relation to patriarchy, and I mean both writers and academics. I feel deeply annoyed right now thinking of this... Women like me, interested in dismantling patriarchy, are the ones, then, writing about male writers as men, which is, if you think about it, quite strange since we lack the experience of being men.

I wish we lived in post-patriarchal, post-gender times and could get over the onerous task of having to take positions that are so hard to defend. Then we could talk about spaceships—though dear Becky Chambers forgets that this is also a heavily-gendered issue. Every time I see a phallic rocket taking off, I wonder what dictates the shape: pure physics or gender issues? In contrast, in Octavia Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood*, or Xenogenesis Trilogy, the alien Oankali spaceship is an organic, fully sentient being, which often feels as a gigantic womb. You see where I'm going with this...



I cannot write here ‘in conclusion’, for I don’t know that I have reached any conclusion. I’ll continue accepting invitations to discuss feminism and women’s writing, as I work on gender integration as a teacher and a researcher. As a feminist, then, I’ll antagonize both my radical women feminist colleagues and also the recalcitrant patriarchs who think, for whatever reasons, that being a feminist entitles you to receiving constant support from the Government (does it??). I’m already working on a book about men’s writing within the context of patriarchy, so I cannot say that will be my next step. If anyone’s listening, please write inclusive introductions for, I’m fully convinced, that’s the only way to change the way we learn the canon.

And if you’re a woman fully committed to working only on women’s writing and for a female audience, well, I’m happy if you’re happy but do consider how/why male researchers can still afford to ignore your work, and simply not discuss identity in its most basic sense.

#### 4 DECEMBER 2018 / UNLEARNING ROMANTICISM, LEARNING REGENCY LITERATURE

As part of preparing for my Winter-Spring course on Romanticism, I have been reading Duncan Wu’s incisive *30 Great Myths about the Romantics* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015). I’m inwardly smiling at how little the world may care for a crisis involving a middle-aged woman teacher suddenly discovering that she has to unlearn everything she thought she knew about Romanticism. But, well, this is the crisis I’m going through. I feel blessed and fortunate to be sharing it with my co-teachers, David Owen and Carme Font, who have been in charge of the course for several years. This crisis is already resulting in very fruitful discussion with them, and I am certainly benefitting from their experience and insights: David specializes in Austen, Carme is an expert on women writers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so you see what great company I keep!

I do not intend to comment here on all the thirty myths—a kind word for lies—that Wu destroys with his razor-sharp scholarship. Some are ideas which every self-respecting feminist has been battling for years (myth 25: ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*’); others are a matter of common sense, for it is obvious that myth 5, ‘the Romantic poets were misunderstood, solitary geniuses’, is nonsense. Almost as barefaced as myth 6, ‘Romantic poems were produced by spontaneous inspiration’. Funnily, the myths about Byron are the ones I cannot stop thinking of, mostly because Wu is quite brutal with poor George Gordon. I accept with no problem, except Wu’s barely concealed homophobia, that Byron was a fat queen who preferred 15-year-old boys to women. Yet the demolition job applied to myth 19, ‘Byron was a “noble warrior” who died fighting for Greek freedom’, ends with a truly pathetic image: that of the poet dying in Greece not in the battlefield but at home, bled to death by incompetent physicians treating him for a fever caught from a tic in his dirty pet Newfoundland, Lyon. This is indeed the complete antithesis of Romanticism!

I must say that myth 14, 'Jane Austen had an incestuous relationship with her sister'—Cassandra and the author shared a bed for 25 years, it seems—though improbably lurid made me reconsider again a nagging suspicion: Austen may have been a lesbian mocking the heterosexual women of her class, desperately seeking enslavement by the gentlemen of 1810s. An idea to consider when I teach *Pride and Prejudice*... with much care, for this is what Wu is attacking: using speculation and misinformation as the basis of scholarship. One thing is inviting students to consider 'what if...?' Jane Austen had been a lesbian, and quite a different matter is accepting with no proof that this was her sexual identity and, hence, this is how we should read her books. If you find this second option preposterous (which it is!) then you'll be as surprised as I have been to discover that most assumptions about Romanticism are of that kind: empty bubbles very easy to puncture if only the right bibliography is read. For that is Wu's main message—if scholars worried to check their sources, the myths would not be perpetuated. An extremely important point to make in the age of fake news.

I'll quote two passages from Wu's 'Introduction' that call for a profound reflection. 'What we call Romantic', Wu observes, 'might more accurately be called Regency Wartime Literature were we to backdate the Regency, as some historians do, to 1788' (xiv). Anyone who has studied the early 19<sup>th</sup> century knows that, properly speaking, it begins in 1789 with the French Revolution and includes the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). I read a while back the twenty-two volumes by Patrick O'Brien narrating the adventures of Captain Aubrey and Doctor Maturin at sea during those wars, but even so I still find it problematic to connect Romanticism with war.

The problem also affects our understanding of Modernism (roughly 1910-1939) for similar reasons: the name attached to a particular movement is used for a historical period, thus breaking the neat monarch-based chronology of English Literature. 'Victorian Literature' (1837-1901) should be preceded indeed by 'Regency (Wartime) Literature' but, then, it is also followed by a mess of labels in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which contemplate Edwardian and Georgian as periods but then get lost into Modernism and Post-Modernism (rather than the Second Elizabethan Age!). The point not to forget, however, is that Romanticism belongs in the Regency Period and that this was beset by revolution and war, as was Modernism (WWI, 1914-18; Irish uprising, 1916; Russian Revolution, 1917).

The second passage: 'The point is that the contemporary perspective was different from our own. Today Jane Austen is one of the most popular novelists of all time but in 1814 no one thought she would occupy that status, nor did they suspect an obscure engraver named Blake would 150 years later be hailed as a literary and artistic genius' (xv-xvi). The writers that Wu names as popular, best-selling names in Regency Wartime Literature (let's start using the label) are not at all part of the canon that has survived, in which mostly unknown names with some exceptions (Byron, Scott) shine. I suspect that Wu cheats a little when he claims that 'The current popularity of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* would have been unimaginable to the scattered few who heard of them *when they first appeared*' (xvi, my italics), for I believe that their fame soon grew (or am I perpetuating a myth?). Yet the point he makes is equally relevant. What survives from the past is a haphazard selection no person then

living could foresee. If we could bring back a handful of common readers from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century they would be as amused (or dismayed) by our preferences as we're certain to be should we return from death in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century. What great fun it is to guess who will survive!! I wonder that gambling houses are not already offering the chance to bet, for the benefit of our descendants...

Why do the myths persist? Wu replies that 'The limpet-like persistence of some myths may be related to the illusion they draw the Romantics closer to us' (xviii) but I'm not quite convinced. It might even be the other way round: Wu's presentation of Byron as a flamboyant homosexual feels somehow more relatable than his reputation as a heterosexual Don Juan; likewise, his middle-class Keats, the well-educated Medicine student, makes more sense than the working-class apprentice apothecary killed off by a review. Wu, then, is the one approaching the Romantics to our time while debunking old and new myths (lesbian Austen!). Rather, what seems to be happening is that since the instability of the label 'Romantic' makes it impossible to understand what Romanticism truly was, we clutch at the myths, even knowing they're lies. At least they form a coherent body of knowledge, fossilized into respectability first by the Victorian critics and scholars, and later by all the rest until our days. The myths, in short, are convenient and, as we know both as students and teachers, they're also a convenient way to keep undergrads interested as they swallow with immense difficulties the poetry and the novels (we don't even touch the Romantic plays).

Wu is at his most sarcastic when he highlights the 'nuttiness of the thesis' defended among others by John Lauritsen, according to which Percy Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*. Why? Because any scholar who bothered to check the two volumes of *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, The Frankenstein Notebooks: A Facsimile Edition of Mary Shelley's Manuscript Novel, 1816-17*, edited by Charles E. Robinson (1996) could see that a) Percy contributed little and b) of no interest. Wu is specially annoyed because most of the textual evidence required not to blunder and perpetuate myths is easily accessible online. The point that he is making is transparent: all our knowledge of English Literature, beyond Romanticism, relies on bad scholarship; even worse, despite the efforts made in recent decades to correct the most glaring mistakes/lies/myths, they are still being perpetuated because nobody really cares about the truth. You may be thinking, 'well, I prefer my Byron thin, handsome, and a woman-eater' but apply lazy scholarship to other fields and we might get 'Stalin was never as big a genocidal tyrant as Hitler', a myth we should question. For, you see?, if the History of Literature is based on almost indestructible myths, surely this also applies to History, only too easy to sum up as a pack of lies. Not what you want to do in Trump's era.

How should we, then, teach Romanticism? There is no introduction yet that follows faithfully Wu's volume, which means that we're bound to teach still a myth-based version of Romanticism (a mythical version?!). I see little sense in teaching the myth and the truth together to students who know nothing about Romanticism, yet I don't feel ready to incorporate fat queen Byron into my teaching—I might be starting another myth, for all I know. Then, as Google tells me, with two exceptions in minor colleges, everyone still uses the label 'Romantic Literature' rather than 'Regency (Wartime) Literature', though I'd be happy to re-name our course at UAB. What Wu has produced, then, is a

sort of intaglio effect in cameo carving, by which you see the figure as concave or convex, depending on the light. I have reached the point when the effect is visible but, to be honest, I don't know how to proceed.

Well, I do know: hard study. I doubt, however, that I have before February the time it will take to undo 30 years of knowing the Romantic in the standard, clichéd way. And this is how myths survive: by acquiring partial, biased knowledge we are later too pressed for time—or too plain lazy!—to undo.

(PS: Now go and check myth 26, 'Women writers were an exploited underclass—unknown, unloved, and unpaid')

## 11 DECEMBER 2018 / LORD OF THE FLIES, WITH GIRLS: OF COURSE

After re-reading last week William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), simply because some classics need to be revisited now and then, I got curious about whether there was a re-telling of the story with girls, rather than the all-boy cast of characters. What I found out is that there have been two recent projects, with very different outcomes, which are very useful to comment on patriarchy.

On the one hand, American film-makers Scott McGehee and David Seigel seem to have abandoned their project, presented in August 2017, to make a new film adaptation only with girls, following a deal signed with Warner Brothers. There are, by the way, two film versions of Golding's novel, one directed in 1963 by Peter Brook, the other in 1990 by Harry Hook. A Twitter storm-in-a-teacup made it clear to McGehee and Seigel that this was a bad, unwelcome idea. A typical tweet (by @froynextdoor) read 'uhm lord of the flies is about the replication of systemic masculine toxicity, every 9th grader knows this, u can read about it on sparknotes'. Front-line feminist Roxane Gay tweeted 'An all women remake of *Lord of the Flies* makes no sense because... the plot of that book wouldn't happen with all women'. The comments by readers following *The Guardian* article (<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/aug/31/lord-of-the-flies-remake-to-star-all-girl-cast>) make for very interesting reading. The discussion, as it may be expected, focuses on whether Golding depicts specifically masculinity or generally humanity, and on whether girls would behave exactly like boys. Opinions lean towards the conclusion that the novel is indeed about masculinity, but girls are also capable of the same cruel behaviour. A crucial, bewildering paradox to which I'll return in a couple of paragraphs.

The other project is a stage adaptation of Golding's novel, presented last October by director Emma Jordan at Theatr Clwyd, Mold, later transferred to Sherman Theatre, Cardiff. A small affair (with apologies to Jordan), then, in comparison to a Hollywood production. *The Guardian* reviewer, Mark Fisher, generally praises Jordan's 'muscular and brutal production' of Nigel Williams' 1996 adaptation of Golding's novel (<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/oct/01/lord-of-the-flies-review-theatr-clwyd>). Jordan presents two novelties: the play is set in the present, not the 1950s and

the cast is all-female... but the names of the boys in the novel are kept—which is confusing. This production appears to be similar to recent Shakespearean productions with all-women casts rather than a retelling with girl characters. Another reviewer, Natasha Tripney reads, nonetheless, the characters as girls: this version ‘makes sense—there are few things crueller than a schoolgirl—but the production doesn’t capitalise on this premise’ (<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2018/lord-flies-review-theatre-clwyd/>). She complains that the production ‘lacks tension’ but welcomes it anyway, for ‘Jordan’s female-led production makes it clear that violence, tribalism and a *hunger for power* are not—and have never been—the sole preserve of men’ (my italics).

First lesson: it is fine for women to experiment with texts written by men by altering the gender of the original characters BUT it is not acceptable for men to do the same, as, regardless of their intentions, it is automatically assumed that the result will be sexist. If I were McGehee, I would hire Jordan as script writer and in this way the problem of who has the right to retell Golding’s story would be solved. Now, let’s address the problem of whether the plot of Golding’s novel would or wouldn’t work with girls.

I haven’t read Golding’s most immediate referent, *The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean* (1858) by Scottish author R. M. Ballantyne. This is a Robinsonade (as the stories inspired by Defoe’s classic are called) about three stranded English boys who cope very well with the tasks of survival and in several encounters with evil Polynesian tribesmen and British pirates. Golding, it appears, decided that in his own tale, his English boys would carry evil inside, and this would emerge as they gradually detach themselves from civilization and from the hope of rescue. A sort of *Heart of Darkness* for boys, then, but without Kurtz’ excuse of having fallen under the allure of tribal adoration and of the dreamy jungle.

Is Golding’s novel a story about masculinity? Yes and no: it is a story about how *patriarchal* masculinity overwhelms the positive influence, or rather lead, of *non-patriarchal* masculinity over the community. This is NOT a story about how *all men* react, but a story about how *some* men (Jack and his hunters), who are already patriarchal, make the most of the circumstances to impose their rule over other men with a far more rational worldview (Ralph and Piggy).

I agree with reviewers who downplay the public-school background of Golding’s tale but, since this will help, let me rephrase his plot with other well-known names. Suppose that only the boy students of Rowling’s Hogwarts got stranded on a desert island (where magic does not work...). Initially, all would follow Harry Potter’s Gryffindor-inspired, sensible leadership but the moment Draco Malfoy declared that Slytherin should rule, the same split that takes place in *The Lord of the Flies* would follow. Both Harry and Draco are men (well, boys) but this does not mean that they have a common understanding of what masculinity is, and this is what happens with Ralph and Jack in Golding’s novel. What the author is criticizing has been usually called evil but it is actually patriarchy, even though people are now stubbornly calling it ‘toxic masculinity’, a label which is confusing, distracts attention from patriarchy and is useless to discuss women’s own hunger for power.

As soon as cocky Jack appears leading his submissive choirboys, we can already see that he is trouble. When, two thirds into the novel, most of the boys have joined Jack's tribe of hunters, Ralph asks Piggy—whose real name Golding, very cruelly, does not reveal—'what makes things break up like they do?'. They do not have a clear answer, but I do: it's the sense of entitlement that patriarchal men act by. This is the key to everything we call evil, a befuddling pseudo-mystical concept I totally reject. The non-patriarchal, non-toxic men like Harry Potter or Ralph are not interested in power and lack that sense of entitlement but, since they are not as violent, they tend to fight a losing battle. If the providential officers had not appeared in the nick of time to rescue the boys, Ralph would have been hunted down and impaled, as Jack intends (remember the stick with two points that his lieutenant Roger makes?). Harry is almost destroyed by the mission Dumbledore gives him to cancel out Voldemort's genocidal sense of patriarchal entitlement, but—and we must admire Rowling for that—he does so on his own terms, using intelligence rather than murderous violence.

So, can we have *The Lord of the Flies* with an all-female cast? Of course, we can! Girls would be split in exactly the same way as the boys in the novel, BUT not because girls are essentially cruel or because they behave like boys. It's because *everyone*, of any gender or genderless description, feels the pull of patriarchy and its promise to reward a personal sense of entitlement to power. So far, patriarchy has pushed women out of the rat race to accrue power, but the more conquests feminism makes, the more women we see acting out their own lust for power, and not at all to help other women.

I have recently heard Michael Dobbs, the author of the original *House of Cards* novels and Margaret Thatcher's Chief of Staff (1975-1987) praise her thus: 'But it was that drive and that anger, that determination, that obsessiveness that drove her on to achieve things which most of her people could not'. She stood out among other women and among other individuals of her low middle-class background but only to claim power for herself, not to do any good to others like her. I can easily see a girl named Maggie play the part of Jack in a female retelling of *Lord of the Flies*, and a girl called Katniss resisting her.

The confusion springs, then, from this idiotic, harmful, essentialist supposition that *all men* behave in one way and *all women* in another, which does not take into account the OBVIOUS intra-gender divisions. If anti-patriarchal men like Ralph were not constantly opposing patriarchal men like Jack, we would still be living in prehistoric times and women would be much, much, much worse off than they are now. It is, then, both silly and extremely dangerous to go on speaking in essentialist terms of men and women when, actually, human beings are divided along power lines.

Patriarchal individuals, whether men or women (or genderfluid), endorse the idea that society is a hierarchy determined by the degree of power each person enjoys (or lacks). Non-patriarchal individuals, whether men or women (or genderfluid) are not being motivated by a hunger for power, and so they (we!) prefer communal circles to hierarchical pyramids. This looks very much like the political division between right and left, but let's not be naïve: many individuals in the left also seek power (remember

Stalin?). I'm talking about something that transcends political divisions even though politics depends very much on it: the allure of power (for domination).

Golding published *Lord of the Flies* in 1954, at the end of the first decade in the Cold War. His boys are evacuees from some unnamed British colonial outpost, which they must leave following the explosion of a nuclear bomb in a war never mentioned, nor explained. The author had then a very good reason to abandon the optimistic Victorian view of Christian gentlemanliness in *Coral Island* and replace it with a Conradian pessimism. His novel is supposed to link tribal primitivism with modern barbarian so-called civilization, and it is clear to me that the target of his attack were the patriarchal men like Jack or like the makers of the bomb, not the good guys like Ralph. What is very, very sad in Golding's work is that it came out the same year as Tolkien's final instalment in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Return of the King*. Why is it sad? Because, though profoundly damaged, Frodo manages to defeat Sauron with the help of his loyal Samwise and other friends in the Fellowship of the Ring. Instead, Ralph loses Piggy and has no chance at all of becoming the hero that will stop the villain Jack. He is radically alone, as Frodo never is—this is what is sad.

The lesson to learn, then, from Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is how to protect ourselves from patriarchal fascists like Jack (or his imaginary female counterpart Maggie) by listening to the voice of reason. Like Piggy, who embodies it in the novel, this is a voice constantly bullied and denied—even by the supposedly sensible persons. Piggy begs Ralph not to tell the others that he is known by that body-shaming, awful nickname but he non-chalantly lets it be known, thus paving with this act the way for Piggy's final murder. I do not mean that Ralph wants Piggy dead but that failing to protect reason leads to appalling consequences for all.

A last word: dystopias like *Lord of the Flies* are born of despair but make us cynical, which is why their current proliferation is so dangerous. If you want to redraw Golding's tale changing gender lines, make the community of children varied (including boys and girls, hetero and LGBTBI+). Tell how Jack and Maggie try but fail to establish heteronormative racist tribal patriarchy, and then have Ralph and Katniss and Hermione (in Piggy's role)—choose their colour—organize the whole community to resist their rule. If this works, Jack and Maggie end up isolated in a corner of the island, where, with some luck, they kill each other in a fight to determine who is more powerful; the rest build a democratic community based on mutual respect and tolerance. This works so well that when their adult rescuers appear it, they join it.

See how easy it is to think of a utopia that works? What, you find it sentimental? Well, some feeling would be welcome in our age of narcissistic unfeeling and hypocritical dystopian pessimism. And fight patriarchy not masculinity!

## 8 JANUARY 2019 / REMARKABLE BOOKS: A LIST TO END AND BEGIN A YEAR

This post comes in a little late, as it is customary to close the passing year with a list of the best and to begin the new one with a list of the most expected books. This is not, at any rate, what I intend to offer here, as I gave up long ago any attempt at keeping up with the overwhelming mass of literary novelties. Every December I discover horrified that I have missed all that was (apparently) worth reading the previous eleven months and, so, it is only then when I select a few titles for the bottomless list of what I'd like to read. Add to this the classics, the accidental discoveries, and the odd, neglected books that surface from reading other books. I do wonder how the readers who appear to know what is relevant every year do manage. Or is it all marketing?

I keep track of everything I read since the tender age of 14 and this is the closest I have ever come to keeping a regular diary (excepting this blog). It is always exciting to close the list for the year and go through the books read each month to recall the best moments spent in the company of intelligent minds. And it is also exciting to open a new list and wonder how it will be filled as the months to come pass (or, rather, fly!). I don't know that this is an average measure of any use beyond my personal experience but the 2018 list throws this result: I have much enjoyed about 40% of the books I have read but, basically, put up with the mediocrity of the remaining 60%. I mean here the books I have entirely read for I don't count the many books I have abandoned, a figure that grows every year as I get more and more impatient with writers who do not care for producing good prose (also with those who care about the prose but not the content).

I'm not sure how this works for my academic colleagues in Literary Studies but about 50% of all the books I read each year are novels; the rest may also include fiction (short stories) but are mostly non-fiction and academic essays. No poetry, shame on me. Most of the worst books I read are novels and most of the best books are non-fiction, which either means that my own personal preferences are changing as I age, or that generally speaking, novels are overrated and non-fiction undervalued.

Thus, if you ask me to choose just one of the 90 books in my 2018 list, I cannot hesitate: every person on planet Earth should read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1966), the non-fiction book that explained to the world how 1940s-1950s science had horribly polluted the whole environment with its pesticides and other venoms. I must seriously wonder what is wrong with our education since it has taken me so many years to get to this book, which I have only read because it kept surfacing in many academic works on science fiction. Why we think that reading such and such novel is more important than reading *Silent Spring* is a matter that we need to address urgently.

The justification used to be the artistic enjoyment supposedly found in reading novels but I find that few current novelists have either the literary skills or the intellectual equipment required to produce masterpieces, whereas the best essays (why has this been word abandoned for non-fiction??) contain both good, solid prose and admirable brainpower. Also, being myself a writer of academic work, I appreciate the hard work



that often comes into writing non-fiction, and in comparison to which fabulating novels seems a far less daunting task.

I have, then, much admired this past year books as diverse as David Grann's *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Jungle* (2010) and Judith Flanders' *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (2004). And taken off my imaginary hat before gigantic achievements such as Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) or Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), which need to be revisited now and then. I have likewise revered Ian Kershaw's work in *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (1987) and, on the literary front, absolutely loved John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth* (2003) and Humphrey Carpenter's *The Angry Young Men: A Literary Comedy of the 1950s* (2002). Sometimes books talk to each other without the authors knowing it in the individual experience of readers and, so, I find that Pavla Miller's short but intense *Patriarchy* (2017) complements very well Madeleine Albright's *Fascism: A Warning* (2018)—another book I would include in our basic education together with Carson's.

Unfortunately, I don't read illustrated books for children—I say unfortunately because we adults stupidly miss in this way the most beautiful books published each year. My personal award for prettiest book read in 2018 goes then to the British Library's *Harry Potter: A History of Magic* (2017), the companion to the recent exhibition, and a book that manages to be highly informative and a true visual pleasure. Finally, I have already enthused here about Pablo Poó's *Espabila chaval* (2017), worth one hundred novels because of his impeccable understanding of what is wrong with current secondary education or, rather, with under-18 students.

How about the fiction? Well, whereas I would award the books above named an A or A+ (or 4 to 5 stars in Amazon's and GoodReads' parlance), the best novels I have read are, with few exceptions, B+ to A-. I find, anyway, that recommending novels is harder than recommending non-fiction/essays for whereas all readers should read *Silent Spring* to be informed, regardless of whether it bores them or no, with fiction boredom does play a bigger role. Thus, I can insist that you should read Albright's *Fascism*, but I have fewer elements to argue that you should read Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), the novel that best narrates what she discusses. I find Lewis' tale very exciting but, then, you might not. Take, then, the following list as a very personal record of the fiction that has kept me turning pages, sometimes for hours.

Margaret Oliphant's *Hester* (1883) is a splendid Victorian novel about a woman's failure to pass on to the next generation the power she has acquired by accident. John Masefield's *The Box of Delights* (1935) is a novel for children that many connect with *Harry Potter* but that is worth reading on its own, if possibly re-visiting the 1980s TV adaptation. I don't particularly like the work of Doris Lessing, but I have found much to enjoy in my second reading of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974). I can say the same about Lucia Berlin's short stories in *A Manual for Cleaning Women* (2016)—which everyone praised so highly a while ago—and young Abi Andrews's *The Word for Woman is Wilderness* (2018), a mixture of fiction and non-fiction which is simply awesome.

André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) and Michael Chabon's *Moonglow* (2016) are the novels I would award an A, a mark I will also award to Octavio Salazar Benítez' *Autorretrato de un macho disidente* (2017), if only because it is a brave, singular book which too many readers will miss.

Forget Kevin Spacey and the American TV series and do read Michael Dobbs's original trilogy: *House of Cards* (1989), *To Play the King* (1992), *The Final Cut* (1995). If possible, see the author speaking in any of the videos available on YouTube, he's a most interesting gentleman! So is John le Carré, who cannot do female characters well but kept me up for hours one night reading his *The Secret Pilgrim* (1991), a fusion of the novel and the short story collection that works very nicely. I was also thrilled by Robert Harris' *Fatherland* (1992), which has so many points in common with Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937) but is also a great thriller—and I speak as a reader who is not really into crime fiction. My one favourite author, Ian Rankin, has published this year possibly his best John Rebus novel, *In a House of Lies* (2018), a subtle tale suggesting that Mr. Jekyll has already overpowered Dr. Hyde. Following Rankin's suggestion, I read Lawrence Sanders' *Everybody Dies* (Matthew Scudder #14) (1998). Again: see the author on YouTube, what a lesson in writing!

For those of you who like SF, as I do, I must mention Stanislaw Lem's *Cyberiad: Fables for the Cybernetic Age* (1965), Vandana Singh's *Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories* (2018) and Richard K. Morgan's Martian novel *Thin Air* (2018). I found the tales in the collective volume by women authors *I Premio Ripley. Relatos de ciencia ficción y terror* (2017) very good. And was totally surprised by Iraqi author Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2016), a novel translated from the Arabic by Jonathan Wright which narrates the efforts of a local man to give peaceful rest to the victims of terrorist bombings by assembling a corpse out of their bodily remains. A corpse that is suddenly animated...

Do read *Silent Spring*. On second thoughts, do read *Fascism: A Warning*. It is even more urgent. And share with other readers what you love, for those books truly worth reading are too often by-passed by the list of the best. Life is too short to waste on bad books...

## 15 JANUARY 2019 / CAMERON AND SIMON: LESSONS IN COMING OUT

[Warning: Spoilers ahead!]

I first heard about *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2012), a novel by Emily M. Danforth (without capitalized initials), and *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky Albertalli reading reviews of their film adaptations. The former, directed by Desiree Akhavan from a screenplay co-scripted with Cecilia Frugiele, has the same title as the novel. The latter, directed by Greg Berlanti and adapted by Elizabeth Berger and Isaac Aptaker, has a different title: *Love, Simon*. Both films were released last year, 2018. *Miseducation* won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, which is why it has attracted more

critical attention; its IMDB rating is, however, only 6.7, in comparison to *Love, Simon's* 7.7. Since I haven't seen the films (yet), here I focus on the novels.

Both books are debut novels (winners of the William C. Morris Debut Award) originally published by Balzer+Bray, a HarperCollins label which specializes in young adult fiction. And both deal with the coming out of an American teenager. They seem to me, however, very different texts in style, content and approach. *Miseducation* is a literary novel, which is not surprising given the author's training: an MFA in fiction (University of Montana) and a PhD in creative writing (University of Nebraska–Lincoln); she teaches creative writing and Literature (at Rhode Island College, Providence). In contrast, Becky Albertalli used to be a clinical psychologist specialized in children and teens before becoming a full-time writer. Her *Simon* is far less ambitious as a literary novel though, surprisingly, it made it to the National Book Award Long List (for Young People's Literature). A major difference, and the source of much controversy, is that whereas Danforth is a lesbian narrating the coming out of a lesbian teen, Albertalli is a heterosexual woman telling the story of how gay Simon comes out. Cameron's story is rather bitter, Simon's bubbly and happy.

Danforth's novel has some autobiographical aspects, as she has granted, though she denies that Cameron's experience mirrors her own. Author and character are natives of Miles City, in Montana (population a modest 8410), where the novel is mainly located. I usually read this as a negative sign: intense descriptions of one's own small town in a debut novel tend to mean that the author has no other story to tell. We'll see.

Danforth uses 470 very long pages to tell a rather simple story: Cameron Post is 12, in the early 1990s, when her parents die in a car crash—while she kisses a girl for the first time. Her unacknowledged, untreated sense of guilt prevents her from properly mourning them, and also from defending herself when she becomes the ward of her conservative maternal aunt Ruth. A heterosexual girl Cameron gets entangled with, when both are about 16, reports their first and only sexual encounter to her mother and, appalled, Ruth sends Cameron to a religious institution which offers conversion therapy (the novel's implicit addressee is a progressive person, of course, and we know this cannot work). The last third of the novel concerns Cameron's stay in this place, subjected to the increasingly absurd sessions with her bigoted therapist, Lydia, as she plots her escape with fellow sufferers Jane and Adam. Cameron eventually visits the site of her parents' accident, finding closure for her mourning, though it is unclear whether the escapade with her new friends will come to a happy end.

This is a rather flimsy plot that could have been told far more efficiently in 350 pages, as many other readers have noticed. The prose is beautifully crafted, but it often hinders the advancement of the scant plot. It screams at every page 'look at me, I'm a sensitive, nuanced writer', who learned her lessons well. Two caveats, then: I wonder why no editor cut this extra-long text and, more importantly, I wonder how much damage creative writing courses are inflicting. Reading *Cameron* this seems obvious: the subject matter asked for an acerbic style, less prettiness, and more insightful storytelling. Plot, tone and message end up muddled. I expected rampant villainy to colour the

characterization of the obnoxious Ruth and Lydia, but I was left instead with a confusing impression that they meant well but were misguided by their Christian values.

I have not read yet *Boy Erased: A Memoir*, by Garrard Conley, and the object of a yet another recent film adaptation (directed by the truly interesting Joel Edgerton) and cannot say how the memoir and the novel compare. Conley tells the story of his own religious conversion therapy, forced upon him by his father (at that time about to be ordained as a Baptist Minister). One thing I can say is that I learned practically nothing about this totally discredited way of 'curing' individuals of their own natural sexual inclinations reading Danforth's novel. She reduced this bizarre but important issue to the personal quirks of Ruth and, above all, Lydia, without providing in any way her young readers with information, and much less guidance, to resist being ill-treated in this way. This fuzziness was even more horrific to me than what they actually do, also because Cameron Post is very far from being a rebel in a way a real teenager might recognize. If the novel had focused more narrowly on the ugly issue of conversion therapy, it might work, but as it is everything gets diluted by Danforth's artistic ambition. My personal impression, then, is that this is a failed novel containing two possibly great novels: one about conversion therapy and the other about Cameron's process of mourning—which in the end seems to be the main issue.

I also found in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* much coyness in the treatment of lesbian sex. Once you read Sarah Waters, anything else seems coy but Cameron's sexual awakening is so limited that you wonder whether the word 'miseducation' also extends to this. 1993 is pre-internet prehistory but, even so, Cameron seems very little informed about lesbian sex. Her Seattle girlfriend, who boasts of being a progressive, well-connected lesbian, is not really much better informed. Whether you are a lesbian or another kind of reader, you are left pretty much in the dark about the many pleasures of this kind of sexuality. When interesting things finally happen, the encounter is terrible for Cameron, both in its development and its consequences. I wonder how many teen lesbian girls must have felt saddened and even scared, rather than encouraged, in view of this tepid approach and also because conversion therapy is not sufficiently described nor opposed.

Albertalli is much more fun but even worse at describing sex. She reminded me of J.K. Rowling in *Harry Potter*, and her awkwardly limited way of narrating the sexual awakening of the Hogwarts teens. I'm very much aware that Rowling is far, far worse since she completely excluded gay sex from Harry's universe, a pathetic oversight which countless readers have corrected with their abundant slash fiction. Albertalli's novel is quite different in that sense but her openly focusing on a gay teen does not mean that she is comfortable describing gay sex. The worst moment happens when Simon finds himself alone for the first time with his love interest (I won't disclose the name, for this secret is the core of the novel). Believe it or not, they kiss and caress their naked chests as they lie on Simon's bed. Yet, rather than masturbate each other, as one would expect of two 17-year-old gay boys (I think), Albertalli has each go to the bathroom separately. The words she uses are not very different from my own plain phrasing.

These are novels for young adults and the case is that adolescents—or teenagers, whatever you prefer—usually have their first full experience of sex (i.e. attempting to give each other an orgasm) around the age of 16 or 17. What Cameron and Simon do at that age corresponds to an earlier age, which is puzzling. Or one of the unstated rules of young adult fiction: discuss sex but describe it only coyly. Do I sound like an adult, heterosexual voyeur asking for some teen porn? I hope not! The point I'm making is that, in my view, the experience of coming out as narrated in fiction must be focused not only on acceptance by the corresponding social circle (or rejection, as happens to Cameron) but on the presentation of homosexuality as fun, pleasing and sexy. Sarah Waters does this—why can't Danforth and Albertalli do it? Are they bound by narrow YA codes? Or by the same irksome American puritanism that has Katniss and Peeta spend chastely so many nights together during the Hunger Games? Is Rowling a sign that this YA puritanism is not just American?

*Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* is a very nice novel—not necessarily a term of praise. I do prefer stories that end well for their gay protagonists and I frankly enjoyed sharing time with adorable Simon (a word frequently used by Albertalli) than with bland Cameron. The plot, however, completely lacks the tension one is supposed to find in romance. The story, again, is very simple: Simon replies to a post on Tumblr by a gay high-school fellow, calling himself Blue, and what follows is a sincere, friendly correspondence, only mildly complicated by this boy's reluctance to give his real name. The game the author plays with her reader is straightforward: you need to guess Blue's real identity, which is not so difficult. In romantic comedy, typically protagonist A meets protagonist B, they start a promising relationship, and then a mistake leads A to lose B. Subsequently, A and B are gradually brought together, the mistake is cleared out and eternal happiness follows. Shakespeare fixed this productive model in *Much Ado about Nothing* and Jane Austen polished it in *Pride and Prejudice*. Simon's and Blue's romance, however, goes through no crisis: it's nice to see it unfold but not thrilling. As for Simon's coming out, it also lacks a significant turning point. His blackmailer cannot really hurt him nor his loving circle of friends and family is welcoming and accommodating. This might be the reason why Albertalli's novel is popular: it's an uncomplicated tale, what teen readers need to come out and the rest to learn tolerance. It seems, however, disingenuous, to take this simple road in view of the horrors that Danforth narrates (or tries to).

At one point, Simon says that everyone should come out, including heterosexuals. I have done that a few times: whenever I start teaching a Gender Studies course, I declare explicitly what I am. This is not easy because coming out as a heterosexual should never be about clearing out any suspicion that I might be gay. If I do it, this is because I want my students to feel comfortable and speak frankly about who they are. I find that declaring yourself asexual is hardest since everyone assumes that all individuals are interested in sex. But I digress. Cameron and Simon teach us that there is a happy and an unhappy way of coming out as gay and that both need to be discussed, in fiction and in life. Hopefully, one day teens won't have to come out at all, for there will be no closet and all persons will be free to be whatever they are.

## 22 JANUARY 2019 / ALL THAT RESENTMENT: UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AND SPANISH SOCIETY

My post today refers mainly to the article in *El País*, “La Universidad afronta la salida del 50% de sus catedráticos en siete años” ([https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/01/09/actualidad/1547044018\\_002135.html](https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/01/09/actualidad/1547044018_002135.html)). As it is habitual in the Spanish media, *El País* mistakes ‘catedráticos’ (i.e. full professors) for tenured teachers (i.e. those with positions as civil servants until they retire, but not necessarily ‘catedráticos’). The point raised is the same, though. By 2026, 16200 of the current full-time university teachers will have retired (almost 17%) but, here’s the nub: the current hiring system will not allow to fill in the vacant positions. The Spanish university will dramatically shrink though, in view of the constant demand, it might have to offer in a rush a high amount of tenured positions. Most likely, as we fear, 2026 will be the date when many Departments might disappear.

Allow me to comment on some on some points raised by the article, and then on some comments by the always angry readers of *El País*.

Point 1: the average age for teachers in the Spanish public university is 54. This refers only to full-time tenured teachers for, as we know, the average age for part-time associates is much lower (but also rising towards 40 since no tenured positions are being offered). I am myself 52 and was hired full-time aged 25 (yes, 27 years ago), so I am of the privileged best-paid, best-positioned teachers that aspire to retiring before 2026 (I certainly don’t want to be teaching 20-year-olds when I am past 65). Whenever I read this kind of news, I feel guilty that I am so lucky and profoundly annoyed that my professional group is presented as unusually, or even unfairly, privileged. This is the trick that the Spanish Government (and many others around the world) have been using to antagonise the different generations: the problem is not that the young are being grossly abused (they are!!) but that we, the ageing parasites, cling to our privilege.

Point 2: Pedro Sánchez’s current Socialist Government does not want to offer “an avalanche of tenured positions” that might bar access to the following generations, as happened in the Orwellian 1984. What happened then? Well, 5000 teachers with five years of experience and a doctoral degree were offered tenure in quite accessible state examinations. This, it is said, was a serious error as a blockage was formed that prevented the next generation from accessing tenure. The information, however, is not correct. In 1984, the year when I myself became an undergrad, there was a massive influx of students with working-class backgrounds (me again) thanks to Felipe González’s Socialist policies. This influx made it necessary to improvise the hiring of the new teachers; at the time, nobody thought of an alternative to the tenure system because this is how the university traditionally worked.

By 1991, when I was first hired as a teacher, the system still ran quite smoothly: you were employed full-time, with the expectation that you would write your doctoral dissertation in three years, and next face the corresponding state examination one or two years later. I should have been tenured, then, by 1997 or 1998, at the latest. What interrupted the quite acceptable ratio of generational replacement was not the

bottleneck allegedly formed in 1984 but the new restrictive policies by the conservative Government headed by José María Aznar, which started to brutally attack the public university by destroying its hiring system. Thus, to use my own example, I did between 1996 and 2002, when I finally got tenure, the same amount of work as a tenured teacher but on the basis of temporary, poorly paid contracts, while I waited. In 2008 the full-time contracts to hire junior researchers, as I was in 1991, were withdrawn. Then started the agony of the system and of the individuals who, like me, only aspire to doing their best for the Spanish university. Incidentally: replacing 17% of all employed teachers in seven years is a very acceptable ratio below 3% each year. This should liberate money that would suffice to pay for new tenured positions, which would be anyway cheaper as teachers would not be receiving money for any extra merits as after a long career. As things are now, though, this is considered too much and here lies the main problem.

Point 3: the function of ANECA and the accreditation system. Since the university system no longer could absorb the junior researchers, for lack of tenured positions, the Government raised the amount of qualifications needed to apply for one about ten years ago. The agency founded to grant national accreditations, ANECA (and other regional equivalents) guarantees the possession of those qualifications but has also created a fantastic amount of frustration. *El País* reports that ANECA has certified that 15000 Spanish doctors qualify for tenured positions (both 'titular' and 'catedrático') but this is far more than it is offered. Once you're ANECA-approved, the waiting can take many years, during which, if you're an associate, you might easily be dismissed by your university. I see that many of my colleagues have started signing as 'catedrático acreditado' or 'titular acreditado', which, in my modest view, is very sad.

By the way: I totally disagree with the opinion that, when we retire, there will be no sufficiently qualified personnel. It might well be that the Spanish university goes up a few notches in the international rankings, since the patient 'anecandos' know very well how to be competitive. What I see is that the 70-year-olds will be replaced, at the rate we're going, by 50-year-olds with waning energies, past their prime in some specialities which require the stamina of the 25-35 young. After a time of restrictions, in which only 10% of the positions occupied by tenured teachers could be offered again, the Government has finally allowed universities to replace all their teachers. Yet, without better funding, this cannot be done. What I say: many brilliant researchers now in their 40s will still have to wait long years for tenure. Only 2.3% of all current 'titulares' like myself (i.e. senior lecturers) are younger than 40. Of course, many researchers in the 40-50 bracket are hired rather than tenured, but, even so, the case is that students aged 18-22 are being taught by their grandparents' generation!

Now, three comments from readers (there are 270).

Comment 1: some countries, a reader says, would take the chance as a "golden opportunity" to replace the "endogamic, stagnant" Spanish teaching body. Thank you very much on behalf of the generation currently doing our best to educate students who are amazingly reluctant to being educated and to do, besides, research at levels never known in Spain before the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is extremely satisfactory to receive so much support from the society that we serve and to be told, besides, that anyone younger

would be better prepared. By the way, dear reader: the article does not refer to the massive *dismissal* of currently employed teachers but to our *retirement*. We do expect to be replaced by much better personnel, of course, but the point the article is making is not that we *should retire* but that the younger generation *should be employed* in adequate conditions. Not the same.

Comment 2: who cares, a reader writes, if the public Spanish university disappears? There are not sufficient students, anyway, to maintain a “bunch of lazy, overpaid guys, while the mass of workers lives in miserable conditions”. Thank you again, on behalf of my colleagues and myself. The whole point of the 1984 university revolution was to guarantee the higher education of the working classes so that they could be critical with their life conditions, including employment, and socially mobile upwardly. The 2008 crisis was used to destroy the university hiring system following the same abusive economic policies that have reduced the life of those born after 1985 to a constant struggle to survive. I am well aware that I am a luxury but what we should be demanding is not an end to the Spanish public university but an end to all the ultra-capitalist policies that are making the rich richer and the poor poorer. You might say that a university education does not guarantee any upward social mobility (the upper classes have done all they can to hinder it) but imagine for one moment a Spain with only ultra-expensive private universities and a paltry scholarship system, possibly much worse than what we have now. How’s that an improvement on the lot of the working classes? The upper and the middle classes can choose between the public and the private university, either in Spain or abroad. But, how do you allow the talent of working-class individuals to flourish? Aren’t you interested?

Comment 3: (with this one I must agree). “Spanish society does not value research”, nor any merits attached to it. This is possibly the key to the whole matter: the comments elicited by this article show a colossal miscommunication between those of us who take university research and teaching seriously and those who, unaware of what we actually do (or in some cases rejected by the system), show enormous hostility at what they assume to be our privileged positions. Reading the comments you can see how the colleagues that try to explain our job face an adamant dislike, even hatred, based on immovable premises: we get tenure aided by a close circle of accomplices though we lack sufficient merits, and the little we do does by no means justify the enormous salaries we are paid. Of course, to someone paid 800 or 1000 euros a month, a salary of between 2500 and 4500 (these figures are public) might seem stratospheric. Also, the very idea of tenure. It is funny to see, though, that nobody disputes what football players, top models, influencers of all kinds and the CEOs that kills thousands of jobs at the drop of their hat are paid. Supposing, then, that in the next seven years a new generation is given tenure, this is what they’ll find: generalised resentment. Just what one needs to offer good teaching and progressive research.

We’re trapped, then, in a vicious circle: any defence of the Spanish university as a necessary public service and of their under-50 workers as unfairly exploited sounds to lay ears as a defence of privilege. I do acknowledge that some of my colleagues shamelessly abuse their positions but a) they are the minority and will be out by 2026, b) the same can be said about many other workers—we’re not saints, and nor is anyone



else. The resentment poured on us is a product of envy, the 'national sin' as many call it, but also of the low educational levels in Spain. Germans, Britons or Americans do not seem to hate their university teachers, though they're possibly only socially respected in places like Japan (my guess). Long gone are the times when being a 'catedrático' or a simple senior lecturer elicited respect and I keep no illusions about that. But why we are so misunderstood baffles me. Also, why instead of urging the Government to solve a situation that can be indeed solved with a minimum good will the solution offered is getting rid of absolutely the only institution that can bring some social change to our chronically backward nation. Unamuno's ugly "¡Qué inventen ellos!" still has us in thrall.

## 29 JANUARY 2019 / FICTIONS WE LIVE BY: ORGANIZED CRIME, THE BANAL SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT, AND PATRIARCHY

I have just read two excellent volumes on organized crime in the UK, one by Alan Wright (*Organised Crime: Concepts, Cases, Controls*, 2006) and the other by Dick Hobbs (*Lush Life: Constructing Organized Crime in the UK*, 2013). Reading the last novel by Ian Rankin in the long John Rebus series, *In a House of Lies* (2018), I was struck by the idea that the main villain, Edinburgh's top gangster 'Big Ger' Cafferty, is quite an independent operator. He is very different, despite his remarkable power, from the classic godfather figure first named in Mario Puzo's novels on the Corleone family (and which Francis Ford Coppola famously adapted). Wright and Hobbs confirm this suspicion that there is not such a thing as a shadow crime syndicate with a rigid criminal hierarchy but, rather, a fluid, chaotic predatory business environment that appeals to violent patriarchal men. And that thrives with the complicity of consumers willing to purchase illegal goods.

Wright is a former officer with the Metropolitan Police in London, who later became a lecturer at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies of the University of Portsmouth. Dick Hobbs is an urban ethnographer, and a native London East-ender who, his web presentation claims, 'came to academic work late having worked as an office boy, labourer, dustman and schoolteacher'. Although they come, then, from radically different positions—even possibly from enemy lines—Wright and Hobbs agree that we need to be cautious about the widespread idea of organized crime. Wright, who participated in the investigation of the crimes committed by the infamous Kray twins—whom Hobbs mocks as 'marquee gangsters'—warns that 'Because of the contested nature of the concept, the sense of organisation of each group needs to be understood within its specific social, political and economic contexts. Simplistic or one-dimensional theories simply do not work in this field' (in interview with Woodiwiss & Telford 115). Hobbs goes much further, arguing that, basically, the only organized crime is the one being committed by liberal capitalism since the 1980s-1990s when it started destroying the industrial labour that allowed the working classes in Britain, at least for a very short time between the 1950s and 1960s, to maintain the illusion that a prosperity disconnected from illegality was possible.

Wright's book is written from the side of the law and, though he is very much aware of how distorted notions of organized crime may even obstruct effective policing, he offers

what Hobbs might criticize as a conventional, typically bourgeois view of criminality, in which the working classes are demonized. I must stress that Wright has also written extensively on what is usually called 'white collar' crime and that he more generally calls 'business crime', meaning the offences committed from inside the legal system. Bankia and the Gürtel scandals in Spain show, as we all know, that the higher your social position is, the bigger your chances are of committing massive fraud and theft. Since this kind of crime leaves in its wake much personal suffering, including suicide, but is not connected with bloody violence, the general public tends to downplay it, showing greater alarm in cases at a much smaller scale which do affect specific individuals as victims of physically harmful crime. At any rate, the downfall of Rodrigo Rato is useful to explain why organized crime as such does not exist; rather, criminal organizations are formed *ad hoc*, opportunistically, to take advantage of certain new chances of making an illegal profit. In Rato's case this came through the exploitation of uncontrolled areas of banking; in others far more often stereotyped as organized crime, a positive change may bring in new criminal opportunities. For instance, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 created an immense new market for drugs in Eastern Europe, closely connected with new patterns of conspicuous consumption. This meant an enormous expansion of the global drugs trade, which progressed as demand grew and not on the basis of a prior business strategy.

There are so many challenging ideas in Hobbs' volume that it is hard to know where to begin. Perhaps with my surprise at the class-related seething rage that inspires the author who, while using an implied Marxist discourse, is also writing from the heart of his personal experience as someone born and bred in a working-class family—as I was myself. Hobbs is deeply annoyed that the in-your-face criminality of capitalism is not acknowledged as the breeding ground for the predatory (his word) behaviours so heavily surveilled by the police, the Government and the media. And he has a point, though I feel that Hobbs tends to downplay the harm done to specific victims who needn't see their lives ruined by that kind of constant criminal predation.

Hobbs is very specific about when and why the phantom of organized crime was raised. 1991-2001, between the fall of the U.S.S.R. and 9/11, 'was the decade when the internationalization of American law enforcement found favour after the cessation of the cold war had opened up political and security space in Europe, and organized crime began its rapid ascent [ascent?] in importance within political discourse' (24). American paranoia, the nation's penchant for alien conspiracy theories, its racist xenophobia and 'the conflicting moral orders of urban America' (35) gave rise to the consolidation of the concept as a way for the USA to 'attempt to establish a global hegemony in which law enforcement became little more than a front for a government-backed central casting agency, stereotyping both heroes and villains' (37).

If you see Hobbs' drift, it is also hinted that the establishment of terrorism as a common global enemy after 9/11 follows a similar pattern: the US Government casts whole nations and associations of rogue individuals in villainous roles that merit universal contempt, without looking at its own role in building the global policies from which the resentment expressed through the bombings emerges. And I'm NOT justifying terrorism any more than I would justify the violence of the intensely patriarchal world on which

urban crime thrives. Here lies, actually, the main source of my disagreement with Hobbs: while I accept that it is wrong that classing 'the transgressive tendencies and hedonistic drives that lie at the heart of so much urban life (...) into the emotive and politically charged category of organized crime implies a coordinated threat far more powerful, ominous, and extensive than is justified' (38), I totally fail to see why we must put up with the brutal violence of illegality. Whether the threat comes from a world-wide mafia, supposing it exists, or from the individual mugger or rapist, the problem is the same: we live under the constant shadow of violence caused by the patriarchal endorsement of a sense of entitlement over bodies and minds which is not being addressed at all. The same applies to high-level corporate business.

Hobbs speaks of the 'banal entitlements' to the 'lush life' as the hypocritical source of much common criminality: the more affluent individuals promote 'the ambiguity that is central to the urban milieu' with their 'demand for cheap goods and contraband, whether it be drugs, cigarettes, sex, or somebody to pick up the kids from school and do a little light dusting, that drives illegal markets, rather the administratively convenient demonic catch-all of organized crime' (235). Having been an au-pair in Britain I know a little about the sense of entitlement to a good life that drives the not-so-affluent middle-classes to exploit others below them. Yet, I should say that there is an enormous difference between exploiting the craving for escape of drug users and forcing women and children to sell their bodies and be enslaved for that. A problem, then, which Hobbs does not address are the specific traits of the consumer market—in which exploitative men (not ALL men, but a certain kind) play a major role.

Hobbs claims, rather disingenuously, that although criminal culture is based on a clear machismo, women are also active in drug-dealing because it does not require the strength of other more violent types of crime (though they need to be protected by henchmen) and because the flexibility of the market makes dealers 'unlikely to be lodged into a permanent niche of some rigid patriarchal hierarchy' (155). Yet, he traces a very clear line of descent from working-class normative masculinity to post-industrial predatory patriarchy. In the past, when Britain was mostly white, East End 'youth' (not men) could enter normative working-class life 'as a reward for ending their brief dalliance with deviant subcultures' (126), and be absorbed into a 'parent culture which offered, via local and familial networks born of long-standing settlement, unionized manual work in dock-related employment, in local wholesale markets, in the building trade, or any of the multitude of proletarian options over which the local white population had acquired some measure of control' (126-7). Now that this safety net is gone, the macho cultures 'integral to traditional work cultures' do not fit the 'low-paid, non-unionized, post-industrial service sector' and are, thus 'ideally suited to predatory illegal trading cultures' (127).

This is the equivalent of saying that the 'patterns of violence and predatory interaction that have become normalized' (127), leading to beating-ups, stabbings and so on, have always been part of a boys-will-be-boys essentialist view of masculinity. They were curbed down in the past with some tolerance for the years of men's dangerously violent youth (remember Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*?) but now that family and employment have collapsed, the same patterns lie behind urban crime. Hobbs paints, I think, a rather

bleak picture of working-class lads, totally forgetting those who, despite the odds, are still opting for a life with no violence and/or for an education. In his bleak view the only constant that remains still and untouched, despite the many changes, is the violent, predatory personality of the individuals that choose crime, whether they are naturally inclined or because society offers no alternative employment.

In this sense, Hobbs' strategy to defuse racism also falls into this paradigm of presenting working-class masculinity negatively. Before post-industrial Britain was born, with Thatcher's mandates (1979-1991), the preferred concept was not organized crime but the 'underworld', 'a construct commonly used to describe violent parochial networks of working class men active across a range of illegal markets' (59) between the 1930s and the 1970s. Incidentally, this is a concept very much alive in Ian Rankin's novels and which even 'Big Ger' uses. The 'underworld' was a mainly white, native milieu whose ethnicity was not commented on because it was assumed to be a non-issue. In contrast, Hobbs explains, each new wave of foreign migration has been connected, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Irish, to 'a contamination of indigenous purity whose degraded origins lie far away in a dangerous and unfathomable "Otherstan"' (48), a racist strategy which disregards how native demand shapes illegal trade. When the different white ethnic groups (Irish, East European Jews, Italians, the Maltese and even the French) were replaced by non-white migrants (Asian, Caribbean, African) the same pattern was repeated, but with the addition of an increased racism. This was, of course, made far worse when the second and third generations, born in Britain, found themselves made socially doubly redundant by the post-industrial job scarcity. Their opportunistic criminality was then read (from the early 2000s onwards) as a sign of the re-organization of crime along imported, threatening youth gang lines.

Hobbs, then, strenuously defends that since the early 1990s the Machiavellian corporate market forces constraining British society have 'enabled the normalization of individualistic and predatory relationships, and a whole range of illegal trades has thrived as a means of acquiring and transacting capital in the void left by legal employment, organized labour, and the enabling institutions of industrial culture' (234). The criminal networks are not master-minded from above but, rather, formed on the basis of a common 'general entrepreneurial habitus' (166) needed to operate in the realm of 'unlicensed capitalism' (Hobbs 232); actually, the 'fluid parameters' of illegal trade follow 'the chaos and fragmentation of deindustrialization' (Hobbs 232). It's, to sum up, a patriarchal Darwinian world at all levels, from corporate CEOs to teen street drug dealers.

I am then more than willing to accept that 'organized crime' is, like 'global terrorism', a convenient fiction articulated by authorities around the world, following the US example, to increase citizen surveillance. What I wonder is why both Wright and Hobbs, who show such great acumen, fail to see the elephant in the room: what lies behind the efforts to legally dominate and to illegally exploit persons all over the world is the same patriarchal sense of entitlement. This is not, I insist, common to ALL men, but to the minority that rules by means of legal and illegal violence, with the complicity of many women.

If, Hobbs argues, there is a direct link between the admiration of physical strength in working-class male culture, which connects the past respectability of the industrial worker and the present glamour of the young street gangster, this needs to be examined in depth. I would admit that the brutal violence perpetrated by the CEOs that have sent whole generations into the 'no future' announced by 1970s punk is the cause of the survival strategies implemented by those who live by illegal trade. But since I am not aware of any all-female criminal networks that traffic with male sex slaves, perhaps it is time to consider the issue of gender, most particularly the predominance of male patriarchal individuals in criminal circles.

Unless, that is, men are content to see working-class masculinity so generally equated with rampant violence, whether organized or chaotic. I hope not, for this is an insult to the many non-patriarchal good men in working-class families all over the world.

## 5 FEBRUARY 2019 / REVISITING *FRANKENSTEIN*: A FEW NOTES ON DOMESTICITY, THE CYBORG AND THE POST-HUMAN

I will soon start teaching Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and although the best time to revisit this classic was last year—the bicentennial anniversary of its original publication—2019 is also a good moment to re-read it, for it is the year when Ridley Scott set his masterpiece, *Blade Runner* (1982). Both novel and film are closely connected, since *Blade Runner*, though based on Philip K. Dick's bizarre SF novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1969) is one of the myriad texts descended from *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley was the first to ask, in earnest, 'what if science could generate powerful monsters that could escape human control?' and this is a question that frames Dick's and Scott's work. And our year 2019.

I have recently reviewed an article by a young researcher in which I found some confusion regarding the use of the concepts 'post-human' and 'cyborg', and I'll use *Frankenstein* to clarify them, and then to proceed with some comments. Before I forget: I'm using the Oxford World's Classic edition (the 2008 reprint) with my students but I was aghast to see that the prologue and the bibliography are the work of one Prof. M.K. Joseph who died in 1981. I immediately e-mailed the Literature editor at Oxford UP to suggest that they commission a new introduction by someone who truly understands how Mary Shelley's mistresspiece connects with current, urgent issues, and, generally, with our science-fictional present. We'll see if they answer.

Brian Aldiss famously celebrated in *Billion Year Spree* (1973) Mary Shelley as the mother of science fiction, stressing in passing that the Gothic narrative mode is one of the foundations of sf, at least of its more technophobic branch. Re-reading the novel now, at the beginning of 2019, and possibly for the fifth or sixth time (I lose track), a few things strike me as singular. One is that Mary's tale is a frontal attack against male ambition but not necessarily a feminist text; the other is that she understood long before we had a name for it, what the post-human is.

The feminist question is obvious enough: Victor's horrific ordeal is framed by the letters that explorer Robert Walton sends to his sister Margaret so that we see how useless men's pursuit of glory, honour and fame is. The alternative lifestyle which Mary recommends is, nevertheless, one of sedate domesticity, in which women occupy a traditional position as dutiful, pre-Victorian angels in the house.

Margaret, the addressee of the letters by Captain Walton that frame Victor's and the monster's testimonials, stands for married bliss in safety and domesticity. So does Elizabeth Lavenza, Victor's adoptive sister, and doomed wife as the monster's victim; as such, she is the embodiment of the dangers that men bring into the peace of the hearth but also of total submission. Mary, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, the woman who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), among which she placed education in a central position, never mentions Elizabeth's right to attend university, as Victor and his friend Henry do. She is raised to be Victor's wife and no event in the awful tragedy that unfolds diverts her from this path, even though she could have been much better company for Victor if only she had some inkling of his overambitious scientific pursuits. Mary Shelley simply offers no critique of the patriarchal script written for Elizabeth by his adoptive parents and by Victor himself, even though the author is adamant that there is something very wrong in men's extra-domestic pursuit of glory and, using Barbara Ehrenright's phrase, their 'flight from commitment'.

I partly agree with Mary's critique of the male sacrifice of domesticity—possibly what she endured as Percy Shelley's wife—because it is often based on total selfishness. At the same time, I fail to see in which ways the world would be a better place if the many self-driven individuals (mostly men but also many women) had limited themselves to raising families. There must be a middle ground.

Reading David Grann's excellent non-fiction account of British explorer Percy Fawcett's suicidal search for the lost *City of Z* (the title of the book), I often thought that male *wanderlust* must be evidence of ingrained insanity. Yet, so many women also feel the drive to fulfil their ambitions even against all reason that it cannot simply be a matter of gender but something else that makes domesticity secondary. Why someone with small, dependent children would volunteer to travel to Mars, and possibly never return, baffles me, not so much because of the need to fulfil the dream but because of the aspiration to combine ambition and family. This is not, of course, Walton's and Frankenstein's situation, and perhaps what Mary Shelley was saying is that excessive ambition is incompatible with family life, and even with life. But, is this right? If she was imagining some low-key, pastoral idyll, as an alternative, she does not explain. At the same time, most often the likes of Victor are managing to create man-made horrors while keeping jobs and family well balanced, a possibility Mary does not contemplate, believing as she does that scientific discovery is a kind of youthful brain fever that overtakes everything else in the single individual's life. Again: there must be a middle-ground.

How about the cyborg and the post-human? The monster that Victor creates is NOT a cyborg, for a cyborg is a creature, or person, whose body combines organic and inorganic materials. Donna Haraway had read sufficient science fiction when she wrote her famous 1985 tract 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' to understand this, but it seems to me that

very often students and scholars who use the word cyborg do not really know what they're talking about, and simply assume that the word refers to any artificial creation.

Victor's monster is artificial because he is not woman-born but he is 100% organic. Frankenstein discovers first the principle of life, 'the capacity of bestowing animation', and decides next to build a superhuman body—if that body is functional, then he will apply himself to re-animating ordinary human corpses. Since preparing 'a frame' is difficult because of 'its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins' he decides to work at a larger scale: 'As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature, that is to say, about eight feet [2.40 m] in height, and proportionably large'. Mary wrote before DNA was known, and before the first transplant of a human organ was ever attempted, and we need to read this part of Victor's research as a necessarily preposterous tale; yet, the main point is that he is not using magic but science.

Once the creature is made—and in its manufacture 20-year-old Victor is amazingly successful—Frankenstein is appalled to see that he is an ugly thing: 'His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips'. Nobody has really managed to give an accurate pictorial representation of the monster, who does not look at all like the bolts-and-nuts version of Boris Karloff. Yet, I always say that Victor's problem is that while he is a great anatomist and a wonderful surgeon, he is a disaster as an artist. A failure, if you wish, as a plastic surgeon. Had he been able to combine the features selected harmoniously, we would have a very different tale of celebrity, as everyone admires a beautiful being. As for his being a giant, well, being 7 feet tall is the foundation of Pau Gasol's celebrity... The monster would be a highly valuable basketball player today!

Something that I missed in previous readings is how often the monster refers to ordinary human beings as another species, and also to himself. I am always correcting my students when they refer to the human race, for we are a species (*Homo Sapiens*) and not a race, and I was surprised to see that the monster is well aware of this crucial difference. The name *Homo Sapiens* was coined by Carl Linnaeus in 1758 but this was long before any thought of evolution was contemplated by Charles Darwin (1809-1882); many have commented on Mary's allusion to Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus (1731-1802) as the scientist whose discoveries in connection to electricity may have inspired Frankenstein's use of an engine to ignite the spark of life. Yet, to me, the monster's awareness of species difference is far more exciting.

When he demands an Eve from his maker, the creature argues: 'I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the *same species* and have the same defects. This being you must create' (my italics). Of course, I'm cheating a little bit, for Mary mixes 'species' and 'race' indiscriminately and, thus, Victor decides to destroy

the female creature he is working on afraid that 'a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror'. He is horrified to see himself as the 'pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race'. My point, though, is equally valid: *Frankenstein* is the earliest text to posit the possible replacement of *Homo Sapiens* with a man-made superior human species, that is to say, with a post-human species.

The difference between the cyborg and the post-human is, then, easy enough to understand: the cyborg has inorganic material in their body and cannot pass on any modification of this kind to their offspring; in contrast, the post-human is a different human species that will breed other individuals of the same species, and might wipe out *Homo Sapiens* if competing for the same environmental resources. As the Neanderthal disappeared, so might we, with the difference that this might happen out of our own mad shattering of the frontiers of science, if we go just one step too far and modify the human genome. Of course, neither Mary nor Victor knew about all this, but their ignorance is irrelevant (also an anachronism): the monster is a monster because we are terrified of the possibility that other humans might push us out. Victor, it must be recalled, manufactures not just someone who is big but also someone who is strong, extremely resistant to heat and cold, with an enhanced muscular capacity and, in short, far better equipped than *Homo Sapiens* to live on a radically post-human Earth.

The other novel I am teaching this semester is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), published five years before *Frankenstein*. Indeed, Austen died in 1817, while Mary Shelley was busy writing her novel, as a young mother of the boy William. I never cease to be amazed that English Literature could accommodate in the same period styles in fabulation so thoroughly different. And I wonder what would have happened if Elizabeth Bennet instead of Elizabeth Lavenza had fallen in love with Victor Frankenstein, rather than Fitzwilliam Darcy. Or if Darcy had kept a secret lab at Pemberley. Possibly, some kind of literary short-circuit!

How lucky we are that we can enjoy both Mary Shelley and Jane Austen.

## 12 FEBRUARY 2019 / ADOLESCENCE REVISITED, 1800 TO 2019

I'm in the middle of reading Jon Savage's *Teenager* (2007), a study of how youth was socially constructed between 1875 and 1945 in the USA, the UK, and some other European countries. We usually assume that 'teenager' appeared in Western culture in the 1950s but the first thing Savage's volume teaches is that this word actually started being used in 1944, in the USA, as a sort of harbinger of what youth would be like after an Allied victory in WWII: a time to enjoy yourself, and all the new pleasures of total consumerism, no matter what class you belong to. I remain, in any case, puzzled and amused by how the English -teen suffix was used to create the age category 13-19 quite artificially. Today there is talk of 'teens' and 'tweens' (tweenager!) for 10-14 kids, though I'm not sure to which category the 20-29 young adults belong to anymore. I don't hear



the word 'adulescent' so often these days, perhaps because now everyone seems to be a 'millennial' up to 35 (and young up to 40!).

I would say that in Spain we use predominantly 'pre-adolescente' (10-14) and 'adolescente' up to 21, which agrees more or less with the old legal majority (this was changed down to 18 in 1978). As happens, the word 'adolescence' is also an American creation: the contribution to our essential vocabulary of psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924), a staunch admirer of Sigmund Freud. His book of 1904 (vol. 2, 1907), *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime and Religion* is the first instance of the use of this key word.

Before the invention of adolescence, Savage explains, childhood just ended in adult age, around 18, when youth began (the Victorians did use the label 'young adult', now used for different purposes in YA fiction). For Hall, childhood ended, rather, at 13-14, with puberty, and adolescence between 21-25 (presumably when you were ready to marry). One thing that bothers me is that although Latin *adolēscēns* means 'growing up, maturing'—hence its use by Hall to define the transitional period from childhood to adulthood—it also meant originally 'lacking', which is where the Spanish verb *adolescer* comes from. The RAE dictionary warns that this verb means "having some sort of defect or suffering from some malady" and not "lacking" but the point I'm making is still valid: an 'adolescent' is, whether Hall intended it or not, an individual missing an indefinite something—arguably maturity. I've never really liked the word for that reason: it seems awfully patronizing to me. Even ageist, in current parlance.

It must be recalled that childhood is actually a late 18<sup>th</sup> century invention, fully established in the Romantic period (or Regency period, if you prefer it) and that, of course, the cult of youth is a product of the same era. Before that time, basically the ages between 0 and 17 were seen as a long preparation for adulthood, which could start as early as 10 (or earlier) for working-class children employed full time, apprenticed in some cases already at 7. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century adulthood, then, was assumed to begin as soon as an individual entered the marriage market: around 16 for the girls and 20 for the boys. Naturally, the possibility to enjoy childhood and youth would depend on each family's income—in upper-class families, the girls would also be considered marriageable adults by 16 but the men enjoyed a far more prolonged youth, including a university education, travelling and perhaps professional training (in business, the law, the military, or politics) up to the age of 30.

From my constant repetition of the word 'marriage' and similar, you might get the impression that weddings used to be the main rite of passage into adulthood—or a specific age barrier in their absence: if, as a woman, you were not married by 30, and, as a man, you were still single by 40, then you became officially a spinster or a bachelor, that is to say, a celibate adult. But I digress. Actually, the factor that introduced all the changes in the way age is socially constructed is education.

It seems quite clear from Savage's comments that childhood was invented when the need for a prolonged primary education was understood (first by upper-class families, eventually by the British state in the 1870s). Likewise, the invention of adolescence is a

by-product of the American high school system. Obviously, the biological changes leading to puberty have been a constant in the life of *Homo Sapiens* for many thousands of years but how each culture reads them varies enormously. In American culture, puberty started to overlap with secondary education at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup> and, so, Hall could come up with the idea that, in essence, an adolescent is someone being educated beyond primary school, and up to college graduation (even MA level).

Besides education, pleasure took centre stage. The four decades between 1904 and 1944 gradually established a new understanding of youth, based on a sense of entitlement to pleasure (for boys and girls), beginning with the upper classes. Young people were socially powerless, which is why (mostly the men) had to go through the generational massacre that was WWI; they reacted against this appalling patriarchal abuse by getting rid of their late Victorian and Edwardian shackles. I still marvel that couples courted up to the early 1920s in the presence of a chaperon or that parents could choose dates for their daughters when the concept was invented in America. We are not fully aware of what the 1920s supposed in terms of a youth revolution which was possibly deeper in many senses than the 1960s by comparison with what came before, though, of course, limited to a social elite. The post-1929 Depression decade of the 1930s seems sedate and conventional by comparison. I need not explain what WWII did to the young all over the world, specially the men.

The novelty of the late 1940s to mid-1950s is that the new 'teenager' could be found in any social class, whereas it seems to me that the adolescent is, in contrast, a middle- and upper-class figure. To be an adolescent you need a certain educated sensitivity and leisure to ponder in true post-Romantic fashion the unfairness of life and of the adults around you. If you're young but busy working eight to ten hours a day, you may still possess that sensitivity but far less time to engage in self-centred adolescent thinking. What you do is reinvent the concept of leisure and transform it into the time when you enjoy your hard-earned wages, either in imitation of what richer kids do or generating your own working-class version of fun, quickly catered to by the entertainment industry. Hence, the teenager.

Savage hardly ever takes into account how different youth and adolescence has always been for boys and girls—this is my main complaint against his book. Yet, apart from the constant difficulties to fix age boundaries for each period of life since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Savage highlights a recurrent problem: society's inability to control unruly young men, particularly of working-class background, whether they're called teenagers or adolescents. Many complaints against the gangs of uncontrolled, second-generation, Irish or Italian youths in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America are a dead ringer for similar fears of non-white gangs in Britain now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This connects with my previous post about Dick Hobbs' *Lush Life: Constructing Organized Crime in the UK*, a book in which he presented working-class male youth as a phase of unruliness before the acceptance of adulthood set in. Or boys will be boys, and the rest of us must put up with them, beginning with girls their own age.

What tends to be forgotten in most studies of youth is that the idea of youthful rebellion is specifically masculine: the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of intense masculine revolt against patriarchy, in the most traditional sense of the rule of the father. The French Revolution of 1789 and the Napoleonic Civil Code of 1804 resulted in new legislation that, while still binding women closely to their male legal tutors (father, husband or even son), allowed young men much more leeway than in the past. Fathers used to have total authority over sons, including matters of career choice or even marriage. Young men of the Romantic period and later steadily eroded that authority at the cost of eventually having to accept a loss of their own patriarchal authority when they became fathers. This seems on the whole positive but has an underside.

In short: the unruliness of young men is the collective price we are paying for diminishing the total authority of the patriarchal father. Western society has failed to find a better replacement for that authority—or, found it but lost it. Gentlemanliness worked for a while as a desirable way of having young men stick to a positive masculine ideal that did not undermine their personal autonomy; yet, it was lost in WWI, and we don't know how to appeal to unruly young men on the basis of principles that instil respect for others. Hence, the cycle of recurrent youth violence which Savage (and Hobbs) describes: the adult men who have become fathers after going themselves through a violent youth lack the authority to restrain their unruly sons—in the worst cases, they have never matured, do not participate in their sons' education, or even celebrate the boys' misbehaviour. This is why, I insist, we need to see adolescence and the teenager as heavily gendered social constructions, paying specific attention to how and why youth rebellion becomes anti-social criminality.

Youth, then, changed around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be re-invented by Hall, on the basis of the Romantic cult of youth, as adolescence—a time for personal introspection and the construction of the self in opposition to parents. It became next, Savage explains, beginning in the 1920s and culminating in the 1950s, a time for hedonism and the rise of the teenager. This was followed eventually in the 1960s and 1970s by sexual liberation. It seemed, then, with fourth-wave feminism demanding total equality, that the 1990s would be the beginning of the best of worlds for youth. Yet, the stories we tell in the 21<sup>st</sup> are either the sugary nonsense of John Green and company, or grim tales connected with social network horrors (do see Aneesh Chaganty and Sev Ohanian's visually amazing film *Searching...* )

Perhaps adolescence and the teenager are no longer useful to understand how the young live and it is urgent to hear what they have to say about themselves. Before we read it in the History books written in the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 19 FEBRUARY 2019 / NO MEAN CITY: RECONSIDERING CLASS

[I'll begin by saying that even though this blog deals (in part) with teaching, I have been writing next to nothing about this aspect of my job for the past year because I have been away from the classroom all that time. Returning to lecturing after almost fourteen months has been easier than I expected but it is too early to go back to discussing classroom policies and politics, hence my focus on books in recent posts.]

The volume that interests me today is a novel: *No Mean City* (1935), 'the classic novel of the Glasgow slum underworld' as the cover of the Corgi edition announces. Apparently, this novel has its origins in the short stories written by Gorbals unemployed baker Alexander McArthur. They were polished for publication by journalist H. Kingsley Long, a choice made by the original publisher, Longmans, Green & Co. The middle-class target readership might explain the unique narrative style of *No Mean City*, which mixes melodramatic, violent action with pseudo-ethnographic comments on working-class life in Glasgow's most notorious neighbourhood, the Gorbals, between 1921 and 1930. Despite the abundant Lowland Scots dialogue this does not feel like a novel primarily addressed to Scottish people, though it might well be that I'm mistaken and that the patronizing tone adopted is intended to inform anyone outside the Gorbals of its degraded social situation, whether they live in Glasgow, in London or elsewhere.

In essence, the plot concerns the efforts of Razor King Johnny Stark to maintain his reputation among the local gangs by getting involved in a variety of brawls, though the novel also narrates the failure of his brother Peter and of his friend Bobby to climb socially upwards beyond the Gorbals. McArthur and Long portray a lifestyle which is absolutely depressing for there is no way out of the violence, the squalor, the economic insecurity, and the general injustice that keeps these characters tied to their sordid background. The vicious circle depicted is easy to grasp: poverty results in working lives that begin too early, with no chance of an education; boys and girls marry young and soon have too many children, which results in poverty like their parents'. Finding decent housing is simply impossible because slum landlords charge outrageous amounts for appalling accommodation—if that's a word to be used in this context—with unhygienic bathrooms shared by dozens. Ill-health is general. Not even youth offers a respite. With no prospects at all, girls try to catch a husband as soon as possible to leave their exploitative, low-paying jobs and boys try to find in gang violence and heavy drinking the enjoyment which work does not offer. All this is well known but it is still shocking to find it described in so much detail.

Critics and readers since 1935 have complained, precisely, that the detail is lurid and that the plot veers in the last third of the book towards the sensationalist—and I agree. The novel loses interest and quality the moment the marriage of Stark and Lizzie begins disintegrating and the authors show more interest in how other persons take part in their sex life than in why they live in that miserable way. The sub-plot dealing with Peter narrates how his budding political awareness—stimulated by his voracious but haphazard reading—results in his leading, though unwillingly, a more than justified workers' protest. This ends up costing him his job and, hence, his chances of accessing the low middle-class. Yet, *No Mean City* is not at all a political novel, nor a text that seeks to denounce

the situation of the characters in any way: it is just a vivid representation of a condition that seems to be impossible to solve; the authors demand no reaction from middle-class readers except curiosity for the human zoo that the Gorbals appears to be. They offer no pity for any of the characters, which is understandable in Johnny's case but not so much in Peter's and Bobby's. Much as it happens in its main successor, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993), the main aim seems to *épater les bourgeois*.

*No Mean City* came to attention again in 2010, in its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, with some controversy about whether it should be kept alive at all. An interesting article by Dave Graham (<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-glasgow/glasgow-fights-no-mean-city-tag-75-years-on-idUKTRE6042N520100105>) explains that Johnny Stark's "fondness for slashing his adversaries' faces with razors" is still a problem today. As local police officer Carnochan warns "If you bring a child up in a war zone, you'll create a warrior. That's what we're doing. I've been a cop for 35 years and I can tell you, you can't arrest your way out of this". Actually, Glasgow Police and the Town Council authorities have started a quite successful programme to if not eradicate at least to curb down the stabbings that have replaced the slashings (in my time in that city I learned that a 'Glasgow kiss' is a knife cut that opens both corners of the mouth...). The authorities are doing something quite simple but effective: have the gang members talk to each other. Most boys simply do not know why they are perpetuating a type of patriarchal masculinity that only finds satisfaction in hurting other equally disempowered young men, and women, and talking seems a good way to start deconstructing it.

Two issues caught my attention in particular when reading *No Mean City*. One is the ambition for 'reflected glory' that leads women like Lizzie to encourage men like Johnny onto their violent path, regardless of the dangerous consequences. The women were (and are) mostly the victims of Johnny and his ilk and, indeed, in the novel they are beaten and raped as he pleases. Yet, they are loyal, though it is also true that only as long as it is convenient. To my surprise, Johnny's mistresses, even his wife, take other lovers without concealing this from him; Stark is so certain that his reputation will attract other girls that he does not care for any in particular (except briefly for Lizzie). The women may be disempowered in this patriarchal regime but the authors remind us that they have some domestic power derived from the unstable economy: the men are often unemployed and depend on their women; they feel, however, no qualms to let the girls pay for drink, entertainment or household expenses—even for their upkeep. There is a kind of equality combined with inequality, though it is also evident that the couples' social standing depends on the husband, which is why the wives are constantly judging (to their face) whether they are 'manly' enough to get better jobs.

The other issue is 'the impossibility of imagining something better'. There is an obsession in *No Mean City* for specifying how much money each character earns at each job they take, accompanied by frequent comments on how being on the dole often pays better than taking the worst jobs. The working classes are presented as tremendous snobs that classify neighbours depending on their unkempt looks and clothes with more precision than any middle or upper-class person might use. At the same time, the jobs the characters aspire to are a limited selection—the best-paid men are Lizzie's lover, a foreman at the bakery where they work, and Peter's father-in-law, an usher at a

'kinema'. Bobby manages to earn quite a nice amount of money as a professional dancer, partnering with his girlfriend and later wife Lily but their private lessons also include sexual services for the richer patrons. Not only upper middle-class professions, such as medicine or the law, are totally absent from the horizon of the Gorbals' people but also the professions by which many working-class individuals have improved their lot: primary school teaching or nursing for women, office work or specialized positions as mechanics for men, among others. Blue-collar life is not even guaranteed in the Gorbals, though it is obvious that those with higher aspirations (mainly Peter) are trying to copy more affluent neighbours. Of course, those with no chance of upgrading their lives hate the better off workers.

School is never mentioned, either, in *No Mean City* and this seems to be a glaring absence. Social upward mobility was (and is) encouraged in working-class schools by teachers: to begin with, theirs might be the first and only example of employment based primarily on mental work that working-class children ever see. Things have changed very much since the 1920s represented in this novel, but I can tell first-hand that contact with teachers, particularly those in possession of university degrees, is primordial in awakening the imagination of the less privileged children to social mobility. In middle-class families this is very different: children are surrounded by relatives with socially respectable jobs and the family's income allows them to take a higher education for granted. This does not mean that middle-class children do not face any battles, but it means that they needn't face some battles. There is an abyss between a child who wishes to be, say, a lawyer in a middle-class family and who perhaps has lawyers in the family and a child with the same vocation whose parents are constantly in and out of employment (even always out) and who, besides, knows no one with a university degree.

Obviously, primary and secondary school teachers are also often the ones to help children see beyond their family's horizon of expectations, suggesting specific professional training, further education and even careers. Apart from them, working-class kids with a wish to pull themselves up by their bootstraps started dreaming of a chance to leave the Gorbals—or their local equivalent—thanks to each new 20<sup>th</sup> century media. Movies, the popular press, radio, television, the internet, etc... have made the representation of desirable middle-class lives constant in the cultural panorama of the working classes. Some may bemoan that the glorification of the middle classes has destroyed working-class culture but, as the authors of *No Mean City* claim, the truth is that, given the choice, workers prefer being middle-class. This is what Marx and Communism, generally, woefully misunderstood.

What I'm saying is that, though this may sound trite, *No Mean City* has taught me again a lesson I had managed to forget: you need imagination to leave a working-class background behind, and this must be awakened somehow. We take it for granted that social upward mobility is there for the taking but it is not and though consumerism seems to fulfil the function of stimulating an urge for what the Victorians adored, namely self-improvement, this is still very limited. I'm well aware that in 2019 we are at the end of an attempt to allow the working classes to change their prospects thanks to the welfare state. Even the children who got university degrees are unemployed or find only

bad-quality employment, while the children of the upper classes continue enjoying privileges based on their families' networking as the middle classes are destroyed. I hear no one, however, truly discuss how social mobility works, if at all, and there is total silence about children born to affluent parents who end up being working-class by income, if not by background. There is much talk about how the current generation will have a worse life than their parents, but the issue is not addressed from the point of view of how much actual upward mobility there has been, in Scotland or anywhere else.

If you ask me, I'd say that very little—the upper classes have noticed that too many working-class individuals have dared imagine a better future through education provided by the welfare state. The way to limit those dreams is by a) cutting funding for public education; b) putting as many obstacles as possible in the way of publicly-educated persons; c) forcing families to spend so much on housing that nothing is left for improving the chances for their children. And d) pretend anyone can become an overnight instant success on YouTube, Instagram, etc while allowing 1% of the population to enjoy 99% of all wealth on Earth.

Imagining a better future might not be enough but it's a beginning.

## 26 FEBRUARY 2019 / TEACHING THE BASICS ABOUT AN AUTHOR (ON WILLIAM BLAKE)

Tomorrow I'll be introducing my class in 'English Romantic Literature' to the pleasure of discovering William Blake (1757-1827). I haven't taught this course in fifteen years and, so, I needed to re-discover Blake myself, re-learn the basics I must transmit. Within limits, careful as usual not to let myself be carried away and use for three hours of lecturing five times that in preparation, or more. We lead hectic lives and even the most interesting tasks need to be restricted, or else risk producing no new research at all.

I'll mention first a 1995 episode of *The South Bank Show* devoted to Blake, available from YouTube (for instance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qvx0on0Hj2I>). The documentary is conducted by novelist and biographer Peter Ackroyd, not by chance: he had just published then his well-received biography *Blake*, part of a long list that began in 1863 with Alexander and Anne's Gilchrist pioneering work (of which more, later). The biggest surprise in this documentary is, no doubt, the presence of notorious American Beat poet Allen Ginsberg *singing* Blake's poems as he plays a vintage harmonium. This, he explains, is how Blake would have presented his poems to an audience, since for him the figure of the bard of ancient times was essential. Funnily, even though Blake's best-known works are *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, I had missed that the word 'songs' has a literal meaning. Leaving this aside, the documentary, about 50 minutes long, made me wonder what the point of classroom lecturing is in the times of YouTube and, generally, the internet. My lectures will borrow, after all, from online sources, including Wikipedia and Google Books. And of course, the simply splendid Blake Archive.

In my times as an undergrad there was no internet, strange as this may sound to current undergrads. I was very lucky, nonetheless, because having heard about Blake in some introduction to English Literature, I could see some of his original drawings in a stunning room of London's Tate Gallery. This was in the mid-1980s, before Erasmus, when every girl student who wanted to learn English spent a year as an au-pair. A decade later, in 1996, 'La Caixa' staged a major exhibition of Blake's works in Barcelona, which was a marvel to see. Nothing compares to seeing the originals but the Blake Archive ([www.blakearchive.org](http://www.blakearchive.org))—founded also in 1996 as a joint international project by the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities and now run now by the Carolina Digital Library and Archives—has digitalised practically everything by Blake which the ravages of time have respected. This is a great little miracle, considering that he made and sold very few prints of his major works and that his best-selling work sold about 30 copies.

Browsing through the Archive, I wished I could be free from the onerous task of assessing my students—I would gladly give all of them an A+ if they promised to read the Romantic poems I have selected for study and spend a few hours enjoying online wonders like the Archive. Honestly: how can an exam or any alternative exercise replace the joy of admiring Blake's work? What can I possibly say that makes a lecture more exciting? I could, naturally, use my classroom time to show a selection of what is in the Archive (or *The South Bank Show* episode) but public sharing doesn't work. Somehow, one must be alone to enjoy the feeling of personal discovery; ideally, the teacher's task should only be pointing out where to find the best resources. On Blake or anyone else.

Some places where Blake is present are obvious (Wikipedia!), others unexpected. Three comments on the YouTube channel offering the documentary named the videogame *Devil May Cry 5* as the reason why these persons were interested in Blake. As it turns out, in Capcom's new release of their popular videogame, just launched this week, there is a new character called V, who is fond of quoting Blake. This is great but no novelty: William Blake often crops up in popular culture. For instance, he is a central element in the first Hannibal Lecter novel by Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon* (1981), made into a film as *Manhunter* in 1986 and later again in 2002. Harris's serial killer (not Lecter but another man) is so obsessed by Blake's series of watercolour paintings (1805-1810) for the *Book of Revelation* that he has a tattoo of the red dragon covering his whole back (he even tries to eat Blake's original). Check on Google images of English actor Ralph Fiennes made up in this way. I wonder what Blake would think!

*The South Bank Show* episode does not explain why William Blake, an obscure artist few knew in his own time, has become such a ubiquitous presence. In fact, Blake is remembered because of the biography by Alexander Gilchrist, which I have named before. A reference in the Wikipedia page led me to an excellent article by top-rank biographer Richard Holmes, actually a segment of the introduction to the 2004 re-issue of Gilchrist's work, *The Life of William Blake: Pictor Ignotus: "Saving Blake"* (*The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/29/classics.williamblake>). 'Pictor Ignotus' means 'unknown painter' and we must wonder why publisher Macmillan decided to issue a volume about someone who had been largely forgotten by the mid-



19<sup>th</sup> century, with the exception of some keen admirers. Yet, this is how Blake survived into our times.

The story is worth telling, if only briefly. Gilchrist, born one year after Blake's death, was a trained lawyer but also a budding art critic. He published a biography of minor artist William Etty before embarking in the two projects that articulated the rest of his brief life: his marriage to Anne Burrows and his work on William Blake—whom he discovered accidentally thanks to a second-hand copy of *The Book of Job*. Gilchrist's subsequent research passed through interviewing people who had met Blake, and others interested in him, among them the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, Dante Gabriel Rossetti—a collector of Blake's work. No wonder, since Blake had to appeal necessarily to the neo-Medieval spirit of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Gilchrist succeeded in completing his investigation and signing the contract with Macmillan but he died of scarlet fever passed on by his daughter. His distraught wife Anne, a major collaborator in her husband's work, completed the manuscript, attributing to herself only editorial tasks rather than co-authorship. William Rossetti, Dante's brother and a major art critic, endorsed the biography, which found a receptive audience. This success started the process of canonization by which Blake eventually became studied both as an artist and a poet, and also his seeping down into popular culture, with the infinite lists of allusions.

Gilchrist's many sacrifices to rescue Blake from oblivion raise an important issue: would we remember Blake without him? Or would, inevitably, someone else have fallen in love with his artwork and rescue it? How many other obscure artists are waiting to be rescued in similar ways? And how come that the Pictor Ignotus of a time can be the star of a later time? It is usually claimed that this happens because some artists are ahead of their times but in Blake's case this is a peculiar stance. Blake is perhaps best explained as a belated Old Testament prophet rather than as a modern artist, though it is true that his Romantic pledge to follow his own course rather than the art of his time, and the niche he carved for himself as a unique engraver using his own technique of relief engraving, make him closer to us. He was his own person, and this is something we appreciate. As for his heavily religious writing, we tend to downplay it (and woefully misread it), preferring to enjoy on the whole the mystery of his muscular figures and his alluring, vibrant colours.

Here's a pocket biography. Blake was the child of a middle-class Soho hosier, attended briefly school as he was a difficult child, and was next home-schooled by his mother. Between ages 10 to 14 he attended drawing school, while he continued his domestic education by reading voraciously (the Bible was a central text for him, also John Milton). At 15 he was apprenticed to engraver James Basire, formally becoming at 21 a professional engraver, even though he was always employed by others, mainly as an illustrator. He married Catherine Boucher in 1782 and the pair enjoyed a happy union for 45 years, only flawed by the birth of a stillborn child and Kate's subsequent inability to bear children. She was a most valuable collaborator, to the point that Blake trained her as a fellow engraver, caring besides for her husband on the domestic front with no complaint about their poverty. Both worked very hard to turn Blake's visions and ideas into the illustrated books that transmitted them to posterity (thanks to Gilchrist!).

Incidentally, Blake and Kate spent their lives mainly in London, and appear not to have travelled at all (or very little).

Blake had proto-anarchist ideas, which we celebrate today. He defended that individuals should be free to enjoy life without being fettered by any tyrannical Government or Church. According to him, personal evolution should be encouraged, sexuality fully explored, the body respected as a source of perception indivisible from the soul. Because of these tenets we trick ourselves into believing that Blake is of our times, which he was not. The man constantly had, since age 4, visions of God, angels, spirits, the dead and even the Devil—that was the reason why he spent such short time in school. Most contemporaries believed him mad, whereas now we tend to call him depressed or, less gently, schizophrenic. Actually, he had the kind of self-mythologizing imagination that others like J.R.R. Tolkien also possessed with the difference that Blake drew no separation between rationality and his visions. He was not insane at all, just a man comfortable with a kind of mind we now call pathological but that used to be called mystical. Perhaps only Biblical New Agers can truly understand Blake. A New Age approach, however, is not encouraged in our ultra-rational Literary and Cultural Studies.

In many senses, therefore, we profoundly misunderstand Blake. He is, among the artists we insist on calling Romantic, possibly the most resistant to science, having made of Newton his main nemesis. In Newton's mechanist universe there is no room for spiritual visions, which have been denied by science since the Enlightenment. As a child of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Blake seemingly sides with the writers of Gothic fiction, who claimed there must be something beyond stark reality. The difference is that whereas they imagine evil monsters—frequently explained as illusions rather than actual supernatural occurrences—what Blake imagines is not scary but comforting. He claimed to speak with his dead brother Robert on a daily basis, in the same way widowed Kate later claimed to speak daily to him once dead. Blake is an in-your-face example of a pre-Enlightenment imagination which is fully aware of Enlightenment rational restrictions, in a way that his Medieval predecessors could not be. It was easy to call him madman, but also convenient because accepting that his visions were not a product of disease would be too scary—too Gothic!

Tolkien wrote that although he had been fantasizing about Middle-Earth for as long as he could remember, he had no notion of having invented any element in it: when he wrote he felt as if he was being told what to write. Though a strict pro-establishment Catholic, and not an anti-establishment Dissenter like Blake, Tolkien also turned belief into mythology. I'll argue, then, that individuals with a strong sense of belief are more prone to accepting the existence of other universes, which rational Enlightenment denied. This may sound like something borrowed from Carl Jung, but I truly think that adamantly denying other possible universes is... irrational. I'm not myself a believer in God the patriarch but I do suspect that we live in just one of many possible multiverses, a view many scientists support today in view of what quantum physics is teaching us. We make enormous efforts to convince ourselves of the coherence of our world-view but perhaps individuals like Blake—and the many others after him that tap directly into their imaginations to create the parallel universes we enjoy in fiction—are simply quite at ease with the idea of this numinous elsewhere. We fear monsters as children and are

taught to suppress that fear as adults, but I always say that seeing an angel would be far scarier than seeing a monster, particularly if you're not a believer. This is why we need to convince ourselves that Blake was a lunatic, though one whose art is wonderful.

Teaching the basics of any artist's work is, then, reducing a person to trite, manageable slogans. Once a madman, later Pictor Ignotus, then a Victorian favourite and currently both canon and legend, William Blake reminds us that we cannot condense any living person, and much less an artist, into a matter for two lectures, a Wikipedia entry, a documentary, or a biography—no matter how enthusiastic. Yet, this is how we learn and teach: hurriedly, in little pills, and trusting that one day students will have more time to take pleasure in names like Blake rather than just take credits for a course.

### 5 MARCH 2019 / COOL AND UNCOOL AUTHORS (ON WILLIAM WORDSWORTH)

I shared with my 'English Romantic Literature' class the video showing Jon Cheryl perform his musical version of William Blake's 'The Tyger' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFexFkJwrAo>) and also Michael Griffin's song 'London' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAkEyFbGjTc>) based on Blake's eponymous poem. We agreed that both songs are cool and that, by definition, an author whose work can be enjoyed in this up-dated way is cool. Blake is, no doubt, cool as Shakespeare and the Brontë sisters are cool. Other authors are uncool, and I believe that William Wordsworth belongs to that class.

Julien Temple, who was once a cool Brit director (he shot many music videos for stars like David Bowie), made in 2000 a film called *Pandemonium* about Wordsworth and Coleridge's friendship during the time of the French Revolution. Wordsworth was played by John Hannah (how uncool is that?) and Coleridge by Linus Roache (cooler!). The script writer was Frank Cottrell Boyce who later wrote the, definitely, very cool account of Manchester in New Order's heyday *24 Hour Party People* (2002). I haven't seen Temple's *Pandemonium* but an instance of how hard it is to make its subject matter cool is that, apparently, the end credits roll to the sound (or noise) of Olivia Newton-John's song "Xanadu" (1980) which vaguely alludes to Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn". Viewers' reviews on IMBD are mostly positive (despite the middling 6.6 average rating) and the film might be worth spending two hours of your life on seeing it. Yet, one of the most enthusiastic commendations reads: "A splendid effort which will likely be most appreciated by those into classical literature—particularly 19th century poetry". This is like recommending, just to name a random first-rate movie, *The Right Stuff* (1983) mainly to people who are interested in the history of NASA. A movie either works or it doesn't, and if it appeals to a highly specialised academic audience it doesn't. A more candid viewer writes "With its utter disregard for the historic record, *Pandemonium* attempts to do for England's greatest Romantic poets what *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* did for the Arthurian legends—but (sadly) without the wit or the humour".

In *Pandemonium*, in any case, and also in their friendship, coolness fell on the side of Coleridge with Wordsworth playing second fiddle; he always seems to have been the kind of guy you know is not really into it even when you're having the greatest fun together. The wonder is not that their friendship started, for opposites attract each other, but that it lasted for so long and that it was even retaken after a serious falling out. I very much suspect that without cool Coleridge—and most likely without Dorothy Wordsworth, the adoring sister—Wordsworth would not be Wordsworth as we know him today. He would be perhaps Robert Southey (who?).

Much of Wordsworth's uncoolness has to do with his living to old age and in good health. I am aware that this sounds callous and that the Rolling Stones are living proof that one can be a youthful rebel well beyond youth: Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are both 76. If Byron and Shelley had lived to old age instead of dying in absurd, preventable circumstances at, respectively, 36 (infection caught from his dog) and 29 (drowned for sailing in bad weather), they would have probably behaved like Jagger and Richards. The problem with Wordsworth is that he only had that rock-star profile by association with Coleridge and, once he married his childhood sweetheart Mary Hutchinson in 1802, aged 32, he became the anti-Romantic myth: a steady family man. Even his fathering an illegitimate daughter ten years before, during his stay in post-Revolution France, announced that this is who Wordsworth was at heart. He was rash enough to embark on a passionate affair with a Frenchwoman called Annette Vallon, the pretty daughter of a barber-surgeon, but also prudent enough not to marry her when she got pregnant. He was, it seems, a responsible but detached father for the girl, Caroline, but she was kept apart from her English siblings.

Keeping a family of five children, a wife and a sister (Dorothy never married) on the money made by selling poems is not easy. To be precise, Wordsworth never really lived on his modest earnings as a poet. To be even more precise, Wordsworth mainly lived off rents generated by family legacies. His father, a lawyer, was the legal representative of an aristocrat and it was the money this man paid to settle a long-standing debt that generated the rents allowing Wordsworth to marry. Wordsworth, incidentally, had a BA from Cambridge and his family, specially the uncles that paid for his education after he was orphaned at age 13, expected him to become a parson. He, however, would take no profession. Only in 1813, at the tender age of 43, did Wordsworth accept an appointment as post-master and Stamp Distributor for Westmoreland, rewarded by a yearly stipend of £400 per year, which finally ensured the financial stability of his family. They moved then to a beautiful house, Rydal Mount, near Ambleside in the Lake District, where the Wordsworths lived between 1813 and 1850 (it's now open to visitors). However, the celebrity Wordsworth who received there an endless stream of visitors was not the same man who had written the poetry he was known for but someone else, his mature counterpart.

By the time Wordsworth published *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1822) the transformation was complete. His daughter Catherine and his son Thomas died both in 1812—she in June, he in December—and this must have been a terrible blow, no matter how often we tell ourselves that in past times parents assumed that some of their children would die in childhood. In fact, Wordsworth took the position as a civil servant to make sure that his

remaining three children could enjoy the best of lives. Yet something went amiss at the time in his poetical career, as most critics agree, because of his job. It took me a while to understand what exactly Wordsworth did. Anne Frey explains in *British State Romanticism: Authorship, Agency, and Bureaucratic Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2010, p. 55) that Wordsworth did have an office in town and performed numerous professional duties, though not those of a full-time job. "While certainly compatible with Wordsworth's idea of himself as a professional poet, however", Frey writes, "the job necessarily took away some time away from Wordsworth's vocation". Frey's sly wording suggests that Wordsworth was not really a professional poet, but she struggles not to reveal a basic fact: his poetry emerged from youthful leisure (no matter how hard he worked at his verse) and was far less compatible with an adult working life. In contrast, Blake managed to produce his poems after his daily work routine as an engraver was over, which does sound professional.

I came across a very illuminating article by Andrew Klavan (originally published in 2009 in *Romanticon* and reproduced here: <https://www.city-journal.org/html/romanticon-13214.html>) titled "Wordsworth's Corpus Reflects the Growth of a Conservative's Mind". Klavan grants that "Wordsworth's conservatism hardened as he grew into middle age, sometimes becoming small-minded". In 1829 (he was then 59) he protested against the Catholic Relief Act which allowed Daniel O'Connell to be the first Irish Catholic to serve as MP. Wordsworth was a strict Anglican all his life and Anglicans like him very much feared the impact of Catholicism on politics and social life. He did not support, either, the 1832 Reform Act, the first to extend franchise among English men (though only within narrow limits). This is typical: the youthful supporter of revolution becomes an adult conservative when changes in family, personal and professional life make political, economic and social stability desirable. In even simpler terms: one becomes more conservative the more one has to lose. Klavan contends, nonetheless, that Wordsworth regained part of his revolutionary fire later on. In 1846, aged 76, he gave his support to the democratic Chartist movement, though warning that rioting would not help the cause. By then, of course, he was a gentleman pensioner of leisure finally free to indulge in his youthful ideals. And the times were no longer Romantic but Victorian.

Wordsworth was given in 1842 a Civil List pension of £300 a year; he resigned then from his position as Stamp-Distributor. Next year, 1843, he was appointed Poet Laureate, aged 73, replacing Robert Southey and after having received honorary doctorates (by the Universities of Durham and Oxford) in the late 1830s. In the last years of his career as a poet, at the height of his celebrity, Wordsworth worked on his massive autobiographical poem 'The Prelude' which was only published post-humously in 1850 by his wife Mary. Actually, Wordsworth started writing this autobiographical poem back in 1798, the year when, aged 28, he published *Lyrical Ballads* with Coleridge, and kept adding blank verse lines to it until it grew to 14 books, a total of 7863 lines. This does not mean that the poem covers Wordsworth's whole life—as the title suggests, it deals mainly with its first decades and it is, on essence, a poem on the 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' as the subtitle announces. There is complete critical consensus that 'The Prelude' is Wordsworth's greatest poem but you should read the comments by readers at GoodReads before considering whether you want to read it. I must confess that I have

failed to find a valid reason to go through so much verse and no, I'm not ashamed to make this confession even though I teach English Literature. Some other time, perhaps.

No Romantic poet is complete without an oddity in his biography and in Wordsworth's case this is supplied by Dorothy's constant presence. There were other three siblings (John drowned at sea in 1805) but she and William, born only one year earlier, seem to have been constant childhood companions until their father died in 1783. The girl, aged 12, and the boy, 13, were then sent to the homes of different relatives and were only reunited in 1795, when she was 24 and he 25. They never separated again, sharing their diverse homes even when William married Mary. Many have read their relationship as incest and a few sexist scholars have even blamed hysterical Dorothy for it, presenting her as a needy woman who hindered William's path with her demands. This sexualized view of their siblinghood is, I think, plain silly and only reveals that sex occupies too much space in our minds. William and Dorothy were comfortable with each other, they shared many ideas and observations also present in his poems (as her journals have proved) and were perfect companions at a time and in a society when a man and a woman could enjoy friendship in total freedom only as siblings. Mary welcomed her sister-in-law to the family home and the couple took good care of Dorothy when, in the 1830s, she became an invalid. She died in 1855, outliving William by five years. It's a bitter-sweet tale.

A surprised GoodReads reader sentences "Turns out I like *The Prelude* a lot. But I still wouldn't invite Wordsworth to a party at my place"—yet another sign of his uncoolness. Wordsworth might then be a category to himself: the kind of author you profoundly respect but do not enthuse about; the type you admire because you can see the man is making an effort but also the type that forces you as a reader to make an effort, and you like him less for that. He is not Milton—I still haven't met a person who would like to meet Milton for coffee much less at a party—but he is not either, definitely, Blake. He is Wordsworth.

Coolness moves in mysterious ways.

## 12 MARCH 2019 / SAMUEL COLERIDGE AND THE ROMANTIC POWER OF CURIOSITY

It has become commonplace to see Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) through the lens of his drug addiction, which is why it is perhaps quite wrong to begin this post in this way. His case, however, must be contextualized and his addiction treated as an ailment similar to that currently killing 130 Americans every day and plaguing hundreds of thousands more (see <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis>). With an important difference: whereas in Coleridge's time the addiction to opium, and mainly to its derivative laudanum, was poorly understood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century our experience of drug abuse is already very extensive. This did not prevent greedy pharmas in the 1990s from flooding the market with potent analgesics said no have no side effects while they fooled the corresponding Government agencies.

Coleridge, like most current victims of the American opioid overdose crisis, suffered from chronic pain (connected with rheumatism) and simply needed relief. He most emphatically did not take drugs for recreation and if he had any visions attached to their use, this was not the outcome of any experiment—it was a side effect. Trying to make his body more comfortable Coleridge fell into a downward spiral of drug abuse that even his closest friends misread as vice. Wordsworth broke his long friendship with Coleridge for that reason (though they later reconciled) and if we have such vast textual production from him this is only because one Dr. Gillman took pity on his unfairly abhorred patient. This man and his family provided Coleridge with a home at their Highgate residence in London between 1816 and 1834, helping their illustrious guest to control his addiction as far as possible and allowing his mind to shine free from that burden (at least temporarily) to write, among others, his *Biographia Literaria*.

A constant in Coleridge's life is an insatiable craving for knowledge. His father was an Anglican reverend but also the headmaster of the local King's School at Ottery St Mary's, Samuel's birthplace in Devon. From Coleridge's remembrance of his early childhood as a constant stream of reading, we may deduce that the father encouraged this activity. Reverend Coleridge died when Samuel was 8 and the boy, the youngest of ten siblings from two marriages, was sent to boarding school, at Christ's Hospital (in London), an experience he did not relish in general. With one important exception, recalled in *Biographia Literaria*: in that school he "enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a very sensible, though at the same time, a very severe master, the Reverend James Bowyer".

This man not only gave his young students a formidable education in the classics—combining them with Milton and Shakespeare—but was also an adamant editor of his pupils' written work, teaching them to aim at precision. As Coleridge recalls, "he showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image, unsupported by a sound sense, or where the same sense might have been conveyed with equal force and dignity in plainer words". Bowyer did not take half measures: if two faults were found, "the exercise was torn up, and another on the same subject to be produced, in addition to the tasks of the day". Coleridge still had in adult age nightmares about this man's severity, but he acknowledged his "moral and intellectual obligations" to him. He and his classmates, Coleridge adds, reached University as "excellent Latin and Greek scholars, and tolerable Hebraists", though this was "the least of the good gifts, which we derived from his zealous and conscientious tutorage". Reverend Bowyer, though not the kind of teacher we celebrate today, gave his brilliant student Samuel the foundations he needed for his extremely rich intellectual life.

Not all went well at Cambridge for Coleridge, for he never got a degree. Besides, he wasted one year of his youth in the King's Light Dragoons, a regiment where he secretly enlisted as 'Silas Tomkyn Comberbach'. He was discharged by reason of insanity (as the regiment papers attest), though other sources note that he was just the ineptest soldier ever. Others claim that his brothers rescued Samuel from a personal crisis possibly provoked by an amorous disappointment when one Mary Evans rejected him.

Biographer Richard Holmes explains that Coleridge had many talents, but he was above all a fascinating talker. Also, a rambling one, which means that his listeners were often amazed but also confused by the fast flow of his ideas. Coleridge was unable to write them down as they left his mouth and, besides, his manuscripts are known to contain many borrowed ideas he did not acknowledge or, in plain words, many plagiarisms. In any case, whereas Wordsworth's main talent was as a poet, Coleridge was a much vaster intellect.

To my surprise, he was for a while an itinerant Unitarian preacher and seems to have regarded himself mainly as a theologian, though this is by no means how we think of him today. He was a philosopher deeply influenced by German idealism (which he imported into Britain), a psychologist *avant la lettre* specialised in the works of the Imagination (or creativity) and of literary creation, and a great literary critic (who, among other achievements, rescued *Hamlet* from the trash-can of literary history). Wordsworth gave us in *The Prelude* a whole treatise on the making of the poet, and Coleridge gave in his prose work *Biographia Literaria* an even more extensive exploration of the same topic. Some of his passing remarks have become key concepts in current culture: the notion that when we read fiction we 'willingly suspend our disbelief' comes from a remark in *Biographia* about Wordsworth's 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

The question of Coleridge's source of income must also be considered for, as I have been arguing here, although Romanticism creates a literary market that enables authors like Walter Scott or Lord Byron to invent the very idea of the best-seller, it also depends on leisure afforded thanks to rents or, in this case, patronage. Coleridge abandoned his duties as a Unitarian minister (in 1798, when he published *Lyrical Ballads*, aged 26) because his friend Thomas Wedgwood provided him with an annuity. Wedgwood, credited today with possibly being the first British photographer (see <http://scihi.org/thomas-wedgwood-first-photographer/>), was the son of Josiah Wedgwood, founder of the world-famous pottery firm that carries his name. Josiah was a most gifted businessman but also a patron of causes such as abolitionism and his son, also named Josiah (Tom's brother), continued the family tradition of offering patronage to some artists. Apparently, the annuity was withdrawn in 1812, following the outing of Coleridge as a drug addict (this is attributed to Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, but this book came out in 1821). There is an article (available from JSTOR) about the Wedgwood annuity but this is more detail than I can supply here. I simply don't know, then, how Coleridge survived after 1812 but my guess is that Tom still helped, and other friends. I don't know either what the arrangement was with the ultra-friendly Dr. Gillman. Interestingly, patronage used to be regarded as a potentially humiliating relationship of dependence—hence the word 'patronizing'—but is now back with crowdfunding and platforms like Patreon. Today, I'm speculating, Coleridge could have made a living in this way, though he could also have been offered an academic position as resident poet, or creative writing teacher. Remember he had no degree and could never have become an Oxbridge don.

Coleridge's private life was not very happy—or, rather, it was rich in friendship but not so rich in women's love. He married in 1795, aged 22, a girl called Sara Fricker simply because his good friend Robert Southey (the poet) had married her sister Edith. Both



couples intended to establish a utopian project in Pennsylvania called Pantisocracy, but the mad scheme simply collapsed. Sara and Samuel had four children and separated in 1808, when he was 36. She lived with her sister's family and later with her son Derwent (check <https://wordsworth.org.uk/blog/2017/07/29/romantic-but-hardly-romantic-sarah-frickers-life-as-coleridges-wife/>). They never divorced.

It is odd to think of Sara struggling to make ends meet while her husband enjoyed the beautiful English landscape or stayed away for one year in Germany, all with the Wordsworths. Their baby Berkeley died while the father was abroad and he did not return home for the funeral. The elder, Hartley, was a constant problem for her parents. I should have thought that Dorothy Wordsworth was Samuel's secret love, and the most evident way to bond with William beyond friendship but, apparently, Samuel fell in love instead with William's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson (his wife Mary's sister). Actually, this happened in 1799, before William married Mary, and the unrequited love story continued for many years. Sara also lived with the couple (and with Dorothy) until her death in 1835 and there was much occasion to meet. She was a good friend to Samuel but, for whatever reason, she never returned his love (see <https://wordsworth.org.uk/blog/2017/11/01/sara-hutchinson-coleridges-asra/>). She never married. He died, in 1834, having engaged in no other significant relationship with a woman.

Samuel Coleridge did not have a very high opinion of himself. He refers in *Biographia Literaria* to his "constitutional indolence, aggravated into languor by ill-health; the accumulating embarrassments of procrastination; the mental cowardice, which is the inseparable companion of procrastination, and which makes us anxious to think and converse on anything rather than on what concerns ourselves". His bouts of depression and the constant effect of the drugs (and of the many attempts at withdrawal) certainly could not have helped to develop steady work habits but he was certainly a far more laborious individual than he credits himself for. Under the Wedgwoods' patronage he spent that frantic year in Germany, furnishing his head "with the wisdom of others. I made the best use of my time and means; and there is therefore no period of my life on which I can look back with such unmingled satisfaction". He took lectures in diverse universities on an astonishing variety of subjects as he improved his German. And he never stopped learning, which is why Coleridge had opinions on all subjects. He comes across, in short, as a man in intense conversation with himself, of which the rest of his contemporaries were witnesses rather than participants (except Wordsworth for a time). We possibly have in his writings only a mere fragment of what his mind could do.

I haven't yet mentioned any of Coleridge's poetry. I'm still processing Iron Maiden's fifteen-minute-song based on 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', and the heavy-metal crowds singing the lines in a concert (check the video on YouTube). Amazing, really. Also, the wonder of listening to Benedict Cumberbatch read "Kubla Khan". That's the beauty of today's digital world: it offers much more than kitten videos and ranting if you only care to seek it.

Coleridge would have loved the internet since he was, in a way, his whole life a student—an academic outside academia, so to speak, and not only a poet. He led a precarious life

on the financial front and his body kept his mind chained to drug abuse for long years. Even so, he managed to produce extremely relevant literary and intellectual work out of insatiable curiosity. This is why it is so painful to read the many comments that accompany the videos on the Romantics on YouTube.

Not the Iron Maiden video, which everyone watches for pleasure, but videos such as Peter Ackroyd's BBC mini-series 'The Romantics', which many students watch as compulsory homework. A man, as disappointed as I am by the rejection of education, bemoans the 'lack of intelligence' of the students who complain that Ackroyd's series is boring. An irritated college student replies that not enjoying something does not mean that you're not intelligent. I agree: it means you're not curious—and this is the most common curse today. The albatross around the necks of most students. Coleridge, as his year in Germany shows, was immensely curious. Luckily for him, he had patrons that allowed him to take his curiosity as far as he could and, so, he connected ideas in new ways that have shaped our own world. I wonder what he would make of those who, given the chance to learn by their parents and all of society, reject it—though I think I know.

Romanticism was, let's recall this, in rebellion against many traditional ideas but, as Coleridge's case shows, it was a very well-read rebellion, passionate both in feelings and in thoughts. This is something to remember: education empowers individuals and, ultimately, changes the world. Boredom should play no part in this equation. I very much doubt that Coleridge was ever bored. Or boring.

## 19 MARCH 2019 / LORD BYRON: APPROACHING DECANONIZATION

In a hilarious moment of the two-part documentary *The Scandalous Adventures of Lord Byron* (2009) presenter Rupert Everett discusses with Donatella Versace—as they wait for her butler to announce dinner at her own luxury Milan home—whether Byron (1788-1824) was really as handsome as so many contemporaneous testimonials claim. At this point, Everett has already seen diverse portraits and has even donned the same Albanian dress that Byron wears in the famous painting by Thomas Phillips, now at the National Portrait Gallery. Seeing handsome Everett look rather ridiculous in it, the spectator might conclude that Byron was indeed a man of good looks and even better poise. Also, a man who controlled each portrait that was made of him as we control our image in our Instagram accounts. He wanted specifically to look manly, a man of action and not a poet, as Everett notes, and also disguise a limp caused in childhood by polio.

Everett and Versace note that notions of beauty were very different in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that Byron's physical appearance would not seem so extraordinary today. I find this quite tantalizing! Everett quips that, on the other hand, Byron must have looked stunning at a time when having all your teeth while still young was not common. At a later point in this second episode the tone changes and becomes a bit less flippant. Rather subtly, Everett's comments start defending the view that by the time when Byron died, aged only 36, he was past his prime. The infection that killed him

was an accident of life, perhaps one preventable, but the documentary hints that Byron's choice of malaria infested Missolonghi as his home in Greece was somehow suicidal. It is implied in short that had Byron lived on his life would have been a sad, gradual fall into physical decadence. This is, at the same time, part of the Byron myth: live fast, die soon, and conquer eternal fame. I'm not sure about leaving a beautiful body to bury.

In life, Byron enjoyed fame, but he was mostly beset by celebrity and by notoriety—and, of course, scandal. It is fit that Everett, an openly gay man with a pansexual past, presents Byron's biography, for George Gordon (this is his actual name) was a product of the sexual prejudice of his time or, rather, of its hypocrisy. Just as it seems impossible to discuss Coleridge without mentioning his drug addiction it seems impossible to discuss Byron without alluding to his sexual adventurousness. Likewise, whereas no biographical sketch of Wordsworth is complete without his sister Dorothy, no portrait of Byron can be offered without associating him with his half-sister Augusta Leigh (his father's daughter by a first wife).

Byron might scream to high heaven that they did not commit incest and that Augusta's third child Medora was her husband's and not his but we would still doubt his word, for that is what celebrity and scandal are about: constructing people as we want them to be, not as they are. With lights and shadows: incest may be too much even for us, but the pansexual man Everett describes is more to our taste. Funnily, as we dismantle the sexual prejudices of Byron's time (serious enough to land you in jail for sodomy), we have started criticizing the man for not being handsome enough, and even for being at times in his life rather overweight. Duncan Wu, in particular, offers an image of an effeminate, flabby, shortish, stout Byron totally at odds with the connotations that the word 'handsome' awakes in our minds.

Byron was an aristocrat and though not an extremely rich man (he lived on borrowed money, mostly, like most of his class), he led a life of ease and luxury that seems to belong in the 18<sup>th</sup> century rather than the early 19<sup>th</sup>. He may be celebrated as a great national hero in Albania and Greece but his mildly Whig politics in defence of nationalism (and even at one point of the anti-Industrial Revolution luddites) are not based on very strong beliefs. It seems, rather, than in a world in which nobody cared for anyone beyond the national borders, Byron's curiosity and personal presence in remote lands was in itself welcome as a heroic act. His contribution to the independence of Greece was, at best, very marginal and he seems to have been seen during his time at Missolonghi in the early 1820s as just a rich English lord that could be easily milked for his money, if you excuse the expression. He did not die a hero's death in battle as one might expect from all the exaltation but simply write verse that vaguely endorsed the right of Greece to be a free nation again, on the strength of what it used to be in the classical past. He died, as I have noted, of a fever variously attributed to an imprudent ride in the rain or a bug caught from his pet dog.

If abroad he was a hero, at home Byron was a celebrity of the kind that the *Daily Mirror* enjoys praising and demolishing in equal parts today. And this what happened to this man: he found himself suddenly famous, as he wrote, after the immense success that

the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* (1812) were, only to be completely ostracized just four years later. In 1816 Byron had to leave England for ever following the scandal of his separation from his wife Annabella because of the rumours about incest with Augusta. Byron was probably one of the worst husbands on record and the separation makes complete sense: his wife, whom he had married for her money as his father had married his two wives, just could not endure the constant humiliation of Byron's active extramarital life. What is hypocritical is the scandal. Byron often claimed that he had never seduced any woman because he didn't have to: basically, the women of the Regency period that chased him were the first groupies in literary history, and no wonder, since Byron has often been compared to a rock star. One of the harassers, Lady Caroline Lamb, defined Byron as 'bad, mad, and dangerous to know' but probably this is who she, not him, was.

The good looks, the hectic search for sexual pleasure, the journeys to distant lands, the scandalous married life, the more than likely homosexuality and the incest with Augusta... all these are sufficient not for one but for several celebrities. What makes Byron a radically different celebrity from those plaguing our time is that his fame was based on his poetry, for which he did work much harder than he pretended. The sales of his work from *Childe Harold* onward were in the first years high enough to push best-selling poet Walter Scott out of the market, to the point that Scott became a novelist (though he published anonymously his early novels as if ashamed that they were a second-rank, mercenary product). Byron was particularly well-known because of his narrative verse and he continued enjoying that success even after he had been socially ostracized, from his exile in Switzerland, Italy and finally Greece. To understand how relatively lucky he was, we need to think of the far more tragic fate of Oscar Wilde, a man as flamboyant and sexually curious as Byron but who could not escape, as Byron did, the harsh action of British homophobic legislation. Wilde's exile was a much sadder story indeed but, then, he was no aristocrat.

Byron's main cultural legacy, beyond his poetry and even beyond Literature, is the Byronic hero, a construction that was appended to his own person by his readers whether he wanted it or not. We cannot know what Byron was really like but just as his looks his personality also elicit doubts. He insisted for years that he was not Harold, the character that first expresses the Byronic temper which other male characters inherited—restless, moody, pessimistic, curious about people yet a loner, interested in pleasure but little capable of sustained love. Yet, Byron eventually gave in and granted that in many ways the Childe's pilgrimage was his own, and Harold a thin mask for himself. Indeed, Byron is all over his poetry, also as Manfred and Don Juan and most of his main male characters, but this is not at all singular. Look at how Wordsworth mined his own youth for *The Prelude*. I see the appeal of the Romantic construct and why the Byronic hero soon surfaced in many other narratives (mainly novels and plays) giving us Heathcliff, but also Dracula, and even Christian Grey. What puzzles me is what kind of audience Byron had and how they could follow him at all.

I have just finished reading *Childe Harold*, the four cantos, and I'm not sure how to describe the experience. Last week I told my students that Romantic poetry was published in its time with no footnotes and that the original readers did not expect a

critic to decode the meaning, or any obscure passages, for them. We had read the passages in *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth introducing some of his poems, but they were aimed at describing the circumstances that inspired each poem, not the poem itself. Likewise in relation to Coleridge and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. We listened in class to Ian McKellen's beautiful reading of this long narrative poem (about 30 minutes) and though I stopped now and then to make sure students could follow the plot, in general the text was well understood. I'm not in favour of that kind of teaching that turns reading poetry into a forensic exercise, of which you can find plenty on YouTube (a lot from India, for whatever reason!) and I'd much rather my students enjoy the poems they should know about. With Byron, however, I simply don't know what to do. The booklet we are using includes all of *Manfred* and *Don Juan's* first canto and not *Childe Harold* but, even so, the point is the same one: Byron's poetry is just too obscure for us today, here and in my second-language, second-year classroom.

I did try to read *Childe Harold* without checking Byron's own lengthy notes (mostly on points of History, always showing an amazing erudition) or the notes of his editor, which also included notes to Byron's notes!! It was just impossible: it was like reading through glasses that would suddenly cloud and blind me, but also suddenly disappear altogether, a veritable rollercoaster. Thankfully, Rupert Everett's documentary follows the journeys by Byron reflected in this long poem and I could make sense more or less of where Harold was at given points but without that aid (and the notes) I would have been quite lost. To my surprise, even though I expected a very intimate portrait of the Byronic hero to connect the diverse observations of the pilgrim, I found the stanzas oddly detached except in the few passages (mainly in canto four) where Harold bemoans his fame and wonders what it will be like once he dies. I positively missed Wordsworth, whom Byron very much disliked, in the stanzas about the landscapes and even the cities. And I had a really tough time understanding allusions to personalities of the 1810s even with the editor's excellent notes. There was also the problem of when to read the notes, for they constantly interrupted the flow of the lines. I eventually settled on reading them after each stanza. When I came across six stanzas without notes, it felt like being on a sailing ship with a full gale.

Reading the negative comments on Walter Scott's first novel, *Waverley* (1814), I came across a disgruntled reader who, hating this pompous piece of fiction as much as I do, proposes that we 'decanonize' Scott. I think that we are already in the process of decanonizing Scott, who has not been included in our second year 19<sup>th</sup> century courses here at UAB since at least 1994. Preparing the lectures on Byron I realised that I wasn't even sure when to tell my students about Scott: now, commenting on his poetry together with Byron's, or later when we teach Jane Austen. It is very clear to me that an English graduate must know who Scott was, but I would not include one of his novels in the syllabus, for that would probably alienate rather than interest students. What I fear is that we have reached the same point with Byron: students must know who he was and what he did, but can they read his poems at all? Perhaps the lyrical pieces like 'She Walks in Beauty' but this hardly gives a glimpse of the giant he was.

Arguably Byron (and Scott) are a case not so much of decanonization but of increasingly difficult readability. It's not the same. Robert Southey may be canonical, but we just do

not include him in our syllabi, either his poetry or his person, whereas, I insist, knowing about Byron and Scott is essential. This is a typical conundrum for all teachers: how should we teach? On the basis of literary archaeology or on the basis of accessibility? It used to be the former in the ancient times when philology reigned, but the more pragmatic current approach tells me that Byron is approaching if not total at least partial decanonization.

I'm not sure I'm sorry... but that must be my class (and gender) prejudice against privileged male aristocrats, no matter how handsome.

## 26 MARCH 2019 / PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY: THANKS TO MARY'S LOVE

The title of my post today is intended to be ambiguous: I mean to say that it is thanks to the love of his wife Mary that Percy Shelley is celebrated as a major poet, and that both he and all poetry readers must thank her for her efforts. As she wrote, 'He died, and the world showed no outward sign. But his influence over mankind, though slow in growth, is fast augmenting; and, in the ameliorations that have taken place in the political state of his country, we may trace in part the operation of his arduous struggles'. Yet, while it is true that Percy Shelley's post-humous fame was based on the gradual discovery that his texts were politically relevant and inspirational for later times, his writings would not have survived without Mary's editorial intervention and her determination to make them be known.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) died shortly before his thirtieth birthday. He had published a long list of volumes (about twenty) including poetry, drama, fiction, and essays but Shelley was known only by a small circle of *connoisseurs*. He had no public fame in life comparable to that which his good friend Lord Byron enjoyed (if that is the correct word) though he had a high impact among those who knew him. Famously, Byron said of Percy Shelley that 'I never met a man who wasn't a beast in comparison to him', which suggest he was also well liked as a person, not only as an artist of the word.

Percy drowned in the sea, near Livorno in Italy, where he lived since 1818, in a boating accident that was the product of imprudence and poor seamanship. A fierce summer storm caused his poorly build ship, the *Don Juan*, to sink. Percy, his friend Edward Williams, and boat boy Charles Vivien had no time to react. Shelley's much disfigured remains washed up on the shore eventually and he was cremated on the beach following Italian quarantine laws. Legend, established by the mendacious Edward Trelawney, has it that his heart survived the burning, though Duncan Wu argues that the cherished relic is possibly a piece of the liver... No matter. His devastated widow—who was only 24 and had also lost three children—set out to make sure that the memory of her husband survived for posterity, with the help of devoted friends like Leigh Hunt.

In 1824, two years after Percy's death, Mary published *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, a lovingly assembled volume which shows her accomplished editorial skills (she worked in some cases with almost undecipherable manuscripts). Amazingly,

Mary had to withdraw this book from circulation at the request of her father-in-law, Sir Timothy Shelley. He adamantly refused her the right to publicise the details of his son's complicated private life, fearing that scandal would hurt the snobbish family. Percy's father only relented when he was approaching ninety, apparently out of affection for his grandson Percy Florence, Percy and Mary's only surviving child. Sir Timothy finally allowed Mary to publish in 1839 *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, on condition that she did not include a biography. Mary added abundant notes to the poems that can be read as a sort of covert life of the poet. She had no doubt that her notes would tell the truth about the man, for she had 'the liveliest recollection of all that was done and said during the period of my knowing him'.

I'll get back to Sir Timothy later, but I'd like to stop first at Mary's 'Preface' for the 1839 anthology. My opinion about Percy Shelley is no doubt coloured by the negative view transmitted by my dear teacher Guillermina Cenoz that he was, basically, a selfish man. She saw *Frankenstein* as a work which Mary wrote mainly aiming to secretly expose and punish her husband's artistic career and personal self-centredness for the cost it meant to family life. I tend to agree with her view, for Percy's biography is, besides, full of his palpable need to get attention from adoring women: not only his two wives (Harriet Westbrook and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin) but also other women present in his life as intimate friends, such as Jane Williams.

It is often supposed that Percy was a practitioner of free love, and that he not only had liaisons with other women but also that he tried to have Mary involved with other men. I think this is part of our constant over-sexualization of every close relationship and that Percy was, rather, a man who craved for emotional attention. Of course, what do I know? It occurs to me, though, that if he had misbehaved in a very serious way, Mary would not have made the effort of producing the two volumes (the second edited while her health was seriously impaired). She would not have written, either, the preface for, though she speaks of fulfilling a duty, nobody really expected her to do anything for her late husband.

Mary's preface has been accused of sanitizing Percy and offering an angelic view of the man. She called him 'a pure-minded and exalted being' and though she referred to his brain and not his body, her hagiography, which led to Shelley's canonisation in Victorian times, is only now being contested from a more politically oriented stance. It is important to recall that Mary was writing under the strict surveillance of Sir Timothy and that a loving widow (she never remarried) is not probably the most impartial judge of her dead husband. I find, however, the preface as candid a view of Percy as was possible under the circumstances and I don't think, anyway, that an artist's widow in more recent times would produce something substantially different in tone and intention. It is also interesting to note that the efforts of Mary's own father, William Godwin, to honour his dead wife's legacy, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) caused much outrage because of his outspokenness. This was no doubt a precedent Mary had in mind.

Mary begins mentioning the 'obstacles' now 'happily removed' which allow her to 'fulfil an important duty,—that of giving the productions of a sublime genius to the world,

with all the correctness possible, and of, at the same time, detailing the history of those productions, as they sprang, living and warm, from his heart and brain'. She will offer no comments on his private life, 'except inasmuch as the passions which they engendered inspired his poetry'. A bit mysteriously, she writes that the time 'to relate the truth' has not come and she will not, anyway, offer a convenient version. 'Whatever faults he had ought to find extenuation among his fellows, since they prove him to be human; without them, the exalted nature of his soul would have raised him into something divine'. To err is to be human, then, though we will never know to what faults Mary referred. And why should we?

Now, for the main qualities: 'First, a gentle and cordial goodness that animated his intercourse with warm affection and helpful sympathy. The other, the eagerness and ardour with which he was attached to the cause of human happiness and improvement; and the fervent eloquence with which he discussed such subjects'. Mary launches then into presenting Percy as a man fully committed to the cause of political freedom, with utmost passion: 'any new-sprung hope of liberty inspired a joy and an exultation more intense and wild than he could have felt for any personal advantage'. These words were written after the passing of the 1832 Reform Act, the first timid step into the widening of the franchise to all male voters in Britain, and Mary stresses that decades before, when her husband was politically active, defending any kind of freedom was a risky enterprise. Percy's poetry reflects 'the determination not to despair', against the tenet that Romanticism is the expression of despair.

Mary argues that Percy's poems are of two types: 'the purely imaginative, and those which sprang from the emotions of his heart'. Of the second type, the 'more popular', she writes that they were the expression of personal feeling that, while running deep, he was 'usually averse to expressing (...) except when highly idealized'. This is puzzling for it suggests that Percy's 'intensity of passion' and 'extreme sensibility' were better manifested in the poems than in person. Mary refers to finding fragments of unfinished poems with manifestations of his deep self of which she was not aware but, then, every person leads a secret emotional life not even available to their spouses. Interestingly, she mentions that Percy himself valued the 'metaphysical strain' expressed in the less popular poems above the personal effusion: 'He loved to idealize reality; and this is a taste shared by few', though she trusts that there is plenty in his Platonic poems 'that speaks to the many'.

Mary, born in 1797, was forty-two when she wrote the preface, thirteen years older than when Percy died. She grants that 'there is the stamp of such inexperience' in all his production, for 'the calm of middle life did not add the seal of the virtues which adorn maturity to those generated by the vehement spirit of youth'. On the other hand, Mary notes that her husband was a 'martyr to ill-health', attributing his heightened sensitivity to 'constant pain', which made this 'perfectly gentle' man often irritable and overexcited. Mary reports that the day before his untimely death Percy declared 'If I die to-morrow I have lived to be older than my father', meaning that his body had accumulated in less than thirty years more sensibility and feeling than many others could expect to have in much longer lives. Live fast, die young... and leave a sadly destroyed body and an inconsolable widow. A tragedy, really.



Percy Shelley's family background is that of the gentry portrayed in Jane Austen's novels. Percy's paternal grandfather, Bysshe Shelley, was 1st Baronet of Castle Goring (a baronetcy is the lowest title in the aristocratic hierarchy; baronets are commoners with a right to be called Sir). His upward social mobility and that of his son Timothy were secured by means of rewarding matches with rich heiresses (the same tactic followed by Byron and his father). It is often forgotten that upper-class patriarchal masculinity treated sons as chattel to be traded with other equally powerful families, and this is what Percy resisted.

Initially the relationship with his father was good, as proven by the fact that Sir Timothy financed the first four volumes his son published (two collections of poems with one of his sisters, two gothic novels). A disastrous turning point happened, however, when Percy, then nineteen, married sixteen-year-old Harriet, a schoolmate of his sister Helen and the daughter of a coffee-house owner. If the Westbrooks thought the match would guarantee their daughters' financial and personal happiness they were quickly deceived. Sir Timothy reduced Percy's allowance to a minimum and the couple survived, together with her sister Elizabeth, mainly by borrowing much above their possibilities. To make matters even worse, Percy had got himself expelled from Oxford shortly before eloping with Harriet for having written the pamphlet 'The Necessity of Atheism'. He had no degree, no qualifications, and no way of entering any of the gentry-sanctioned careers for men.

Romantic legend has presented the relationship between Percy and Mary as the stuff of beautiful, romantic legend but nothing could be further from the truth—it was, at least at the beginning quite a sordid affair. Percy originally met Mary when she was fourteen and he, then nineteen and recently married, a visitor in William Godwin's home. Mary's father was happy enough to receive money from his admirer, but he was outraged when, two years later, Percy abandoned Harriet to elope with Mary, then sixteen, to Europe. They may have married there but if this happened then Percy became a bigamist. Harriet had his second child (Charles, the elder was Ianthe) a few months before Mary had her first with Percy, Clara. Mary and Percy could finally marry legally in England in 1816 a few weeks after Harriet drowned herself in Hyde Park's Serpentine. She was then heavily pregnant, probably from a lover, not Percy. Sued by Elizabeth, Harriet's sister, Percy lost custody of his two children, who were put in foster care. One can imagine Sir Timothy's disgust as his son's behaviour, though he did not come to the rescue in any way, leaving Harriet's children unattended.

In the preface Mary writes that Percy 'spurned' his privileges because he foregrounded his ideological duties. 'He was generous to imprudence, devoted to heroism', she writes. I will not deny his idealism, but it is important to note that once Sir Bysshe died in 1815, Percy became the beneficiary of an annuity of about £1000. This was not much in relation to the lifestyle of his social circle, which is why Mary and he eventually moved to Italy, where they frequently coincided with Byron. When Percy died, Mary depended on her work as a writer (she published other novels, not only *Frankenstein*) and on the rather limited help which Sir Timothy gave her for the upkeep of Percy Florence. It seems that one of his conditions was that she never used her name in her publications, to

prevent any connection with the surname Shelley (see <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/tshelley.html>).

The anonymous author of the article I have referenced calls Sir Timothy a ‘mean-spirited, hard-hearted’ man and a ‘forsaker of genius’, an expression I have found nowhere else on Google. This seems a fair judgement particularly since Sir Timothy was indeed aware of his son’s literary talent. The life he intended for Percy was a repetition of his own: a political career as an MP in some rotten borough under the protection of an aristocratic patron and marriage to a landowning heiress. It is easy to see why an idealistic youth like Percy would reject this plan but, of course, the downside of his rebelliousness is that Shelley always depended economically on the men of his family, both his father and his grandfather. This great defender of the workers of England never worked to earn a living, though I grant that he did much work on the literary front. In contrast another idealist young man decided decades later to make the most of his father’s money by running his factory and embezzling funds to start a political revolution. I mean, of course, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895).

Shelley’s idealism and commitment to the cause of freedom are, then, respectable but also the product of his class and privileged circumstances. Mary celebrated her late husband in her preface and the two anthologies, but I wonder how she felt about Harriet. It is hard not to sympathise with this poor woman and her children. As a worker’s daughter I myself have a great deal of mistrust against upper-class individuals presenting themselves as liberators, much more so against those who never did a day’s paid work in their life. I may value Percy Shelley’s poetry (I really do) and I might accept that he was not as selfish as my teacher painted him. Still, I have many doubts about Shelley, beginning with whether he really deserved all the love Mary put into the task of ensuring his immortality. And I wonder whether he would have done the same for her.

## 2 APRIL 2019 / JOHN KEATS: HERITAGE, LEGACY, AND BOHEMIAN POVERTY

Obsessing about how each of the great six male Romantic poets made a living is not the most orthodox way to approach them. It is now John Keats’s turn and, once more, this is, I think, a very relevant issue.

I’ll begin, then, by mentioning Keats’s guardian Richard Abbey, the man who put in charge of young Keats’s education in the absence of his father (a successful ostler-keeper who died when the boy was eight) and the mother (dead when he was fourteen). Keats was born in what might be called a middle-class family and he received a rather good primary and secondary education at liberal John Clarke’s School, happily for him away from Eton (where, remember, Shelley was mercilessly bullied). The headmaster’s son, Charles Cowden Clarke, awakened the love of poetry in the child Keats but, very sensibly, Abbey chose for his not-too-rich ward an apprenticeship, at age fourteen, with a surgeon/apothecary. After this, Keats enrolled as a medical student at Guy’s Hospital in 1815 (aged twenty). Keats started publishing poetry in 1814 and by 1816—already in

possession of an apothecary's licence, which could have led to his being a physician and surgeon—he decided to abandon medicine (and not because he lacked a talent for it).

Abbey's fury is easy to imagine, not only because a great deal of money had been invested in Keats's training but also because the poetry market could by no means guarantee a living. For whatever reasons the legacies of his mother and grandmother, which could have freed Keats from the need to do paid work, were left unclaimed and he mainly depended on Abbey's generosity and that of his friends to progress in his career as a poor, bohemian poet. Sales of his three poetry volumes were very low and Keats basically lived in poverty—his lack of prospects was the reason why he could not marry his beloved Fanny Brawne (she was in mourning for him for six years and only married twelve years after his death). The difference with Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, who were also poets of subsidized leisure, is that unlike Keats they had a title and an upper-class family background to rely on. It is actually quite extraordinary that Keats launched himself as a poet in his social situation—Wordsworth, remember, accepted a position as head post-master once he was a family man, Coleridge had a patron. Keats, of course, died too young, aged only twenty-five, to be in a similar position as a husband and a father and so he embodies—even more closely than the celebrated poet Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) who died by his own hand aged only seventeen—the myth of the young genius taken too early by death.

Read in hindsight, Keats's biography makes perfect sense: he quit medicine to focus on poetry for a short career of just five years (1816-1821) as if he knew that he was going to die. The point, though, is that he did not know that he would die young. Keats chose poetry because he felt strongly entitled to earning an immortality for which the only foundation was his own strong belief in his talent. Is this wrong? Isn't this the stuff of every Romantic dream of being an artist? Yes it is but let me ask this question: if Blake could produce his amazing *oeuvre* while still working long days why did Keats see his poetical vocation as incompatible with the pressing need to make a living? What if he had turned out to be a bad poet? How many others have destroyed their lives following the myth of the artist devoted to his/her art? And no, I don't have a child asking me to be an artist full time... I'm just making the point that these choices and his early death do not constitute a tragedy. They are part of the socio-economic subtext of Romantic poetry, a genre which depends very heavily on a youthful sense of leisure financed by others (mainly patient, devoted, besotted family and friends), though this is hardly ever commented on. Would I rather not have Keats's poems? No, of course not—but I'd rather not pass on as Romantic myth what was a very snobbish view of paid work as a sort of humiliating activity.

Like Shelley, Keats was only known among a small coterie in his lifetime. He emerged as a poet at a time when Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron were already stars and was therefore seen as a member of a school about to peak. His poetry was not particularly well received, to the point that Byron established the myth that what actually killed poor Keats was the negative reviews of *Endymion*, the poem Keats saw as his masterpiece. So much for legend. Keats actually died for lack of antibiotics, only available from 1945 onwards, and because the poorly understood nature of tuberculosis led to appalling medical treatment (believe it or not, patients like him were bled... as if they needed to

lose even more blood). Fanny could not do for Keats what Mary did for Percy Shelley with the post-humous edition of his poems and, apparently, none of Keats's friends could agree on how to approach his biography. There were scattered comments and even Shelley's monumental poem "Adonais" (in fifty-five stanzas!) but it fell to Victorian admirers who had not met Keats in life to write his biography. Incidentally, Alfred Tennyson was one of Keats's main champions.

Allow me to stop for a while at Andrew Motion's 1997 biography, which came after a long silence of thirty years on Keats's life (by the way: the most recent biography is Nicholas Roe's 2012 volume). Motion is a first-rank poet who simply loves Keats and so, though no scholar, he published his book as a heart-felt homage. Interestingly, his efforts elicited a furious attack from American leading poetry scholar Helen Vendler, who absolutely hated Motion's style: "There is an odd mixture, in his chapters, of the old vocabulary of appreciation with the newer vocabulary (never adequate to poetry) of materialist criticism" (<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v19/n20/helen-vendler/inspiration-accident-genius>). Vendler was incensed by Motion's discussion of issues connected with class, gender, and race, believing that scholarly comment on the poems should have been the main focus. I'm myself a cultural materialist (hence my comments on the Romantics' income) so I cannot sympathise with her point of view. I mention her vitriolic attack because it gives us a chronology for when scholarly analysis started being inextricably mixed with Cultural Studies concerns: the late 1990s.

The 'materialism' attached to any literary career is, sorry Vendler, very important. It connects not only with the material production of the editions that help to canonize authors and keep them alive but with many other aspects also worth considering like heritage and adaptation. Keats is right now a text beyond the texts he produced, as we see in the way his person is recalled beyond the scholarly analysis of the poems. The road to his canonisation was fully established by *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats* (1848), edited by Richard Monckton Milnes, himself a poet in the Apostles Club which also included Tennyson. But the poems are just part of Keats's construction as a Romantic icon. His memory is, intriguingly, also celebrated in two houses he never owned: Keats's House in Hampstead (London) was the property of his friend Charles Wentworth, he just rented rooms there; the Shelley-Keats House in Rome is not even connected to his writing, as Wentworth's house is, but to his death—this is where his journey south seeking a warmer climate ended. Shelley, by the way, never shared a home with Keats so it's funny that their names have been linked.

You can enjoy on YouTube the introductory video that Keats's House offers its visitors (<https://youtu.be/tgjZdBEdVs8>) and compare it to another production of similar length and content, 'The strangely encouraging life of John Keats' (<https://youtu.be/Mxc63WPaksY>) to consider: a) how a life can be summed up in just nine minutes (in both cases); b) which aspects are highlighted (consider the mother's role). As for the house itself, I had great fun watching vlogger Jesse Waugh's report, also nine minutes long (<https://youtu.be/ED1VOSO8rug>). The age of the amateur documentarian is just wonderful! Watch next the official video 'A Walk Through the Keats-Shelley House with Giuseppe Albano' (<https://youtu.be/7ZxAGg9qhKg>), a nice five-minute piece designed to... ask for funding from admirers. Then wonder a) why we

visit these places at all, b) what type of fetishism they depend on, c) whether seeing the locket with Keats's hair, and his life and death masks, illuminates our understanding of the poems. I have visited the house in Hampstead and, yes, you do get that funny feeling of 'my, this is where Keats wrote his best poems' but, then, each of these museums is an artificial construct that caters to aspects of fandom quite tangential to the persons there celebrated. Or are the museums central and the poems tangential?

The heritage industry extends to adaptation usually through the biopic but also through other audio-visual and print products. For all of these the basis is biography, based on its turn on scholarly research. I have already alluded to some films based on the lives of the Romantic poets: *Pandemonium* (Wordsworth and Coleridge), and a few dealing with Byron and Shelley—*Gothic*, *Rowing in the Wind*, *Enchanted Summer*, *Mary Shelley*... John Keats has received the attention of New Zealander film director Jane Campion, known mainly for the Victorian drama *The Piano*. Her film *Bright Star* (2009) is based on Motion's biography but focuses specifically on the doomed romance between Fanny Brawne and John Keats. I cannot offer an opinion since I have not seen it: as much as I like Ben Wishaw (Keats) the reviews complaining about how boring the film is put me off. And my class prejudices—the impossible love which the film narrates has to do not only with Keats's failure to make sufficient money to marry Fanny (excuse me!) but also with the gender prejudice that prevented the daughters of gentlemen from making a living. Today, talented Fanny would probably be a fashion designer and it would be her choice (or not) to maintain Keats while he wrote poetry. At the time when they were alive this was not an option and, so, what is presented as a tragic romance is just the product of ugly gender-related social limitations. Biopics tend to do that: focus narrowly on their subject paying little attention to the bigger picture—but, then, socio-economics make no good R/romantic plots.

There is another adaptation which I'd like to mention: the four novels by Dan Simmons, known as the *Hyperion Cantos*: *Hyperion* (1989), *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990), *Endymion* (1996), and *The Rise of Endymion* (1997). These are, as it is habitual in Simmons's work, a heady mixture of science fiction and unbelievably rich literary allusion. Every time someone tells me that SF is a trivial genre, I ask them to read Simmons and then get back to me. In an often quoted interview (<http://www.bookpage.com/9708bp/firstperson3.html>), Simmons comments that 'In fact, when I first started writing *Hyperion*, I knew I'd have to deal with Keats' long poems, "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion". I really appreciated his theme of life evolving from one race of gods to another, with one power having to give way to another, as Hyperion must". You don't need to have read all of Keats to follow Simmons, but the more you know the better you can catch the allusions—and enjoy Keats's presentation as an immortal 'cybrid' (a mixture of clone and AI). In another novel, in this case by Tim Powers, *The Stress of her Regard* (1989), Byron, Shelley and Keats encounter their terrible muse and are vampirised by her and the even more terrible Nephillim...

How about Keats's poems? Two very quick comments, as I have room for no more: it is really amazing that he is remembered by a very short list of pieces (mainly the odes), and, now that we have lost the art of letter-writing to whatsapp and even more criminally illiterate social media, it is important to recall that Keats was a magnificent

writer of letters. His intellectual work is scattered among them (he did not write other essays) but so is his love life—the letters he addressed to Fanny Brawne are pure poetry though in prose. And everyone agrees that he was a poet of sensuality, which is why the Pre-Raphaelite painters took inspiration from so many of his poems—another form of adaptation.

Keats chose ‘Here lies one whose name was writ in water’ as the epitaph for his tomb in the Non-Catholic Cemetery for Foreigners in Testaccio, Rome (where Shelley’s ashes are also buried), believing he had failed in his bid to conquer immortality. His friends added more words, claiming that Keats died ‘in the Bitterness of his Heart at the Malicious Power of his Enemies’, thus perpetuating the legend that he was killed by his mean reviewers. This is a point often noted by introductions to Keats (in which, Richard Abbey is unanimously characterised as a villain) but it may be about time to consider this epitaph from the opposite point of view: Keats’s view of himself as a man who could reach immortality through poetry is an extraordinary stance to assume, and we need to deconstruct it as part of the Romantic myth. I’m not trying to kill off personal aspiration or deny Keats’s right to make the most of his talent. I’m baffled by the economic dependence though what truly irks me is the implicit celebration of bohemian, self-chosen poverty as part of the Romantic act of creation. Surely, among the truly poor there may have been one or two Keats, maybe three... but they never ever dreamed of immortality, how could they? For them having a Richard Abbey to help them would have been enough dream—but I’d rather stop here before I make myself totally unable to read Keats... Damned cultural materialism...!!

## 9 APRIL 2019 / CULTURAL STUDIES REVISITED: A BITTERSWEET FEELING

I have spent a good portion of my morning today working on a talk I’m giving next month at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. The topic is Cultural Studies, specifically my point of view on their evolution in Spain. As happens, I was invited ten years ago to lecture on this very same topic and this neat figure offers a good chance to consider what has happened in the last decade. Since I have decided to use only one third of my talk for an introduction to the matter and focus in the other two thirds on a practical example, today’s post has the double function of serving as a complement to the talk and allowing me some room for reflexion.

One obvious problem of Cultural Studies is that we are constantly in need of defining what it consists of, particularly in comparison to ‘Filología’ (I’m using the Spanish word to distinguish it from English ‘philology’, which is the discipline in charge of guaranteeing the preservation of ancient and old literary texts). ‘Filología’ refers to the study of a given culture on the basis of its language and its literary canon, to the exclusion of other texts either because they are regarded as inferior in quality or because they are not based on writing. Cultural Studies, in contrast, considers as texts worth studying using its multidisciplinary methodology any cultural manifestations susceptible of being read and interpreted. I’m aware that this is a tautological definition for Cultural Studies both defines and articulates as texts what it studies. Thus, you might not think of the popular

drink Red Bull as a text but the moment you approach it as the object of your research, it becomes a text worth exploring in all aspects of its cultural impact. And no: this is neither Anthropology nor Sociology, it's Cultural Studies.

Ten years ago, the new degrees based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) were implanted in Spain and that seemed a turning point in the evolution of the old-style 'Filología' into the new style 'Estudios'. Many degrees were renamed in this way, whereas in other cases 'Filología' was replaced by 'Lengua y Literatura'. The label 'Filología' still survived in the nomenclature of some BA degrees and in the names of Departments, which did not change. Thus, I work for the Departament de Filologia Anglesa, even though our BA carries the label English Studies (the one, by the way, recommended by our national association AEDEAN). The truth is that 'Filología' was not generally dropped from the degree titles because there was a widespread need to extend the field of Cultural Studies but because it was a label unpopular with students. They simply stopped attaching any meaning to it and it was expected that the new labels might help prospective students to understand better what we do and, hence, enrol in our courses. I have already commented on this question several times here in this blog but I'll mention again that, as much as like the idea of being a teacher of 'English Studies' I find that graduates with that degree lack a professional title similar to the old 'filólogo'.

Thanks to the efforts of my colleague Felicity Hand my Department has been offering Cultural Studies since 1992 (well, my Department actually means she, our friend Esther Pujolràs, and myself). Prof. Hand was the organizer of the first Cultural Studies conference in English Studies in Spain, back in 1995—probably an absolute first in Spain. She was also a member of the core group, together with Rosa González (UBarcelona), David Walton (UMurcia), and Chantal Cornut-Gentille (UZaragoza), which founded the Culture and Power conferences, of which the UAB meeting was the first. There were fifteen annual and biannual meetings until 2015 and the same number of proceedings volumes. Besides, Antonio Ballesteros became in 1998 the first coordinator of the Cultural Studies panel for the AEDEAN conference and in 2001 the Iberian Association of Cultural Studies (IBACS) was born. Other associations, such as SELICUP (Sociedad Española de Estudios Literarios y Cultura Popular) also welcomed Cultural Studies, though coming from a very different perspective.

My personal impression is that the implantation of Cultural Studies in Spain is a partial failure. On the one hand, if you check the titles of the post-2009 BA and MA degrees offered in Spain, you will notice an increase in the number of titles that do use the label 'Estudios Culturales'. On the other, not a single Department has taken yet that name and I know of very few scholars who call themselves Cultural Studies specialists. If you care to check Dialnet you will find a list of publications on the topic (see for instance Chantal Cornut-Gentille's *Los Estudios Culturales en España: Exploraciones teórico-conceptuales* (2013) and the proceedings of the *I Congreso Internacional de Estudios Culturales Interdisciplinarios Cultura e identidad en un mundo cambiante* (2018)) but I don't think that Spanish academia has truly accepted Cultural Studies. It is a still marginal discipline.

This marginality is usually attributed to the conservatism of the Spanish university and I would agree that this is indeed the case. I marvel that in 2019 students are still being told that no dissertations should be written on *Harry Potter* or *Star Wars*, but this is still happening. It is my belief, however, that other factors need to be considered.

To begin with, although the Culture & Power circle, to which I myself belonged, did much to introduce Cultural Studies into 'Filología Inglesa' we had zero impact in Spain because our publications were in English, including David Walton's excellent handbook *Introducing Cultural Studies* (2007) published in Britain by Sage. The language is a barrier but so is the territorial division of the Spanish university. Thus, the Universidad Carlos III offers a programme in Cultural Studies which combines aspects of the degrees in the Humanities, Sociology, and Media (both Journalism and Audiovisual Communication) but no 'Filologías'. In Britain the degrees in Cultural Studies are closer to Media Studies than to English but the case is that those of us who had first access to the original bibliography in English failed to connect with other areas of study in Spain and make ourselves visible. This has generated strange distortions: for me, any text originally in English is part of the field of Cultural Studies, whereas for many Spanish specialists in Media Studies I might be guilty of intruding into their field by exploring texts which are not literary (like film, series, or videogames). As long as we publish in different languages this is not a problem, but territorialism has certainly prevented us from establishing a common ground.

On the other hand, despite the efforts of AEDEAN to make networking more fluid within English Studies we still suffer from a chronic state of disconnection. By this I mean that since the Ministry does not publish the list of R+D+I subsidized projects in any accessible way (you need to check the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* year by year) it might well happen that your neighbour in a close-by university is doing very similar research without your knowing about it. There have been, then, several groups doing Cultural Studies without being aware of each other, and without being even aware of the existence of IBACS and of the Culture & Power seminars. This means that many young researchers in the field have no idea about how their path has been eased by us, the senior researchers, nor is there a sense of tradition but a constant reinvention of the wheel. This also means a certain stagnation instead of accumulative progress.

Within the Culture & Power circle what happened was that, progressively, each of us started focusing more narrowly on our field of interest. To name a few persons, Rosa González put all her energy into Irish Studies and Felicity Hand into Post-colonial Studies. I myself focused on Gothic and science fiction. Each Culture & Power seminar, then, had to have a wide-ranging topic that could encompass many different interests and eventually we started having the impression that the conferences were too open. The reason why they have been discontinued then has to do, if only partly, with their no longer being necessary because other conferences welcome now Cultural Studies specialists. The AEDEAN panel, I think, suffers in contrast from another kind of indefiniteness: it has a too large presence of papers about Literature and too little research based on other texts, though films and TV series are also present. Of course, one can produce Literary Studies with a Cultural Studies approach but there is too much dependence on what I can only call standard Literature.



There is also another matter that I'm not really at liberty to discuss in all detail because I should have to name persons that might feel offended by my partial vision of events. I'll go, however, as far as I can. Something which is never discussed in academia is how personal feelings affect the expansion and consolidation of research areas, but this does affect Cultural Studies. I don't mean jealousy or anything remotely in that line, I mean a perplexing inability to stay in touch and go on working together. Or to click, for lack of a better word. What appeared to be promising connections failed in a variety of cases. Persons who seemed friendly had an aggressive agenda in mind, others remained friendly but oddly inapproachable. Then, within the group we may have made mistakes, such as not taking the road to become a research group, for which I myself have been blamed. My point of view is that we were too diverse to cohere in the terms which the Ministry requires, and I still think this is a correct perception, but maybe this is me being mulish. I also think, and I'm sorry to say this, that we lacked a strong leadership. As you can see, I'm talking about the past because in a way the generation that introduced Cultural Studies into English Studies in Spain is approaching the end of their careers and the ideas that have been abandoned will not be retaken.

I have then a bittersweet feeling: I think that English Studies is the study area most welcoming to Cultural Studies in Spain, but I don't think this means that it is fully consolidated. I'm happy to see that researchers apply its methods often without being 100% aware that this is what they're doing but I worry about the backlash from right-wing academics constantly arguing that Cultural Studies is nothing but left-wing activism. Of course, that's the whole point—questioning how ideas and values are formed, though the politics of Cultural Studies are a matter for another post.

To conclude, I should say that whereas Cultural Studies as we practice them in English Studies in Spain has radically changed the way we think of identity—exploring nationality, ethnicity, gender, age and other factors—there is still an obvious shyness about breaking textual barriers and fully accepting variety. Popular music and videogames are still mostly virgin territory, and as I know first-hand as a reader of science fiction, not all genres are equally appreciated.

I don't think we are ready for Literature to take less space in our degrees (and research) but this is happening in the world around us and sooner or later we'll have to consider this question. And truly welcome Cultural Studies.

## 6 MAY 2019 / VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN'S MAN AND THE (VEXED) QUESTION OF THE POST-HUMAN

These days I'm teaching *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831) and writing about one of its thousands of descendants, Richard K. Morgan's *Thin Air* (2018). As science and technology advance and speculative fiction gets closer to everyday life (or perhaps the other way around), writers imagine creatures that would have baffled Mary Shelley. The newer creations are sometimes categorised as monsters, sometimes as freaks,

depending on whether they appear to be capable of overwhelming Homo Sapiens or just contribute an exciting sense of difference to the narration where they appear.

Having written my doctoral dissertation on monstrosity (<http://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/4915>) I know that taxonomies have limitations, and that a full inventory of the monsters and freaks of one period may have to be reconsidered for the next one. I'm also aware that many of us, scholars, are still too wary of reading gothic, fantasy, and science fiction, preferring instead to read theory, which is always safer to quote and sounds more properly intellectual. I believe this is the root of two serious problems: the use, abuse, and misuse of concepts such as cyborg and post-human in an abstract way, without much consideration of the particularities of the fantastic characters in question, and the tenacious but incorrect overlap between human and Homo Sapiens.

When Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was still a curio often attributed to Percy Shelley and nobody dreamt of making this novel an integral part of university courses on Romanticism, British SF writer Brian Aldiss and his co-author David Wingrove declared in *Billion Year Spree* (1973) that Mary was the 'origin of the species'. They praised her work as the very foundation of SF, at the same time arguing the thesis that since *Frankenstein* is gothic fiction, SF's essence is shaped by horror – not necessarily that inspired by scary monsters but by the sublime fear that we may feel if we stop to consider the universe and our place in it. Aldiss was so in love with Mary that he published in the same year 1973 a novel, *Frankenstein Unbound*, in which he fantasises about meeting her (Joe Bodenland, his delegate in the text travels from the future to give Mary a copy of her novel...). I wrote already many years ago an article about Roger Corman's rather crazy film adaptation (<http://ddd.uab.cat/record/116804>), one of the many films that have toyed with the motif of the monster made to be better than human but condemned to being hated.

Now that *Frankenstein* is part of our syllabus, my personal choice has been to ask my students to present in class a brief text about a film that connects with Mary's creation. If all goes well, I might publish their work later this summer and offer a nice guide to this peculiar sub-genre. Now, as part of class activities I'm doing some necessary close reading, during which I had quite a big surprise. It's funny how reading aloud reveals layers of meaning that go unnoticed in silent reading. I was reading this central passage from Chapter IV, in which Victor narrates how he made his man, when I stumbled upon a word I had not noticed before. See for yourself (this is the 1831 edition, at Project Gutenberg):

I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion.

The word is 'slaughter-house'. The man (not creature, not monster) that Victor manufactures is made of the pieces of human dead bodies but, here is the surprise, the passage hints that animal parts are also used for his body. Possibly, many scholars have already commented on this rather shocking issue, but I had simply not noticed. I don't recall, in any case, a passage in the novel which discusses the non-human components that contributed to making the new man. Possibly, H.G. Wells did notice the presence of the slaughter-house next to the dissecting room, and the charnel house, and this is where his hybrids come from in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896).

Before the passage I have quoted, Victor declares that he is motivated by a straightforward patriarchal fantasy: 'A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs'. There is a hilarious moment in the episode of *The X-Files* (5.5) *The Post-modern Prometheus* (1997) in which Mulder enthuses about the possibility of creating life which imitates humans, as a mad geneticist he has just met is doing. Always a cool-headed pragmatist, Scully replies that this already exists: it's called reproduction. The passage I have quoted is, of course, usually read as a sign of Victor's arrogant bid to try to replace God or, from a feminist angle, to usurp women's power to create life. Once you become aware of transhumanism, however, Victor can be read as a transhumanist and the other way around: transhumanism appears characterised as the patriarchal aberration it is when you read *Frankenstein*.

Now it is time to discuss labels. To begin with Victor correctly refers to a 'new species' and not a 'race'. We are *Homo Sapiens*, which is a species of the genus *Homo*. This genus and the genus *Pan* (chimpanzees, bonobos) are part of the tribe *Hominini*, which, together with the tribe *Gorillini* (gorillas, obviously) conforms the family *Homininae*. There is currently just one species in the genus *Homo* but there used to be more, beginning with *Homo Neanderthalensis*. Scientists do not agree on the definition of the word species for the very simple reason that since species are in a constant state of evolution, fixing them taxonomically makes little sense. They warn us, at any rate, that species differentiation (the process by which a new species branches out from a previous species) is extremely slow, and not visible in historical terms. To sum up, then: a) we should NOT use the word 'human' as if it only applied to *Homo Sapiens*, for it applies to all past and future species of the genus *Homo*; b) evolution cannot be appreciated in small periods. I'll add c): evolution is a reaction to changes in the environment and it is therefore quite impossible to imagine, much less say with certainty, how *Homo Sapiens* will evolve and into what.

Transhumanists, as you possibly know, believe that the evolution of *Homo Sapiens* should be controlled and that technoscience should be applied to produce better humans. This is exactly what Victor believes and does, even though he had no idea in his pre-Charles Darwin times of evolution (or of genetics!). Victor's new man has qualities that Mary Shelley calls 'super-human' such as an enormous resistance to heat and cold, little need of nutrients (he is a vegetarian!), and a powerful physique that allows him to run fast and leap high. Those who criticise the unlikely way in which he learns to

command a language (French, incidentally), and even read, forget that he is no ordinary Homo Sapiens but an enhanced, or augmented man. Following transhumanist tenets, the creature is actually a transitional individual. His children, born of the union with the female that Victor aborts at the last minute, would be the real post-human species. My main objection to this is that the couple's children would not be post-human but post-Homo Sapiens: still human (part of the genus Homo) but belonging to a different species, as Homo Neanderthalis was different from Homo Sapiens.

Speaking, then, of the post-human is, excuse me, quite lazy. Our future will be post-human only if the genus Homo dies out replaced by some mutated, new animal species (as the franchise of *Planet of the Apes* is narrating) or by artificial intelligences, in what Ray Kurzweil famously called the singularity. The first-case scenario is quite unlikely, in view of how we ill-treat animals, whereas the second is simply silly. If, as happens with Skynet in *The Terminator* (1984), a computer goes rogue on us and starts making the combat robots that will end Homo Sapiens, the solution is quite easy: shut down the power grid and the computer with it. This might result in an overnight return to the Middle Ages, or further back, but we tend to forget that, for instance, the Roman Civilization did very well with no electricity.

If, as the passage I have quoted earlier on suggests, Victor's new man is a transspecies human-animal hybrid, then, technically speaking, he is no longer Homo Sapiens, and he is certainly post-human. However, most discussions of *Frankenstein* avoid the animalist angle and focus on the issue of how Victor jump-starts evolution rather than patiently wait for Earth to bring forth the replacement for Homo Sapiens. His man has no organic pieces whatsoever, which means that he is not a cyborg. My personal view is that the creature is a replicant, as he is 100% organic but made in a lab rather than born out of a woman or an artificial incubator. Like the replicants of Karel Čapek's pioneering play *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*, 1920) and those in *Blade Runner* (1982), Victor's man awakens to life as an adult – he's never a baby. Unfortunately, the word robot, introduced by *R.U.R.*, has also caused much confusion, for although in the play it simply means 'worker' (its meaning in Czech) in the popular imagination it was coupled with the older notion of the automaton, hence generating the modern idea of the robot, a fully mechanical, non-human, machine. In the famous 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*, the creature was presented as an inarticulate, lurching, stiff individual, which hinted that there might be a hidden mechanism in his body, as automata have. He looked, in short, cyborgian, rather than totally human.

The problem with the cyborg, or cybernetic organism, a concept invented in the 1960s but mostly popularized in the 1980s, is that it connects poorly with genetic engineering. Take the protagonist of the novel by Richard Morgan which I'm writing about. Hakan Veil is sold into indentured work by his impoverished mother when he is still in her womb. He is heavily modified by means of genetic engineering and digital implants to become a super-soldier of the kind needed in interplanetary travel to quench possible insurrections. The corporation that employs him also transforms him into a hibernoid, that is to say, a person who sleeps four months a year but that can be deployed day and night during the remaining eight on board spaceship. Whereas digital implants cannot be inherited by the offspring of cyborgs, genetic modifications are quite another matter.

This is the reason why cyborg is an insufficient label to describe Veil. He has no children and we cannot know whether his mutations would be automatically inherited by his offspring. If this happened, and the children were extremely different from Homo Sapiens, then they would be a new Homo species – but still human, just as Veil is fully human despite being a weird type of Homo Sapiens.

I believe that Mary Shelley was absolutely right to warn against the transhumanist project of creating post-Homo Sapiens life, and also that Morgan is likewise absolutely right to warn that transhumanism will make slaves of us, and not free human beings. The difference is that, logically, whereas the vocabulary I am applying to *Frankenstein* was unknown to its author (the label science-fiction appeared in the 1920s), contemporary authors like Morgan are discussing transhumanism with a remarkable knowledge of what it implies. Like Victor, the transhumanists expect the new species they want to turn Homo Sapiens into to be grateful but, again like Victor, they are making decisions that involve all of us without asking for our opinion. Perhaps, strictly speaking, the first transhumanists were the Homo Sapiens individuals who decided that having, as humans, the whole Earth to us was a pretty good idea. I've never ever believed for a second that Homo Neanderthalensis simply died out... Just recall that for them we, Homo Sapiens, were the others... the post-humans that would replace them. And so we did.

I'll leave philosophical post-humanism for another post... or rant.

### 13 MAY 2019 / IN THE MONSTER'S OWN WORDS: GETTING TO KNOW FRANKENSTEIN'S NEW MAN

I was interviewed last week on a Catalan-language radio show on monsters ("AutoCine: Els Monstres", Cerdanyola Ràdio, [https://www.ivoox.com/autocine-els-monstres-audios-mp3\\_rf\\_35501071\\_1.html](https://www.ivoox.com/autocine-els-monstres-audios-mp3_rf_35501071_1.html)). The presenter's last question was 'which famous monster is most imperfectly known?' and I had to reply that this is Frankenstein's creature.

Unfortunately, the movies have transmitted a very limited image of this monster, based on the theatrical line descended from *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823), the melodrama (with songs!) by Richard Brinsley Peake. This was the first adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel and, as happens with modern film adaptations, many audience members took for granted its fidelity. The famous 1931 film directed by James Whale is, in fact, based on the 1927 play by English author Peggy Webbling, who must have been familiar with Peake's play. She, like him, characterises the monster as an inarticulate being, incapable of uttering any coherent speech. Webbling, incidentally, is also responsible for the absurdity of calling the creature by his maker's name. The monster speaks in later films (for instance in Roger Corman's 1990 *Frankenstein Unbound*, based on Brian Aldiss's novel) but only Kenneth Branagh's 1994 adaptation reflects Mary's original conception of the creature as an intelligent, perceptive individual. Even so,

Branagh's cannot be said to give an accurate picture of the monster's acumen and singular process of self-education.

Many critics have disputed Mary's authorial decisions about this self-education. The monster, if you recall, takes shelter secretly in a hovel attached to the humble home of the De Lacey's, a French family down on their luck for political and personal reasons. The arrival of the son's Turkish fiancée, Saffie, is used by Mary as the excuse to have the monster witness her education, which he mimics. Since the monster, as I explained in the previous post, is an enhanced (or augmented) Homo Sapiens, I'm ready to accept that he can profit by this second-hand method of learning, though I grant that the whole process does test the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. This is further tested with the monster's casual discovery of three fundamental books (John Milton's epic biblical poem *Paradise Lost*, a volume of *Plutarch's Lives*, and Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*). He also happens to be in possession, very conveniently, of Frankenstein's journal. This volume covers the several months of the research leading to the creature's creation and the monster has it because Victor kept him in the cloak which the creature takes to cover his naked body.

By the time creature and creator meet in the Alps, the monster can already use sophisticated speech, though he has never had the chance to interact with a fellow human being: all run away scared, or turn against him violently, as soon as they see him. If he tries to speak, this is to no avail—his monstrous physiognomy causes such overreaction that communication is simply impossible. If Victor can overcome his revulsion and sit down to patiently listen to his 'son', this is only because he has no option. His parental duty, as we know, is of no consequence, for the moment his baby was born, Frankenstein turned his back on him, expecting the ugly thing to vanish, somehow. The monster, however, insists that Victor must play the role of parent like any other father.

I'd like to comment on two passages, often quoted but, anyway, worth considering in order to learn who this monster is. I find it quite peculiar that in his process of self-learning the creature chooses no name for himself, for this complicates our reading very much. Very obviously, he is a man, for Victor has made him as such, and calling this new man 'the monster' and 'the creature' is something I very much dislike, since it is demeaning. The obvious name for him is Adam (a name he knows from reading Milton's version of the Biblical fall in *Genesis*) but, for whatever reason, Mary kept him nameless, a questionable decision that somehow shows her bias against her own creation. (And that, indeed, confused Peggy Webbling...).

In Chapter 15, the monster tells Victor about his having read the diary narrating his 'accursed origin' and the 'disgusting circumstances' of his unnatural birth. The diary also contains 'the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person (...) in language which painted your own horrors and rendered mine indelible'. No wonder he is 'sickened'. Logically, he questions Victor's methods: 'God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred'. From this passage one must deduce that

the monster does not look radically non-human but horridly human, and that his physical appearance is scary for that very reason. His ugliness, in short, is our own ugliness, as if you could take an average human being and deprive him of any feature that makes him moderately attractive. I remain, in any case, perplexed by the reaction of those who come across Victor's new Adam, for they seem to lack the curiosity that led so many spectators to enjoy the strange frisson provided by freak shows in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The monster, let's stop to consider for a second, does look human: he has no claws, or big fangs, or any other feature we connect with aggression—so why do people scream and run away at his sight? I do not quite understand why nobody stops, once the shivers are controlled, to ask him 'what are you?'

Faced with his general rejection, the monster assumes his abjection and starts behaving in a vicious manner which corresponds morally to the ugliness of his physical appearance. As we know, he kills Victor's youngest brother William and blames poor Justine, a mixture of servant and family member, for that crime. When he demands, in Chapter 17, from his creator that he manufactures a female companion to share his misfortune with, Frankenstein expresses serious doubts that this can be a solution to the problem of how to contain his evident 'malice'. The monster is offended: 'My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor, and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being and become linked to the chain of existence and events from which I am now excluded'. Famously, in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), also directed by James Whale, the female monster starts screaming the moment she sees her intended male companion; she shows, instead, a manifest interest in the rather handsome Frankenstein... The novel has no similar scene because Victor decides to abort the bride, but it is very easy to see that the monster's logic is very faulty, and sexist. He (that is, Mary) never thinks of the needs that the new Eve might have; in fact, she is to provide the same comforts as the later Victorian angel in the house: companionship but, above all, unconditional love and even admiration which will supposedly curb down the monster's alleged inclination to do evil. 'Give me a nice woman and I'll be a nice man' is a recipe that, we know, does not work at all well.

Victor's new Adam is, in the early stages of his life, a meek, well-behaved individual that gradually learns to respond with aggression to the abhorrence he is treated with. This is an obvious reading. I believe, however, that he is also naturally spiteful and resentful. I don't mean naturally malevolent but the type of individual that will bear a grudge down to the last consequences. Granted, the grudge he bears against Frankenstein is more than justified but the decision he makes to murder William and, later, Victor's bride Elizabeth is unfair to the victims and, ultimately, counterproductive. Naturally, we should not forget that Mary intended *Frankenstein* to be a gothic story and she had to stress the moral monstrosity of the creature. In her argumentation, the monster is corrupted, so to speak, by the animosity people display against him and, so, the community is partly responsible for his crimes. However, you cannot be both innocent and guilty of the murders you choose to commit, and this is the unstable position in which Mary places her new Adam. Super-human as he is in many aspects of his anatomy, he is, nevertheless, very human in the worst aspects of his personality: his capacity for

hatred and violence. Nothing will convince me that the creature would have been a good companion for the bride. Or a good father to their children.

The very fact that I am discussing these moral issues shows how complex the characterisation of Mary's monster is. In the end, the main challenge she poses to her readers is forcing us to wonder how we would react if we ever came across Victor's man. Would we give him a chance to explain himself? Would we be part of the mob chasing the poor thing in so many films? Would we be disgusted, fascinated, or both? How much difference from our human standard, in short, are we willing to tolerate in our fellow human beings? These are all valid questions, and I marvel that an eighteen-year-old girl could manage to put them together in that strange child of her imagination that *Frankenstein* is.

### 20 MAY 2019 / A HISTORIC DAY IN FICTION: CHIVALRIC ROMANCE WINS (OR IS THE GAME OVER?)

It is just impossible not to refer today to the controversial finale of HBO's series *Game of Thrones*, which surely has put 19 May 2019 in the history books about fiction for ever. While the internet rages, divided into lovers and haters of the ill-conceived eighth season (more than 1,100,000 people have already signed the Change.org petition to have it thoroughly re-written and re-shot), it is no doubt a good moment to consider whether chivalric romance has won the fight with mimetic fiction that Cervantes immortalised in *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615).

I must clarify that I am by no means a fan of *Game of Thrones*. I watched the first two seasons, and read the first two novels, and that was more than enough for me. I have been following, however, the plot summaries (I must recommend those by *El Mundo Today*), for I felt an inescapable obligation to know what was going on. Pared down to its bare bones, then, the series has narrated the extremely violent struggle for the possession of power in the context of pseudo-medieval, feudal fantasy—hardly a theme that appeals to me, for its overt patriarchal ideology. Women have participated in that struggle, as they did in the real Middle Ages (and later), only from positions left empty by dead men, and not as persons with the same rights. Since in the eight years which the series has lasted the debate about women's feminist empowerment has grown spectacularly, this has created enormous confusion about the female characters in *Game of Thrones*. I'll say it once more: the degree of respect and equality for women should NOT be measured by their representation in fiction written by MEN but by women's participation in audio-visual media as creators. In *Game of Thrones* this has been awfully low.

[SPOILERS IN THIS PARAGRAPH] I'll add that I am very sorry for those who named their daughters Khaleesi or Daenerys—you should always wait for the end of a series before making that type of serious decision! Perhaps it is now time to think why so many women have endorsed a story that has ultimately justified the murder of its most powerful female character by a man who supposedly loves her, and who is then allowed



(by other men) to walk free, despite this feminicide. And the other way around: we need to ponder why this brutal woman, a downright villain no matter how victimised she was once, has been celebrated as a positive hero. Just because she is young and pretty? All Daenerys ever wanted was power for herself, to sit on the throne and play crowned dictator, not to change the lives of others for good. This is the reason why she needs to be called a villain. In short: patriarchy has scored a victory with *GoT*: we are hungry for female heroes, and they have given us a villainess (or two, if we count Cersei, of course). Sansa and Arya (and Brienne) are just what they have always been: consolatory nonsense, as the late Angela Carter would say. Next time around, please all of you, women and men who hate patriarchy, reject its products.

Now, back to my topic: leaving gender issues aside (supposing we can), has chivalric romance won over mimetic fiction with *GoT*? Was the battle skewed since its inception? Did Cervantes really intend us to follow Alonso Quijano in his madness, induced by reading so much high fantasy? Or is the collective passion for *GoT* the kind of insanity Cervantes warned us against? I don't have room here to explore this in much detail but since I have a class to teach tomorrow about *Pride and Prejudice*, I do want to trace here briefly the frontlines in the battlefield to see how they stand. Austen once wrote her own Cervantine anti-fantasy novel, *Northanger Abbey*, a frontal attack against gothic, published posthumously in 1818. If she were alive today, she would be possibly groaning and sharpening her computer keyword to pen an onslaught onto fantasy with dragons...

The thesis I am going to defend is that we are at a crossroads: mimetic fiction as practiced by Jane Austen and company cannot fight the primary impulse that favours fantasy; yet, fantasy seems unable to renew itself and satisfy the demands of its consumers (above all, of women seeking post-sexist stories). Both mimetic fiction and fantasy fiction, I maintain, are reaching an impasse. The popularity of television series is contributing to that impasse by eroding the novel in favour of the audio-visual and by maintaining an anachronistic writing system that, as we have seen, can no longer ignore the voice of the (angry) spectator.

Histories of literature usually present realistic/mimetic fiction as the centre of the Literature worth reading, leaving fantasy at the margins. Academia, however, has been partly colonized since the 1980s by scholars with very different values, quite capable, besides, of reading both mimetic and fantastic fiction (here I mean the three modes: fantasy, gothic, and sf). This has been changing the perception of how fiction works, with non-mimetic fiction gaining more ground but with the main line still attributed to realist fiction. My point is that, in fact, *GoT* certifies that we have been narrating a very biased version of literary history: mimetic fiction has not only been unable to stem the tide of fantasy but has also given fantasy some key elements—the melodrama of the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel of sensibility, the historical fiction of the Romantic period, and the verisimilitude that the old romances lacked with the mighty Victorian novel. When J.R.R. Tolkien changed fantasy for ever with *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), all those elements solidified.

So, let me trace the genealogy, briefly. Chivalric romances, written in a variety of European languages, started as epic tales in verse to become prose narrative by the early

13<sup>th</sup> century. I don't know enough Spanish Literature to understand why Cervantes focused in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century on the dangers of reading a genre that had been around for centuries. *Amadís de Gaula* by Garci Rodríguez de Montalbo is supposed to have been written in 1304, though it became really popular after the introduction of printing (c. 1440s). *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485, Thomas Mallory) and *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490, Joanot Martorell, Martí Joan de Galba) are closer to Quixote but even so, he is driven mad by very old-fashioned texts, if I understand this correctly.

*El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615) came too early to have an immediate impact, for the novel, so to speak, was not yet ready to be born. Thomas Shelton is the first to translate the two volumes into English (this was the first translation ever) in 1612 and 1620 but it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that Cervantes could truly impact the realist novel. Tobias Smollett, who translated *El Quijote* in 1755 is usually included in the list of British authors of the sentimental novel (or novel of sensibility) but he seems to have picked up from Cervantes a major distrust of any fiction aimed at eliciting excitement rather than intellectual pleasure. Henry Fielding, who mercilessly mocked Samuel Richardson's quintessential sentimental novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) with *Shamela* (1741), took Cervantes's mantle to propose a style of narrating full of authorial irony, which Jane Austen eventually inherited. *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) remains Fielding's masterpiece.

Jane Austen's own mimetic fiction can be said to be a belated type of sentimental fiction and at the same time as example of double resistance to this sub-genre and to gothic. Austen cannot have enjoyed the excesses of Richardson's tale of rape *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748) nor the silliness of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) but I do see her having a good laugh at Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella* (1752), Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and, of course, admiring Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778) or Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Austen, plainly, did not enjoy what most of her contemporary readers preferred: not only sentimental fiction but, mostly, gothic, from Horace Walpole's pioneering *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), passing through Ann Radcliffe's best-selling *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Lewis's frankly scandalous *The Monk* (1796). I'm 100% sure that George R.R. Martin has read, and heavily underlined, Lewis's novel.

Gothic brought fiction back the Middle Ages as the backdrop for countless horrific thrillers about innocent heroines chased by appalling villains. At the time when the genre had been around already for about fifty years, Walter Scott (1771-1832) expunged the fantasy elements to turn the past into the stuff of the new historical novels. The Waverley Novels (1814-1832), with hits such as *Ivanhoe* (1820), prepared the ground for the grafting of the old chivalric romance, purged of the less palatable that so worried Cervantes onto the fictional model of the historical novel. William Morris laid the foundation for what was later known as high fantasy, heroic fantasy or sword and sorcery with his prose narratives *A Tale of the House of the Wolfings* and *All the Kindreds of the Mark* (1889), *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894) and *The Well at the World's End* (1896). Morris's translations, in partnership with Eiríkr Magnússon, of the *Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs* (1870) and these novels were a direct inspiration for Tolkien.

*The Lord of the Rings* is called a novel, not a romance, and this is what it is. H.G. Wells must have been among the last novelists to call his fantasy fiction 'romance' (a word we now use, confusingly, for romantic fiction similar to Austen's). I might be completely wrong but as I understand the matter, whereas in the old type of romance which Alonso Quijano enjoyed reading most elements were highly improbable, the new kind of romance (from Morris and Wells onwards) has learned the lesson of verisimilitude from the novel. Its plot is still impossible but, once we suspend our disbelief, each scene seems plausible, that is to say, the characters interact realistically, as they would do in a mimetic novel. This is how the battle against mimetic fiction is being won: if you can have similar complex characterisation, a naturalistic type of dialogue and a thrilling setting, why not choose fantasy over fiction set in the too well-known realm of realistic representation?

The post-Tolkien realism of fantasy (call it the neo-romance), however, is also its bane. You may include as many dragons as you please, and give some of your characters magical powers, but it is simply impossible to write first-class fantasy (or gothic, or science fiction) which is not rooted in the real world. I do not mean by this that the best fantasy is necessarily allegorical: what I mean is that since characters in current fantasy must act realistically, they are shaped by expectations very similar to those shaping characters in mimetic fiction. If you had Harry Potter fight corporate villainy instead of a dark wizard, with no magical elements, the tale would be more boring but, basically, the same story (if would be closer to John le Carré's *The Constant Gardener*). And the other way around: just because Daenerys has a special bond with her dragons, this does not mean that you may disregard the feminist expectations piled on her by so many female and male readers, based on their experience of real life (and not of handling dragons). Hence the impasse...

Ironically, then, we need to go back to Jane Austen for the fantasy of female empowerment, which allows the relatively poor Elizabeth Bennet to marry upper-class Darcy and climb in this way many rungs up the social ladder. Cinderella wins the game and gets to be, presumably, happy. In contrast, *Game of Thrones* has taken its ultra-realism so far that we are literally left with a colossal pile of ashes and the mounting anger of the many fans who thought that by endorsing fantasy they were supporting the alternative to the conservatism behind most mimetic fiction. It's game over, not for fantasy but for fiction which does not listen to its readers and that can only tell tales of violence, with no sense of wonder or of hope—which is what we really need.

## **27 MAY 2019/ ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE: WHY ACADEMIC CAREERS HAVE LOST THEIR APPEAL**

The teachers and researchers of all Catalan universities have been called to strike on Tuesday 28 in protest against the appalling conditions under which the non-permanent staff work. The article by the branch of the workers' union CGT which operates in my own university, UAB, explains that Royal Decree 103/2019, on the rights of trainee

researchers (Estatuto del Personal Investigador en Formación, EPIF), is insufficient and, anyway, it is not being applied, which puts UAB on the side of illegality (<https://cgtuab.wordpress.com/2019/05/17/28-de-maig-vaga-del-pdi-de-les-universitats-publicues-catalanes/>). The call to strike refers both to part-time associates and to full-time doctoral and post-doctoral researchers who enjoy fellowships and grants, and, most importantly, to the lack of tenured positions they might occupy one day.

A friend told me recently that one of the main weaknesses of the academic sector is that we are not solidary with each other, which is why our protests always fail. This makes me feel quite bad about my decision not to join the strike, but, then, it is my habit to systematically reject all calls of that nature. I am a civil servant offering a public service and I don't see why my students should be negatively affected by my refusal to work, no matter how justified the cause. Actually, I believe that strikes have lost their edge in the education sector, as there are so many every year that Governments (local, national) just do not pay any attention to the protesters. Other forms of activism are needed, and, so, this is what I am doing today: inform my students, and anyone interested, about what is going on.

I have described the situation many times in this blog, and what follows may sound repetitive, but this is one of the problems: nothing has changed since September 2010, when I started writing here, and certainly for some years before. To recap a very old story, until 2002, when I got tenure, you just needed to be a doctor in order to apply for a permanent position. Obtaining it depended, logically, on the quality of your CV and competition was anyway harsh, but on average you could get a permanent job around the age of 36 (it used to be 30, or slightly below, in the early 1990s). Next came the 'habilitaciones', an evil system which meant that candidates to positions had to demonstrate first their qualifications to a tribunal which could be sitting hundreds of miles away from home. This was expensive, tedious, anxiety-inducing for the members of the tribunals (who had to interrupt their lives often for months, regardless of their family situation) and evidently for the harassed candidates (who often had to try several times in different cities). Once you obtained your 'habilitación', you had to apply for tenure in a specific university and compete with other qualified candidates. ANECA, technically a private foundation attached to the Government, created in 2001, was given in 2007 the crucial function of organizing a new accreditation system to replace the nomadic 'habilitaciones', centralized in Madrid but mostly run online. Under this new system, imitated as we know by local agencies such as Catalan AQU, candidates must fill in a complex, time-consuming online application before being certified apt by the corresponding commission. Then you can apply to a university position. If you find any.

The perfect storm that risks demolishing the public Spanish university has been caused by the confluence of two incompatible circumstances: ANECA's demands from candidates have been increasing—in principle to secure that better research is done and better teaching offered—whereas the 2008 economic crisis (about to be repeated) has destroyed all the junior full-time positions that trainee researchers used to occupy. Very optimistically, ANECA (and the other agencies) suppose that applicants have produced their PhD dissertations while being the recipients of a grant, and that they have next

found post-doctoral grants, etc. In fact, most junior researchers are part-time associate teachers, which is incongruous because associates are, by definition, professionals who contribute their expertise to the universities for a few hours a week, and not academics aspiring to tenure. The Spanish public university suffers because of all this from a most dangerous split between the older, tenured teachers (average age 53, a third or more inactive in research) and the younger, non-permanent staff who should one day replace us, if they survive their frantic daily schedules. In fact, the 2008 crisis and the associate contracts have destroyed the chances of a whole generation (now in their forties and even fifties) to access tenured positions. And I am by no means as optimistic as ANECA, which appears to believe that all those currently beginning their PhDs will be eventually tenured.

We were told, around 2008, as a collective that Spain was not doing well in research and that we needed to raise the bar, hence the increasing demands of the accreditation system and of the assessment system (I refer here to the 'sexenios' that examine our academic production). The rationale behind this is that if we applied measuring systems borrowed from first-rank foreign academic environments this would increase our productivity and the quality of our research and teaching. Three problems, however, have emerged.

Here comes number one. Whereas in the past having a PhD was enough (being a 'doctor' means that you are ready to offer innovative teaching and research), now this is just the beginning of a long post-doctoral period that has delayed tenure to the age of 40, if you're lucky, and with the addition of total geographical mobility within Spain. This means that private life is totally subordinated to the needs of academia, a situation which punishes women severely since the decade between 30 and 40 is when we have babies. Since, besides, men tend to leave women the moment they choose to move elsewhere for their careers, this means that few women scholars can succeed in the terms that are most highly praised, namely, by becoming an internationally known scholar. My personal impression is that the persons earning tenure at 40, or later, in the current system could have also earned it at 30 under the older system. And, obviously, we run a major risk: faced with this perspective of a long professional post-MA training, of 17 years..., most budding scholars will simply give up. Specially the young women, right now the majority in the Humanities.

Problem number two: without young full-time staff we, seniors, are collapsing, too. Here's how I feel this week: seriously depressed. Why? Well, because after almost 28 years as a teacher/researcher I have a very clear perception that I will leave nothing behind. Since we have no full-time colleagues to train, and replace us, but a succession of part-time associates, when we retire our research area will retire with us. Overall, I feel, besides, very much isolated. I work mostly alone, either at home or in my university office, and I never meet my colleagues for a distended chat. Formal meetings are increasingly hard to organize because they conflict with the overworked associates' hectic schedules. Informal meetings do not happen because we are too busy working for the glory of our CVs and we have no time to spare. And, anyway, when we speak our topic is invariably the pathetic state of the university. I just wonder where intellectual life is happening, if it is happening anywhere. I feel, besides, frustrated that all new

projects to do something exciting never get started or are always provisional. Our book club is run by an associate who might be gone any day. When an enthusiastic associate and I visited the head of audio-visual services at UAB last week, to ask for advice about the project of opening a YouTube channel for the Department, the first question he asked was whether it would have permanent staff in charge. Too often, he said, new projects are started by keen associates only to be abandoned as soon as their contracts expire. My colleague replied that hers would last at least for... four years.

The third problem is that we are following foreign models of research and teaching assessment already imploding elsewhere. You may read, for instance, Anna Fazackerley's article of 21 May, "'It's cut-throat': half of UK academics stressed and 40% thinking of leaving" ([https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/may/21/cut-throat-half-academics-stressed-thinking-leaving?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/may/21/cut-throat-half-academics-stressed-thinking-leaving?CMP=share_btn_tw)). In the British system there is technically no tenure: teachers do not become civil servants but are hired for life (like in the Generalitat-run Catalan system). This is why so many are thinking of quitting. In our case, we, tenured teachers, develop a sort of bad marriage relationship with our jobs: I realized recently that I am constantly protecting myself from my academic career, as if it were an abusive partner. In Britain there is an additional misery to deal with: academics are made responsible for the recruiting of the many students to guarantee the financial stability of their institutions. Aware that they are coveted clients, students have learned to disrespect their teachers even more than we are disrespected here (as supposedly lazy, privileged 'funcionarios'... which some are indeed).

Fazackerley's piece is actually based on a report about the wellbeing of British academics (<https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/resources/research-reports/staff-wellbeing-higher-education>), which, as you may imagine, leads to worrying conclusions. Reading it, I even wondered whether we have a right to our wellbeing as tenured teachers, in view of the ill-treatment that associate teachers and post-docs are victims of. Of course, this is one of the most devious tools of the system: making you feel bad about tenure you have earned with great effort. Anyway, the report notes that "Wellbeing is maximised when people feel valued, well-managed, have good workplace collegiality and can act with agency and autonomy". However, our wellbeing is being eroded by, they say, "management approaches that prioritised accountability measures and executive tasks over teaching, learning and research tasks", though in the case of Spain I should say this is different. Here there is, simply, an obsession for publishing based on scientific principles that just fails to understand what we do in the Humanities (and I mean 'should do', namely, think slowly). The British report concludes that "In general, respondents did not feel empowered to make a difference to the way that Higher Education institutions deal with wellbeing issues and this generated some cynicism". That's right: one day you feel depressed, the next one cynical, and so on. Even angry which, unfortunately, may affect classroom mood and lead to burnout.

I have already mentioned the sense of isolation (what the report calls 'lack of collegiality'). *The Guardian* article highlights, as well, the stress caused by the frequent rejection of work for publication (which begins now at PhD level), the pressure caused by deadlines, the impossibility of excelling at the three branches of our jobs (teaching,

research, admin tasks), and two more factors I'd like to consider a bit more deeply. One is that the rules change all the time and the top bar keeps moving. The other is how you are judged by what you have not done, despite having done a lot.

We are being told by the agencies which judge us that our planning should be improved, that it to say, that we should focus on publishing in A-list journals and not waste time in other academic activities. I acknowledge that I don't know how to do that: I get many rejections from the top journals, I am invited to contribute to books that I love but that are worth nothing for the agencies, and so on. And the other way around: projects I have committed to, thinking they would bring nothing worth adding to my CV, have led to the best work I have done so far. Anyway, since the rules about what is a merit and what a demerit are changing all the time, you cannot really plan your career. You may choose, for instance, to be Head of Department for four years, and diminish the pace of your research at risk of failing your 'sexenio' assessment, only to find later on that admin work does not really count towards qualifying as full professor. I constantly suffer, in addition, from impostor's syndrome because I have chosen to be very productive in some lines of my work but not invest time in others that the official agencies prefer. I certainly feel that my rather long, full CV is simply not good enough even though I have done my best. And intend to go on doing so until I retire.

Will this situation implode? I think it might, and soon enough. So far, we have been relying on a constant supply of young, eager volunteers to accept whatever poor conditions the university offers, for the sake of the glamour attached to presenting yourself as a higher education employee. If, however, that glamour, which was never real, goes on being eroded, young people will find something else to do. At this point, I do not recommend to anyone that they begin an academic career. If you're talented enough, train yourself up to PhD level, and then find alternatives to disseminate knowledge through self-employment (I would say online audio-visual work).

In view of the situation in Britain, we might conclude that the situation is about to reach a tipping point all over the Western world, for something needs to give in. Naturally, the solution for Spain is more money, a return to full-time contracts at non-tenured level, simplifying the process of accreditation, and offering more tenured positions around age 35 at the latest. Unless there is, as many colleagues suspect, a plan afoot to destroy the public university and, with it, the social mobility it has afforded to some working-class individuals (not that many). What is going on cannot be, however, that clever and it is possibly just the product of political short-sightedness, compounded with—yes, my friend—our inability to present a common front before society as a collective, and defend our lives from this constant stress.

And on this bitter note, here finishes my contribution to the strike.

## 11 JUNE 2019/ REGARDING THE PROBLEM OF LABELS: (BIOLOGICAL) POST-HUMANISM VS. (CRITICAL) POST-HUMANISM

In my post of 6 May on the question of the post-human in relation to *Frankenstein*, I announced that my ranting would eventually continue, so here we go.

Mónica Calvo and Sonia Baelo, members of the research project “Trauma, Culture and Posthumanity: the Definition of Being in Contemporary North-American Fiction”, of the Universidad de Zaragoza, were the organizers of the recent conference “Representations in the Time of the Post-human: Transhuman Enhancement in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Storytelling”, which I attended (and enjoyed enormously!). You might want to download the programme, and the truly cute poster, from <http://typh.unizar.es/conference/>.

The three days spent there thinking about post-humanism have convinced me that we have the very bad habit in scholarship of accepting labels first and discussing what they mean later. This leads to considerable confusion. Post-human is used in such wide-ranging sense that in a recent article I reviewed, the author called the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* post-human monsters (actually, following a secondary source). The funny thing is that though I rejected this denomination as plainly wrong, depending on how you use post-human it is correct – and, also, a clear proof of how we need more specific labels.

Every discussion, then, of post-humanism begins with a lengthy list of secondary sources that give different meanings to the label, until the author offers his/her own. If the author tries to offer alternatives or be more specific in any way, this is done in vain for the curious thing is that the label is there for good, no matter how blurry it is. We have clearly not learned the lesson from the endless waste of time and energy that discussions around the word post-modernism (postmodernism?) have generated, and here we are again stuck with a problematic but absolutely central notion, once more. Even the Wikipedia page is no use! (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posthuman>).

I don’t intend, then, to trace a genealogy of post-humanism but to explain where I think the problems lie in its definition, for those who care. I am possibly totally wrong, but this goes in favour of my argument that the label is confusing. And I might also repeat some of the ideas in the post of May 6, but, then, I have my own (human) limitations...

To begin with, then, post-human is used in two very different ways that, while interconnected, refer to two different aspects of humankind.

- 1) What I’ll call biological post-humanism explores the possible replacement of Homo Sapiens by another Homo species emerging from
  - a) natural evolution
  - b) applying cutting-edge technoscience to evolution (a crazy, dangerous position defended by transhumanism)



c) the merger of the flesh with A.I. (as technogeek defenders of the so-called singularity dream of).

In scenario d) Homo Sapiens disappears, and instead a new species takes our dominant position, whether this is an animal (*Planet of the Apes*), an A.I. (the *Terminator* series), or an alien (name your favourite invasion story). A possibility less often considered is the scenario in which Homo Sapiens evolves into another Homo species with genetic elements from animals or aliens (but do consider Octavia Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood*). And, of course, in 2001 Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke imagined that a mysterious alien presence (remember the monolith?) had jump-started our transition from Australopithecus into the genus Homo and would again repeat the feat in the future, to turn us into something yet unknown. I offered, by the way, the label post-natural for all of this in Zaragoza but I was told that 'nobody uses it' and that was it!

2) Philosophical, or critical, post-humanism can be subdivided, I think, into two branches (though, again, I must warn that they tend to be mixed anyway):

a) the branch that wishes to rethink classical humanism in relation to what it means to be human in ethical or moral terms

b) the branch that shares a similar concern but also worries about how (biological) post-humanism will alter our bodies and minds, and therefore what it means to be human.

Critical post-humanism began as an intellectual project to question the way in which privileged Renaissance men had used prejudiced, limiting values for the construction of humanism. The patriarchal white man should be rejected as the source for the definition of what it is to be human, since his experience excluded basically the majority of humankind. Those so far excluded, therefore, felt called to offer a new, far more comprehensive way of understanding the human and humanism.

The problem, in my humble view, is that this meant throwing the baby away with the bathwater. Since the white patriarchs had appropriated the word human for their own interests, the alternative label chosen was post-human – an unfortunate choice, since it places the critical majority on the wrong side of human. Post-humanism was intended to define the opposition against biased classical humanism, but it has ended up making that type of humanism central, and the alternative peripheral (because of the injudicious use of the prefix post-). Besides, I personally feel aggrieved as a woman to be called a post-humanist because of my critical anti-patriarchal thinking when, last time I looked, it seemed to me I'm Homo Sapiens (well, I haven't checked how much Homo Neanderthalensis DNA is in my genes!). I reclaim, then, the right to call myself a humanist, not post-anything but the real thing, though with different values. Neo-humanist would have been cooler (particularly because everything I read Neo, I think of Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix*...).

On the other hand, my impression is that there are many difficulties to connect philosophical post-humanism (on the essence of the human) with thinking on biological post-humanism. Problem number one is the fact that those of us in the Humanities know too little science to make informed contributions to the debate – I'm really serious about this, though I do not mean that only scientists are entitled to offering reflections on what

makes us human. No, what I mean is what I wrote in my post of May 6: Homo Sapiens is just ONE type of human, not all that is human, which means that we should brush up our palaeontology, biology, genomics, etc. Typically, I got entangled in the Zaragoza conference in a loud debate with another colleague, who claimed that 'the system' and those who oppress us are not 'human'. Having spent the last fifteen months of my life considering villainy, I can tell you that of course they are! Patriarchal villainy is as human as the compulsion to do good, and we will never progress unless we overcome that hurdle. In fact, I think we should do much better if we focused on 'humane' instead of 'human' to explain how some persons feel inclined to abuse their power and others to oppose that inclination.

Since 1985, when Donna Haraway published her 'Manifesto for Cyborgs', critical post-humanism has evolved into more science-conscious intellectualism but it is still limited by a) the little awareness of technoscientific issues which I have already mentioned, b) the reluctance to acknowledge science fiction as a major aspect of speculative reflection on Homo Sapiens as a species. I know next to nothing about science but what little I know comes from first reading SF novels, and then reading essays to check whether what they speculate with makes sense. Whenever I explain to an audience of even less informed readers where the world is heading, there is usually much surprise and much incredulity. What I feel is quite different: there are days when I wonder how we can live with the knowledge that our place in the universe is absolutely insignificant, as science is showing. The dire warnings about climate change may be altering this general neglect of science but even so, look at how the deniers insist that Homo Sapiens is in control and the Earth safe (we are not, and it is not).

If you have been following my rant, then, you will see that I'm trying to make sense of post-human and post-humanism by telling myself that:

- a) (biological) post-humanism considers what might happen when/if the species Homo Sapiens ends, in natural or unnatural ways
- b) (philosophical) critical post-humanism is focused on what makes us humane (even though the label preferred is human)

In my view, then, any consideration of our subjectivity passes through remembering that 1) as Homo Sapiens, we are just an animal species, and we possibly did all we could to wipe out the other human species as we're doing to animals; 2) Homo Sapiens individuals are all human though many of us are not humane; 3) we matter very little in the amazingly gigantic universe and nobody out there cares for us; 4) since we're doing an awful job of destroying Earth it would be totally fine if we were wiped out (I'm in favour of plants conquering the planet!); 5) transhumanism (=the use of technoscience to transcend the limitations of Homo Sapiens, including death) is classic patriarchal selfish wickedness; and 6) please, can we stop using the prefix post- for everything? I fear the day when I will be called post-person!

Incidentally, the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* are said to be post-human because their rebirth from fossil DNA disrupts the species' balance on Earth and announces (at least in Michael Crichton's original novel) the end of Homo Sapiens' dominion. In that scenario, we become either extinct –as dinosaurs are– or creatures cowering before the

power of mighty predators –as we were once. The new dinosaurs are what comes after humanity is pushed off the top rung of the animal ladder, hence it makes sense, more or less, to call them post-human. I rejected the terminology because, though they are a product of Homo Sapiens' science, the dinosaurs are not genetically connected with us at all, and I limit my use of post-human to that sense.

The thought that sends chills down my spine is that from the point of view of all the other human species that have died out we, Homo Sapiens, are the real much feared, post-humans. Yet, here we are, hypocritically expressing our fears that our species might die and be eventually replaced. Poor things! If you ask me, we're just a bunch of selfish, arrogant bastards and bitches that deserve never seeing how happy and relieved Earth will be in its post-Homo Sapiens future... Towards the end of *Jurassic Park*, mathematician Ian Malcolm notes that whereas for a human being one hundred years is the limit of life, the Earth counts its life in millions of years: 'We can't imagine its slow and powerful rhythms, and we haven't got the *humility* to try. We have been residents here for the blink of an eye. If we are gone tomorrow, the Earth will not miss us' (my italics). Wise words, though I hope Dr. Malcolm is also right in his perhaps naïve belief that we don't have 'the power to destroy the planet', for surely the Earth deserves the chance of a post-Homo Sapiens life. Call it post-human, if you prefer, though there might be nowhere around to remember us, nor care that we once existed.

## 26 JUNE 2019/ SELF AND IDENTITY: READING MARIA DIBATTISTA'S NOVEL CHARACTERS

I'm not sure that I can do justice to Maria DiBattista's *Novel Characters: A Genealogy* (2010) in this hot Mediterranean afternoon and after a mind-numbing two-week spell of marking. The case, however, is that I can't stop thinking of her distinction between self and identity (or, rather, Self and Identity) and I'd like to add my own thoughts to that. I'm sure that much better brains than mine have discussed this issue but here's the first lesson about self and identity: each person feels them in a different way and, so, a personal point of view must be necessarily valid. Or I'm just having my cake and eating it.

You may have come across DiBattista, a Princeton professor, because she is co-editor together with Emily Wittman of *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography* and a specialist in Virginia Woolf (which explains plenty about her view of character). Her *Novel Characters* does not seem to have stimulated readers to leave comments in the habitual places, from Amazon.com to Goodreads, but it has gone through seven editions. This means either that it is more popular than it might seem at first sight, or that it has found its place in a rather scant line of publications about character. E.M. Forster's venerable *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) still reigns supreme (DiBattista opens her own volume with the inevitable reference to flat and round characters), despite the efforts of neuroscientists to unlock literary creativity. I have managed to forget the big name behind the crass analysis of *Hamlet* in one of those scientific volumes, which only convinced me that scientists do not read enough literary criticism. I truly think that I

have read DiBattista's rather old-fashioned volume in rebellion against that silly, arrogant man.

Allow me to clarify that I use 'old-fashioned' here as a term of praise. DiBattista begins by promising to offer a new taxonomy of character but soon enough she plunges into the comfort of treating fictional constructs as if they were real people, which is what we all do (and enjoy). Her people are divided into Whole (Originals and Individuals), Fractions (Selves/Identities) and Compounds (or Native Cosmopolitans), though I'm not sure why she uses subdivisions which only include one category. She does not offer what I expected from her: a reflection on how authors view their own characters and the mechanism it takes to create them; instead, she discusses the personality of fictional characters with much gusto. That was, if not totally unexpected, quite rewarding. At points I thought I was reading a 1980s, pre-theory volume, of the kind I was asked to admire as an undergrad (by authors such as Tony Tanner and company) and I found myself enjoying DiBattista's unembarrassed discussion of Alonso Quijano or Isabel Archer, as if these were people in our acquaintance about to have dinner with us. She still trusts that we all have read the same novels, which is a daring position to take in a book published in 2010.

DiBattista writes that one thing is personal identity (or Self, with a capital S) and quite another group identity, the basis of identity politics. "Identity", she argues, "has come to displace Self in an age and in a culture that has become increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan, and multinational", hence her inspection of what she calls the native cosmopolitan. I think it is only common sense to claim that a "self that is more aware of its outward rather than inward determinations may envision its contact with others somewhat more anxiously—or aggressively as the case may be". Yet, this is a truth that needs to be repeated for it is at the core of most human tragedy: each Holocaust victim reminds us of what it is like to have a Self but be treated as an individual marked by Identity; the process of dehumanisation of the other, whether in Auschwitz or on the flimsy rubber boats loaded with migrants sinking in the Mediterranean on a daily basis, begins by denying the Self, and continues by abusing Identity. This is the great theme, DiBattista says, of for instance, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* and similar masterpieces. This is the great theme of life on Earth, I should think.

How, then, does one "preserve the rudiments of the Self in the fortress of (group) Identity", as DiBattista puts it? This tension, DiBattista notes, is present in all hyphenated identities, such as Chinese-American and so on. The problem, I think, is that whereas racial and ethnic compound labels are acknowledged and, thus, have become useful (or relevant) to discuss the clash between Self and Identity, others are invisible, denied, or inexistent. Brigitte Vasallo's idea of staging the first festival of 'cultura txarnega' a while ago in Barcelona met a barrage of negativity from those in Catalonia who believe that we, the culturally hyphenated persons, do not exist (her initiative was, though, welcome by those who needed the label 'charnego' to be reconfigured for our times, to express their Self). As I age, I am, like everyone else, chagrined by the growing distance between the Self I perceive in me and the Identity pushed on my body. Yesterday, a young man offered his seat to me on the metro (by no means the first time this happens to me). That was a lovely gesture, for which I thanked him, because I have learned that this is

how people see me, but, still, it rankles. Imagine what it must be like to be a Self but be denigrated all the time by misogynists, racists, homophobes because of the Identity you supposedly embody.

So, here's the great literary conundrum: fiction is supposed to express Self through its best-rounded characters but, what do you do with Identity? Authors are making the point that individuals other than white, male, heterosexual, patriarchal men have a Self but in order to do that, they highlight Identity. This is what misogynists complain about when they say that in the novels by women too much attention is paid to femininity (as if men's fiction were not essentially about masculinity). As those of us supposed to lack a Self shout to high heaven that we also have complex feelings, which is how I felt as a working-class undergrad reading privileged Virginia Woolf, we are increasingly isolated by Identity labels; meanwhile, those who should be labelled escape scot-free. Nobody ever refers to 'White Literature' but we have 'African American Literature', and we have 'Women's Literature' but not 'Men's Literature'. Expressing the Self, in short, is not open to everyone, which is why Identity is receiving so much attention. We collectively believe that this is the best way to have everyone express their Self, but I very much suspect it is just another form of control. Those with the privilege to express their Selves without Identity labels have not really relinquished the privilege, nor do they want to do it. And why should they?

Is claiming the right to a Self a bit too much in the times of the selfie and the narcissistic display on the social media? Possibly. Yet, again, it needs to be done because even in the novel, which offers the deepest possible way to share human experience beyond our immediate circle, the Self is disappearing. I don't read autofiction, precisely because it manages to offer the hell of narcissism without offering the heaven of understanding another Self, but I was tempted to read Manuel Vilas's highly acclaimed *Ordesa*. What I found in its pages was a testimonial of the current inability to express (deep) Self, coming from someone my own age and with a similar experience of being declassed through education. As I put up with the farrago of repetitive, wearisome prose (and he is a major poet!), I told myself that it is not Identity but the Modernist invention of the inner Self that is destroying the novel. Few people are truly interesting and while Vila has been praised for making that very same point, I balk at the emptiness of his main character and possibly self-portrait. At one point, I can't recall the exact sentence, this pathetic excuse for a man says that feelings are bourgeois, though he doesn't really mean feelings. He really means the possession of enough sensitivity to notice that feelings must be of a specific kind—that is the Modernist Self, inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel. I think that I resent Vilas's male protagonist because although he is in terms of Identity unlabelled, he still cannot sustain his own Self. And he doesn't even write well. What a loser...

I'll finish with a personal anecdote. I was last week in Valladolid and whenever people asked me where I'm from and I replied Barcelona, they had the same reaction: 'but you don't have an accent!' I explained that I'm bilingual, that my accent in Catalan is the standard Barcelona accent, and that my Spanish sounds like the neutral variety spoken on the Telediarios because a) I was educated in Spanish-language Francoist schools until the age of 14 and b) my grandparents on the maternal side were Castilian from Burgos,

and I did like very much my grandfather's crystal-clear, solemn speech patterns. The puzzlement of my Valladolid colleagues, then, has to do with the lack of representation in the media and in fiction of people like me. We don't exist as an Identity, though we are very common, which means that our Self is hard to express in any language (here I am writing in English!). Novels, by the way, have no place for bilingual people, as they (the novels) are written in one single language. A limitation hardly discussed, by the way, in Literary Theory, if ever.

So, to really finish with: ask yourself what kind of fictional character you would be. Would your representation be dominated by an idea of the Self or by Identity? How does your sense of Self cope with the Identit(ies) you have chosen, or have been attached to you by others? Is the Self, as Vilas argues, the privilege of the higher classes and of the declassified educated? What's the future of the fictional character if Identity labels continue their proliferation? And so on...

### **1 JULY 2019/ A BOOK CO-AUTHORED WITH MA STUDENTS, *GENDER IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SF CINEMA: 50 TITLES***

My post today seeks to publicise unashamedly the work I have done with my students in the Masters' Degree in Advanced English Studies at my university, the Autònoma de Barcelona. Last week I had the great pleasure of seeing finally online the e-book *Gender in 21<sup>st</sup> Century SF Cinema: 50 Titles*, which can be downloaded for free from <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/206282>. We even had a presentation at Llibreria Gigamesh (together with that of my recent book *Ocho cuentos góticos: Entre el papel y la pantalla*), which can be seen here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F\\_XdiT4k1sg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_XdiT4k1sg). I'll divide my post, then, in two parts: one dealing with the logistics of setting the e-book in motion, editing and publishing it, and the other one dealing with the main findings in our research. By the way, this is my sixth e-book with students. Here is the complete list:

2019: *Gender in 21st Century Cinema: 50 Titles*, <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/206282>

2018: *Gender and Feminism: The Students' View*, Vol 2.

<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/129180>

2016: *Reading SF Short Fiction: 50 Titles*, <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/163528>

2015: *Gender and Feminism: The Students' View*, <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/129180>

2014: *Charming and Bewitching: Considering the Harry Potter Series*,

<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/122987>

2014: *Addictive and Wonderful: The Experience of Reading the Harry Potter Series*,

<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/118225>

The most successful one in terms of downloads so far is *Reading SF Short Fiction: 50 Titles*, now past the 6300 mark. This is nothing in comparison to the millions of clicks a video posted by the most popular YouTubers gets but it's infinitely much more than any academic publication gets in the Humanities. For this is what the e-books are: academic publications (in English Studies).

I came across the idea of the e-book quite by chance, when I taught the monographic course on *Harry Potter* in 2013-14. I put then together two volumes, one with the students' short essays on their experience of reading Rowling's series, the other with their papers. Progressively, I have transformed my BA and MA electives into project-oriented teaching (or learning) experiences, to the point that I'm beginning to think of students' exercises written only for my eyes as a waste of time (excuse me!).

What I mean is that since, anyway, I need to correct and mark plenty of these exercises, I'd rather invest my time into texts (or even videos) that can be published online. This gives my teaching and their learning more sense, since we are both producing practical work in cultural communication which has, besides, the advantage of training students professionally. We must, of course, teach students to produce different academic exercises at each level of their studies, but why not aim at producing texts that do have potential impact beyond the classroom? Online publication, as I have learned, is at first a scary proposition but it eventually boosts students' self-confidence, which should be, I think, one of our main aims as teachers, and as researchers training future researchers.

So, what have I done in the case of *Gender in 21st Century Cinema: 50 Titles*? Well, to begin with, imagine the final result: an e-book composed of 50 factsheets, each one dealing with how gender is represented in an English-language science-fiction film. As a researcher I specialise in Gender and in SF, which explains the combination of both fields. It's the first time I have taught a monographic course on cinema, but I have written extensively about this narrative medium which, besides, I do want to defend from the onslaught of the series everyone is watching these days.

Each factsheet contains some information about the film's cast and crew, other similar films, and the main awards reaped. Next comes a plot summary (150-200 words), and then the main bulk of analysis: a consideration of the most salient gender issues (300/400 words), followed by the description of a relevant scene (150 words). The factsheet is completed by quotations from three other sources (reviews, academic articles, etc) and links to IMDB, Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, and Wikipedia.

The e-book is a Word document turned into a .pdf, nothing fancy about it. Yet, I have made an effort to teach myself how to produce a nice cover, and to give the factsheets a look as attractive as possible. My students use a template that I have myself produced but, inevitably, when I sit down to edit the final text, I always realize that I should have chosen another type, or size, or style... You name it!! Next time, I'll run some more print tests before I pass the template onto my students. If you're thinking of editing an e-book with your students, then, here is a warning: work on the template for as long as it takes (it will save time later), give your students very clear instructions (ditto) and be ready to invest many hours in editing.

I have used for the 50 factsheets (a total of 72000 words, including my own preface) about 65 hours, with 45 to 75 minutes per factsheet. Why so long? Because I checked every source the students quoted from and because I edited their texts in depth. You must also warn them about this: students' English might not be solid enough to be published online without raising criticism and diverting attention from the content of

their work. So, I have indeed smoothed out any problems, corrected errors, etc. I would have done that anyway to mark their papers, though I have certainly used more time in editing than I use in marking. On the other hand, I have used most of our classroom time for students to present a preliminary version of their factsheets (each of the eight students was responsible for six films, and thus six factsheets). The time I have not needed to prepare lectures is the extra time I have invested in the e-book. Yes, very clever of me!

Of course, I would never ever set out to produce an e-book about 50 films I didn't know, and here's the other piece of advice: don't embark students in projects about areas you're not 100% familiar with. In the case of *Gender in 21st Century Cinema: 50 Titles* the difficulty for me was selecting only 50 films, for I had a list of more than 100 possible candidates. The other difficulty was hitting on a good method to give each student a set of films they could be interested in. I made the list in summer, prior to meeting the students and it was only once I met them (quite briefly, over coffee in the MA's presentation in September) that I decided to give each one specific titles. I operated quite blindly, I must say, but I seem to have made only one error, quickly corrected by two students' swapping films. In another project I have allowed students to choose freely what they want to work on, but this means that the ones that take long to make up their mind might end up discussing movies they are not interested in at all. In any case, what I'm saying is that I simply got lucky this time! We'll see next time around.

The purpose of *Gender in 21st Century Cinema: 50 Titles* and of the MA course on Gender Studies of which it is a product was finding out whether there is an evolution in the representation of gender issues in current Anglophone cinema. The focus on SF was justified on the grounds that since it is mostly set in the future (not always) this genre is an excellent lab to test out new ideas about genre – do recall that SF also stands for speculative fiction. Rather than name the 50 films chosen I'll invite you, of course, to download the e-book (<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/206282>) and you will see what we found, namely, that there has been no significant evolution.

The path trodden by SF cinema between *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001) and *Annihilation* (2018) might appear to be progressive; after all, Alex Garland's *Annihilation* has an (almost) all-female cast. Yet, this is not a choice that is attractive to all audiences; in fact, its most recalcitrant misogynistic segment is now 'defeminising' films, that is to say, producing cuts in which all female characters are erased. The smaller films can risk being more daring than the summer blockbusters but, in the end, whether major or minor SF films are in the hands of male directors and screen writers (there are, however, many women producers). Please, note that I'm here speaking about the difficulties to see more female characters on the cinema screen. The representation of LGBTBI+ characters is entirely missing with few exceptions (very, very few and still in secondary roles).

The picture of the present and of the future we have collectively discussed in class is bleak. We are still being told again and again the same story about a heroic man who needs to prove himself. If a strong female character appears (and she's fast becoming a stereotype), she is isolated from other women and never, in any case, a more prominent



hero than the man. We have also noticed that many male characters only stand out as caring parents in the absence of a mother (a pattern you may observe in *Signs*) or do their job briefly before going away for good (Tom Cruise in *War of the Worlds*). It takes a major world-wide crisis, like an alien invasion for these men to react. And speaking of Cruise, it's funny to see that he and Scarlett Johansson contribute star value to the many films they lead in radically different ways: he embodies the confusion of contemporary men (see *The Edge of Tomorrow*), she women's alienness whether as human (*Lucy*) or literally alien (*Under the Skin*). We have noticed, in short, that with no more diversity among those producing, writing and directing films we will endlessly repeat the same stories, even in films that look beautiful and spectacular and that do have women in key roles (*Gravity*, *Interstellar*). We didn't make any great discovery, though we more or less agreed that Jyn Erson in *Rogue One* is possibly our favourite hero. But do consider the kind of story she is involved in.

One thing is certain: the impatience of audiences and reviewers with how gender is misrepresented on the cinema screen is growing, and much more so since 2017, when the #MeToo movement began. Reviews written in the 2000s carry fewer comments on gender than those of the 2010s; the more recent the film, the less willing audiences are to condone missteps in gender representation (except the 'defeminisers'!). My students, indeed, grew more and more annoyed with the clichés and the stereotypes as the course advanced and they identified in each newer film the same old problems. It is our hope, then, that *Gender in 21st Century Cinema: 50 Titles*—a certainly anti-patriarchal, feminist volume—increases that annoyance by raising awareness about the errors that can be easily corrected and about the pressing need to find new stories and new storytellers. And this is practically universal, for the e-book's authors come from Spain (Ainhoa Goicoechea Ortiz, Alexandra Camp Martínez, Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín) but also Turkey (Merve Barbal), the United States (Meghan Henderson) and China (Jiadong Zhang, Shuyuen He and Alvin Ng, from Hong Kong).

My thanks to them for having followed me into this adventure. I hope it has been as gratifying for them as it has been for me. And I do hope that if you read *Gender in 21st Century Cinema: 50 Titles* you find much to enjoy—though not necessarily in how the SF films which many of us love so deeply (mis)represent gender.

## 8 JULY 2019/ A LABEL TO ABOLISH: SECOND GENERATION MIGRANT

I have been asked to be on the board that will assess an MA dissertation dealing with V.V. Ganeshanathan's first (and, so far, only) novel, *Love Marriage* (2008). This work created some stir in the year when it was published, earning the honour of making it to the long list of the Orange Prize, among other distinctions. The focus on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the United States and in Canada was the main factor why this novel attracted attention, for Ganeshanathan (an American born to Sri Lankan migrant parents) addressed in her work the reality of an ethnic community until then underrepresented in the mimetic fiction in English. It is not, however, my intention to discuss either the arguments articulating the dissertation or the novel's plot in detail but

a concept which is central to both and that needs to be revised: the use of the label 'second generation migrant'.

Here is how the European Commission defines the concept: 'A person who was born in and is residing in a country that at least one of their parents previously entered as a migrant' ([https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/second-generation-migrant\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/second-generation-migrant_en)). The EC webpage includes two notes: in one, it plainly contradicts this definition with the observation that, according to the Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing, second generation is 'generally restricted to those persons whose parents were born abroad'; those with just one foreign parent are a 'special case' with 'a mixed background'. The other note warns that second generation migrant is 'not defined in legislation but has a more sociological context' and that the label, anyway, 'does not relate to a migrant, since the person concerned has not undertaken a migration'. The webpage refers to another section on the wider label 'person with a migratory background' and mentions the related term 'third generation migrant' (though without offering either a definition or a link).

I find all this deeply offensive and extremely discriminatory. The bottom line here is that, against a most basic tenet of legislation world-wide, being born in a specific state does not guarantee that you will be awarded full citizenship, in the social sense, unless you renounce the foreign background of the migrant members of your family. Besides, it particularly punishes citizens born of two foreign parents of the same nationality by making them appear to be substantially more alien than citizens born of just one foreign parent.

Let me give an example for you to see what I mean. V.V. Ganeshanathan and her protagonist, Yanili, are regarded as second generation migrants with an autobiographical experience that requires a double identity (Sri Lankan American) and that is worth narrating because it explains to the normative host society (that is, white America) what it is like to be the Other. In contrast, nobody thinks of Barron Trump, son of the current President of the United States (himself the grandson of a Bavarian migrant), as a second generation migrant, even though his mother is a Slovenian immigrant. The same applies to Barron's elder siblings, born of Trump's marriage to Czech immigrant Ivana Zelníčková. Yes, Ivanka Trump is also a second generation migrant, but who would ever think of her as such?

Obviously, the racial factor is crucial, even though white Melania Trump (née Knaws) looks distinctly non-Anglo, leaving plastic surgery aside. The presumption here is that Melania's cultural background plays no part in Barron's upbringing, because she has renounced it to be fully assimilated into American society. If this is the case, it would be anyway quite exceptional, for many foreign parents in mixed couples teach their own language and culture to their children, a situation particularly appreciated by the upper-middle and upper classes. Whereas V.V. Ganeshanathan's Yanili rejects her parents' native Tamil language (which she understands but does not speak), for its unwanted connections with a culture she does not know and that gives her no advantage in America (quite the opposite), an American child that rejected, say, her father's native

French would be mocked for taking an absurd decision. I have no idea, though, whether Barron Trumps speaks Slovene or eats Slovenian food, most likely not.

Let me go back to the European Commission's observation that the term second generation migrant 'does not relate to a migrant, since the person concerned has not undertaken a migration'. It's so ridiculous that it's even funny. It also proves that the label is an oxymoron, for if you're born in one place you cannot simultaneously be a migrant. Whoever came up with this absurdity seemingly presumed that if your genes come from a migrant, you *are* a sort of 'blood migrant' and your children remain migrants unless you start mixing with the host population. Supposing the ethnic community you belong to tends to intermarry, then the migratory gene is never erased (which is what was basically certified by the Nazi Nuremberg Laws and the equally racist American One-Drop legislation). Migration, a matter connected with spatial displacement, becomes thus a matter connected with racist labelling of the worst kind, which you inherit and possibly also your (third generation migrant) children.

So why should anyone accept being called second generation migrant? The answer is that nobody should. If the law says that any person born on American land is an American, regardless of their parentage, then there is absolutely no reason to separate Americans into diverse social categories depending on their migrant background. And, as I have insisted again and again, if you wish to use a double identity label, like Sri Lankan, that's fine but, then, that practice should be extended to everyone, so that President Trump should be properly labelled German American. In fact, as it is easy to see, double labels connected with European backgrounds were certainly used in the past but started falling into disuse the moment ethnic and racial labels emerged. Then, Americans of mixed white European descent became normative, provided we forget that only American Indians are native to the land. All the rest are migrants and, at worse, invaders or, even worse, the children of slaves.

There are many more issues to consider in the use of the obnoxious label second generation migrant. Evidently, as I have suggested, it connects with the racial and social status of the migrant parents, with race being an even more important factor than class. In V.V. Ganeshananthan's *Love Marriage* the migrant parents are middle-class (the father is a doctor) and have chosen to live isolated from the American Sri Lankan community. Still, their physical appearance marks their alienness (and that of their daughter) in a way which would not apply to a white, middle-class, French couple who decided to migrate to the United States. I even doubt they would be called migrants.

On the other hand, I find that the academic theorization of migration in all its aspects tends to neglect how international migration worked in the past among European states, as well as internal migration. By this I mean that both transnational and internal migration have always occurred, though reading current scholarship (the product of 1990s post-colonial theorization) it might seem that this is a relatively new phenomenon. Many of the issues raised in Anglophone fiction about migrant persons and communities, and the recurring pattern of feeling doubly out of place in the host country and in the family's place of origin, are common to all types of migration—not just

transnational experiences marked by racial difference. An Andalusian may feel as out of place in Catalonia as a Sri Lankan in the United States, as I have seen in my own family.

Being a second generation (transnational) migrant, then, is connected to how poor and how non-white your foreign parents are. It is an appalling term, used to further discrimination from one generation to the next and to stigmatise as a disadvantage the participation in a culture different from that of the host country (particularly if it is not European). There is, besides, something that always surprises me: the supposed homogeneity of the receiving community, despite the constant migratory movements along all human History. Who are the Americans, or for that matter the British claiming for Brexit, or the Catalans, to determine which persons counts as 'us'? What community can call itself homogeneous?

Something else puzzles me (or, rather, irritates me). The label second generation migrant supposes implicitly that families are either purely foreign, or purely local, or mixed half and half, but cannot really explain truly mixed families. I mean families in which different generations marry migrants of different types as well as locals. This situation, I think, is far more common, above all in internal migration. It used to be, besides, a matter of pride to declare yourself of very mixed origins. I'm thinking here of Cher, whose genes come from Armenian, Irish, German, English, and Cherokee ancestors. Her mixed ancestry was always mentioned and enthused about in relation to her personal uniqueness and how impossible it is to define her, except by simply calling her American (or Cher). Or think of everyone's favourite film star this summer: Keanu Reeves, or, as some call, him '*the Keanu*'. How has identity become so narrow these days in comparison to the refreshing idea of the singular human mixture? Even the adjective cosmopolitan is now tied down to a limited experience of the transnational, when it should be everyone's definition of planetary citizenship.

Could it simply be that Homo Sapiens does not particularly like other Homo Sapiens because our survival depended on tribal grouping for aggression? Is a mistrust of other fellow humans our most fundamental cultural trait? Is this why we need at least three generations to declare that the process of migration is over, even though the individuals of the second and third generations are not migrants at all? Please, consider what you're doing the next time you define someone as 'second generation migrant' and, if you're called that yourself, how it makes you feel. And think: Barron, Melania, Trump.

## **12 AUGUST 2019/ THE TRANSFORMATION OF SEDUCTION: SEXUAL ENTITLEMENT, THE MATTER OF CONSENT (AND A NEW SCHOOL PROJECT)**

This past academic course I have gone through a quite peculiar experience in tutoring. One of our MA students, a young man from Hong Kong, asked me to supervise a dissertation on the topic of why James Bond is a low-quality seducer. He intended to take at least one film which each of the main actors playing this major British icon (Sean Connery, Roger Moore, Pierce Brosnan, and Daniel Craig), examine each seduction process, and dismantle Bond's reputation as a proficient seducer. The originality of the

proposal is that this student wanted to measure Bond against the tenets of the seduction industry but not really attack the very concept of seduction using pro-feminist arguments.

If you have never heard of the seduction industry, then what I am narrating here might not be shocking to you. But it was to me. Basically, there is a whole world-wide network of heterosexual men training other heterosexual men on how to seduce women (I mean online but also in face-to-face seminars). This does not sound so negative until you realize that mainly the coaches bolster their tutorees' sense of sexual entitlement by teaching them to gain access to women's bodies quite aggressively. The idea is to cancel out the women's capacity to choose, and to consent, using what often borders on coercion. The student asking for my help, however, did not seem to be that kind of man and so I asked him to explain himself. To my astonishment he said that I was the first woman to show a willingness to listen to him. Well, I told myself, I'm a Gender Studies specialist and I must study anything connected with gender, even if it raises difficult issues for me.

My new tutoree, for I soon accepted being his tutor, clarified that he had been attracted to the seduction industry for romantic reasons, as he was in love with a young woman who did not reciprocate. The advice received, he claims, allowed him to interest this girl and the happy result is that they are about to marry. I have seen them together and they make a lovely couple, believe me. As I learned about the seduction industry from my student, then, I taught him how to curb down any sexism that might surface in his investigation of James Bond. This was not at all difficult, since I found no sexism in his approach. We agreed that the aim of seduction should be mutual satisfaction (whether sexual or romantic) based on good intercommunication, always founded on consent. He wrote thus a doubly inspiring dissertation, for it has the rare merit of being pro-feminist while being extremely candid about the seduction techniques marketed by professional pick-up artists (or PUAs) to other men.

Perhaps the most perplexing part of the whole process of tutoring this dissertation was my having to reassure my student's examiners (two British male scholars) that he was acting in good faith, being properly critical, and not defending at all a misogynistic argumentation. I warned my student that his examiners might read his dissertation as a covert political attack against Britain, since he is, as I have noted, from Hong Kong and the current political protests there started shortly before he submitted his text. It might seem, I pointed out, that by destroying Bond he was tearing down British power and implicitly denouncing Britain's decision to leave Hong Kong in China's hands, with the negative results now becoming visible. He strongly denied this was his intention, and his examiners did not raise the issue at all. As the gentlemen they are, both examiners were aghast at the seduction industry's cold, exploitative approach to women but also amazed that my student defended the need for heterosexual men to be somehow trained to approach women successfully, in romantic terms. It had worked for him, he insisted.

I eventually suggested to my student that he read Jean Baudrillard's classic *Seduction* (1979, translated into English in 1990). He did so but told me that its arguments did not

apply to his own research. I realize that he is right. Baudrillard's appallingly sexist monograph is a call for French women not to cease seducing men as feminism demanded at the time (or so he claims). He writes that feminist women are "ashamed of seduction, as implying an artificial presentation of the body, or a life of vassalage and prostitution. They do not understand that seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe. The sovereignty of seduction is incommensurable with the possession of political or sexual power" (8). This is more or less in line with the letter signed by Catherine Deneuve and a long list of French women, at the start of the #MeToo movement, to demand that seduction and flirtation be maintained intact, as they are part of how heterosexual men and women connect, and not abusive displays of power as American women claimed.

Before I turn to the current use of the word seduction in English, allow me to stress that a major problem is how seduction connects with coercion—not now, but along its troubled history. Baudrillard and Deneuve apparently defend a very Gallic view of seduction with no victims, in which even when you know that you're being manipulated the ensuing sexual encounter can be great fun. And I mean in both cases, either when the woman or when the man is the seducer. I don't know anything about Giacomo Casanova, but I know a little about English Literature, in which the seducer is always in essence a rapist. Samuel Johnson's pioneering 18<sup>th</sup> century novels, *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, are horrid tales of abuse in which, respectively, the virtuous heroine marries her potential rapist and she is raped and then dies of shame. Clarissa's abuser, Lovelace, is the epitome of the seducer in English culture. Next comes Byron (author of the epic *Don Juan*) who, most biographers agree today, was a misogynist who preferred men's company. This is not surprising, as the whole point of donjuanesque seduction is being able to tell the tale to other men, and thus validate one's patriarchal, predatory masculinity.

The whole point of coercive seduction (not of the playful kind no one discusses anymore) is that it victimizes women. In *Pride and Prejudice* Wickham's fundamental wickedness is exposed when Elizabeth is told how he tried to seduce Darcy's teen sister, Georgiana. Austen's readers understood very well how this worked: unlike the straightforward rapist, the seducer convinces his victim with his sleek performance of romance to collaborate in her own abuse. As happens in rape, too, the victim of seduction feels ashamed that she could not defend herself (thus are women doubly victimized), though in seduction she feels, besides, mortified for having been gullible enough to believe that the parody of romance was true. Wickham, it must be noted, does not intend to seduce and abandon Georgiana but to seduce and *marry* her, the solution often preferred in these cases, once the woman was *ruined*. In contrast, his own seduction by Elizabeth's flighty fifteen-year-old sister Lydia does not *ruin* him. Austen, of course, punishes Wickham by having Darcy orchestrate his marriage to Lydia, which can only be a very unhappy one, but his reputation is not damaged. Mr. Bennet even considers Wickham his favourite son-in-law.

Seduction, in the sense that my student used it, is a new post-1990s concept studied in depth by Rachel O'Neill in her recent volume *Seduction: Men, Masculinity and Mediated Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018). I have only come across it a few weeks ago, which is

how things work: you only find what you need for research after the fact. O'Neill uses an ethnographic approach to describe the seduction industry from the inside, though this is often hindered by the sexist way in which she is treated by coaches and students. Her postscript describing her troubles is both illuminating and depressing. "The programmatic logics of seduction" O'Neill writes, "preclude genuine dialogue and enable men to bypass all but the most nominal considerations of consent". In fact, she argues, the seduction industry is not focused on the women but on how to sell its mainly middle-class, professional clients (the fees are quite high) the skills required to "achieve greater control in his relationships with women" mainly to enter a supportive fraternity based on the lie that it is not based on money. The male clients, O'Neill writes, believe that they are being validated by their friendly coaches without realizing that they are being exploited following the tenets of neoliberal culture, for which intimacy is just the object of business. The clients, however, become complicit because their coaches promise "access to so-called high-value women –whose worth is calculated using aesthetic criteria that are deeply classed and racialised". Whereas truly wealthy men have no problem accessing these trophy women as mistresses or wives, less fortunate men (in riches or looks) need the support of the seduction industry to be able to claim that they had sex with many highly desirable women. This, O'Neill writes, has nothing to do with desire and intimacy but with patriarchal validation.

'To be against seduction', O'Neill writes in her conclusions 'is to be against the kinds of sexual encounters in which the perspectives and experiences of our partners are valued only insofar as they enable us to more readily manipulate others to comply with our own wishes'. The women are oddly absent from her book, as O'Neill claims that they have been researched by others, but the main problem is that the coaches and clients she interviews end up standing for all the men in the contemporary world (or at least in the UK). O'Neill cannot, besides, be an impartial researcher for, like me, she is a feminist and, thus, bound to find in the seduction industry the misogynistic horrors which any woman (and most men) can anticipate when first coming across its description. She tries hard to keep her balance, but her book is ultimately highly offensive against those in the seduction industry and cannot build any bridges with it.

What I am saying is that if one stops to listen, as I did (sorry to brag), the success of the seduction industry turns out to be based on a much wider need to re-connect with women. Reading O'Neill, I realize that the coaches are doing the work that feminist women should be doing. O'Neill very rightly suggests that the clients are being seduced by exploitative men who do not see their male students as fellow human beings but as business opportunities. I know that what I'll say sounds ridiculous, but the problem is that the men eager to be in relationships with women have no feminist coaches to teach them new ways of approaching mutually satisfactory seduction. And so, they all fall prey to the seduction industry. Reading Sally Rooney's phenomenally successful millennial novel *Normal People*, it is obvious to me that both men and women have no idea about how to approach each other, even when they are in relationships. At one point, befuddled by how his girlfriend Marianne is behaving, Connell tells himself that he had no idea where men learn intimacy. As for Marianne, it seems she has learned it from *Fifty Shades of Grey*...

Would anyone like to become my business partner...? Just kidding—or maybe not.

## **22 AUGUST 2019/ WHEN WE WERE REFUGEES: READING AGUSTÍ CENTELLES' *DIARI D'UN FOTÒGRAF: BRAM 1939***

Now that the refugee crisis is raging in the Mediterranean (I refer here to the Spanish rescue ship *Open Arms* and the brutal reluctance of the Italian authorities to help her passengers), it's time to remember that we, Spaniards, were also once refugees. In January 1939, when it was already obvious that Franco's fascist troops would win the assault against the democratic Spanish Republican Government, about 500,000 persons crossed the border to seek refuge in France. They were, of course, mostly Republicans who feared for their lives, ranging from first-rank political figures to common citizens, all with a clear understanding that all of Spain would become a prison in the post-war period. As it did.

There is a hidden family story here, which I need to tell. It has taken me many years to understand that my paternal grandmother was among those anonymous citizens together with my father and possibly his aunt, though I have no proof that this was the case. Allow me to explain.

My paternal grandfather was only 19 when the war started in July 1936 and from what I gather he and my grandmother—a Galician migrant seven years his senior—contracted a war marriage only a few days later. I mean by this that they would not have married in such haste, or at all, if it weren't for the war. My grandfather eventually became a Republican commissar (the head of a small militia platoon) and fought mainly in the Teruel area; in one of his very few comments on the war, he claimed to have taken part in the Ebro Battle with the International Brigades. My father was born in 1937 and he has often told us that when he finally met his father he was already four, and had no idea of who he was. This was, then, in 1941, most likely during the first leave which my grandfather had from his three-year post-war military service, a punishment meted out to low-profile Republican soldiers (or those who had managed to silence what they really did, as I suspect in my grandfather's case).

Anyway, my father was baptized in March 1939 in the church of Saint André de Meouilles (today Saint-André-les-Alpes), in the French district of Alpes-de-Haute-Provence. He does have a certificate for this but no further information whatsoever about why he was there at the time. He never asked, fancy that! I understood (not too long ago) that my grandmother must have run away with her baby to France, returning possibly once the war was over for good (after April 1939). She never said a word about this, and to this day I have been unable to locate a refugee camp in the area where my father was christened, though probably they were at Sisteron (for a complete list, see [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campos\\_de\\_internamiento\\_en\\_Francia](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campos_de_internamiento_en_Francia) ).

The family of photographer Agustí Centelles is luckier. He did not discuss his terrible experience in detail with them, but he left a considerable number of letters to his wife and two handwritten notebooks. These were rescued from oblivion by his son Sergi as



late as 1986, right after his father's death. Later, Teresa Ferré edited the text, published in 2008 as *Diari d'un fotògraf: Bram, 1939*. In case you have never heard of Centelles, he is the author of one of the most iconic images of the Spanish Civil War, the one showing three Republican guards and a male civilian shooting as they lean on the bodies of some dead horses (this was taken on 19 July 1936 in the middle of Barcelona's Eixample).

Centelles (1909-1985), often dubbed the local Robert Capa, was a pioneering press photographer. Born in València, he pursued his whole career in Barcelona, though in two very different phases. His press-related task ended in 1939, with his exile to France and his internment in the refugee camp of Bram, following an intense collaboration with the Republican Government (though he was never a soldier). When he returned (in 1944) Centelles spent a couple of years as a baker, living a clandestine life in Reus with his wife and child, until the Francoist authorities allowed him to work as a photographer again, but only in advertising and industrial photography. When he left for France, Centelles was carrying with him a suitcase with thousands of negatives, which he hid in the Carcassonne home of some loyal friends until 1976, once Franco died. The exhibition of his pre-1939 photos, specially the one staged in 2002, has secured his lasting fame as a press photographer, which is what Centelles always was.

Teresa Ferré warns in her introduction that Centelles was not a literary writer. Besides, she adds, his notebooks are not a memoir written in hindsight, but a very basic journal kept against all odds at Bram. Centelles begins his first notebook with a dedication to his son Sergi (then an infant) and to 'all those who might come later', meaning, I think, other children he and his wife might have, though the dedication encompasses any potential reader. Writing in Catalan with many doubts about his proficiency, Centelles already expresses in the first paragraph the complaint that articulates the whole text: although he is a political refugee, the French authorities are treating him (and all his fellow Republican refugees) as a prisoner. The bare prose, once the initial summary of his life is covered, works as a diary, by which I do not mean a journal in the style of Anne Frank's but as a record of the daily struggle to live in the camp of Bram, organized in very simple, starkly descriptive entries.

I must say that the catalogue of small daily events which Centelles offers is more than sufficient to get a thorough picture of the Republican refugees' miserable life. Although I cannot name a specific text, before reading Centelles the descriptions I had come across of the horrors in appalling camps such as the one at Argèles-sur-Mer ([https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campo\\_de\\_concentraci%C3%B3n\\_de\\_Argel%C3%A8s-sur-Mer](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campo_de_concentraci%C3%B3n_de_Argel%C3%A8s-sur-Mer)) had already put me on the alert about the terrible odyssey of the Republican refugees. Basically, theirs was a case of escaping the frying pan to fall into the fire, and much more so for the men. They found themselves forced to work for the French Army once WWII started, which explains why so many ended in Mauthausen (some women, too). Centelles escaped that fate because, as he narrates, he was eventually hired by an elderly photographer in Carcassonne whose son had been recruited to be a soldier. The camp authorities charged a fee for the services of the refugee prisoners farmed out to work elsewhere... but this is a minor abuse compared to the rest.

The camps are difficult to discuss without criticizing the inhumane, horrific treatment which the French authorities offered to the refugees. Just like the Syrian refugees today, the Republican refugees were clearly unwelcome. When they poured in masses into French territory, they were secluded, as Centelles narrates, into concentration camps not very different from the ones Franco was using in Spain (see Carlos Hernández de Miguel's new book *Los campos de concentración de Franco: Sometimiento, torturas y muerte tras las alambradas*). The refugees, as Centelles rightly complains, were treated in practice as prisoners: piled in barracks that were actually shacks, undernourished (because of rampant corruption), practically isolated from home, prevented from circulating freely in France, and left to die from disease caused by the unspeakable filth. Spanish refugees, Centelles notes, were treated with extreme distaste by the local population, who saw them as dirty criminals deserving their imprisonment. Knowing the war was lost and they could hardly return to Franco's Spain, the refugees were abandoned to their fate, and only aided by the few surviving Republican institutions. These helped some to embark on a long-lasting exile in nations such as Mexico, Argentina, or Chile, though most Republicans eventually returned to Spain. Why Mexico, above all, reacted with such generosity and France with so little is something that needs to be considered.

Europe has not built (so far) concentration camps for refugees, but the United States has, as we have been seeing, and shamelessly so. I am very much aware that migrants and refugees are categories that tend to be mixed today, since both are exploited by mafias and, anyway, many who run away from their home countries are both poor and politically persecuted. I do not know how this situation can be solved for good –there are 65 million political refugees all over the world (see [www.acnur.org](http://www.acnur.org)) and possibly as many people trying to escape plain poverty. When the war in Syria started (back in 2011), if that can be called a war at all, it seemed that, given the availability of personal testimonials on the social networks, the more civilized nations would quickly offer help. People would be granted visas, flights would be organized, jobs would be found for those in fear of losing their lives. Instead, refugees had to brave the hostility of the people in the territories which they crossed on foot (remember that Hungarian female journalist kicking a Syrian man carrying his boy in his arms?) and of the Mediterranean. Texts like Centelles' journal show us that the plight of the refugee may affect people like us at any moment –people like my grandmother and my father– yet we still see the refugee as an unwelcome guest.

Since Centelles knew the value of graphic representation, he would probably be quite surprised at how little impact the work of the press photographers is having today. Or any other audio-visual report. Netflix's short documentary *The White Helmets* (2017), which follows the Syrian first responders rescuing civilians from the rubble caused by the bombings, got an Oscar. The group had been nominated to the Nobel Peace Prize, which they lost to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Many other videos and photos are available but, still, the slaughter continues. What, then, does it take for basic human empathy to take roots? If textual, rather than audio-visual representation is what we need, then a long list of books is already available (see <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/the-read-down/books-understand-refugee-experience>). And possibly, plenty of academic analysis.

I come to the sad conclusion that nothing works. We have refugee fatigue, it seems. We always wonder how the Holocaust could happen, with so very few people helping those imprisoned in the extermination camps but I also wonder what went through the mind of the ordinary French people who thought it was fine to keep 500,000 Spaniards in concentration camps. The French authorities, Centelles explains, wanted to be thanked for the effort made. He himself took the pictures published in the local Bram press showing the camp officers and the refugees celebrating the generosity of our neighbours. It was all false, of course, and soon collapsed once WWII started and the refugees became a veritable nuisance. I wonder what would have happened if the Republican Government had won the Civil War and Spain had been flooded with 500,000 French refugees escaping their Nazi invaders –and I’m not saying the camps would not have been the chosen solution on this side of the Pyrenees.

Homo Sapiens is, definitely, not progressing at all.

## 26 AUGUST 2019/ THE FALL FROM CHIVARLY: CONSIDERING MASCULINITY IN *EL QUIJOTE*

This post is inspired by reading Alfredo Moro Martín’s excellent volume *Transformaciones del Quijote en la novela inglesa y alemana* (U. Alcalá de Henares, 2106), which is based on his doctoral dissertation. His research follows, as he acknowledges, from Pedro Javier Pardo García’s essential study *La tradición cervantina en la novela inglesa del s. XVIII* (U Salamanca, 1997). What is original in Alfredo’s case is that he adds to the ground covered by his predecessor (Henry Fielding and company), an examination of German author Christoph Martin Wieland’s Cervantine credentials, and a quite intriguing section on Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (1814) as a Quixotic text.

When I met Alfredo last year (he works at the University of Cantabria and had invited me to lecture on *Frankenstein* and current science fiction), we exchanged some comments on how masculinity is an important, though under-researched, issue in *El Quijote*. Regretfully, we had no time to pursue the conversation. With apologies for having taken so long to read the book he gave me then, here are some thoughts on the matter.

As a specialist in the fantastic (Gothic, science fiction, fantasy), I return again and again to *El Quijote* as the text that problematized the consumption of this narrative mode. Its publication in 1605 (part II, 1615) acts as kind of primal scene in a chronology of events of which I have not made complete sense. Alfredo’s monograph does clarify the turning points at which a succession of translations made Cervantes’s proto-novel available to English and German speakers, but I’m still mystified by the time lag. Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) was a contemporary of William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The novel by Henry Fielding (1707-1754) which transformed the understanding of *El Quijote* in English Literature, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and His Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams*, was published in 1742. I should not be surprised by this type of long-ranging

connections, since, after all, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), re-formulated heterosexual femininity by adapting and re-writing Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1816). Yet, what baffles me is that while Austen and Fielding (Helen) work essentially within the same novelistic tradition, Cervantes and Fielding (Henry) belong to two extremely different narrative paradigms.

Or perhaps not, because if something characterizes the approach of these two authors is how they use masculinity as a foundation for their absurdist humour, which centres on a naïve, idealistic, chaste man. I'm getting in this way closer to what interests me here: chivalry, and its fictional expression, the romance.

This is where things get confusing because even though all readers understand that Cervantes is mocking the genre of the chivalric romance through Alonso Quijano's addiction, hardly any of us is familiar with its texts. We may have heard of Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo's quintessential *Amadís de Gaula* (written approx. 1304, earliest surviving print copy 1508); or, if you're a young Catalan-speaking person, you may have been forced to 'enjoy' *Tirant lo Blanch* (Joanot Martorell and Martí Joan de Galba, 1490) in secondary school. In fact, the list of chivalric romances is quite extensive and the works hardly touched upon by Spanish Literature scholars (see [http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/libros-de-caballerias-castellanos-textos-y-contextos/html/6220ef90-a0f6-11e1-b1fb-00163ebf5e63\\_3.html](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/libros-de-caballerias-castellanos-textos-y-contextos/html/6220ef90-a0f6-11e1-b1fb-00163ebf5e63_3.html)). What we vaguely know is that Quijano, a fifty-year-old impoverished 'hidalgo', loses the ability to distinguish between the fiction of the chivalric romance and reality. I have no room here to unpack the amazingly charged word 'hidalgo' (= 'somebody's son') for it means at the same time a nobleman man of the lowest rank and a man of chivalrous behaviour. Technically, Quijano is a knight –no wonder, then, he is confused.

A major source of his and our confusion has to do with the fact that knights did and did not exist –if this sounds like quantum physics, then maybe this is how we need to approach the matter. Working last year on an essay about Obi-Wan Kenobi and the Jedi Knights (see *Foundation*, 48.1, #132, 2019, 37-53), which connect in many ways with the Knights Templar, I came across a very singular text: Walter Scott's "Essay on Chivalry" (1816). This is the man who wrote *Ivanhoe* (1819), the novel (or is it romance?) which re-invented both chivalric romance and the knight for the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I expected Scott to enthuse about the original Medieval knights but what I found instead was this (in reference, as you will get, to Courtly Love): "Extremes of every kind border on each other; and as the [religious] devotion of the knights of Chivalry degenerated into superstition, the Platonic refinements and subtleties of amorous passion which they professed, were sometimes compatible with very coarse and gross debauchery" (40). Scott goes on in this vein to express a fundamental idea: chivalry is, as Judith Butler would put it, a gendered performance, which aristocratic men engaged in to disguise the less savoury aspects of patriarchal masculinity. Since it was a fiction even in real life, chivalry had no problem to move into the heart of the romance and thus offer men (and women) an idealized version of patriarchal masculinity.

*El Quijote* does not deal, then, just with the conflicted experience of a man who cannot separate romance from reality but with the mental short-circuit he suffers as the last

social descendant of the men who invented the ideal. Let me stress this: Cervantes is targeting not only a literary issue but also a gendered issue, deeply embedded in the construction of patriarchal masculinity.

Let's see if I can clarify what I mean. Take Superman (created in 1938) and all the superhero comic book tradition, and try to imagine a man who very much enjoys it, while being perfectly aware that characters like these are ideals that have nothing to do with reality (but wouldn't it be nice to have some superheroes around...?). Now take this man, today in 2019, mightily annoyed by the way the endless stream of superhero movies is perverting (in his opinion) the comic-book legacy. Next, suppose he writes a comic book series in which a guy believes himself to be a superhero and all kinds of ridiculous things happen to him... This comic-book writer would be apparently criticising all superheroes, but he would be actually expressing a distaste with how the figure is handled in the worst-written stories.

This might well be how Cervantes was situated. Alfredo quotes American scholar Ruth El Saffar, according to whom "Romances obviously gave [Cervantes] pleasure", though "His problem was to find a literary form that would preserve that pleasure in the face of an active critical intelligence". Yes and no. Whereas most obviously superheroes have no social equivalent and do not seem to generate any wish among men of actually acting like them (beyond wearing silly superhero outfits in fan conventions), Cervantes's knight Alonso Quijano is indeed socially connected with the noblemen that inspired the invention of chivalry. He produces the same shock and hilarity that a man trying to behave like Superman would inspire, for everyone knows that knights and superheroes are invented –presumably, so does Quijano until he forgets. Yet, the difference is that while no Superman imitator comes from the stars, El Quijote does connect with aristocratic classes.

What I'm arguing, then, is similar to what many others have argued –Quijano wants to regulate his behaviour by a chivalric code no longer extant in the Spain of his time– yet it is very different. Quijano breaks mentally down because the chivalric romances he consumes have provided him with an idealised model of patriarchal masculinity that he values highly but that he cannot realistically perform. This is not just his fault: his society apparently venerates the same chivalric ideal, though embodied by the 'caballero' (the gentleman) rather than the 'caballero' (the knight). Since, however, the transition to the 'caballero' was still incomplete in the Spain of his time, Quijano is befuddled, hence his madness. In a similar vein, a man behaving today as a 'caballero' to a woman (as Darcy behaves towards Elizabeth in the last part of the novel) would appear to be a Quixotic throwback. For which I'm personally very sorry.

I'm then displacing the narrative tension from the generic fictional models (romance vs. the novel) to the patriarchal idealization of masculinity (the Medieval knight vs. the modern gentle/man). Let me add two more ingredients to this heady mixture: class and age. Most obviously, if the foolish Quijano elicits our sympathy this is because of his class background. Even though, later on, the dangers of reading romances were connected with the uneducated, this still meant in the upper classes (women, and young men). In a sense, his passion for reading chivalric romances unmans Quijano, which is why he

must re-masculinize himself by playing knight errant. But I digress: being too poor, Sancho is not a reader and, so, he has no chivalric masculine ideal to fulfil. Regarding age, although Fielding and all subsequent authors would turn their Quixotic characters into youths, Quijano is, as I have noted, a mature fifty-year-old. This is perhaps closer to seventy in contemporary terms but let me note that R.L. Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll is also split in two at the same age, thus showing that the tensions between inner and outer ways of understanding and performing masculinity take longer than we assume to manifest themselves.

The best proof I can offer that Cervantes deals in *El Quijote* essentially with the problematic performance of idealized patriarchal masculinity is that Charlotte Lennox called her very funny own version *The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella* (1752). Not the *English* Quixote, or the *young* Quixote but the *female* Quixote, thus implicitly showing that the Spanish one is, above all, the *male* one. This may seem far-fetched because we are used to reading everything concerning men as lacking any gender marks, but this is a perspective that needs to be altered. Now that we are seeing women's football attracting big crowds, it's about time to call the other kind *men's* football. Same with Literature: *El Quijote* is a central work in *men's* Literature and in the construction in fiction and in society of patriarchal masculinity.

On second thoughts, although the knight is a quintessential patriarchal figure (he always puts himself above those he aids), perhaps Quijano is at heart a dissident. By this I mean that by attempting to implement the outmoded, fictional chivalric code Quijano highlights the shortcomings of men's actual behaviour. Just think of the contrast between the ideal, gentlemanly characters that James Stewart used to play, and the reality of President Donald Trump and you will get my drift. A man who insisted on behaving in real life like Stewart in the films would be both Quixotic and, indeed, radically anti-patriarchal in his own singular way. Wouldn't Cervantes be surprised to read this?

Do enjoy Alfredo Moro Martín's *Transformaciones del Quijote en la novela inglesa y alemana* and, of course, Cervantes' most clever take on the masculinity of his time. Please read too Lennox's delicious *Female Quixote*.

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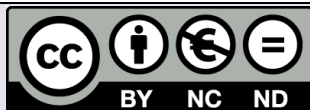
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