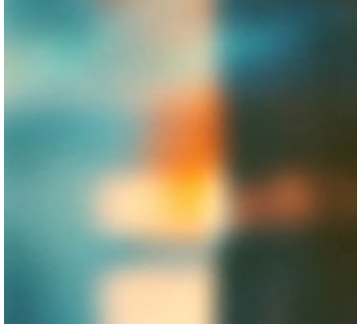
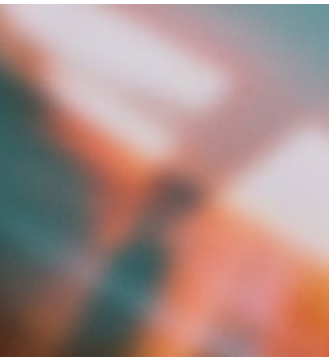
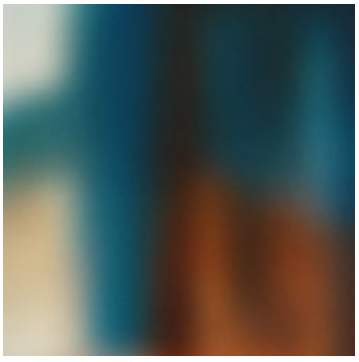
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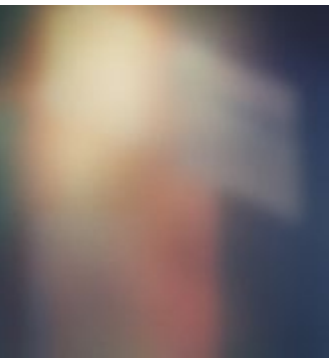








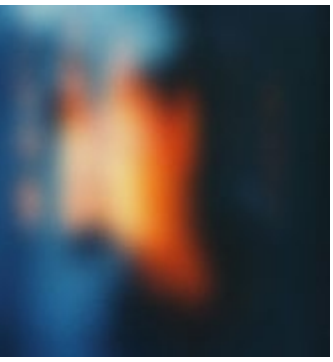
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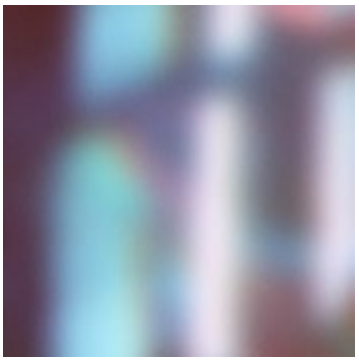


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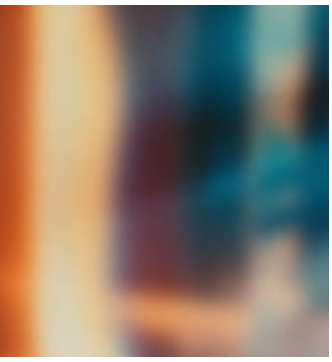
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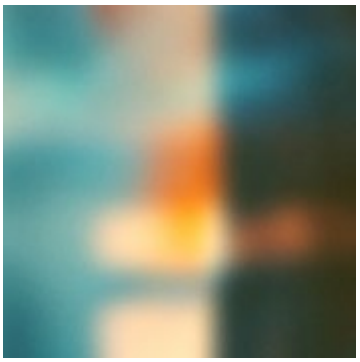


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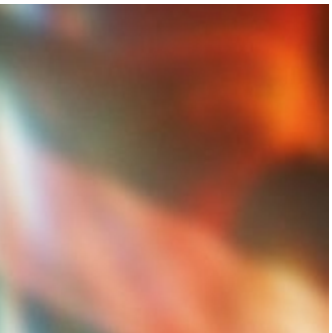
Sir Tom Stoppard



In Memoriam

Javier Ruano García

Pilar Abad García





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ÁNGELES DE LA CONCHA MUÑOZ
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia. UNED
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The History of English Studies in Spain (5)

Dedicar un nuevo capítulo a la historia de los Estudios Ingleses en España tras los publicados en *NEXUS* por colegas tan ilustres como Tomás Monterrey (22-02), Fernando Galván (23-01), Socorro Suárez (23-02) y Susana Onega (24-02) desde perspectivas tan informativas e interesantes como variadas, no deja de ser tarea osada. Si me atrevo a hacerlo es porque no puedo negarme a la generosa invitación de Rosario Arias, actual Presidenta de la AEDEAN, quien ante mi vacilación en aceptar por mi sensación de que todo lo realmente importante de esta ya dilatada trayectoria está cubierto, me anima a aportar mi experiencia personal y académica en el proceso de consolidación universitaria de los Estudios Ingleses en España y, concretamente, de la AEDEAN. Y, desde aquí, quiero darte las gracias, Rosario, porque la rememoración ha sido una luminosa experiencia de verificación de que lo sembrado bajo la inspiración de unos pocos de aquella primera y esforzada generación y el aliento de sucesivos equipos, en condiciones tan precarias que su recuerdo hoy día puede o resultar increíble o hacernos reír, ha florecido con admirable vigor y extraordinarios frutos.

Desde esta perspectiva personal, porque los hechos a la vista están, no puedo por menos de comenzar expresando mi sentimiento de admiración y satisfacción profunda, por no decir orgullo, ante la constatación de que la historia de los Estudios Ingleses en España es una historia de éxito. Ejemplo evidente y significativo es el propio *NEXUS* ante vuestros ojos, heredero del primitivo *Boletín Informativo* que yo viví y los más veteranos acaso recordéis, y del que hablaré más adelante para resaltar el valor de lo que habéis conseguido. También querría que mi relato inyectara ánimo en los más

jóvenes que peleáis con la burocracia, la competitividad y las cargas del sistema. Por experiencia propia puedo asegurar que la vocación y el impulso académico—sostenidos a fuerza de constancia y esfuerzo, eso sí—las acaban venciendo.

Voy a permitirme recurrir a la intrahistoria, en el sentido de aquello que queda fuera de los estudios cuantitativos y la crónica oficial y se ocupa de lo que ambos necesariamente excluyen. Esto es, a vivencias más íntimas y anecdóticas en la urdimbre de estos relatos que arrojan luz, a pesar de su individualidad y pequeñez, sobre el trasfondo social y cultural de una época y unos hechos que la Historia—con mayúscula—en este caso de los Estudios Ingleses, recoge.

Voy al principio de mi experiencia. Concluyo una licenciatura en Filosofía y Letras, con la especialidad de Filología Inglesa, consistente en ese tiempo—los sesenta—en dos años de estudios comunes para todas las especialidades de Humanidades entonces existentes y tres de estudios ingleses. También el trabajo de investigación denominado Tesina—no obligatorio para la obtención del título oficial, pero sí preceptivo para realizar el Doctorado y emprender una futura carrera académica—y me dispongo a proseguir mis estudios con el proyecto de Tesis doctoral.

Primer obstáculo: ¿recordáis el minucioso análisis de Fernando Galván en su detallada aportación a la *Historia de los Estudios Ingleses*, subtitulada "Sobre el profesorado universitario de Filología Inglesa hace cuarenta años: recuerdos, curiosidades, reflexiones"? Una de estas últimas era el muy escaso número de profesores permanentes, fueran catedráticos o adjuntos. Esto dificultaba en extremo el proceso tanto de encontrar director de tesis como tema de esta. Acudo al único Catedrático de Literatura entonces existente en el Departamento de la Complutense, cuyo nombre omitiré por confidencialidad y respeto porque fue profesor mío en la especialidad y habíamos tenido una relación excelente ya que, aparte de mis buenas notas—recuerdo su expresivo "Enhorabuena" escrito a mano en la papeleta de calificaciones que recogíamos de manos del bedel de la facultad—había sido delegada de curso muy activa. De hecho, a iniciativa suya, al concluir la Licenciatura trabajé un año (un decir, porque ni tuve contrato oficial ni percibí salario alguno) clasificando y organizando la exigua biblioteca de Lengua y Literatura Inglesas existente, albergada en armarios del Seminario del Departamento, muchos de los libros aún en cajas a la espera de que se les hiciera sitio en la Biblioteca de la Facultad. Un par de años más tarde, una vez realizada la Tesina, acudo a él a expresarle mi deseo de proseguir mis estudios académicos con el Doctorado y solicitarle que me dirigiera la Tesis doctoral. Su respuesta, amablemente paternal, fue: "Hija mía, "¿para qué quiere usted hacer un doctorado? Una tesis es como dos partos." "Acabo de tener mi segunda hija," le respondo, animada. "He pasado por dos partos, puedo hacer una tesis." Le expongo el tema y no le convence. Realmente no es de su especialidad. Él imparte Literatura Inglesa y mi tesis es sobre Americana, pero en ese momento no hay catedrático de esta materia. Me atrevo a insistir rogándole que, al menos, me escriba una carta de recomendación que me permita acceder a la Widener Library de la Universidad de Harvard, donde mi marido iba a cursar un Máster e íbamos a residir un año, lo que para mí—le digo—era una oportunidad única. Pero, con imperturbable benevolencia, me responde: "Pero hija mía, la mujer debe trabajar como una "mulita" (sic, lo juro) para ayudar a su marido." Eso sí que me deja atónita. No quiero ni pensar en qué me está insinuando que me corresponde. Le contesto que mi visado no me permite trabajar ni percibir salario alguno durante mi estancia en los EEUU, pero eso tampoco le convence.

No me desanimo. Clavado tengo en mi mente "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments" y a fe que no voy a admitirlos. En cuanto llegamos a Cambridge (Mass.) y me organizo, accedo a la Widener con el carné de mi marido, nerviosa ciertamente por si "me pillan," lo que le acarrearía a él un grave problema. Afortunadamente, el carné no tiene foto; el nombre extranjero no me delata; voy a horas poco concurridas porque la biblioteca no cierra de noche y yo tengo que esperar a que él regrese a casa y me releve con las niñas; y no saco libros, sino que me limito a tomar notas y fotocopiar artículos. Así que salvo el obstáculo. Regreso a España con una maleta llena de papeles, hago la tesis por mi cuenta, curso las asignaturas de doctorado, y con todo el proceso concluido, vuelvo y el catedrático me acepta la tesis.

Consigo una plaza de Profesora Contratada en la UNED, entonces en ciernes, muy desconocida y con nulo prestigio, en el Departamento de Lenguas Modernas en el que imparto Literatura Inglesa, asignatura optativa del segundo ciclo en la Licenciatura de Hispánicas. El alto número de alumnos que eligen inglés y los comienzos de las nuevas tecnologías con su potencial de aplicación a la enseñanza requieren ampliación del profesorado, hasta ese momento exiguo, y se incorpora como Profesora Adjunta Pilar Hidalgo, quien será desde entonces mi absoluto referente y a la que debo con enorme gratitud el ensanchamiento del horizonte académico e investigador. Pilar me anima a irme a Inglaterra al Seminario que organizaba el British Council en Cambridge, en el Downing College, donde tengo la suerte y, sin duda, el privilegio de conocer a sus organizadores, los profesores y novelistas Malcolm Bradbury y David Lodge y, entre los ponentes en aquel año a un jovencísimo Ian McEwan, a los ya más reconocidos David Hare y Antonia Byatt—sobre todos ellos escribiría yo más tarde artículos académicos—y al eminente crítico George Steiner, que me fascinó. Me impactó la pasión que transmitía al disertar sobre literatura. Una pasión que me acompañó siempre y que yo trataría de transmitir a mis alumnos. Pilar me anima asimismo a acudir a cursos de especialización en verano en el Birkbeck College en Londres y, sobre todo, a hacerme socia de AEDEAN, entonces en los comienzos de su andadura, y a acudir y contribuir a sus Congresos. Lamentablemente, nos deja demasiado pronto porque obtiene una cátedra y marcha a Málaga.

Despega por entonces lo que pronto sería el *boom* de las nuevas tecnologías y la UNED se convierte en el buque insignia de su aplicación a la enseñanza abriendo un horizonte de posibilidades inéditas que nos permiten albergar la ilusión de una especialidad de Estudios Ingleses con la consiguiente necesidad de ampliación de plazas de profesorado permanente. Justamente en ese tiempo se publican las dos convocatorias de plazas de Profesores Adjuntos de Universidad, la primera de diez plazas y la segunda de seis (*BOE* de 31 de diciembre de 1981) a las que me presento, y en cuya naturaleza y desarrollo no entro dada la explicación tan sumamente detallada del sistema del concurso-oposición que Fernando Galván les dedica en su capítulo sobre la Historia de los Estudios Ingleses (*NEXUS*, 23-01). Tan solo quiero atraer la atención sobre tres de los puntos que comenta, todos relacionados entre sí a efectos de esta intrahistoria. El primero, el porcentaje de hombres y mujeres—68,25% y 31,74% respectivamente—tanto de firmantes como de aprobados en la primera de ellas, que refleja una situación general de la Universidad en el campo de las Humanidades, en el de Ciencias y las Politécnicas la disparidad es mucho mayor. El segundo, el escasísimo número de profesores permanentes en los departamentos, con los problemas docentes consiguientes. Y el tercero, la dimisión de miembros de los tribunales.

El exiguo número de catedráticos hace que los miembros de tribunales pertenecientes a aquellas universidades en las que han salido plazas objeto del concurso-oposición, digamos que "peleen" por los aspirantes que ya imparten docencia en ellas, o por quienes compañeros del cuerpo se lo ruegan. A mí, que provengo de la UNED de la que no se sabe bien para qué quiere una especialidad de Filología Inglesa ni cómo es posible su enseñanza a distancia, no me conoce nadie. En la de diez plazas, paso con éxito el primer ejercicio y me retiro en el segundo porque el Tribunal me elige un tema contrario a mi especialidad y francamente prefiero no quedar mal sabiendo que hay otra oportunidad en unos meses. Me presento a esta segunda convocatoria de seis plazas y, sorprendentemente, paso el primer ejercicio con la nota mínima, inferior a la de la convocatoria anterior. La misma baja nota en el segundo, aunque esta vez la suerte me ha acompañado porque el tema es de literatura. Me temo lo peor porque hemos pasado ocho concursantes, dos más del número de plazas de la convocatoria, yo con una nota más baja, lo que no me permite albergar gran esperanza. Y en estas, un miembro del tribunal, el Catedrático de Sevilla Francisco García Tortosa, nos anuncia al grupo de aspirantes que aguardamos las notas para ver quién pasa al siguiente ejercicio, que ha dimitido por escrito ante el Ministerio por la falta de ética del Tribunal en la valoración de los méritos de los concursantes. Se organizan el revuelo y la incertidumbre consiguientes. El Secretario del Tribunal, Julio-César Santoyo, nos comunica oficialmente la dimisión de Francisco García Tortosa, así como que un funcionario del ministerio estará presente en el tercer y último ejercicio, el práctico, y llevará consigo al ministerio los documentos, esto es, los exámenes escritos de todos los aspirantes con las evaluaciones razonadas correspondientes y la calificación final, resultado de todos ejercicios del concurso-oposición. Mi salvación. Porque el práctico—un ejercicio difícil en el que de poco servía haber memorizado temas, sino que mostraba el conocimiento a fondo de la amplísima materia de Lengua y Literatura Inglesas por consistir, como explicaba Galván, en una traducción directa e inversa sin diccionario, un dictado y su transcripción fonética/fonológica, y un análisis lingüístico, literario y filológico de textos actuales y antiguos—era mi fuerte. Para hacer la historia corta, revolución de calificaciones e inédita resolución salomónica del tribunal. En lugar de seis aprobados para las seis plazas, ocho aprobados, dos sin plaza, Guillermina Cenoz del Águila y yo misma. No aparecemos, por tanto, en la relación del BOE de 13 de abril de 1983 que señala Galván en la que figuran José Luis Martínez-Dueñas Espejo, José María Bravo Gozalo, Ángel-Luis Pujante Álvarez-Castellanos, Susana Onega Jaén, Josep María Jauma Muste y Pilar Zozaya Ariztia, sino en otro posterior. Y un logro, no menor para la época: el porcentaje de cuatro hombres y dos mujeres pasa a convertirse, por primera vez, en uno totalmente paritario: cuatro hombres y cuatro mujeres. Buen presagio.

En el Congreso de Logroño en 1991, entro a formar parte, como Secretaria, de la Junta de AEDEAN de la que era Presidenta Susana Onega, y ahí comienza una de las etapas más bonitas, desafiantes y satisfactorias de mi vida académica. La tarea que teníamos por delante era ingente. AEDEAN había crecido con rapidez, gracias al entusiasmo y el trabajo de los fundadores y las Juntas que les sucedieron. Pero ese mismo crecimiento planteaba problemas urgentes. El primero y principal era precisamente el creciente número de socios y sus frecuentes traslados de universidad, de los que da cuenta Fernando Galván en su capítulo. Era difícil mantener un listado coherente de miembros. Las direcciones postales y bancarias no coincidían y se sucedían las devoluciones de recibos de cuotas, lo que complicaba la contabilidad y año tras año mermaban nuestros exiguos presupuestos. Susana Onega menciona en el suyo (*NEXUS* 2024.02) que el saldo bancario llegó a ser de una—sí, una—peseta.

Esa era la cruda situación cuando me incorporo a la Junta Directiva. La primera tarea fue pues poner orden en el sistema. Recuerdo a un afligido tesorero, José Luis Caramés, comunicándonos desolado el estado de la cuestión. Acordamos reunirnos a escudriñar listados y cuentas y buscar soluciones y, dada la urgencia y lo alarmante del caso, nos ofrece generosamente hacerlo en su casa de Oviedo para evitar el coste del alojamiento. Allí acudimos Susana y yo. Nos recibe solícito con la explicación de que sus hijos están de vacaciones con su mujer y él tiene que estar en el tribunal de una tesis doctoral fuera de Oviedo. Nos muestra el dormitorio con la litera de los chicos, la cocina y la nevera, nos abre el ordenador y se marcha discretamente, poniendo la casa a nuestra disposición, pidiéndonos tan solo que, sin prisas, cuando terminemos, cerremos sin más la puerta al salir. Susana y yo nos quedamos sin habla, sin dar crédito a encontrarnos durmiendo en una litera de chavales, cortesía del Tesorero de la Asociación, aunque luego todos en la Junta, José Luis incluido, nos partiéramos de risa al recordarlo. En fin, tras comprobar la imposibilidad de desenredar la madeja

sobre la marcha, decidimos llevarnos la documentación y me pongo a la tarea de armonizar tres listados diferentes de socios, expurgar altas y bajas duplicadas o triplicadas, tanto de secretaría como bancarias, y empezar de nuevo por la base. El avance de las tecnologías ayuda y con la incorporación a la tesorería de Carmelo Cunchillos, un auténtico genio como gestor, la situación va saneándose hasta convertirse en desahogada. Diría que, comparativamente, boyante. Eso y la colaboración creciente, cada vez más estrecha y grata, con instituciones como el British Council, la Embajada de Irlanda y la Casa Americana, fundamentalmente, nos permiten consolidar la calidad de los Congresos e invitar a personalidades académicas y literarias más atrayentes cada año.

Crecen exponencialmente la participación y contribución de los Departamentos de Inglés de todas las Universidades y parte de mis mejores recuerdos son los buenos ratos pasados con los colegas encargados de la coorganización de los congresos anuales en la Universidad acordada cada año en la Junta General de la Asociación, aunque tuviéramos que tomar decisiones a veces difíciles como la de recortar la asistencia de alumnos, limitándola a la del último curso. Igualmente, los ratos pasados con los conferenciantes invitados a los que había que atender y presentar. Las presentaciones constituían una de mis tareas favoritas. Dada la ampliación de los campos de investigación y la variedad y especialización que iban adquiriendo dentro de las grandes materias de Lengua, Literatura y Lingüística, con sus crecientes subdivisiones, me parecía importante preparar una introducción a la obra crítica o literaria de la persona invitada que proporcionara a la audiencia el contexto necesario para disfrutar de la conferencia, aunque no coincidiera necesariamente con su especialización, a la vez que percibía que el o la invitada se sentían más y mejor acogidos.

Uno de los aspectos más interesantes de mis dos mandatos como secretaria en AEDEAN desde 1991 hasta 1997 fue la colaboración con ESSE que, creada en 1990, se intensificó enormemente gracias a la iniciativa, la energía infatigable, el don de gentes y las dotes de comunicación desplegadas por Susana Onega. Gracias a sus gestiones, la intercomunicación fue siempre fluida y extraordinariamente fructífera, a pesar de las muchas diferencias culturales entre los diversos países integrantes. Y se tradujo, como tan bien expresa su capítulo, en un enriquecimiento espectacular de conferenciantes e intercambios académicos de todo tipo, amén del establecimiento de interesantes relaciones de investigación con colegas de otros países y de lazos de amistad que han perdurado en el tiempo, algunos hasta hoy tras años de jubilación. Como experiencia personal, recuerdo lo bien y lo divertida que resultó la reunión de los presidentes de ESSE en Madrid en los comienzos de su andadura, a pesar de los nervios de la organización, que recayó sobre mí simplemente por residir en Madrid como lugar de más fácil acceso desde Europa. Solo me faltó la banderita del "Follow me" tratando de no perder a ningún miembro por los pasillos del metro. Algo que agradecí aprender de la ocasión fue superar el apuro de pedir financiación a entidades desconocidas para no abusar de las que habitualmente nos sostenían. Recuerdo, en ese sentido, solicitar una cita al Lloyd Bank, hoy desaparecido en Madrid, aventurando que quizá quisieran patrocinar una actividad cultural inglesa. Y así lo hicieron y con enorme generosidad.

Por concluir con las aventuras de los inicios y resaltar de nuevo el espectacular crecimiento de las actividades de la Asociación hoy en día, no me resisto, en línea con la intrahistoria anunciada, a rememorar la transición del antiguo Boletín al embrión de lo que hoy es el espléndido NEXUS que disfrutáis. Y aquí, apelo a vuestra imaginación.

El Boletín se había comenzado a editar en 1977 y era, al principio, anual. Cuando se me encarga su realización al incorporarme a la Junta Directiva en 1991, incluía el Acta de la Junta General, con la relación de las actividades de la Junta a lo largo del año y la oferta de actividades académicas y de investigación de los Departamentos de Inglés en las universidades españolas, así como de las distintas asociaciones, tanto nacionales como europeas y norteamericana. El Boletín consistía en folios impresos y grapados que se doblaban por la mitad, se ensobraban con la dirección postal en etiquetas pegadas a mano en los sobres y se llevaban a la sucursal de correos más próxima. Correos no admitía paquetes de sobres sin ordenar por distrito postal, por lo que a todo el proceso había que añadir la reagrupación final de acuerdo con los distritos postales de toda la geografía nacional. Todo ello, elaboración casera. Imaginaba que quienes me habían precedido en la Secretaría de la Junta Directiva habrían contado con la colaboración de becarios o alumnos dispuestos a echar una mano, pero los nuestros en la UNED eran, como su nombre indica, A Distancia. Así que imaginad una mesa de comedor de familia numerosa—ya cuatro hijos—con montones de folios grapados y listos para doblar, ensobrar, pegar etiquetas con la dirección postal y ordenar cuidadosamente por distritos postales. Mis dos hijas mayores eran mis "becarias." Ahora nos reímos porque ambas han salido académicas, una Filóloga y la otra Inmunóloga. No es que su vocación se deba a esta experiencia precisamente, pero ahí lo dejo…

Afortunadamente, las nuevas tecnologías abrían posibilidades de cambios impensables ya al alcance de la mano. Al año siguiente, 1992, segundo centenario de la publicación *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), organizo un curso de verano sobre Literatura y Feminismo en el que imparto una de las conferencias sobre la figura y la obra de Mary Wollstonecraft. Y se me ocurre, entonces, la idea de imprimir un cambio, al menos formal, al Boletín. En lugar de los aburridos folios, un fascículo, con una portada y un formato más sugerentes y un contenido asimismo más amplio, que rebasara la mera información de actividades de la Junta Directiva, noticias de premios, congresos, jornadas y eventos pasados y próximos. La tecnología y el servicio de Publicaciones de la UNED colaboran y la imagen de Mary Wollstonecraft es portada del primer formato. Al año siguiente, la portada es un *collage* de ilustraciones de obras literarias,

y el contenido se enriquece con publicaciones de los socios y reseñas. Y al siguiente, Paco Garrudo se incorpora como vocal a la Junta directiva y pasa a ocuparse del Boletín mejorándolo de edición en edición. Hasta hoy, en que el *NEXUS* brillante que os salta en la pantalla es el signo más estimulante de esta historia de éxito de los Estudios Ingleses en España.

En 1997 concluye mi segundo mandato en la AEDEAN en el XXI Congreso en la Universidad de Sevilla. He aprendido mucho de todos los colegas con quienes he compartido tiempo, esfuerzos, experiencia, y buenísimos ratos en la Junta. Sobre todo, de Susana Onega, una presidenta única para el ilusionante momento de expansión que nos tocó vivir. Por lo que a mí respecta, un momento difícil. Mi marido ha fallecido de un infarto en pleno trabajo, sin que nada hubiera hecho temerlo, solo un par de meses antes. Me viene a la memoria la conversación con mi director de tesis en los inicios de mi carrera académica. No hubo necesidad de mi trabajo como una "mulita," pero—ironías de la vida—el suyo, como funcionario de Hacienda, recuerda Susana, vino a resolver la situación financiera y estatutaria de la AEDEAN como asociación no de lucro. "A marriage of true minds." Y mi trabajo intelectual, por otra parte, me sería vital con cuatro hijos en edades cruciales ante el que una pensión de viudedad como único ingreso habría sido harto complicado. Pilar Hidalgo me dice: "el trabajo es la mejor anestesia." Y así fue. Tengo un nuevo reto por delante que incluyo aquí en esta intrahistoria porque siendo la UNED una de las últimas universidades en ofrecer los Estudios Ingleses, y entonces seguramente de las menos conocidas del país, viene a contribuir a su Historia de éxito.

A finales del siglo pasado—¡qué antiguo suena!—la consolidación de las nuevas tecnologías es un hecho y su aplicación a la enseñanza universitaria una realidad. Un arrollador esfuerzo de innovación permite acceder a la enseñanza superior a un alumnado de clase mayoritariamente trabajadora que o no tuvo ocasión, o medios de formación superior en su día, o reside en puntos de la geografía española en los que no existe universidad presencial. Un grupo numeroso en su seno lo constituyen mujeres —algunas, cabeza de familias monoparentales; otras, con la doble carga de trabajo profesional y responsabilidad doméstica. Para todos, ellos y ellas,—muchos nos confiesan—la Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia les supone una oportunidad profesional y vital de otro modo imposible. La UNED crece exponencialmente y en el primer curso académico del nuevo siglo, el 2000-2001, inauguramos la *Licenciatura en Filología Inglesa*. Ricardo Mairal, hoy Rector de la UNED, en su momento vocal de la AEDEAN, diseña el currículo y coordina las materias de Lengua y Lingüística; a mí me compete el de Literatura y Cultura y las suyas. En 2009-2010, la *Licenciatura en Filología Inglesa*, la más numerosa de la Facultad de Filología, se transforma en el *Grado en Estudios Ingleses: Lengua, Literatura y Cultura*, que también nos toca diseñar y coordinar a Ricardo Mairal y a mí en nuestras respectivas áreas. En 2015-2016 ofertamos el Máster Universitario en *Estudios Literarios y Culturales Ingleses y su Proyección Socia*l, mi última contribución a los Estudios Ingleses en España, repetidamente valorado como el mejor de la Facultad de Filología, y un año incluso de la Universidad entera, gracias principalmente a su coordinadora prácticamente desde su implantación, Marta Cerezo.

A este respecto, otra de las mayores satisfacciones personales que nos cabe a quienes trabajamos en el ámbito universitario es la colaboración y la formación en equipo junto a la comprobación de que nos formamos y crecemos en cadena. Yo me debo a muchas personas que han sido mi inspiración, pero siempre he tenido presente—y me alegra la oportunidad de reconocerlo aquí públicamente—que mis referencias académicas han sido Pilar Hidalgo y Susana Onega. Y, del mismo modo, no cabe mayor compensación al concluir la vida académica que comprobar que el testigo se recoge y el legado se ensancha. Marta Cerezo entró en la UNED en el momento álgido de su expansión, en el año 2001, justo el del estreno de la licenciatura de Filología Inglesa, con su título de Doctorado recién obtenido en la Universidad de Córdoba bajo el brazo. Asistir en 2025 a su brillante actuación en los ejercicios para la obtención de su Cátedra de Literatura Inglesa—uno de cuyos miembros de la Comisión era precisamente Fernando Galván, con quien coincidí dos años en la Junta Directiva de la Asociación y ha recorrido todos los escalones posibles en nuestra profesión, empezando por su vocalía primero y posterior presidencia de la AEDEAN, de ESSE después, y luego Rector de la Universidad de Alcalá—cierra, para mí, el círculo.

"Volver la mirada al pasado frecuentemente se asocia con sentimientos de nostalgia o crisis. No es el caso, sino muy al contrario," afirma con plena razón Tomás Monterrey en el primer capítulo de esta *Historia de los Estudios Ingleses en España* (Nexus 2022-02). Es la Historia de un importante esfuerzo colectivo en el que la participación en cualquiera de sus muchas teselas estoy segura de que ha sido siempre para todos los que la han construido en mayor o menor medida, que son muchos, un absoluto privilegio y una satisfacción profunda y gratificante al máximo. La mía, ciertamente ha sido así y, por ello, os animo a los más jóvenes a contribuir con entusiasmo a la tarea de continuarla. El éxito a la vista está. Lo tenéis ante vuestros ojos. Gracias, Rosario, por tu valiosa contribución y por tu generosa invitación a rememorar la gesta.

TRIBUTES LITERATURE AND CULTURE

JESÚS MANUEL NIETO GARCÍA
Universidad de Jaén

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In Memoriam: Sir Tom Stoppard

Sadly, Sir Tom Stoppard, aka Tomik Sträussler, passed away on November 29, 2025. Those of us who love English, creativity and wit will miss him immensely. These pages are intended as an introduction to his life and work, and as a modest tribute in recognition of what he did, as a writer and as a public figure, for about sixty years of massive work and massive inventiveness.

1. Beginnings: A Writer in the Making at Terrible Times for Humanity

"I'm a professional writer—I'm for hire, if you like" (Stoppard 1974, 62)

A mere summary of main events in Stoppard's life would take longer than is reasonable for this modest tribute to his figure. It is not surprising that two biographies were published in a time span of less than twenty years, the first one of more than six hundred pages (Nadel 2002), and the second of nearly a thousand pages (Lee 2020). Both of them are very informative, not only of Stoppard's life and times, but also of his work and how

it was connected to his biography. Tom Stoppard was born Tomáš Straussler, and as a child was known as Tomik, on July 3rd, 1937, in Zlín, currently within the Czech Republic. Although his first language was Czech, as a result of events in his early life he lost the ability to use it, becoming instead a masterful user of English. His family, of Jewish descent, closely escaped the German annexation of what was then Czechoslovakia, moving to Singapore in 1939, and from there to India in 1942, this time escaping from the Japanese invasion of South-eastern Asia during the Second World War. There, he attended an English-speaking boarding school in Darjeeling, with his elder brother, between 1943 and 1946, and this is where he was broadly exposed to English for the first time in his life, to the extent that it became his first language, supplanting Czech along the way. His father did not survive the Japanese invasion of Singapore, and his mother remarried Major Kenneth Stoppard in 1945. One year later, the family moved to England, and it can be said that from that moment on he was fully Anglicised, in language and culture, and also as a more personal choice.

Many of the events in his life up to 1946—connected to his Jewish origins, to Czechoslovakia, Singapore and the English Raj in India—will be crucially relevant later in his production: his Jewish heritage in his last drama play, *Leopoldstadt* (2020), Czechoslovakia in the TV production *Professional Foul* (1977) and the stage play *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006), the Japanese presence in Eastern Asia at the beginning of WWII in the screenplay of *Empire of the Sun* (1987), his years in India as a child in the radio play *In the Native State* (1991) and its later adaptation for the stage *Indian Ink* (1995), and life in a boarding school in another radio play, *Where Are They Now?* (1970). As can be appreciated, Stoppard's importance as a writer manifests not only in the time span of his production—he was a very active writer for more than sixty years, after he started work as a journalist at seventeen, when he finished secondary education—but also in the diversity of the genres that he addressed, successfully, in his career. If we take just a quick look at the few titles in his production mentioned up to now in this article, we will see that, apart from his major work as a playwright for the stage, he also wrote extensively for the cinema—he received, with Mark Norman, the Academy Award for the script of *Shakespeare in Love* in 1999—for television and for the radio.

As we will see in the following pages, much of this may help explain some of the main aspects that have been traditionally associated to his views on life, art and literature, and also to the way he worked, as an essential figure in English theatre and cultural life, in the second half of the twentieth century and well into the new millennium.

2. One of the Great Artists of English Theatre in Recent Times: Using Language

"I'm hooked on style" (Stoppard 1968, 23)

It has been said that a Stoppard play can be identified by simply paying attention to how the language is employed, beyond situations, characters or how the dramatic game is played—Rusinko (1986, 9) actually describes him as "the master of […] the spoken word." In fact, many of the effects he attains come from his sense of humour and how jokes, double entendres and puns abound in his production, sometimes in ways that are not always easy for the reader or spectator to understand, at least in a first reading or viewing.

His verbal wit frequently takes the form of paradox, making the literal metaphorical or vice versa, or turning a sentence around without an apparent transition that might explain why this is happening, making the characters contradict themselves. These forms of humour are commonly used in *Dirty Linen*—his "little joke play [done] rather quickly" (Stoppard 1979)—which works as a call to disentangle the private lives of British MPs from their public roles, "provided they do not transgress the rights of others or the law of the land" (Stoppard 1976, 72). Even if such a serious message is sent to both readers and viewers of this play, the tone tends to be farcical, with a secretary who does speedwriting if she is given enough time (29), or an MP asking her to take his appendix out and passing it around (31), or having another MP write on the blackboard the words 'noes' as 'nose' in counting votes during a session of a committee in parliament (40). Many of the jokes in the play turn around the unnecessary use of expressions in French, Latin and Italian, to the extent that long speeches are made remotely understandable for most readers and viewers, with a clear critique of how often political jargon can be deliberately far from clear for most people. A second iterative source of jokes in the play is the presence, on stage, of linen, in a work intended to pun, from the title, on how necessary it was to wash dirty linen in English politics at the time, to the extent that a briefcase can turn into a "brief case" (43), to put a pair of briefs in. These are just a few examples of verbal humour, and of how language is exploited and turned around in different situations to make readers reflect on the common inconsistencies and difficulties of human communication.

Some other times, his writing goes far beyond this relatively simple straightforward use of jokes intended to get an easy laugh from the audience, so that what seems to be initially absurd is in fact a way to define characters and their attitudes

towards life and art, after closer analysis. This happens in the following situation, taken from *Travesties*, a play where he reflects on the function of art: Tristan Tzara, the Rumanian head of the Dadaist movement in the early twentieth century, is apparently playing an innocent game where he cuts up pieces of text, in English, puts them in a hat and then extracts them, one by one, to form sentences that do not seem to make sense: "Eel ate enormous appletzara / key dairy chef's hat he'll learn oomparah! / Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east, / noon avuncular ill day Clara!" (Stoppard 1975, 18).

The artificiality associated to this apparently random extraction of words is only apparent, as it is very unlikely that three out of the four resulting lines could rhyme, or that the composition has a certain sense of rhythm. Beyond that, however, it is even more surprising to read the words in the following way, in Hunter's (1982, 240) reformulation: "Il est un homme, s'appelle Tzara / Qui de richesses a-t-il nonpareil (?) / Il reste à la Suisse / Parce qu'il est un artiste / 'Nous n'avons que l'art', il déclara." This is in fact just a small adaptation of the original text, regarding mostly language—from English to French—and, secondly, establishing new limits between the words. Now, the apparently absurd text makes full sense, back into English: "He is a man called Tzara / who has unparalleled talent / He stays in Switzerland / Because he is an artist / 'We have only art,' he declared" (Hunter 1982, 240).

The language game here makes most of the audience think this is a simple innocent game where the random extraction and putting together of words must logically result in a meaningless message, very much in line with Dadaism. Even most readers—rather than spectators—of the play, with more time to think and to reflect on what they are reading, will see it in the same way, but it is the playwright's intention to offer a complex introduction of a character in the opening scene of the play, in two languages, and to convert the game into a brief meaningful show of how language can work in different ways to communicate meanings and intents. This is just an example of how complex Stoppard's texts can sometimes get to be, and this partially explains why it is so common to find books that mostly focus on dealing with these hidden complex meanings in his plays, including, among others, Hunter (1982, 2000), Sales (1988), and McCarthy (2001).

Stoppard's dual focus on language and style, however, did not mean necessarily that he treated his characters as separate entities, but rather as figures intended to play a major role who are part of his dramatic and theatrical strategies, to the extent that he once said that he had to manage to have on stage "the only African president who speaks like me" (Stoppard, in Gussow 1979, 132), in his 1978 play *Night and Day*. This, however, may not be fully true in some of his other plays—something Rayner (1987, 140) reflects on when she speaks about "the collision of styles [and] the collision of characters, for to a large extent style and character are identical," in her study of *Travesties*—to the extent that the same character may end up speaking in two different voices, when the play demands this change. Another case in point here is the double role played by Elizabeth Hapgood, the protagonist of his play of 1988, where she is supposed to act as a state agent and also as her twin, Mrs Newton. In the first role, she is also a mother, a non-smoker, and she avoids swearing, among other personal traits. Her fictional twin, on the other hand, acts quite differently, she is a heavy smoker and swears all the time. As a result, both the readers and viewers of the play will know immediately which of the two 'characters' will be responsible for what is going on in the plot of the play. Hapgood and her fictional twin, however, are not the only characters in Stoppard's plays who exemplify these differences in style and language. Other cases worth studying are the different Indian characters of *In the Native State* (1991) and *Indian Ink* (1995), or Brodie, in *The Real Thing* (1982). For all of these characters, the words and tones will be very different, even though it can be said that there is always a reason why Stoppard uses language differently to single out the characters in his plays.

3. Ideas for Plots: the Complexity of Stoppard's Drama Plays

"the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy" (Stoppard 1974, 59)

For many years, early in his writing career, Stoppard was commonly described as a mostly derivative playwright—Dean (1981, 57) actually speaks about "a distinctive, albeit highly derivative, dramatic style" in these initial plays—in the sense that he commonly used other writers' plots as a basis for his own plays. Probably the main reason for this view on young Stoppard was the early success of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), where these two minor characters taken from *Hamlet* become the focus of attention, and where a large amount of text from Shakespeare's immortal play is incorporated to the text of Stoppard's. Something similar seems to happen, once again, in *Shakespeare in Love*, the filmscript of 1998, with a major difference: whereas the earlier drama play is a clear example of young Stoppard's production, and the plot here is not its most relevant aspect, the filmscript is a more mature writer's work, and the frequent use of *Romeo and Juliet*, and of other texts taken from Shakespeare, in the film, play a major role in the development of the plot and in an intertextual game that the writers of the script play with the film's viewers.

As part of Stoppard's evolution as a writer, in many of his works we can actually see how often he managed to make several apparently unrelated topics get together in the text, and on the stage, to act as a play's leading principles, in such a way that it may be difficult to assert what a given work is actually about. In *Jumpers* (1972), for instance, we see a philosophy professor preparing a speech to be delivered at a conference while his wife is going through a personal crisis, a murder has been committed on the stage, the police are investigating it and a moon landing has failed, with the captain of the spaceship leaving behind another member of the crew, to save his own life. All of these topics seem to work in different directions, but a common idea works as one of the main motifs in the play: readers are left wondering how an individual should behave towards other human beings in a highly unstable world—and even far from it, on the moon—knowing that we all share a common role in humanity's welfare. In the end, it is all a matter of individual ethics and how they manifest, publicly, in people's decisions. In a similar way, *Arcadia* (1993) mixes academic integrity with mathematics and the English romantic period, and *The Invention of Love* (1997) brings together an impossible love with academic honesty in classical criticism and the characters' differing attitudes towards homosexuality. What seems to be, in these plays and many others, a mere combination of issues leading the reader or spectator in no direction is in the end part of a major strategy that will playfully involve them in a game that Stoppard keeps on playing, endlessly, with us.

Nowhere is Stoppard's attitude towards the way drama works than in what he once defined as the "series of small, large and microscopic ambushes" (Stoppard 1974, 57) for the audience that he intentionally incorporated to his plays. We can find innumerable examples of this highly theatrical technique, which is intended to make the audience enjoy the plays and take an active role in the plot, or else they may not fully understand many of the details that enrich Stoppard's drama plays—"If the audience is bored, [or if they are] not thinking, Stoppard has failed" (Demastes 2013, 2). These "ambushes" frequently coincide with the opening of his major works, creating a certain sense of suspense. For example, *Night and Day* opens with a journalist being shot and killed on the stage; we later find that this is just a dream this character is having. Similarly, the couple having an argument at the beginning of *The Real Thing* are in fact two actors rehearsing for a play, but we will not know this till the end of the first scene; later, the scene is practically repeated as scene 9, with little differences, as part of the play's denouement, with different characters, this time representing a "real" argument affecting two of the protagonists—for a more extensive treatment of this play as a permanent source of uncertainty for the spectators, see Zeifman ([1983] 1986). As a result of these common unexpected turns in plots, readers and viewers must play a permanently active role, Stoppard's theatre is never apt for passive receivers.

4. Stoppard's Evolution as a Writer: Merely a Cold Stylist?

"ultimately, before being carried out feet first, I would like to have done a bit of absolutely everything" (Stoppard 1977, 98)

In a writing career of more than sixty years, some kind of evolution is to be expected, especially in a highly professional writer like Stoppard, even if we can say some permanent traits can be found in his writing, especially in the general issues that have been outlined so far in this article. This sense of evolution is noticeable from his very early years as a dramatist. What is probably his best-known play to date, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, is generally taken to be his first play as well. However, by the time it was first staged and published, when Stoppard was not even thirty, he had been extensively published, including a reasonable long career in journalism—on Stoppard's early years, including his work as a journalist, see Fleming (2013)—some fiction—see, on his fiction, among others, Hendrickson (2013)—including his only novel, *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon* (1966), a couple of works for the stage and several works for the radio and for television. Although most of these are not within Stoppard's best, they can be seen as early writings in the different genres where he later built his career as a major writer—with the only exception of narrative. In the case of his first great production, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the main idea for it actually had already appeared in another play that was never published, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear*, where these two minor characters from *Hamlet* arrive in England and they do not really know what is going on with their lives.

Many of these early works were generally seen as masterful intellectual reflections on a number of issues in which Stoppard played the cold stylist's role, as somebody who could not bring life to his writings and his plays on the stage; he seemed to be all brains and no heart. This, however, would also change as part of his evolution from young age to maturity—at a time when, according to Londré (1981, 19), he showed "an unprecedented willingness to explore his characters' emotions." This change started in *The Real Thing*—Brassell (1985, 257) describes it as "easily his most personal play to date"—and continued with some of his best plays in the 1990s and after, including such emotionally loaded masterpieces as *Arcadia*, *Indian Ink*, *The Invention of Love*, *Rock 'n' Roll* and *Leopoldstadt.* All of these plays are, like most of his earlier production, perfect examples of complex, artificial plots full of twists, cultural referents that the inadvertent reader or viewer may actually miss, with a very special sense of humour, but, beyond all that, they are now clear examples, too, of how a text can appeal to many readers' feelings and to the common nature we all share as human beings. This was probably not fully expected when critics addressed his production up to the late 1970s.

A second way in which mature Stoppard is different from the Stoppard we find in his earlier production is the way in which he addresses roles for women protagonists. It is not just that he mostly wrote plays for male characters up to the late 1970s, with women always taking a secondary role, with the only possible exception of his very short radio plays *'M' is for Moon Among Other Things* (1964) and *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank* (1966). In these two works, women play major roles which were initially not fully convincing, according to some critics and fellow writers—on this, Tynan (1979, 63) reports Derek Marlowe's words: "His female characters are somewhere between playmates and amanuenses." The first fully convincing major role written for a woman comes with Ruth Carson in *Night and Day*, in 1978, later followed by Charlotte in *The Real Thing* (1982), Elizabeth Hapgood in 1988 and, above all, with Thomasina Coverly in *Arcadia*, in 1993, and Flora Crewe in *Indian Ink* (1995). All these roles, either as protagonists of the plays or as central characters in them, are now neatly delineated, and their language is as magnificently written and as convincing as it can be for any male character anywhere in Stoppard.

5. Political Stoppard: Highly Controversial Opinions at No Less Controversial Times

"I always thought of myself as a conservative not in a sort of ideological way" (Stoppard 1994, 96)

One of the most controversial issues in Stoppard's trajectory as a public figure centred on his political stance, and how it affected his work as a dramatist—see, on this, Bull (2001). At a time when many playwrights leaned towards the left in politics, he described himself as "a conservative with a small c" (Gussow 1979, 133), and openly supported Thatcherism in the early days of Dame Thatcher's first election as PM. However, like practically everything else in his life and work, this, and his later evolution, call for further analysis, and just using a label to describe him is difficult and unfair. In many of his plays, we can find a deep reflection on modern society, both in Britain and other countries, of how society has changed in the past century, and of how it may still change in the years to come. This is made evident in a quick look at the topics and issues covered in two of his major works in the twenty-first century, the trilogy *The Coast of Utopia* (2002) and *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006). In the first of these, he reflects on the evolution of the Russian Empire, mostly within the second half of the nineteenth century as part of the pre-revolutionary period, on political and social theories and movements, including Anarchism, Utopian Socialism and Marxism. In the trilogy, he focuses on how all of this ended in the Soviet revolution of October 1917. As is common in mature Stoppard, readers and critics cannot really say, at the end of the trilogy, whether he is taking sides in the social and philosophical debates turning around the different intellectuals whose theories are presented on the stage for about nine hours of acting time. In a similar way, and dealing instead with the recent history (1968-1990) of both the United Kingdom and Czechoslovakia, in *Rock 'n' Roll* Stoppard combined fact and fiction, history and invention, in a difficult mix where the readers and spectators of the play do not know for certain whether what they are reading or watching is fiction or history. The play turns around the different characters who express their views on life in both countries, and it is far from being a complacent view of the UK in the late 1980s. Although artistic, social and political repression by the Czechoslovakian authorities is bitterly criticised in the play, the evolution of British society is not seen favourably in contrast, with clear messages concerning the press's role in recent social changes and the way in which life changed in Britain in those years. At one point, Lenka, a Czech dissident who has lived in Cambridge all this time, refers to the UK as a country "that's fucked for fifty years at least" (Stoppard 2006, 103), mostly as a result of Thatcherism. This highly critical view on conservative politics does not seem to come from a public figure who has sometimes been blindly described as a conservative; instead, his views are made manifest when he says in his introduction to *Rock 'n' Roll* that "socialism and capitalism in their selfish forms are different routes to global totalitarianism" (Stoppard 2006, xv).

We can then say that Stoppard's loyalties in socio-politics stand not so much with a party, or with a leading figure, as with an open unquestioned defence of liberties in different parts of the world, and they were made public around the mid 1970s. This "change […] in his attitude to the function of drama" (Billington 1987, 111) roughly coincided with Charter 77, a document where Václav Havel, and several other public figures in Czechoslovakia, protested against the lack of respect for human rights in their country. As a result of this document, the signers were sent to jail and, when they were released, they no longer held positions where they had a public voice that allowed them to go on criticising the government. Since then, both in many of Stoppard's writings and on occasions where his voice was heard publicly, he openly defended freedom of speech and respect for people's liberties, openly criticising those characters that opposed civil liberties. This is the case, at least, of *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1977), taking place in a mental institution in the Eastern bloc where opposers are taken, in the TV play *Professional Foul* (1977), where he goes back to personal ethics and how they may be in open conflict with public behaviour, in *Night and Day*, a play where both the current President of a fictional African country, supported by the Western powers, and his guerrilla opponents, with the Eastern bloc's support, are openly criticised, and also, later, in the filmscript of the dystopian *Brazil* (1985), cowritten with Terry

Gilliam and Charles McKeown. It may look as if this patent socio-political involvement took place for just a brief period of time, mostly from 1977 to 1985. This, however, is not fully true, as mature Stoppard's interests in the current world and where it is heading for are an issue in several later plays, including, at least, the already mentioned *Coast of Utopia* trilogy, *Rock 'n' Roll*, and his last play, *Leopoldstadt*, which focuses mainly on the circumstances affecting a Viennese Jew family from the late 1930s to the mid 1950s, this time openly criticising Nazism and how its rise to power meant death or exile for millions of people.

In sum, if the question is whether Stoppard was a political writer, the answer is clear: in a person clearly committed to the times and circumstances he lived through, it could not be otherwise. As for what kind of political writer he was, the answer is not as easy. Although he initially supported the conservative party, he was later not so keen on what the result of conservatism had meant to the United Kingdom at the end of the twentieth century, and also on the way in which some newspapers had contributed to this change. His unflinching support for "the values associated with Western, liberal humanism" (Fleming 2001, 2), in other words freedom of speech, democratically elected governments and public liberties, remained stable for most of his career, also supporting the more personal ethics that Delaney (1990) elaborates on in his book.

6. Pragmatic Theatre: Stoppard's Degree of Involvement in the Production of his Plays

"For me, theatre is not literature, it's an event" (Stoppard 1978, 118)

Beyond the different major periods in Stoppard's evolution as a writer, his public social involvement or his role as a professional writer, something else seems to project a stable image of his figure as a dramatist, and that is how he thinks of theatre productions as events, rather than static texts that take a final shape and will stay there for ever for future readers. The dynamicity of his drama plays can take different forms, and may be, once again, an added difficulty for his critics. It is not just that he was genuinely interested in the rehearsals of his plays' first stage productions, both in England and in the US, in addition he listened attentively to the opinions of the production team, including the director and the actors, and he was ready to adapt, change or rewrite fragments of his plays, if he was convinced that the changes wold mean a show that could be better adapted to the tastes of the different possible audiences. As a result, it is not merely that the spelling or some grammatical choices were different in the English—Faber and Faber—and American—Grove Press—editions of his published plays, additionally many of the turns, expressions and cultural referents could also change for the stage, in different ways at different productions.

In this always complex process of mutual influence of writing for the stage and about the stage, two very short texts by Stoppard are invaluable if readers and theatre audiences want to understand better the special connection he had with the stage. In the first (Stoppard 1988), he offers invaluable reflections on different stage productions—not only of his own plays—he had attended, and to what extent the production teams had to face decisions affecting the final outcome, so that in the end it all worked as theatre, as an event. He also commented on some liberties sometimes taken in the productions, especially when the drama plays are adapted for foreign audiences, with possibly different dramatic tastes. In the second text (Stoppard [1999] 2001), he focuses much more on technique, and it somehow fills in the 'empty space' between the text, quite frequently written many years before the stage production takes place, and the actual show, where "the adjusting of the timing, duration, volume, intensity, color, and speed of a hundred or two hundred production cues" (5) are essential for a successful event.

A second way in which Stoppard's theatre defies critics and researchers in this area is the frequent existence of multiple editions, with sometimes small changes affecting the final drama text, commonly as a result of the form taken by the different stage productions in which Stoppard played an active role—according to Corballis (1984, 189), "[directors] and critics alike are often unaware that most of the major plays exist in significantly different versions." This can be seen, for instance, in a comparison between the 1979 (second) edition of *Night and Day* and the version included in *Tom Stoppard: Plays 5* (1999), with over twenty major changes that in the end affect the way readers and viewers perceive the play as a whole. The changes mostly affect character delineation, with the young journalist Milne sounding more professional in the later edition (Stoppard 1999, 283, 291), President Mageeba being an even more sinister character (335), 'Ruth'—the female protagonist's inner voice—getting better lines that offer a more complete picture of who she really is (298-304), and also with the main topic in the play, the role the press plays in public life (289, 302, 312, 315, 343-45, among others). These are not changes that would alter the play in depth, but some of them may affect important issues in the play's development, and possibly also the way audiences and readers may judge the author's stance towards some major aspects, including how far the press can intrude people's lives for the sake of freedom of speech—this

evolution, coming from somebody who was a journalist himself for many years, and who saw his personal life directly under scrutiny for some time, is studied in some detail by Lawson (2021).

These two general ideas of the play as event and of the need to find pragmatic solutions in theatre productions also had another very direct kind of influence over the way in which Stoppard's writings can be approached critically, it is not just that he constantly revised his texts, and that he adapted them for the stage, depending on the occasion—according to Jenkins (1989, 24), "Stoppard has always been a self-cannibalizer, adapting and refining his thoughts." Quite frequently, the texts themselves get adapted to a new medium and to different languages, so that, in the end, they become different events. Probably the two clearest examples of this are the rewriting as a film script of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1991) and the conversion of the radio play *In the Native State* into the theatre play *Indian Ink.* In these two cases, the changes are not merely the inclusion of a few more lines, or some additional long speech by a character, as we have seen in the treatment of the two editions of *Night and Day*. In the case of both *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *In the Native State/Indian Ink*, Stoppard, as the professional writer he was, clearly knew how the medium affects the final result, and he adapted the writing to this general principle. The first of these profound adaptations must be linked to the twenty-five years separating the original play's staging and publication from the filmscript, so that the emphasis is, in the second of these two texts, on a number of visual effects that run as motifs in the film (Nadel 2001, 96), and on the compression and adaptation to the screen of a text full of complex dialogues that shape the original theatrical experience. In the second case, it may look as if *Indian Ink* may limit the possibilities of the original radio play, at least partially, as the aural effects and how they evoke, in the radio play, sensations and changes in the physical space and time of the action, must take a different form on the stage. Once again, however, these changes will depend on how the language of radio plays may differ from that of stage plays, and Stoppard, once again, was perfectly aware of how both work. Even the structure of the two texts, with the radio play divided in nineteen scenes and the stage play in two acts, is different. For the stage adaptation, which is certainly a major rewriting, a flexible sense of scenography was needed, sometimes with a split stage and different characters acting in different parts of the stage simultaneously—one of mature Stoppard's favourite stage techniques, and another way in which he did pragmatic theatre. This is explicitly addressed by Carey Perloff (2022, 138-39): "Characters from the two periods and cultures coexist in one collective image against a deep blue background, swirling around Flora, who glowed in the center," in an invaluable reference text where she reflects on her experience of more than twenty-five years directing many of Stoppard's productions in the US, in permanent contact with him and getting to know in depth how he understood the dramatic and theatrical experience.

In summary, we cannot say that Stoppard was a simple direct easy playwright in the way he understood theatre and in his own attitudes towards artistic creativity. The theatrical experience was essential for him, and it may be necessary for critics and researchers to revise the different written versions of his works, at least because this allows for a more detailed study of the many differences that we can often find between subsequent versions of the same play, or concerning the way he used the language in the different media he wrote for.

7. By Way of Conclusion: a (Personal) Stoppard Canon

"It's quite hard to establish a pattern, I think. Perhaps that's the truest thing to say about me as a writer"
(Stoppard 1994, 103)

From what has been seen in these pages, we can say that Tom Stoppard, as a writer, was professional in how he addressed writing for different media, that he was also frequently controversial and apparently contradictory in many aspects of his life and work. After more than sixty years of great writing and great shows, for the stage, the screen and the radio, finding common elements in his works is a difficult task—according to Gabbard (1982, 2), "the plays do not lend themselves to any clearcut classification" either. In this final section I would like to offer a modest contribution to Stoppardiana by selecting a play from each of the six decades marking his writing career, between 1960 and 2020. It is true that the way in which these six decades of intensive work are covered cannot be fully uniform, at least in the sense that it is much more difficult to choose one play from the 1990s than from the 1960s, for instance, but the main purpose here, as a kind of closure, is to select six great plays that can illustrate how he viewed theatre as a spectacle.

From the first decade, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) is generally appreciated as his finest and most original creation. Beyond the initial idea that takes *Hamlet* as its basis, the play is full of the humour, the intellectual development and even the sense of visual and verbal spectacle that would later, for many years, become the leading principles in much of his production. It also presents a clear evolution of the absurdist tradition that Samuel Beckett and, in a different way, Harold Pinter had started on the English stage towards the middle of the twentieth century, to the

extent that Victor L. Cahn (1979, 157) actually referred to Stoppard's writing career to date as marking "the beginning of the post-absurdist movement."

The second decade saw Stoppard as still a young dramatist who wanted to make his theatre entertaining while reflecting on major issues in life and on the function of art in the modern world. My personal choice here is *Travesties* (1975), a play that still uses other texts as its origin, including *The Importance of Being Earnest*, several texts by Shakespeare, *Ulysses* and Lenin's political writings. It may look as if, through a combination of all these sources, the play may be a simple imitation, even a simple mix, but one of Stoppard's points in the play is precisely how the human mind at old age can be largely unreliable, to the extent that what we see on the stage is the protagonist's remembrance of events that possibly never took place, or at least not in the way he remembers them, and the mix is no longer valid as such, but as the outcome of faulty memories.

With the third decade, we find Stoppard as a more mature writer, and *The Real Thing* (1982) is a good example of this. In addition, it is arguably his first play that is truly emotional, human, at a time when the roles written for women are, from now on, wonderful creations. The play as a whole is full of situations where the audience, and also its readers, must pay close attention to what is happening on the stage, or otherwise they are likely to get lost in a complex plot with characters that, as part of a large metatheatrical game, seem to play another character's role for some time. In addition, the text is full of wonderful quotable moments that seem to reflect Stoppard's own ideas on life, art and the theatre.

Choosing a representative play from the fourth decade is really hard work. Apart from *Arcadia* (1993), probably his best play ever, both *Indian Ink* (1995) and *The Invention of Love* (1997) are full of the spirit that permeates Stoppard's writing at the time. *Arcadia* is, undoubtedly, a complex play, so it is not surprising to find full monographs devoted to its analysis and to the study, in some detail, of its place within the Stoppard canon—see Campos (2011) and Campos & Vatain (2011). However, it is not just as human and emotional as some of his plays of the previous decade, it is also full of contrasting views coming from the different characters, and the use of theatrical technique is outstanding, frequently in the play with a split stage and different characters interacting in the same physical space but with a time span of nearly two hundred years separating them. It is also full of reflections on mathematical theory, the evolution of English gardening in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and literary criticism, to name just three of the areas that coexist in the play. As a result, it is a total play that probably defines Stoppard's oeuvre like no other text.

The first years of the twentieth century find Stoppard as a writer more and more concerned with his own roots. As a result of this deeply-felt interest in his personal and familial history, *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006) is one of his most political plays. The evolution for over twenty years of a not very well-known Czechoslovakian band rock, The Plastic People of the Universe, is the background story, and music plays a major role in the play, as it also did in other plays, such as *The Real Thing*, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1977) and *Darkside* (2013)—see, on the role played by music in his plays, Morra (2021). However, *Rock 'n' Roll* was, beyond this, defined by Stoppard in the introduction as "an autobiography in a parallel world where I returned 'home' after the war" (2006, ix). As a result, it had to be deeply political, and one of the best public recognitions that Václav Havel and his work possibly received in his life.

Finally, for the sixth decade, *Leopoldstadt* (2020) connects readers and viewers with another side of him, his Jewish origins. As human and emotional as any of his plays from the early 1980s, it is also a perfect example of the uncertainties and the suffering that millions of people had to go through in the turbulent Europe of the first half of the twentieth century. It is not just one more play dealing with the Holocaust, it also reflects the social situation in central Europe in the years before the ascension to power of Nazism, and also the different reactions to what was felt as a real threat to real people at the time. Although it is not the playwright literally dealing with his family, it is as close as it can be to his family's, and his own, life experience in troubled times.

In these few pages, I have just tried to review what the figure of Tom Stoppard has meant for the world of theatre, and also, probably to a lesser extent, for the radio, television and the cinema. Although we will miss his sense of humour, his professionalism and his sense of engagement, the best homage we can pay a writer is reading his plays and enjoying them. We are lucky that he left behind a large amount of wonderful texts that we can read, and reread, as a nearly inexhaustible source of knowledge, inspiring moments and laughs.

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TRIBUTES LITERATURE AND CULTURE

JOSÉ ANTONIO GURPEGUI PALACIOS
Universidad de Alcalá

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España y Estados Unidos, de la invisibilidad histórica al redescubrimiento geopolítico

El idioma español, rico en matices y expresividad, ofrece fórmulas elocuentes para describir transformaciones profundas. Expresiones como *pasar de Pepito a Don José* o *de Juanito a Juanazo* reflejan tanto un cambio de estado y estatus de una persona como la alteración sustancial de la percepción de un acontecimiento. La mencionada imagen lingüística refleja a la perfección el proceso historiográfico que ha experimentado la valoración y atención prestada a la contribución española en el proceso independentista de los Estados Unidos. El actual contexto de revitalización de las relaciones bilaterales España/Estados Unidos, iniciado en gran medida a finales del siglo XX durante la presidencia de José María Aznar, está propiciando un revisionismo histórico que sitúa a España como un protagonista decisivo en la independencia estadounidense.

En los últimos años estamos asistiendo a un intento de corregir, a la carrera, siglos de olvido, corriendo el riesgo de desplazar el argumentario al polo opuesto defendiendo un enfoque en el que España se presenta como el gran adalid, el gran aliado silenciado de la independencia estadounidense. El patriotismo suele ser mal compañero del rigor histórico, y conviene no obviar matices esenciales, pues resulta necesario situar la actuación española en su contexto geopolítico para

comprender plenamente el estado de la cuestión. El más importante de ellos tiene que ver con que el verdadero interés de la intervención española en la guerra de independencia americana en absoluto se debió a compartir algún tipo de afinidad ideológica con los insurgentes, sino a una lógica estratégica orientada a debilitar a su principal rival, Gran Bretaña, y recuperar los territorios perdidos tras la Guerra de los Siete Años.

La lógica y el más puro sentido común imponía importantes limitaciones a España, pues apoyar abiertamente un movimiento independentista provocaría suspicacias y un peligroso riesgo de contagio revolucionario en sus propios territorios de ultramar. La prioridad, por tanto, no era fomentar la independencia de las colonias británicas, sino erosionar el poder británico en el panorama internacional. Esto motivó que España actuara a través de intermediarios evitando compromisos públicos con los insurgentes y canalizando su apoyo mediante redes financieras y logísticas que resultan disfuncionales con la épica de la independencia estadounidense. En resumen, más que un apoyo desinteresado a las trece colonias, la ayuda española debe analizarse, principalmente, como una acción dirigida contra el poder británico.

José Moñino y Redondo, Conde de Floridablanca, hizo oídos sordos a quienes proponían aliarse con el rey inglés Jorge III al producirse el levantamiento en las colonias británicas, convencidos de que tal insurrección derivaría en situaciones similares en los territorios españoles. Sin embargo, evitó el reconocimiento formal de Estados Unidos porque también él temía la influencia de la nueva república en los territorios de ultramar y por la percepción de que Estados Unidos podría convertirse en un rival estratégico, como así ocurrió. El Conde de Aranda, negociador del Tratado de Versalles de 1783, mostró una lucidez geopolítica fuera de lo habitual y comprendió desde el primer momento las implicaciones que traería la independencia norteamericana.

Establecida esta sustancial premisa inicial, el histórico silencio en torno a la contribución española resulta lógico al considerar aquellos factores que condicionaron tanto la actuación de España durante la contienda como una serie de condicionantes cuando las trece colonias alcanzaron la independencia. Un asunto no menor fue que mientras Francia establecía una alianza sólida con los insurgentes, España optaba por una estrategia más ambigua limitando su visibilidad y protagonismo a lo largo de todo el proceso y, posteriormente, en su recuerdo. A diferencia de España la ayuda de Francia sí pretendía la independencia de los Estados Unidos *per se*, pues tras las *French-Indian Wars* los franceses habían perdido su influencia en los territorios del norte.

Ello ha motivado que, durante demasiado tiempo, la narrativa dominante sobre la independencia de Estados Unidos ha girado en torno a la asunción de que la independencia de las trece colonias se logró gracias al apoyo decisivo de Francia; la ayuda española ni tan siquiera aparece, en los manuales escolares, ni como una nota al pie. Cualquier estadounidense identifica a Lafayette o Rochambeau como personajes protagonistas en su proceso independentista, sin embargo, los nombres de Gardoqui o Gálvez, de idéntica trascendencia al de los referidos franceses, les resultan totalmente desconocidos.

En cualquier caso, esta omisión no responde a la inexistencia de una contribución significativa, sino a la naturaleza de dicha contribución. A diferencia del apoyo francés, visible, formalizado mediante alianzas y cargado de simbolismo político, la ayuda española fue más discreta, indirecta y, en muchos casos, deliberadamente opaca. El ejemplo más claro de tal actitud lo encontramos en el viaje de Arthur Lee a España en 1777 al que también me referiré más adelante.

Lee había sido comisionado por el Congreso Continental para viajar a España con objeto de solicitar ayuda económica y suministros militares para la causa independentista, además de reconocimiento diplomático. El conde de Floridablanca, principal autoridad en política exterior con Carlos III, evitó que el comisionado americano llegara a Madrid, propiciando una reunión en Burgos en la que el recientemente depuesto pero políticamente activo Jerónimo Grimaldi, representaba a la corona española. También estuvieron presentes José de Gálvez y Diego Gardoqui, además de muñidor, traductor del encuentro. La posibilidad de debilitar a Gran Bretaña resultaba más que atractiva para la corona, pero la ayuda a los rebeldes debía mantenerse en el más absoluto secreto, para evitar el enfrentamiento diplomático con los británicos.

Durante las negociaciones de paz en París, próximo el fin de la contienda, la relación bilateral España-Estados Unidos estuvo marcada por una mutua desconfianza. España se mostraba remisa a reconocer la independencia de la nueva nación, lo que marcó en buena medida la relación entre los negociadores americanos—en especial John Jay—y españoles—fundamentalmente Pedro Pablo de Bolea, Conde de Aranda—. En las referidas negociaciones de paz (1782–1783), los encuentros entre Jay y Aranda estuvieron marcados por la desconfianza y el enfrentamiento de intereses. Para Jay, España no era un socio fiable y su posicionamiento resultaba ambiguo comparado con el de Francia. El americano intuía que España prefería unos Estados Unidos débil antes que una república fuerte que pudiera amenazar sus dominios en Luisiana, las Floridas o Nueva España. No era solo que la actuación española respondiera a intereses propios y evitara reconocer la independencia estadounidense; su reticencia a conceder derechos de navegación por el Misisipi suponía un grave obstáculo para las aspiraciones comerciales del nuevo país. Durante las negociaciones siempre mantuvo las relaciones con la corona española en un ámbito exclusivamente diplomático.

Aranda también recelaba de los americanos—Benjamin Franklin y John Adams completaban la misión americana—, pues no los veía como simples aliados circunstanciales contra Gran Bretaña, sino como precursores de un nuevo proyecto político radicalmente distinto al español. No solo eso. Para Aranda, Jay no era un simple negociador, sino el representante de una potencia en ciernes que, tarde o temprano olvidaría quién le ayudó a conseguir la independencia y actuaría en función de sus propios intereses, convirtiéndose en el nuevo enemigo en los territorios de Nueva España. La insistencia de Jay en obtener derechos de navegación por el Misisipi y en asegurar amplios límites territoriales reforzaba esa percepción de ambición territorial. Aranda temía, como así ocurrió, que la nueva nación atraería población europea y aumentaría rápidamente su demografía y poder económico propiciando una política expansiva que sin duda terminaría por perjudicar los intereses españoles.

John Jay también desconfiaba de Francia, pues al igual que España podía priorizar sus propios intereses en las negociaciones de paz, y los pactos de familia entre franceses y españoles podían socavar los intereses estadounidenses. Resumiendo, Jay convenció a Franklin y Adams para contravenir las instrucciones de su Congreso relativas a coordinarse con Francia en las negociaciones de paz, y trató directamente con Gran Bretaña. No obstante, Francia sí participó indirectamente en las negociaciones Independentistas-Corona Británica, a diferencia de España que permaneció al margen en estas negociaciones y delegó en Francia la defensa de sus intereses. La relación España-Francia, formalizada a través de los Pactos de Familia, resultaba bastante más compleja de lo que pudiera interpretarse a primera vista. Aunque ambos países compartían intereses frente a Gran Bretaña, la alianza no estaba exenta de tensiones. De hecho, en ciertos momentos, Francia podía percibirse como un aliado potencialmente peligroso, cuyas ambiciones podían entrar en conflicto con las de España dotando de sentido el jocoso dicho "con amigos como estos sobran los enemigos."

Retomando la seriedad del asunto, debe reconocerse que, hasta cierto punto, fue España quien propició tal situación de ninguneo en las negociaciones, pues en buena medida prefería defender sus propios intereses en connivencia con Francia, y centró su diplomacia en alcanzar un acuerdo propio con Gran Bretaña, que se plasmaría en el Tratado de Versalles. Gran Bretaña firmó tres tratados de paz distintos: Estados Unidos—Tratado de París—, Francia—Tratado de Versalles—, y España—Tratado de Versalles—(aunque tengan el mismo nombre y fueran firmados el mismo día, 3/09/1973, se trata de documentos distintos). Este modelo negociador permitió a los estadounidenses lograr condiciones muy favorables. Además del pleno reconocimiento de su independencia, ampliaba sus límites territoriales hasta el Misisipi. Francia recuperó sus colonias en el Caribe y también sus posesiones en la costa de Senegal. España, por su parte, recuperó Menorca y la Florida—oriental y occidental—, pero no logró recuperar Gibraltar.

Por la singularidad de este asunto merece la pena detenerse brevemente en la cuestión. Los tratados de París y Versalles de 1783 además de marcar el final de la guerra, evidenciaron los límites del poder español.

Existen diversas interpretaciones sobre las razones por las que España no logró incluir a Gibraltar en ese acuerdo de paz. El retorno de la posesión del peñón a España, o, mejor dicho, la permuta del peñón por algún otro territorio español en el Caribe había sido contemplado reiteradamente por Londres. D´Alzina Guillermety en "Puerto Rico y Gibraltar (1711-1788): una negociación frustrada" mantiene que de forma recurrente la posibilidad de la permuta estaba siempre presente en las negociaciones británico-españolas.

> […] la diplomacia británica se entregó a la tarea de convencer a los políticos españoles de que sólo estaba dispuesta a negociar Gibraltar si España ponía sobre la mesa de negociaciones un territorio equiparable en importancia a la citada Roca. El objetivo inglés no sería otro que Puerto Rico, que por su relevancia en los mapas militares y navales españoles se le conocía como la «llave de Indias»[1]. (381)

En las negociaciones entre el Conde de Aranda y Alleyne Fitzherbert por parte británica, se ofreció a los ingleses el puerto de Orán. El inglés calificó la oferta de inaceptable, pues Inglaterra tan solo devolvería Gibraltar a cambio de Puerto Rico o Cuba. En estas negociaciones a cuatro bandas—Inglaterra, Estados Unidos, España, y Francia—los franceses no mostraron especial interés en presionar para que Londres devolviera el peñón, ya que su permanencia en manos británicas garantizaba un continuo foco de fricción entre España e Inglaterra. Además el tipo de canje propuesto por Londres les resultaba inaceptable porque semejante posesión británica en el Caribe alteraría el equilibro colonial y supondría una amenaza para las posesiones francesas en La Española. El negociador francés Gérard de Rayneval mostró claramente su oposición al canje de Gibraltar por Puerto Rico; e incluso su secretario de estado, el conde de Vergennes, propuso entregar posesiones francesas en el Caribe si los ingleses no retornaban la posesión del peñón a España. "La debilidad española—afirma Guillermety—consistió en entrelazar su política exterior con la francesa" (396).

Más allá de estos movimientos diplomáticos, la indolencia del Conde de Aranda, para quien el asunto de Gibraltar no ocupaba el centro de sus preocupaciones diplomáticas, fue en buena medida causante del desenlace final. Para los ingleses, Gibraltar tenía un valor estratégico incuestionable al permitir el control del acceso al Mediterráneo; para España,

por el contrario, su posesión no resultaba imperativa pues el control del estrecho y el paso hacia o desde el Mediterráneo podía ejercerse desde muchos otros emplazamientos en la costa gaditana y andaluza. Puerto Rico, la "llave de indias," sí poseía un incalculable valor estratégico para España.

> Aranda subestimó el poder de la diplomacia británica confiando que en el Peñón, por estar en territorio español, tarde o temprano, volvería a ondear el pabellón de España, al tiempo que intentaban impedir que los ingleses adquiriesen posesiones que pudieran poner en peligro el comercio hispano.[2]

No comparto la interpretación de Guillermety en lo relativo al error de cálculo del conde de Aranda respecto a la diplomacia británica tras la independencia de los Estados Unidos. Se trataría más bien de prever con exactitud los acontecimientos que transformaría la geopolítica mundial en el siglo veinte. Aranda difícilmente podía anticipar la magnitud de los movimientos independentistas que surgirían en los territorios de ultramar y que acabarían debilitando de manera irreversible el poder imperial español. Su célebre Memorial de 1783 no refleja una visión derrotista, sino una notable capacidad de anticipación histórica, pues fue el primero en ver que la independencia de las trece colonias británicas, más allá de representar una derrota para Gran Bretaña, suponía a el inicio de una nueva etapa política en América que conduciría a la emancipación y soberanía territorial de las posesiones españolas al otro lado del Atlántico. Para evitar lo que resultó inevitable propuso transformar los territorios españoles en América en reinos independientes gobernados por príncipes borbones creando una suerte de singular confederación. Su innovadora propuesta se adelantaba en décadas a modelos políticos posteriores.

El segundo considerando para evaluar los motivos por los que la ayuda española al proceso independentista norteamericano ha sido históricamente ignorada tiene que ver con las tensiones territoriales por el control y permisos de navegación en el río Misisipi que se venían arrastrando desde las conversaciones de paz. Los intereses de España y de la naciente república estadounidense en lo relativo a este asunto distaban mucho de ser coincidentes, lo que dificultó la construcción de una narrativa compartida.

El río Misisipi constituía el eje fundamental para la expansión económica y territorial de la joven república. Estados Unidos consideraba imprescindible garantizar el libre acceso al río —y, por tanto, al Golfo de México— a los colonos asentados en los territorios occidentales; España, que controlaba la Luisiana y las dos Floridas, buscaba restringir ese uso para proteger sus intereses imperiales evitando así la penetración estadounidense en sus posesiones. Esta divergencia dio lugar a intensas disputas diplomáticas, llegándose a contemplar la posibilidad de renunciar temporalmente a los derechos de navegación a cambio de ventajas comerciales, lo que generó controversia interna en Estados Unidos. La negativa española a reconocer plenamente esas aspiraciones, unida al temor de Madrid ante el potencial expansivo de la nueva república, contribuyó a un progresivo enfriamiento de las relaciones bilaterales. El Misisipi se convirtió así no solo en una cuestión económica, sino en un símbolo del conflicto entre dos proyectos geopolíticos incompatibles; por una parte, el de un imperio que buscaba preservar su integridad territorial, por otra el de una nación rampante decidida a expandirse hacia el oeste.

El último considerando para entender el histórico "olvido" de la ayuda española tiene que ver con la ausencia referencial a España en las primeras publicaciones sobre la independencia de la nueva república. En el siglo dieciocho el declive español ya había comenzado y a los historiadores americanos del diecinueve les resultaba difícil aceptar que pudiera integrarse en el mito y la épica fundacional al haber contribuido a la causa de las libertades y la independencia, una monarquía católica y moralmente condicionada por la Inquisición.

Mercy Otis Warren en *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805), ignora por completo la aportación española; George Bancrof ofrece una narrativa más amplia elaborada *en History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent* (10 vol. 1834-1874)—sí menciona a España presentándola como un actor secundario dentro del contexto de la guerra global contra Gran Bretaña. En resumen, los primeros historiadores estadounidenses reconocieron explícitamente la ayuda de Francia tanto por la importancia política como por su simbolismo en la construcción de la memoria nacional estadounidense. Estados Unidos emergía como una república basada en principios ilustrados y, en una retórica de libertad política, los historiadores tendieron a ignorar o minimizar la aportación española por representar una monarquía católica y absolutista. Los conflictos y tensiones se prolongaron hasta la firma del Tratado Adams-Onís (1819).

Examinados los motivos por los que la participación española en la independencia de los Estados Unidos apenas fue reconocida por la historiografía norteamericana, que privilegió exclusivamente a Francia e interpretó la Revolución como un proceso esencialmente anglo-americano, no es menos cierto que la participación española resultó fundamental en la evolución y desenlace del conflicto. Aunque España prestara su ayuda por interés propio la victoria de los rebeldes se debió en buena medida a la aportación financiera, logística, y en última instancia militar de la corona española. En

absoluto resulta exagerado afirmar que la contribución española, tanto en el ámbito militar como en el financiero, logístico y diplomático, tuvo una relevancia comparable, incluso superior, a la intervención francesa para el triunfo de los independentistas.

La nómina de militares, políticos y diplomáticos vinculados a tal ayuda a la independencia de los Estados Unidos es amplia y diversa. Juan Manuel de Cagigal conquistó las Bahamas en lo que fue la última operación militar de la guerra; Luis de Unzaga y Amézaga mantuvo contactos tempranos con los insurgentes y llegó a dirigirse a Charles Lee reconociéndolo como "general de los Estados Unidos," tal vez la primera ocasión en la que se utilizó tal terminología; Francisco de Saavedra, protagonista del convenio Grasse-Saavedra, acuerdo fundamental para coordinar el apoyo financiero y naval hispano-francés que permitió la decisiva campaña de Yorktown y la victoria final de Washington sobre las tropas británicas; Manuel Gayoso de Lemos o los isleños canarios asentados en Tejas y Luisiana que apoyaron decididamente la causa independentista también merecen ser mencionados. Pero entre todos ellos sobresalen dos nombres, Diego de Gardoqui y Bernardo de Gálvez.

Diego de Gardoqui pertenecía a una acaudalada familia vasca de comerciantes propietaria de la empresa "José Gardoqui e Hijos" (referida como "Gardoqui e Hijos") que mantenía relaciones comerciales con Inglaterra y las colonias británicas en América. La firma participaba de una suerte de comercio triangular (España-Inglaterra-América) de exportación e importación de textiles, herramientas, hierro… pero su principal conexión con los independentistas encuentra su origen en la importación de bacalao. A finales del siglo dieciocho la importación de bacalao—alimento imprescindible para las vigilias en la católica España—suponía el 5% del total, siendo los también bilbaínos "Gómez de la Torre y socios" quienes dominaban este mercado. Los Gardoqui, no obstante, estaban muy bien posicionados en los puertos de Salem, Beverly, y Boston, foco de las revueltas independentistas—Gómez Torre y socios más al norte, en Halifax, territorio francés—. Elbridge Gerry, que llegaría a ocupar la vicepresidencia de la nación, negoció en 1775 un contrato secreto para que los Gardoqui les facilitaran armas y pólvora. Algunos historiadores apuntan que la pólvora almacenada por los granjeros en Lexington y Concord, que intentaba requisar el ejército británico motivando esta acción el inicio de la guerra, había sido proveída por la compañía vasca, pero tal extremo nunca ha sido convenientemente acreditado.

En cualquier caso, la contribución de Gardoqui fue especialmente relevante en los primeros años de la Guerra de Independencia, cuando el ejército revolucionario padecía una grave escasez de armas, pólvora y recursos financieros. Algunos historiadores han señalado incluso que, sin el apoyo material y financiero proporcionado por España, la resistencia de las colonias americanas habría sido imposible de mantener durante los primeros compases de la guerra. No en vano, a partir de 1775, "el nombre de Gardoqui & Sons, o el de Bilbao son apunte frecuente en *The Journal of the Continental Congress.*"[3]

Durante la referida reunión con Lee en Burgos—1777—, Gardoqui además de traductor se rebeló como magnífico diplomático. Primero evitando que Lee llegará a Madrid y propiciando la reunión con representantes gubernamentales en Burgos y no en la capital y centro de gobierno. En la ciudad castellana se acordó que España no reconocería la independencia de las colonias pero sí ayudaría su revolución con avales para la adquisición de pertrechos, y también permitiría el acceso a los puertos españoles en el Caribe y Nueva Orleans. Las peticiones de Lee eran bastante más ambiciosas, pues pretendía que España sufragara la guerra a fondo perdido. Gracias a la mediación de Gardoqui se alcanzó el acuerdo de que una vez alcanzada la independencia, la nueva nación pagaría en especie el coste de la ayuda ofrecida por España. Durante los dos años siguientes partieron de Cádiz media docena de barcos con suministros pagados por la corona para los insurgentes por un valor de casi 3.000.000 de reales. También existe documentación sobre envíos hasta 1780 en barcos de la compañía de "Gardoqui e Hijos" con Elbridge Gerry como consignatario.[4] La nueva nación, los Estados Unidos, nunca devolvieron el préstamo.

Tras la independencia, Diego de Gardoqui se convirtió también en una figura clave de las relaciones diplomáticas entre España y la nueva república norteamericana. En 1785 fue nombrado primer representante oficial español ante los Estados Unidos, función en la que mantuvo contacto directo con figuras como George Washington y John Jay. Durante su misión diplomática participó en negociaciones complejas relacionadas con la navegación del río Misisipi, las fronteras entre los territorios españoles y estadounidenses y las relaciones comerciales entre ambos países. Estas negociaciones reflejaban ya las mencionadas tensiones entre España y Estados Unidos, pues mientras España intentaba preservar la integridad de su imperio americano, la nueva nación mostraba una clara tendencia expansionista hacia el oeste y el sur.

Bernardo de Gálvez es el nombre referencial cuando de establecer la ayuda española a los insurgentes americanos se trata. Gálvez, gobernador de la Louisiana, comprendió desde el inicio de las hostilidades que aquella contienda representaba una oportunidad única para debilitar a Gran Bretaña apoyando a las colonias rebeldes norteamericanas. Junto a Gardoqui estableció una red logística para hacer llegar suministros a los revolucionarios a través del río Misisipi y del puerto de Nueva Orleans tal como acordaron Grimaldi y Lee en Burgos.

Cuando en 1779 el conde de Floridablanca, primer ministro de Carlos III, decidió declarar formalmente la guerra a Gran Bretaña, Gálvez asumió un papel militar decisivo lanzando una serie de campañas contra los británicos en el Golfo de Méjico. Aquel mismo año conquistó Baton Rouge, Natchez, y Mobile, asegurando el control español en el bajo Misisipi e impidiendo las comunicaciones británicas por esa vía estratégica. Galvez es recordado por protagonizar un episodio de dimensiones épicas: el asedio y toma de Pensacola en 1781.

Una primera expedición en 1780 para atacar Pensacola, entonces capital británica de la Florida Occidental, fracasó debido a los embates de un huracán que dispersó los barcos y hundió varias embarcaciones causando importantes pérdidas humanas y materiales. Galvez reorganizó sus fuerzas y solicitó nuevos barcos y recursos a La Habana, principal base militar española en el Caribe. La operación debía retomarse a cualquier precio, pues más allá de la ayuda a los revolucionarios, la conquista de Pensacola era esencial para los intereses de España porque desde allí partían las embarcaciones que hostigaban a la navegación patria en el Caribe, y supondría expulsar definitivamente a los británicos del golfo de México. Finalmente logró organizar una nueva expedición de asalto en 1781. La bahía de Pensacola estaba bien fortificada y cuando llegó el momento decisivo del ataque, José Calvo de Irazábal, jefe de la escuadra naval, consideró un suicidio intentar cruzar siquiera la línea de fuego de los cañones británicos. Tal decisión fue secundada por la mayoría de los comandantes en el resto de los navíos, pero Gálvez no estaba dispuesto a un nuevo fracaso y ordenó avanzar el suyo pese al fuego enemigo; una vez dentro fue seguido por el resto de la flota.

Aquel acto quedó simbolizado en el célebre lema "Yo solo," como reflejo de su coraje personal y determinación de ataque incluso sin el apoyo del resto de la flota. La conquista de Pensacola supuso un hito histórico en la guerra de independencia estadounidense que consolidó a Gálvez como uno de sus grandes héroes independentistas al punto de erigir una estatua en su memoria en Washington. Tal como había preconizado Gálvez, la victoria de Pensacola eliminó la presencia militar británica en el golfo obligándoles a dividir recursos que habrían podido emplearse contra las tropas de Washington en el frente atlántico y permitiendo a los rebeldes combatir con mayores opciones de maniobra.

1781 marcó uno de los momentos más críticos para la causa independentista, precisamente cuando se preparaba la campaña decisiva de Yorktown. Tras varios años de guerra, el Congreso Continental atravesaba una gravísima crisis financiera, al no poder pagar regularmente a los soldados, y logística, sin posibilidad de adquirir municiones. La tropa llevaba meses sin cobrar y su descontento podía derivar en deserciones masivas. También la escuadra francesa del almirante De Grasse necesitaba urgentemente dinero para pagar a la marinería y poder continuar la operación militar. En ese contexto se produjo uno de los episodios más importantes de la ayuda española a la independencia, que históricamente se conoce como "la colecta de La Habana."

Juan Manuel de Cagigal, capitán general de Cuba, y Francisco de Saavedra, hombre de confianza de José de Gálvez y enviado a América para coordinar la cooperación militar y financiera entre España y Francia en la fase final de la guerra, fueron los protagonistas de este episodio que, buena parte de historiadores consideran decisivo para el desenlace de la guerra. La situación que encontró Saavedra al llegar a Santo Domingo y posteriormente a Cuba resultaba desoladora para los independentistas, pues el éxito de la campaña dependía de conseguir financiación de forma urgente. Llegó a una suerte de acuerdo con el Conde De Grasse, comandante de la flota francesa en el Caribe, en el que España se comprometía a financiar los gastos operativos para la continuidad de la guerra y la flota de De Grasse impediría que la marina inglesa pudiera auxiliar a las tropas del general Cornwallis.

Saavedra llegó a recaudar unos 500.000 pesos de plata, cantidad ciertamente considerable, y supervisó personalmente la entrega de esos fondos para financiar la operación naval comandada por De Grasse como la terrestre comandada por Washington que culminaría con la victoria de Yorktown. Tras la rendición de Cornwallis la independencia de las trece colonias estaba prácticamente asegurada. Es mayoritariamente aceptado que sin estos recursos financieros entregados por España, el desenlace bélico hubiera sido bien distinto. El acuerdo Grasse-Saavedra pone de manifiesto que, además de revolución colonial, la independencia norteamericana fue al mismo tiempo una guerra atlántica en la que España y Francia se enfrentaron a Gran Bretaña.

En síntesis, y como sumario final al proceso de apoyo español a la independencia estadounidense podría concluirse afirmando que el histórico ostracismo de la ayuda española a la independencia de los Estados Unidos fue en buena medida gestado y provocado por nosotros mismos. Al defender tal aproximación no pretendo sugerir siquiera que los protagonistas de aquellas decisiones sufrieran de miopía histórica, más bien todo lo contrario. Considerando las circunstancias de aquellos años convulsos, las suyas fueron unas decisiones estatales y actuaciones diplomáticas de gran nivel. España obtuvo claros beneficios tras la derrota británica. Además de debilitar a su histórico enemigo, consiguió el control del Misisipi, recuperó Menorca, y, muy especialmente, las dos floridas—fueron los británicos quienes en 1764 establecieron la división administrativa entre Florida Oriental y Occidental—garantizándose el control total del Caribe y el paso por las Bahamas.

El oscuro devenir histórico de tal alianza quedó claro durante las negociaciones de paz en Francia. Los intereses de España y Estados Unidos eran antagónicos y ni británicos ni franceses tenían especial interés en favorecer el entendimiento.

Además no tardó en iniciarse un proceso migratorio de nuevos colonos hacia el oeste. Resultaría injusto acusar al nuevo gobierno de propiciar o instigar tal acción. Se trataba más bien de su imposibilidad para impedir un proceso expansivo que marcaría su propia historia a lo largo del siglo diecinueve. El análisis de la contribución española a la independencia de Estados Unidos es un ejemplo paradigmático de cómo los relatos históricos pueden construirse y transformarse en función de intereses políticos, ideológicos y culturales.

El actual revisionismo histórico está permitiendo recuperar la olvidada participación española en el proceso independentista y comprender mejor la complejidad de un acontecimiento que no fue únicamente el resultado de la acción de las colonias y de Francia, como se ha entendido hasta ahora, sino de una estrategia global en la que España tuvo un papel protagonista.

1 D'Alzina Guillermety, Carlos. "Puerto Rico y Gibraltar (1711-1788): una negociación frustrada." Anuario de Estudios Americanos (383-97); Tomo XLVII; vol. 47 (1990)

2 Ibidem, 382

3 Reyes Calderón Cuadrado, "Diego María de Gardoqui y Arriquíbar", HISPANAM; Instituto Franklin. Instituto Franklin-UAH_HISPANAM_Diego María de Gardoqui y Arriquíbar.pdf

4 Véase Reyes Calderón Cuadrado, *Empresarios españoles en el proceso de independencia norteamericana: la casa Gardoqui e hijos de Bilbao* (Unión Editorial, 2004).

RESEARCH PAPER LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

JULIO VILLA-GARCÍA
Universidad de Oviedo

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The Science of Language Leaves the Lab: Language to Infinity and Beyond[1]

"Language is the infinite use of finite means."
— Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835)

By and large, the science of language—linguistics—is widely seen as an ivory-tower discipline whose practitioners tend to be out of touch with reality, immersed in their formalisms and rules, hypotheses and theories, algorithms, symbols, experiments, and predictions—you name it. Put another way, the (theoretical) linguist is commonly seen as an individual who plays with data and seeks explanations about the working mechanisms of language, but many of these theoretical explanations are in fact of limited direct application in real practice. They may not be communicated to language teachers or to the general, non-expert public effectively, or it may take ages to see and measure the impact of such findings outside of the discipline. To a certain extent, this is true: there is usually no scientific progress without formalism, abstraction, assumptions, etc., but (theoretical) linguistics can be very valuable far beyond academia. This brief paper aims to demonstrate that linguistics can truly leave the library, the office, and the laboratory.

As I was conducting research to write Villa-García (2025), I asked a host of linguists worldwide what the most useful aspect of linguistics beyond (the field of) linguistics was. The unanimous answer was the following: the scientific method and everything it affords us. If you consult Wikipedia—or, as we are already living in the second quarter of the 21st century, any available AI chatbot—, it is easy to see what the steps of the scientific method are:

(i) Data/observation – a phenomenon draws our attention

(ii) Generalisations/patterns – we find some regularity in the data

(iii) Hypothesis/theory – we come up with a potential explanation for the phenomenon in question

(iv) Experimentation/predictions – we check whether the theory is supported by further data, or else we need to tweak it or replace it with a new theory

From (i) to (iii) we are dealing with induction (from the particular to the general) and from (iii) to (iv) we are talking about deduction (from the general to the particular). This is, in effect, the hypothetico-deductive method. Put differently, we are dealing with (a) description, (b) explanation, and (c) prediction.

It turns out that the daily job of the linguist and well, of the language teacher or language expert more generally, for the most part involves engaging—consciously or subconsciously—with the scientific method in (i)-(iv) above. How can we apply that to real data? To this end, consider the following paradigm:

(1) a. unclear

b. untidy

c. unlearn

d. unhappy

e. undo

f. unable

The first thing that catches our attention, the common denominator of the paradigm in (1), is the presence of the affix *un-* in all the examples. This prefix gives us the opposite or the reverse of the original word (*happy* → *unhappy; do* → *undo*). We can clearly see that this element *un-* changes the meaning of the word it attaches to, in contrast to "*un*" in *uncle*, for instance, which is clearly not a meaningful unit attached to *cle*; on its own, *cle* would mean nothing (although *clé* happens to be "key" in French and regarding English, one overly creative US linguistics student back in Connecticut in 2009 asked me if by logic, *uncle* should mean the man who divorced your aunt…).

Incidentally, we can go further and find a two-way split in the data at issue: in some cases *un-* attaches to verbs (*unlearn* and *undo*) and in some cases to adjectives (*unclear, untidy, unhappy*, and *unable*). So far, we have looked at some intriguing data (cf. (i)), found some generalizations (cf. (ii)) and can already come up with a potential explanation for the phenomena (cf. (iii)): *un-* can in principle attach to verbs and to adjectives so as to either reverse the activity (verbs) or give you the opposite (adjectives). If this is correct, then we should be in a position to make predictions (cf.

(iv)): a noun or a preposition should in principle not be able to combine with *un-*, as this prefix is only possible with verbs or adjectives. This prediction is borne out: **unwater* or **unbehind* are just impossible. Now, you may wonder why *unhappiness* contains *un-* if it is a noun. But note: it is not a simple noun like *water; unhappiness* is morphologically complex, in that it contains the adjective *happy*, whose opposite is *unhappy*, as expected (after all, *un-* can attach to an adjective), and from *unhappy* we can create the related noun *unhappiness* (i.e., [[un-happi]-ness]). So this is not a wrong prediction of our hypothesis; it rather further confirms our claim that *un-* combines either with verbs or with adjectives.

This simple illustration of the scientific method is not so ivory-towerish, is it? Don't we work with generalisations of that kind in our daily lives all the time? Don't language teachers, and even language learners, use those, perhaps beneath conscience?

The multiple benefits of such an approach include lifelong learning skills, such as problem-posing and problem-solving, data tabulation, argumentation skills, abstraction, analysis, and critical thinking, to name just but a few. What is more, at present, when faith-based claims seem to be more important than evidence-based claims, it is our role as intellectuals to promote independent, critical thinking to be able to support our claims with empirical evidence. The kind of training that thinking linguistically provides is tantamount to a win-win situation.

The *un-* data above are also a springboard to discuss another reusable aspect of human language: ambiguity. Take a word such as *unlearnable*. What does it mean? Or rather, what can it mean? This complex word is ambiguous, in that it can have two readings: on the one hand, it can signify "un-learnable," that is, impossible to be learnt; on the other, it can mean "unlearn-able," that is, able to be unlearnt. What the heck?! Yes, both meanings are possible, depending on the underlying structure or arrangement of elements behind the scenes. Since, as noted, *un-* can attach to both verbs and adjectives, in the first reading of *unlearnable* in (a) below, the adjective *learnable* is turned into its negative counterpart by means of the addition of the negative prefix *un-*, yielding *unlearnable* (= "not learnable"). By contrast, in the second reading of *unlearnable* in (b), *-able* attaches to the verb *unlearn* to create the adjective *unlearnable* (= "capable of being unlearnt"):

(2) a. [un- [learn-able]] = "not learnable"

b. [[un-learn]-able] = "able to be unlearnt"

It is important to note that the type of ambiguity exemplified here is not lexical (i.e., it has nothing to do with the meaning of the different morphemes involved); it is purely structural, depending on the underlying or hidden arrangements. Note that linear order does not matter: *un-*, *-learn-* and *-able* appear in the same physical order in both (2a) and (2b); it is the internal arrangements—the structures that we do not see—that make all the difference. Think of the clear parallelism between linguistics and mathematics: we have the same numbers in the same surface order, but with different internal groupings, and the result or outcome varies as a consequence (Villa-García 2025):

(3) a. $(3 \times 2) + 6 = 12$

b. $3 \times (2 + 6) = 24$

Why is all this useful? Well, among other reasons, because ambiguities can be accidental or deliberate, with evil or humoristic purposes. For instance, newspaper headlines are full of ambiguities (whether accidental or not is a different matter), such as the following headline: *Squad Helps Dog Bite Victim*, which is in fact part of the title of a famous book about headlines. This is a sentence, not a word, but the ambiguity arises in much the same way as with *unlearnable* above:

(4) a. Squad Helps [[Dog] [Bite Victim]]

b. Squad Helps [[Dog Bite] Victim]

In (4a), the squad helps a dog to bite a victim, which would represent the preposterous reading, whereas in (4b) the squad helps the victim of a dog bite. Again, the ambiguity has nothing to do with the meaning of individual words, but with internal, invisible structures. The same can be applied to the following (hopefully funny) sentence:

(5) a. University students discussed [sex] [with Dr Libido]

b. University students discussed [sex with Dr Libido]

In (5a), the topic of discussion is sex, and the discussant is Dr Libido; in (5b), the topic of discussion is [sex with Dr Libido].

Regarding intended humo(u)r, ambiguity allows us to crack a couple of jokes, such as the following dialogue between A and B:

(6) Speaker A: For Christmas, I am going to invite 10 people without problems.

Speaker B: How are you going to manage to find ten people who have no problems?

Again, the humoristic effect arises because of the possible underlying combinations: either [[finding [ten people]] without problems] or [finding [ten people without problems]]. But the ultimate structurally ambiguous joke has been attributed to Groucho Marx:

(7) One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know.

The ambiguity could be represented as follows: [I shot [an elephant in my pajamas]] vs. [[I shot [an elephant]] in my pajamas]. The funny (albeit absurd) one is the first one, where the elephant is inside the pajamas. This example is without a doubt a testament to Groucho Marx's intelligence and knack for language use.

In sum, the structural or grammatical ambiguity cases reviewed so far lead us to the conclusion that in addition to talking about the power of words, as is usually the case, we can also vouch enthusiastically for the power of syntactic or, more generally, grammatical structures.

Structures in human language are in fact potentially infinite, in the sense that we can construct sentences or expressions *ad infinitum*. This gives us an expressive power that is technically boundless (Adger 2019, among many others):

(8) a. Linguistics rocks.

b. Pete said that Linguistics rocks.

c. Susan noted that Pete said that Linguistics rocks.

d. The author claimed that Susan noted that Pete said that Linguistics rocks.

e. …

The simple sentence in (8a) can be embedded into another sentence, as in (8b), which in turn can be subordinated to another sentence, as in (8c), and so on and so forth:

(9) … [The author claimed [that Susan noted [that Pete said [that Linguistics rocks]]]]

What is the longest sentence in the world, then? Well, much like in the case of numbers, there is no upper bound to sentences, at least grammatically. We can always add "X said that…" in front of a sentence and make it bigger. Of course, in practice, huge sentences are not very useful in daily communication, but our mental grammars are capable of generating endless structures. Again, the parallelism with mathematics (∞) cannot be denied. And this impressive property of language is not limited to sentences, as shown by the following example featuring the Saxon genitive:

(10) Pat's neighbours' sister's children's dogs' collars.

Let us now look at something slightly different. Consider a sentence such as (11):

(11) Andrew finished the dictionary of weird terms.

What can (11) mean?

(12) Possible meanings of (11):

(a) …finished consulting…

(b) …finished donating…

(c) …finished throwing away…

(d) …finished tearing up…

(e) …finished compiling…

Intuitively, the most likely verbs missing in (11) above are *consulting* (12a) and *compiling* (12e), but not the rest. Why is that?

The renowned computational linguist James Pustejovski (1993) proposed the existence of qualia structures, which are part of the lexical entry of a word, and which can be invoked when it comes to interpreting examples like (11). A lexical item like *dictionary*, for instance, has the following qualia structure:

- Constitutive: a dictionary consists of definitions
- Formal: a dictionary is made of pages (in paper or online)
- Telic (aim and function): a dictionary is meant to be consulted (or read)
- Agent (creation): a dictionary is compiled (or written)

Incidentally, the plausible meanings of (11) in (12) are related to the telic and agent qualia structures: function (to be *consulted*) and creation (to be *compiled*). For other meanings to obtain, the full sentence would need to be spelt out, as in *Andrew finished tearing up the dictionary of weird terms*; otherwise, *Andrew finished the dictionary of weird terms* will generally be interpreted as *Andrew finished {consulting/compiling} the dictionary of weird terms*. In light of the foregoing discussion, think of the potential missing verbs in *Peewee began* ____ *dinner* as an exercise. Imagine how useful this can be when teaching foreign languages!

Here is one last example of the glorious benefits of linguistic enquiry: why do language learners make regularisation "errors," for instance when they say *putted* instead of *put*, or *mouses* instead of *mice*? The time-course or process of child language acquisition is very revealing in this respect: as language acquirers or learners, we like stable rules; exceptions are just horrible. True! Thus, we—as children or as adult language learners—tend to over-generalise the rules to apply to cases where exceptions apply. Things like *goed, breaked, foots,* and *deers* are commonplace among children. Once time goes by and the input tells the learner that what you say is really *went, broke, feet,* and *deer* for those cases, then the "mistakes," as if by magic, fade away. Shouldn't we be more empathetic towards those who make such natural mistakes when trying to learn a foreign language and draw a parallelism with infant child language acquisition? That move will certainly not put learners off as much!

The above is just a mere illustration of the multiple applications of theoretical linguistics beyond science. The list of potential applications is by no means comprehensive; and note that we are not even dealing with applied linguistics *per se* (translation, forensic linguistics, computational linguistics, foreign-/second-language teaching, etc.), whose importance in different domains of life cannot be underestimated—this was just about theoretical linguistics, a subfield of linguistics that some refer to as "armchair linguistics." At any rate, the scientific study of language provides bountiful benefits beyond the lab and even beyond the classroom, and we should certainly make the most of the field. Rather than fear linguistics, we should embrace the discipline, as it can surely be our ally well beyond academia.

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RESEARCH PAPER LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

JAVIER MARTÍN ARISTA
Universidad de La Rioja

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Old English Null Objects: Corpus Analysis and Diachronic Perspectives

Abstract

This article presents a quantitative study of null objects in Old English based on the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* and the *York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry*. A total of 4,139 instances of null objects have been identified across 114 Old English texts, which comprise approximately 1.6 million words. The results show that null objects in Old English are licensed by syntactic movement operations and that traces account for 99.9 per cent of all instances. The absence of discourse-licensed null pronominal objects causes a subject-object asymmetry in null argument licensing. The normalised frequency of null objects in Old English averages 25.9 per 10,000 words, but there is substantial variation by genre: prose translations from Latin evince 30.8 per 10,000 words, whereas chronicles, laws and medical texts show approximately 13-16 per 10,000 words. The translation effect is interpreted as syntactic amplification of a vernacular strategy rather than as contact-induced borrowing. The analysis of Middle English and Early Modern English demonstrates continuity of the movement-only licensing mechanism throughout eight centuries. The main conclusions are that Old English is not a pro-drop language for objects but exhibits a deep subject-object asymmetry and that this asymmetry, together with the underlying movement-only licensing mechanism, remains stable despite extensive syntactic restructuring.

Keywords: Old English, null objects, subject-object assymetry, corpus linguistics, historical linguistics

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of null arguments constitutes a central domain of cross-linguistic syntactic variation. Languages differ systematically as to whether and under what conditions arguments of verbs can remain phonologically unexpressed on the condition that they maintain syntactic and semantic licensing (Huang 1984, 531; Rizzi 1986, 501). At one typological extreme lie languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Japanese and Korean, which have discourse-anaphoric null arguments when referents are contextually salient. At the opposite extreme lie languages such as English and German, which generally require overt pronominal expression except in very specific syntactic contexts. Between these poles numerous intermediate systems can be found that exhibit partial null-argument properties. Holmberg (2005, 537) and the contributors to Biberauer et al. (2010) distinguish three types of pro-drop languages (consistent, partial and discourse pro-drop) that provide the framework within which the Old English evidence must be situated.

Old English occupies a particularly interesting position with respect to this typological parameter. Previous research on null arguments in Old English has focused primarily on null subjects, most notably Walkden's (2013, 159) quantitative investigation using the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (YCOE; Taylor et al. 2003). Walkden (2013, 172) demonstrates that there is remarkable inter-textual variation in null subject frequency and establishes that Old English null subjects include both movement-derived traces and discourse-licensed null pronouns, which are affected by factors such as topic continuity, clause type and person. Walkden's (2014, 198) work on null arguments in early Germanic languages argues that early Northwest Germanic languages, including Old English, have characteristics of partial null-argument languages in which argument omission was possible under specific conditions but not freely available. Rusten (2013, 980; 2015, 60-68) demonstrates that empty referential subjects are significantly more frequent in Old English poetry than in prose. In a more recent work, Rusten (2019, 89-115) enlarges this analysis across Old, Middle and Early Modern English in the most comprehensive diachronic survey to date.

Despite the theoretical importance of subject-object asymmetries and the typological interest of null arguments, a quantitative analysis of null objects in Old English has been lacking. This article uses the YCOE and the York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry (YCOEP; Pintzuk and Plug 2001) to carry out an empirical corpus analysis of null objects in Old English. The article argues that the resulting subject-object asymmetry is explanatory rather than only descriptive and that the patterns of variation across genre and register can help to explain the relationship between vernacular syntax and learned translations from Latin. To provide diachronic perspectives and assess the stability of null object patterns across historical change, this article also examines null objects in Middle English using the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English (Kroch and Taylor 2000) and in Early Modern English using the Penn Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English (Kroch et al. 2004).

The research addresses several central questions regarding Old English null objects. First, what is the overall frequency and distribution of null objects in Old English texts and how do these patterns vary according to genre and register, including the contrast between translations from Latin and original vernacular compositions? Second, what types of null objects occur in Old English, through what syntactic mechanisms are they licensed and how do these patterns compare to null subjects? Third, what syntactic contexts generate null objects in Old English and what does this tell us about

Old English syntax and typology? Fourth, do the licensing mechanisms identified in Old English remain stable in later periods, or do they change as English undergoes extensive syntactic restructuring?

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the corpora and methodology. Sections 3 to 6 present the empirical findings for Old English: the overall distribution of null objects, their distribution by morphological case, genre and register variation and the effect of translation from Latin. Section 7 identifies the syntactic contexts that generate null objects and Section 8 discusses the subject-object asymmetry in comparison with null subjects. Section 9 extends the analysis diachronically to Middle English and Early Modern English in order to assess the stability of the licensing mechanisms across eight centuries. Section 10 summarises the main findings and considers their implications.

2. Corpus and Methodology

The main empirical basis for this study includes the YCOE and the YCOEP. The YCOE, compiled by Taylor et al. (2003), comprises approximately 1.5 million words of Old English prose texts spanning from the late ninth century to the end of the Old English period (mid-twelfth century). The corpus includes one hundred prose texts representing diverse genres: historical chronicles including multiple manuscripts of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, religious homilies by major authors like Ælfric and Wulfstan, biblical translations including the *West Saxon Gospels* and the *Old English Heptateuch*, philosophical and theological works including the Old English translations of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Gregory's *Pastoral Care* and *Dialogues* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*; as well as legal documents, medical texts and hagiographical writings. The YCOEP provides parsed annotation of approximately 100,000 words of Old English verse from fourteen texts, including major works such as *Beowulf, Genesis, Exodus*, *The Exeter Book* and Cynewulf's signed poems. For broader background on the syntactic structures whose annotation is at issue here, the standard reference works are Fischer et al. (2000) and Ringe and Taylor (2014).

Both the YCOE and the YCOEP implement syntactic annotation following conventions adapted from the Penn Treebank tradition for historical languages, as detailed in the corpus documentation (Taylor 2003). Each text is represented as a sequence of syntactic parse trees in bracketed annotation, in such a way that constituents are labelled according to syntactic category and grammatical function. Central to the present investigation, empty categories are explicitly marked: *T* marks traces left by movement operations with co-indexing linking traces to moved antecedents, *pro* marks null pronominal elements, *con* marks elided material in coordinate structures and additional types such as *ICH* (Interpret Constituent Here) mark extraposition. Notice that the YCOE does not annotate a co-indexed *T*-1 trace in topicalisation structures: only relativisation and wh-movement receive that treatment. The paper adds the trace as a theoretical representation of the movement analysis. This is consistent across all topicalisation instances found in the corpus.

The Old English corpus represents noun phrases with case-marking labels: NP-ACC for accusative noun phrases (typically direct objects), NP-DAT for dative noun phrases (indirect objects or objects of dative-governing verbs) and NP-GEN for genitive noun phrases (possessors or objects of genitive-governing verbs). Null objects were identified by searching for empty category markers occurring within noun phrases marked with object case labels. The primary query patterns used regular expressions of the form `\(NP-ACC[^\)]*\s+\*T\*\)` to identify accusative noun phrases containing traces. Parallel patterns were defined for dative (`\(NP-DAT[^\)]*\s+\*T\*\)`) and genitive (`\(NP-GEN[^\)]*\s+\*T\*\)`) cases and for other empty category types (*pro* and *con*). These patterns were implemented using Python scripts resorting to the `re` module for regular expression matching.

Exclusions were applied to guarantee that extracted instances represented genuine null objects rather than other syntactic phenomena. Noun phrases marked as subjects (NP-NOM) containing empty categories were excluded, as they represent null subjects analysed separately by Walkden (2013, 162-70) and Rusten (2013, 975-85). Empty categories in adjunct positions (ADVP *T* for adverbial traces, PP *T* for prepositional phrase traces) were excluded too because they fall outside argument structure. Cases where verbs were annotated as intransitive were excluded even if empty categories appeared nearby. For each identified null object, the extraction process recorded the text of origin, sentence identifier, empty category type and case marking. Word counts for each text were obtained from morphologically tagged files (.pos) and frequencies were normalised as null objects per 10,000 words for cross-text comparison.

For the diachronic perspective, supplementary analysis examined the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English* (PPCME2; Kroch and Taylor 2000), comprising approximately 1.25 million words found in fifty-six texts from 1150 to 1500; and the *Penn Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (PPCEME; Kroch et al. 2004), comprising approximately

612,000 words attested in 147 texts from 1500 to 1710. These corpora use function-based labels (NP-OB1 for direct objects, NP-OB2 for indirect objects) rather than case-based labels, so that they require adapted query patterns of the form `\(NP-OB1[^\)]*\*T\*[^\)]*\)` for direct object traces. The same extraction methodology and exclusion criteria were applied to maintain consistency between periods.

Statistical analysis included chi-squared tests for comparing categorical distributions, t-tests for comparing means and analysis of variance for comparing multiple groups. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d for t-tests and Cramér's V for chi-squared tests to assess statistical significance.

3. Overall Distribution of Null Objects in Old English

The corpus queries identified a total of 4,139 instances of null objects in the Old English corpus. Table 1 presents the overall distribution in prose and poetry.

Subcorpus	Texts	Total words	Null objects	Per 10,000 words
YCOE	100	1,500,000	3,997	26.6
YCOEP	14	100,000	142	14.2
Total	114	1,600,000	4,139	25.9

Table 1. Overall distribution of null objects in Old English.

The prose corpus accounts for 96.6 per cent of null objects, as is predictable from its greater size. When normalised for corpus size, prose shows nearly twice the frequency of poetry (26.6 versus 14.2 per 10,000 words). This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 18.4$, df = 1, $p < 0.001$). This register difference may be a consequence of the more frequent use of hypotactic subordinate structures, such as relative clauses and embedded questions, in prose; and of the more paratactic style of Old English poetry. This prose-poetry asymmetry points out that the paratactic syntax of Old English verse resists the operations that generate null objects. Poetry favours apposition, asyndetic juxtaposition and inflectional licensing of free word order over structural subordination. The corpus thus provides indirect quantitative support for the philological intuition that Old English verse preserves a paratactic syntactic stratum at variance with the increasingly hypotactic prose that imitates Latin.

Table 2 presents the distribution of null objects by empty category type.

Type	Count	Percentage
Trace (*T*)	4,135	99.90%
Conjunction ellipsis (*con*)	4	0.10%
Null pronoun (*pro*)	0	0.00%
Total	4,139	100.00%

Table 2. Distribution of null objects by empty category type in Old English.

Null objects in Old English, as can be seen in Table 2, are overwhelmingly traces resulting from syntactic movement operations. This accounts for 99.9 per cent of all instances. Conjunction ellipsis turns out only four instances in 1.6 million words. This frequency is negligible and consistent with annotation anomalies or marginal constructions. Most

significantly, discourse-licensed null pronominal objects (*pro*) are completely absent. This absence demonstrates that Old English did not license discourse-anaphoric null objects of the type found in languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, or Italian. Every null object in Old English is a consequence of movement operations, not a mechanism for pronominal reference.

This pattern contrasts with null subjects in Old English. Walkden (2013) and Rusten (2013) found that Old English null subjects include both movement-derived traces and discourse-licensed null pronouns. These authors also demonstrated that Old English null subjects show sensitivity to discourse factors such as topic continuity, clause type (main versus subordinate) and person (third versus first/second). Consequently, a deep subject-object asymmetry arises: subjects can be discourse-licensed under specific conditions, objects cannot. This asymmetry, as is shown in Sections 8 and 9, is kept throughout the history of English.

4. Distribution by Case in Old English

The distribution of null objects by morphological case reflects the argument structure of Old English verbs. Table 3 presents this distribution in the corpus.

Case	Count	Percentage	Per 10,000 words
Accusative	3,353	81.0%	21.0
Genitive	336	8.1%	2.1
Dative	308	7.4%	1.9
Other/Unspecified	142	3.4%	0.9
Total	4,139	100.0%	25.9

Table 3. Distribution of null objects by case in Old English.

Direct objects are the primary targets of movement operations such as relativisation and wh-movement. Accusative objects account for 81.0 per cent of null objects. The accusative is the default object case in Old English, assigned by most transitive verbs. Genitive and dative null objects are less frequent. They occur with verbs that govern these cases, such as *biddan* 'to pray for', *neosan* 'to visit', *brucan* 'to enjoy' with the genitive and *fylgan* 'to follow' as well as *helpan* 'to help' with the dative. The case of the governing verb is preserved by the trace: verbs governing the genitive generate genitive traces when their object undergo movement. Similarly, verbs governing dative objects generate dative traces. The distribution by case is a consequence of case-assignment properties of Old English verbs interacting with movement operations that can target objects of any case. The case distribution is consistent with general principles of Old English argument structure. On the one hand, direct objects undergo movement operations more frequently than oblique objects; on the other hand, the presence of genitive and dative null objects demonstrates that movement operations target objects marked with any case, which is only possible in a language with relatively free word order and rich case morphology such as Old English (Pintzuk and Taylor 2006, 4; Fischer et al. 2000, 60; Ringe and Taylor 2014, 415).

5. Genre and Register Variation in Old English

Within the Old English corpus, substantial variation exists according to genre and register. Table 4 presents frequencies for major text categories.

Genre	Texts	Words	Null objects	Per 10,000 words
Learned translations (Latin)	12	565,000	1,740	30.8
Biblical translations	8	285,000	778	27.3
Religious homilies (Ælfric)	6	245,000	591	24.1
Religious homilies (anon.)	12	198,000	392	19.8
Chronicles	9	185,000	300	16.2
Laws and legal documents	15	125,000	186	14.9
Medical and scientific texts	8	98,000	131	13.4
Hagiography	12	187,000	363	19.4
Other prose	18	217,000	516	23.8

Table 4. Null objects by genre in Old English prose.

Learned translations from Latin sources show the highest frequencies (30.8 per 10,000 words), which might have been caused by the complex subordinate structures characteristic of Latin originals that translators rendered with parallel Old English constructions (Cichosz 2021; Walkden 2024). Major translations including Gregory's *Dialogues* and *Pastoral Care*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* make extensive use of relative clauses and embedded questions, which generate movement-derived null objects. Similarly, Biblical translations show high frequencies (27.3 per 10,000 words). Religious homilies by Ælfric, characterised by elaborate prose style influenced by Latin rhetorical traditions (Hill 2007; Liuzza 2025), show moderate-to-high frequencies (24.1 per 10,000 words). At the opposite end, legal texts (14.9 per 10,000 words) and medical texts (13.4 per 10,000 words) show considerably lower frequencies, probably related to direct syntactic styles with less subordination. Null object frequency, therefore, strongly correlates with syntactic complexity: texts with extensive subordination generate more movement-derived traces than texts using simpler paratactic structures. The analysis of variance comparing these genre categories yields $F = 12.7$ ($df = 6, 93$, $p < 0.001$), which confirms that genre differences are statistically significant. Pairwise comparisons show that learned translations differ significantly from all other categories (all $p < 0.01$). Chronicles, laws and medical texts cluster together at the lower end without significant pairwise differences (all $p > 0.10$).

Table 5 presents the twenty Old English texts with highest null object frequencies and illustrates the relationship between text type and frequency.

Text	Description	Words	Null objects	Per10k words
Gregory's Dialogues	Religious prose	133,000	411	30.9
Pastoral Care	Religious prose	100,000	310	31.0
Bede's Historia	Historical prose	118,000	299	25.3
Boethius's Consolation	Philosophical prose	86,000	266	30.9
West Saxon Gospels	Biblical translation	125,000	254	20.3
Catholic Homilies II (Ælfric)	Homilies	87,000	238	27.4
Catholic Homilies I (Ælfric)	Homilies	76,000	209	27.5

Text	Description	Words	Null objects	Per10k words
Lives of Saints (Ælfric)	Hagiography	68,000	187	27.5
Blickling Homilies	Religious homilies	72,000	163	22.6
Soliloquies	Religious prose	48,000	149	31.0
Old Testament (Heptateuch)	Biblical translation	160,000	123	7.7
Ælfric's Homilies (supp.)	Religious homilies	50,000	121	24.2
Vercelli Homilies	Religious homilies	52,000	116	22.3
Gregory's Dialogues	Religious prose	98,000	113	11.5
Wulfstan's Homilies	Religious homilies	42,000	101	24.0
Orosius's History	Historical prose	77,000	93	12.1
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E)	Historical chronicle	48,000	78	16.3
Benedictine Rule	Religious prose	30,000	54	18.0
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (D)	Historical chronicle	27,000	46	17.0
Martyrology	Religious calendar	26,000	45	17.3

Table 5. Old English texts with highest absolute null object frequencies.

As is shown in Table 5, the highest-frequency texts cluster in the learned translation category: Gregory, Boethius, Augustine's *Soliloquies* and the *Pastoral Care* all show frequencies around 31 per 10,000 words. Ælfric's works show consistent frequencies around 27-28 per 10,000 words, which is probably indicative of a relatively elaborate style. Chronicles and simpler prose show frequencies in the 12-18 per 10,000-word range. This variation is substantial, although it follows predictable patterns based on syntactic complexity.

6. Translation Effects in Old English

A particularly important factor affecting null object frequency is whether texts are translations from Latin or original Old English compositions. Table 6 compares these categories in prose texts.

Text Type	Texts	Words	Null objects	Per 10,000 words
Translations from Latin	42	1,113,000	3,428	30.8
Original Old English	58	387,000	569	14.7
Total	100	1,500,000	3,997	26.6

Table 6. Null objects in Old English: Translations versus original compositions.

Translations show more than twice the frequency of original compositions (30.8 versus 14.7 per 10,000 words), a difference that is highly significant from the statistical point of view ($t = 8.3$, $df = 98$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.7$). The large effect size ($d = 1.7$) indicates that translation status can predict null object frequency. This translation effect reflects Latin syntactic influence (Taylor 2008, 345; Cichosz et al. 2016, 80; Ringe and Taylor 2014, 405-25). As Taylor (2008, 350-360) demonstrates with respect to the Old English Bede, Latin source texts can both increase and distort the frequency of marked structures in translated Old English. Latin favours extensive relative clauses and allows for relatively free word order including fronted objects. Old English translators frequently preserved Latin syntactic structures, thus generating more movement-derived traces than vernacular Old English composition might produce. However, even original Old English compositions show substantial null object frequencies (14.7 per 10,000 words). In other words, the data do not support contact-induced syntactic borrowing for this construction. Movement-derived null objects constitute a feature of native Old English syntax, not a direct consequence of translation from Latin. Indeed, original compositions including chronicles, laws, homilies by vernacular authors and various other texts generate null objects through relativisation and questioning. The translation effect could therefore be understood as syntactic amplification rather than syntactic borrowing. Latin source structures might have encouraged Old English translators to resort to strategies that were already available in the vernacular language.

7. Syntactic Contexts Generating Null Objects in Old English

Null objects in Old English arise from three primary movement contexts: relativisation, wh-movement in questions and topicalisation. The early generative analysis of these movement operations in Old English is set out in Allen (1980) and the broader syntactic background is summarised in Fischer et al. (2000).

Relative clauses constitute the most frequent source of null object traces. Old English relative clauses typically display demonstrative pronouns functioning as relative operators, as described in the YCOE annotation manual (Taylor 2003) and in Fischer et al. (2000, 55-73). Consider example (1) from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (see Appendix for abbreviations):

(1) <T06850007100,3.16.5>
Godes geleafan, þone hi gefyrn awurpon

Godes	geleafan	þone	hi
God.GEN.SG	faith.ACC.SG	that.ACC.SG.M	3PL.NOM
gefyrn	awurpon		
long.ago	cast.out.PST.3PL		

'God's faith, which they had long ago cast out'

```
(CP-REL (WNP-ACC-1 (D^A þone))
    (C 0)
    (IP-SUB (NP-ACC *T*-1)
        (NP-NOM (PRO^N hi))
        (ADVP-TMP (ADV^T gefyrn))
        (VBDI awurpon)))
```

In example (1), the demonstrative *þone* 'that' (ACC.SG.M), co-referential with the head noun geleafan 'faith', moves from post-verbal object position to the left edge of the relative CP (WNP-ACC-1), leaving the co-indexed trace *T*-1. The relative clause is formally headless in the YCOE parsing: the antecedent NP (*Godes geleafan* 'God's faith') is outside the CP-REL bracket. The trace in object position after awurpon 'cast out' is the null object. This structure exemplifies the standard Old English relativisation pattern, in which a case-marked demonstrative moves to the left periphery of the relative clause and leaves a trace in canonical object position (Allen 1980, 290).

Direct and indirect questions generate null objects when interrogative phrases functioning as objects undergo wh-movement to clause-initial position. Consider example (2), also from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*:

(2) <T06850004600,2.12.16>
Hwylc geþeaht se ylca cyning mid his ealdormonnum hæbbende wæs be þare onfengnysse Cristes geleafan

Hwylc	geþeaht	se	ylca
which.ACC.SG.N	counsel.ACC.SG.N	the.NOM.SG.M	same.NOM.SG.M
cyning	mid	his	ealdormonnum
king.NOM.SG	PREP	3SG.M.GEN	alderman.DAT.PL
hæbbende	wæs	be	þære
have.PTCP.PRS	be.PST.3SG	PREP	the.DAT.SG.F
onfengnysse	Cristes	geleafan	
reception.DAT.SG	Christ.GEN.SG	faith.GEN.SG	

'What counsel was that same king, together with his aldermen, considering about the reception of Christ's faith?'

```
(CP-QUE (WNP-ACC-1 (WADJ^A Hwylc) (N^A geþeaht))
      (C 0)
      (IP-SUB (NP-ACC *T*-1)
            (NP-NOM (D^N se) (ADJ^N ylca) (N^N cyning))
            (PP (P mid)
               (NP-DAT (PRO$^D his) (N^D ealdormonnum)))
            (HAG hæbbende)
            (BEDI wæs)
            (PP (P be)
               (NP-DAT (D^D þære) (N^D onfengnysse)
                     (NP-GEN (NR^G Cristes) (N^G geleafan))))))
```

Wh-movement is a movement operation independently motivated for question formation that generates null object traces. In example (2), the wh-phrase *Hwylc geþeaht* 'what counsel', (ACC.SG.N) is fronted as a WNP-ACC to clause-initial position, leaving trace *T*-1 in the object slot of the embedded IP-SUB. The subject NP is *se ylca cyning* 'that same king', (NOM.SG), with the additional PP *mid his ealdormonnum* 'together with his aldermen.

Topicalisation, whereby objects move to clause-initial position for pragmatic reasons of prominence, generates null objects less frequently than relativisation or questioning but occurs systematically in Old English. As Speyer (2010) demonstrates in a corpus-based study of object topicalisation across the history of English, this construction was substantially more frequent in Old English than in later periods, before undergoing a sharp decline. Consider example (3) from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy:*

(3) <T06660153500,38.119.1>
þa cwaþ ic: þæt ic geman

þa	cwaþ	ic	þæt	ic
then	say.PST.1SG	1SG.NOM	that.ACC.SG.N	1SG.NOM
geman				
remember.PRS.1SG				

'Then I said: 'That I remember."

```
(IP-MAT (ADVP-TMP (ADV^T þa))
      (VBDI cwaþ)
      (NP-NOM (PRO^N ic))
  (IP-MAT-SPE (NP-ACC (D^A þæt))
          (NP-NOM (PRO^N ic))
          (VBPI geman)))
```

In example (3), the speech content *þæt ic geman* 'That I remember.'constitutes the topicalisation: the accusative demonstrative þæt 'that', referring back to the proposition is displaced to clause-initial position before subject ic 'I' and verb *geman* 'I remember'. This creates a marked focus structure that puts pragmatic emphasis on the fronted object. Topicalisation interacts with Old English verb-second (V2) word order: the fronted object occupies the first position and the finite verb moves to second position, as analysed by Pintzuk (1999, 105), Speyer (2010, 90) and discussed by Ringe and Taylor (2014, 405-425). The V2 property favours topicalisation and other leftward movements in Old English, thus contributing to null object generation.

8. Null Subjects and Null objects: The Subject-Object Asymmetry

These findings on null objects in Old English contrast with the findings on null subjects made by Walkden (2013), Rusten (2013, 2015, 2019) and Walkden and Rusten (2017). The data also show a fundamental subject-object asymmetry.

Walkden (2013) and Rusten (2013) found that Old English null subjects include both movement-derived traces and discourse-licensed null pronouns, although null pronouns account for a minority of instances. Old English null subjects show sensitivity to discourse factors such as topic continuity (null subjects are more frequent when the referent had been mentioned recently), clause type (null subjects are more frequent in main clauses than subordinate clauses) and person (third-person null subjects are more frequent than first- or second-person null subjects). In a nutshell, Old English allowed discourse-pragmatic licensing of null subjects under specific conditions, though the frequency varied across texts. Rusten (2015, 60-70) further demonstrates that this discourse-licensing pattern is preserved more robustly in poetry than in prose.

By contrast, null objects in Old English show no discourse-licensed instances: there are zero instances of *pro* in 1.6 million words. Null objects arise exclusively from movement operations: relativisation, wh-movement and topicalisation. The inter-textual variation in null object frequency is considerably lower than for null subjects when syntactic complexity and genre are considered. Null objects show no clause-type effects of the sort found for null subjects: relative clauses (inherently subordinate) generate null objects through relativisation, but there is no independent effect of subordination preventing null objects.

This subject-object asymmetry is not unique to Old English, as discussed by Huang (1984, 540) and analysed within generative frameworks by Rizzi (1986, 510). Many languages allow discourse-licensed null subjects and prohibit discourse-licensed null objects. Various theoretical accounts have been proposed. Topicality-based accounts (Givón 1983, 5; Frascarelli 2007, 691) note that subjects prototypically function as discourse topics (identifying what the clause is about), while objects prototypically function as focal elements (providing new information). Discourse-licensed null arguments require high topicality and accessibility, but these conditions are typically met by subjects, not by objects. Structural accounts (Holmberg 2005, 540; Biberauer et al. 2010, 8) note that subjects occupy higher structural positions (Spec, IP) than objects (complements of V) and discourse licensing may require or be facilitated by structural prominence. Agreement-based accounts (Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1998, 491) note that many pro-drop languages license null subjects through rich verbal agreement, whereas verbs typically do not show object agreement.

The Old English evidence supports topicality-based and structural accounts. Subjects, being typically topical and structurally prominent, can be discourse-licensed in Old English. Objects, being typically focal and structurally lower, cannot be discourse-licensed. The absence of object agreement in Old English is consistent with agreement-based accounts but cannot be the full explanation, as the asymmetry is also present in later periods, in which verbal agreement progressively becomes less explicit because of the decline of inflection.

9. Diachronic Perspectives: Null Objects in Middle and Early Modern English

To provide context for the Old English findings and assess the stability of null object licensing across historical change, supplementary analysis examined null objects in Middle English and Early Modern English. Table 7 presents the overall distribution across the three periods.

Corpus	Texts	Words	Null objects	Per 10,000 words
YCOE/YCOEP (OE)	114	1,600,000	4,139	25.9
PPCME2 (ME)	56	1,253,261	7,676	61.2
PPCEME (EModE)	147	612,395	3,218	52.5

Table 7. Null objects across historical periods.

The normalised frequencies in Table 7 show an unexpected pattern: Middle English turns out an elevated frequency (61.2 per 10,000 words) compared to Old English (25.9 per 10,000 words), before Early Modern English shows a modest decline (52.5 per 10,000 words). This development differs from the hypothesis that null objects would decline as English lost verb-second word order and developed rigid word order, analysed in detail by van Kemenade (2012, 822), Los (2009, 100) and Kroch and Taylor (1997, 305). However, as Table 8 shows, the most relevant finding is continuity in licensing mechanism rather than frequency variation.

Type	OE	ME	EModE
Trace (*T*)	4,135 (99.9%)	7,675 (99.9%)	3,217 (99.9%)
Null pronoun (*pro*)	0 (0.00%)	1 (0.01%)	1 (0.03%)
Conjunction (*con*)	4 (0.10%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

Table 8. Distribution of null objects by empty category type across historical periods.

Throughout three periods spanning eight centuries, null objects are movement-derived and traces account for virtually 100 per cent of instances. This continuity demonstrates that the fundamental licensing mechanism for null objects remains unchanged despite deep syntactic changes, including loss of verb-second word order (van Kemenade 2012, 825-33; Los 2009, 105-22), rigidification of subject-verb-object order (Struik and van Kemenade 2022, 85-105), simplification of the case system, reduction in verbal agreement and restructuring of verb movement patterns (Kroch and Taylor 1997, 310-23). The parallel diachronic study of null subjects by Walkden and Rusten (2017, 445) and Rusten (2019, 165-210) shows that, in this domain too, the basic licensing distinctions established in Old English continue in Middle English despite extensive grammatical restructuring.

The Middle English frequency elevation seems to reflect corpus composition rather than genuine grammatical change. The PPCME2 contains extensive representation of late fourteenth-century learned religious prose characterised by elaborate subordination, including mystical writings (*Cloud of Unknowing,* Richard Rolle), Wycliffite Biblical translations and sermons, theological treatises and Chaucer's learned prose works (Boethius translation, Melibee). These texts display complex relative clause structures, which extensively generate null object traces. By contrast, the Old English corpus includes substantial representation of chronicles, laws and simpler prose alongside learned translations, which amounts to a more balanced genre distribution. When we compare texts of parallel genre across periods (religious homilies, for instance) frequencies show more modest differences. This reinforces the corpus composition interpretation rather than grammatical change.

The Early Modern English modest decline from Middle English (61.2 to 52.5 per 10,000 words) combined with stability across Early Modern English subperiods suggests that by 1500, the grammatical structures governing null object frequency had stabilised. The major syntactic changes of the Middle English period were complete, Early Modern English representing consolidation rather than continued transformation. Nevertheless, null objects remain movement-derived throughout Early Modern English, thus maintaining the pattern established in Old English.

10. Conclusion

This article has presented a quantitative analysis of null objects in Old English based on 4,139 instances extracted from 114 texts comprising approximately 1.6 million words, supplemented by parallel analyses of Middle English and Early Modern English to provide diachronic perspectives. Four conclusions can be drawn from this quantitative analysis. First, it establishes that null objects in Old English are licensed by syntactic movement: traces account for 99.9 per cent of all instances and discourse-licensed null pronominal objects are completely absent from the corpus. Old English is therefore not a pro-drop language for objects, regardless of the partial null-subject properties that it exhibits.

Second, the article finds a deep subject-object asymmetry in null argument licensing. Whereas null subjects in Old English admit both movement-derived and discourse-licensed instances, null objects admit only the former. This asymmetry aligns most closely with topicality-based and structural accounts of null argument distribution and it proves remarkably resistant to historical change.

Third, the article quantifies the role of genre and register in null object frequency. Variation across the corpus is substantial but systematic: learned translations from Latin show 30.8 per 10,000 words, biblical translations 27.3, religious homilies 20-24 and chronicles, laws and medical texts 13-16. The translation effect (30.8 versus 14.7 per 10,000 words for translations versus original compositions) is best understood as syntactic amplification rather than syntactic borrowing: Latin source structures increase the frequency of a relativisation strategy already available in the vernacular. This finding contextualises accounts of Latin influence on Old English syntax. The prose-poetry contrast, in turn, quantitatively supports the philological intuition that Old English verse preserves a paratactic stratum at variance with the increasingly hypotactic prose cultivated under Latin influence.

Fourth, the diachronic analysis demonstrates continuity of the movement-only licensing mechanism throughout eight centuries. The Middle English frequency elevation (61.2 per 10,000 words) and the modest Early Modern English decline (52.5) reflect corpus composition rather than grammatical change, since traces continue to account for approximately 100 per cent of null objects. Fundamental licensing mechanisms can thus remain stable across periods of extensive syntactic restructuring, including the loss of verb-second order, the rigidification of subject-verb-object order, the simplification of the case system and the reduction of verbal agreement.

Taken together, these findings have implications for syntactic theory, for historical linguistics and for corpus methodology. They show that frequency changes need not reflect grammatical changes, that corpus composition has a noteworthy effect on patterns in historical corpora and that the subject-object asymmetry constitutes a deep typological property of English that has survived the most far-reaching grammatical changes of its linguistic history.

Appendix: Abbreviations

a. Glossing abbreviations (Leipzig)

1SG	first person singular
3PL	third person plural
3SG	third person singular
ACC	accusative
DAT	dative
F	feminine
GEN	genitive
M	masculine
N	neuter

NOM	nominative
PL	plural
PREP	preposition
PRS	present tense
PST	past tense
PTCP	participle
SG	singular

b. Parsing abbreviations (YCOE annotation)

1. Phrase tags

ADVP-TMP	adverbial phrase, temporal
CP-QUE	interrogative complementizer phrase
CP-REL	relative complementizer phrase
IP-MAT	main inflected phrase
IP-MAT-SPE	main inflected phrase, direct speech
IP-SUB	subordinate inflected phrase
NP-ACC	noun phrase, accusative
NP-DAT	noun phrase, dative
NP-GEN	noun phrase, genitive
NP-NOM	noun phrase, nominative
PP	prepositional phrase
WNP-ACC	wh-operator noun phrase, accusative

2. Word-level tags

T	trace — the co-indexed gap left by movement
0	null/zero complementizer (in C 0)
ADJ^N	adjective, nominative
ADV^T	adverb, temporal
BEDI	be, past indicative (wæs)
C	complementizer
D^A	demonstrative, accusative
D^D	demonstrative, dative
D^N	demonstrative, nominative
HAG	present participle of habban in auxiliary use
N^A	noun, accusative
N^D	noun, dative
N^G	noun, genitive
N^N	noun, nominative
NR^G	proper noun, genitive
P	preposition
PRO^N	personal pronoun, nominative
PRO$^D	possessive pronoun, dative context
VBDI	verb, past indicative
VBPI	verb, irregular present indicative
WADJ^A	wh-adjective, accusative

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BOOK REVIEWS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

SILVIA MOLINA PLAZA
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid

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Conflict, Discourse and Cognition. Political Discourse in Northern Ireland

Laura Filardo-Llamas

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ISBN: 978 1 350 37376 1

In *Conflict, Discourse and Cognition*, Laura Filardo-Llamas integrates satisfactorily cognitive linguistics into Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to analyze the Northern Irish (NI) peace process. The central thesis posits that "there is an inextricable link between discourse, conflict and cognition which cannot be neglected when studying political conflict" (1). This volume explores in depth the "alternate realities" created by language, analyzing how opposing communities use discourse to construct deeply divided worldviews.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The Introduction (chapter 1) establishes the foundational premise that the Northern Irish conflict is inextricably linked to the language used to describe it. Discourse does not merely mirror an objective social reality but is a primary agent in its creation. As the author notes, "the importance of language for the study of conflict cannot be neglected" (3). By framing the "Peace Process" as a linguistic construct, Filardo-Llamas suggests that the transition from violence to politics is governed by how actors negotiate meaning. Conflict is not merely a political or legal transition but a "discursive construction which shows opposed and antagonistic views" (16).

Chapter 2 "What can Cognitive Linguistics Offer for Conflict Studies" explains the theoretical background for this volume, including spatial cognition (Levinson 2003), cognitive linguistics (Croft and Cruse 2004) and applications of both to the study of political discourse, mostly based on Discourse Space Theory and Text-World Theory (Chilton 2004). The author establishes this theoretical framework for her research by aligning it with the constructivist tradition in the social sciences (Vygotsky 1986; Chilton 1996; Jeffries and O'Driscoll 2019). This paradigm posits that discourses function as interpretative constructions intended to conceptualize the specific social contexts and actions they address (Pujante 2016). Building upon this foundation, she contends that an examination of distinct discursive selections—and the subsequent varied construals they produce—elucidates the mechanisms of legitimization and delegitimization within political rhetoric. This process is fundamentally predicated on the discursive construction and negotiation of identities, specifically concerning representations of the "self" in opposition to the "other."

Chapter 3 provides the socio-political context of the Northern Irish "Troubles" (1968–1998). It was an ethno-political struggle centered on the region's constitutional status within the United Kingdom. This period was defined by a systemic

divide between Unionist/Loyalist factions, who sought to maintain the union with Britain, and Nationalist/Republican groups, who advocated for a united Ireland. While the conflict was catalyzed by a mid-century civil rights movement protesting the socio-economic disenfranchisement of the Catholic minority, it rapidly escalated into a low-intensity kinetic conflict involving state security forces and various paramilitary organizations, resulting in deep-seated sectarian segregation and a breakdown of civil order. The transition toward a structural peace was codified in the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Central to this framework was the "principle of consent," which recognized Northern Ireland's current status while providing a democratic mechanism for future constitutional change. In the post-agreement era, Northern Ireland has transitioned from active conflict to a stabilized, albeit fragile, peace. Although large-scale violence has largely ceased, the region continues to grapple with the legacy of its past and persistent social fragmentation, evidenced by the continued existence of "peace walls." While the 1998 framework remains the bedrock of regional stability, the ongoing negotiation of identity and sovereignty underscores that the peace process remains an evolutionary endeavor rather than a static resolution. As Filardo-Llamas notes: "Rioting, particularly within the loyalist community, has increased as a consequence of Brexit" (54).

Chapters 4 to 7 are devoted to a relevant qualitative analysis where the four construal operations established by Croft and Cruse (2004) and Hart (2014) are discussed. Chapter 4 "Gestalt and structural configuration" includes two cases studies: 4.1 Brexit and the border in Northern Ireland (75-85) and 4.2 Twenty-year commemoration of the 1998 Agreement (85-91). The cognitive faculty of gestalt creation is defined as the primary conceptual configuration of an event at its most fundamental structural level. This process of configuration is posited to emerge from the discursive activation of image schemas—recurring mental patterns derived from embodied experience. By analyzing their structural configuration strategies, the study elucidates how the complexities of conflict are systematically organized and articulated within discourse.

Notably, the empirical findings from these case studies demonstrate that a singular image schema rarely operates in isolation to trigger a specific construal. Instead, it is the synergistic interaction between multiple schemas that generates more or less contentious perspectives. The Container schema, for instance, is frequently modulated by its interplay with the Center-Periphery schema. Ultimately, the analysis establishes that the contextual instantiation of these schematic elements is the decisive factor in producing either conflictual or consensual representations of a given event.

Chapter 5 focuses on attention and salience in the NI context in managing discourse in conflict scenarios. Three case studies are presented: 5.1 Conflict over the police service. The Patten Report (106-15), 5.2 The question of weapons (115-22) and 5.3 Seeking consensus: Power sharing in 2007 (122-26). These studies reveal that politicians highlight or minimize conflictual relations using linguistic choices. An example of how violence is intensified is the noun phrase *terrorist violence* on page 111 foregrounding who is to blame for the violence. Pre- and post-modified nominalizations, metonymy and scalar adjustment in the examples are used to present different and opposing construals by each political party. There is a recurring pattern in case studies 5.1 and 5.2 where "outgroup" members are framed through a vocabulary of violence, highlighting a specific discursive bias in how these actors are portrayed. In Case Study 5.3, Sinn Féin (SF) and (Democratic Unionist Party) DUP politicians frame political events by intentionally downplaying or omitting the antagonistic behavior of their rivals. By opting for words from the semantic domain of violence with lower intensity, abstract nouns, and nominalized adjectives rather than vivid descriptions of violence, they create a sanitized narrative. This shift in discourse allows them to justify their new roles within government institutions they once actively opposed. Politicians bring attention to certain elements using careful linguistic choices, hence "allowing for different political actions and decisions to be legitimized" (128).

Chapter 6 revolves around the role of comparison and judgement when there is conflict in public discourse. The analysis identifies framing as a key cognitive operation whereby "via linguistic choices politicians and society construct the sociopolitical situation in such a way that they emphasize or minimize conflictual relations between groups" (167). These framing strategies "are related to what we could call inferential evaluation, that is, they do not necessarily convey an explicit use of positive or negative terms, but they allow discourse participants to judge a sociopolitical event" (167). The author advocates for "the analysis of intertextuality as part of framing strategies, as this is a key aspect in CDS" (168), justified by the understanding that "one of e functions of political discourse is to legitimize the actions of the self (and their community)" (168).

Chapter 7 discusses positioning and perspective in conflict discourses with NI with two case studies. Perspective-taking operates through "positioning strategies" which "are based on our ability to see the world from a particular perspective [...] involving a particular point of view in the discursive configuration of a mental space" (208). These spaces are "anchored to a person, space and time deictic centre" (208). The analysis shows that "ingroup and outgroup relations tend to be more conflictual when the referential (and anchorage) scope of the deictic centre is narrower" while "it is easier to reach consensus when the referential scope of reality is widened" (208-09). Relatedly, "proximization is useful for explaining how opposition to particular groups can be constructed by presenting them as a (proximal) threat to the self" (209).

Chapter 8 "Conclusion: Managing conflict via discourse" highlights the main features of Republican and DUP's Discourse. Sinn Féin's discourse constructs identity anchored to "an Irish imagined homeland, with the role of the island of Ireland as the key national container" (213). Their social opposition "is justified by appealing to a cultural mentality shared by members of the republican community: the idea of victimhood" (213). History is intentionally brought to life through narrative to justify a specific viewpoint. In this case, republican groups revisit past events to reinforce their identity as a persecuted community, framing their current status as a direct result of the harm inflicted by opposing sides. The DUP's "identity is constructed as Ulster British [...] linguistically enacted through the construction of two embedded national containers: one standing for NI, as the key anchorage point; the other being the UK, to which NI belongs" (213). Negative political actions are specifically directed at groups perceived as a potential danger to the long-term survival of NI. Essentially, these actions serve as a defensive mechanism against any influence that might destabilize or dismantle the region's established political framework. These construals "are clearly influenced and shaped by the cultural siege mentality shared by at least some members of the Unionist community and which has motivated their description as 'the community of fear'" (213-14).

The study demonstrates that "sociopolitical consensus could be reached if construals resulted in what could be termed 'compatible discourse worlds'" which "elicit a representation of society with which all members of society could feel aligned" (214). Politicians achieve this by either "silenc[ing] those aspects of reality that could be prone to conflictual interpretations or they foreground properties of policies and events which could be more easily accepted" (214). This requires "backgrounding the discursive salience of elements related to national identity or which could activate each community's sociocultural background knowledge" (214-15).

In short, this remarkably well-edited volume is an outstanding comprehensive study of how conflict is shaped by construal operations in NI discourse. The author has managed to compile everything that has been said in this field, enriching it with a series of very illustrative text analyses, as well as very useful references. Each chapter explains how the method used can be applied to other overt and covert conflict scenarios. The comprehensive list of linguistic cues provided is of interest to critical discourse studies, cognitive linguists and conflict studies. This research provides a robust methodological template for researchers seeking to understand how language shapes political perception in divided societies, suggesting that institutional peace is fragile as long as the underlying "discourse worlds" remain in opposition.

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BEATRIZ CHAVES YUSTE
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid

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Blended Learning and EFL in Post-Compulsory Education. Effects, Perceptions and a Teaching Proposal

Mª del Pilar López Oller y Diego Rascón Moreno

LINCOM Studies in Second Language Teaching. 2025. 96 p.
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Este libro se sitúa en un cruce particularmente fértil entre la investigación aplicada a la didáctica del inglés como lengua extranjera y la praxis docente en Bachillerato. Su propósito central es argumentar y constatar que la puesta en marcha de un curso de inglés como lengua extranjera en un formato *blended learning* (en adelante, *b-learning*) mejora el rendimiento del alumnado en comparación con un curso presencial tradicional, mediante un diseño de tipo grupo control / grupo experimental con intervención prolongada. El tema resulta especialmente relevante en un contexto en el que la enseñanza híbrida se ha normalizado tras la expansión del aprendizaje en línea durante la pandemia del Covid-19, argumentando la obra que incorporar simplemente tecnología en el aula no es sinónimo de mejora en el rendimiento académico y que toda buena práctica debe ir acompañada de una evaluación robusta.

La obra se vertebra en dos ejes fundamentales. En la primera parte, se ofrece un marco teórico (8-16) en el que se expone el debate sobre la implementación de un formato *b-learning* en la enseñanza de lenguas. Se discute sobre qué se entiende por un proceso de aprendizaje y enseñanza "híbrido" y qué grado de integración real existe entre lo presencial y lo digital, la evidencia empírica sobre sus efectos en el desempeño de las diferentes destrezas comunicativas y la investigación existente sobre las percepciones del estudiantado respecto a su utilización en términos de motivación, autonomía, carga cognitiva, usabilidad y equidad de acceso.

A continuación (16-25), se presenta la metodología de la investigación llevada a cabo durante un curso escolar completo (9 meses), lo cual es un punto fuerte frente a investigaciones de intervención corta (4-8 semanas) que suelen capturar solo efectos de novedad. La muestra consta de 60 estudiantes de un instituto público de Sevilla, asignados aleatoriamente en un grupo control y un grupo experimental. Ambos grupos comparten enfoques metodológicos comunicativos (aprendizaje basado en tareas y aprendizaje basado en proyectos) y una lógica tipo PPP (presentación–práctica–producción). El estudio argumenta que la diferencia crítica está en el ecosistema de aprendizaje: los resultados del grupo experimental

son mejores debido a la metodología utilizada, esto es, la combinación de dos sesiones presenciales con trabajo online y aula invertida (*flipped learning*), apoyándose en un LMS (Moodle) y en herramientas específicas por destreza: Edpuzzle (comprensión oral), Flipgrid (expresión oral), Google Forms (comprensión escrita), Padlet (expresión escrita) y Quizizz (uso de la lengua), además de Kahoot y Quizizz como plataformas digitales gamificadas para presentar ejercicios de calentamiento o *warm up* o de repaso o *wrap up*.

La práctica ha sido llevada a cabo siguiendo criterios objetivos, como lo demuestra el hecho de igualar metodologías de base en ambos grupos (grupo de control y grupo experimental), lo cual es todo un acierto, puesto que reduce el sesgo de atribuir mejoras a "mejor enseñanza" en general, en lugar de al componente híbrido. Asimismo, el uso de pretests y postests en las cuatro destrezas (comprensión y expresión escrita, comprensión y expresión oral), junto con rúbricas estandarizadas de *Cambridge English: Preliminary Handbook for Teachers* para expresión oral y escrita, aporta un marco evaluativo bastante robusto.

En el subapartado de análisis de datos (24-25), dedicado a la descripción del análisis estadístico utilizado, los autores combinan la inferencia estadística cuantitativa, donde se comparan las calificaciones obtenidas en las cuatro destrezas de comprensión y expresión oral y escrita de ambos grupos, con datos cualitativos. Para comprobar la equivalencia inicial antes de la intervención, se emplea un t-test en fase pre-experimental; posteriormente, para identificar si existían diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre las calificaciones del grupo experimental y el grupo control tras poner en práctica la experiencia de *b-learning*, se recurre a un ANOVA (técnica estadística que compara si hay diferencias significativas entre las medias de varios grupos) aplicado a los resultados postest. Además, el rendimiento pretest versus postest también examina el rendimiento en las diferentes destrezas comunicativas. Este planteamiento refuerza la validez del estudio puesto que controla la comparabilidad basal (grado en que los grupos a comparar son equivalentes al inicio del estudio) mediante contraste previo y permite estimar el impacto del programa híbrido tanto entre los grupos control y experimental al terminar la intervención como el progreso del grupo experimental a lo largo del curso.

Concluimos esta primera parte de la monografía con los capítulos de resultados (25-46) y discusión (46-48), donde se detalla cómo tras la intervención, el grupo experimental mejora en comprensión oral, comprensión escrita y expresión escrita, pero no en expresión oral. Este patrón es coherente con buena parte de la literatura práctica: las plataformas asíncronas y el trabajo mediado por recursos suelen beneficiar especialmente destrezas receptivas y de escritura (por posibilidad de repetición, ritmo propio, relectura y edición). En cambio, la expresión oral suele requerir interacción síncrona, negociación de significado y *feedback* inmediato, elementos que no siempre quedan garantizados si el componente oral se desplaza a tareas grabadas mediante Flipgrid. Aunque esta plataforma facilita la producción e interacción, no siempre reproduce la presión comunicativa real.

En este sentido, la obra aporta, por lo tanto, un estudio útil para docentes. El *b-learning* no contribuye a una mejora automática, pero puede funcionar como amplificador de algunas destrezas. Estos datos cuantitativos se triangulan con datos cualitativos obtenidos mediante la administración del *Blended Learning Experience Questionnaire*, adaptado del *Web-Based Learning Environment Instrument* (Chang y Fisher 2003), con escala Likert de 5 puntos, más 5 preguntas abiertas (e.g. *Have you struggled to adapt to the blended learning approach?*). Este cuestionario se analiza principalmente de una forma descriptiva, proporcionando frecuencias y porcentajes. Por otra parte, la interpretación de la segunda sección del cuestionario (ítems abiertos) y los comentarios de la docente se articulan mediante análisis temático siguiendo la propuesta metodológica de Braun y Clarke (2006). Esta triangulación de datos cuantitativos (rendimiento) y cualitativos (experiencia y percepción) permite explicar por qué ciertas destrezas podrían beneficiarse más del entorno híbrido que otras. Por ejemplo, el estudiantado objeto de estudio señala que la implementación de *b-learning* y el uso de Flipgrid no daba lugar a conversaciones espontáneas, lo que es sumamente útil y demandado por aquellos estudiantes sin ningún tipo de inhibición o vergüenza a expresarse en la lengua meta en público. Además, el cuestionario aporta evidencia interpretativa sobre autonomía, motivación y usabilidad del entorno.

Los autores describen que los resultados reportados en el cuestionario son moderados pero positivos. Además de este cuestionario, también se recoge la percepción docente sobre la efectividad instruccional, la motivación, el seguimiento del progreso, la organización del curso, la autonomía del estudiantado, las disrupciones técnicas y la efectividad de *b-learning* reflejada en los resultados académicos. Esta capa es importante porque la planificación, el *feedback* proporcionado y la gestión de la plataforma viene de la mano de los docentes, y suelen ser elementos decisivos en cualquier intervención educativa.

En cuanto a la segunda parte de la obra (49-65), se ofrece una propuesta pedagógica de 12 unidades para su implementación en otros centros, integrando eventos regionales, nacionales e internacionales (Halloween, Día Internacional de la Mujer, etc.), gamificación (Kahoot, Quizizz), uso de videoclips y segmentos fílmicos para repaso de gramática y léxico, y recursos educativos abiertos con eXeLearning bajo el enfoque del aprendizaje por proyectos. Se añaden pautas de atención a la diversidad y un esquema evaluativo que contempla evaluación docente, coevaluación y autoevaluación. Esta propuesta se entiende como una descripción del planteamiento pedagógico llevado a cabo durante la intervención previamente

evaluada, no como un catálogo de herramientas que pueden facilitar o ayudar en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera en un nivel de Bachillerato. Aquí el libro amplía su audiencia potencial pues deja de ser solo una monografía de investigación y se convierte también en un recurso de diseño didáctico. El riesgo natural es la dependencia contextual (centro, región e infraestructuras), pero la inclusión de unidades, criterios de evaluación y orientaciones de diversidad facilita la adaptación. El valor diferencial no está en usar únicamente herramientas, sino en presentar una arquitectura de curso donde la tecnología queda subordinada a tareas, proyectos y evaluación, es decir, en una propuesta con una base pedagógica sólida.

En conjunto, la monografía contribuye doblemente a la mejora de la didáctica de lenguas extranjeras. Por un lado, aporta un estudio de intervención anual con grupo control y experimental en Bachillerato que arroja evidencia selectiva (mejoras en destrezas receptivas y escritura, no en expresión oral), y por otro, ofrece una propuesta didáctica amplia, organizada y metodológicamente coherente para su transferencia en otros centros educativos. Su principal fortaleza es el equilibrio entre el rigor aplicable y su utilidad pedagógica y no se limita a defender el *b-learning* como algo innovador, sino que lo somete a evaluación y, a partir de ahí, propone un diseño concreto. A tenor de lo expuesto en este análisis, la obra resulta altamente recomendable para investigadores y estudiantes de posgrado interesados en evaluación de intervenciones en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera en contextos escolares reales, a docentes de educación secundaria y Bachillerato que buscan un modelo de curso híbrido con materiales y evaluación, y a responsables de coordinación TIC o innovación que necesiten evidencias empíricas. En definitiva, una lectura pertinente para quienes entienden el *b-learning* no como una etiqueta, sino como un modelo de diseño instruccional y de medición del aprendizaje.

JAIME SEGURA SAN MIGUEL
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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Diario del año de la peste, *de Daniel Defoe*

Edición y traducción de Antonio Ballesteros González y Beatriz González Moreno

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La reciente edición del *Diario del año de la peste* (1722), de Daniel Defoe, publicada por Ediciones Cátedra en su colección Letras Universales, representa no solo una aportación relevante para los estudios sobre la literatura inglesa del siglo XVIII, como edición traducida, sino que cubre un vacío disciplinar que, hasta ahora, permanecía desatendido, al ser la primera edición crítica en español. El volumen, traducido, anotado y comentado magistralmente por Antonio Ballesteros González y Beatriz González Moreno, ofrece al lector no solo el genio característico del «Ciudadano del Mundo Moderno», como su biógrafo John Robert Moore lo definió, sino la impagable compañía de un amplio aparato crítico, a lo largo de toda la novela, que permite situar la obra dentro de un complejo entramado sociológico, teológico, histórico y literario. Sin embargo, y como quiera que el lector de una traducción crítica busca tanto al autor original como el minucioso trabajo de sus editores, creo conveniente situar el *Diario del año de la peste* en su contexto.

Aunque Defoe es recordado principalmente como autor de Robinson Crusoe (1719), su producción literaria abarcó un amplio espectro de géneros y formas narrativas. Dentro de ese conjunto, el *Diario del año de la peste* ocupa una posición singular por su naturaleza híbrida. Publicada en 1722 pero ambientada durante la epidemia de peste negra que devastó Londres en 1665, la obra adopta la forma de un relato autobiográfico, en la forma del diario de un talabartero londinense identificado por las iniciales H. F., comúnmente atribuidas a la inspiración de los escritos de Henry Foe, tío de Daniel Defoe. La publicación de textos bajo la pretensión de ser obra de terceros, a menudo solo providencialmente encontrados por el autor-editor, era una estrategia común en la Inglaterra del siglo XVIII. Esta estrategia, que pronto sería imitada a lo largo del siglo por los primeros autores góticos, por ejemplo, permitían la publicación a muchos autores que, conscientes del potencial uso social de sus narraciones, asentaban las bases de los géneros literarios modernos en su escarceo con experimentos narrativos que aunaban la ficción novelesca con el reportaje y la crítica social.

La catástrofe que sirve de telón de fondo al relato se inscribe en una larga historia de epidemias que marcaron profundamente la Europa premoderna, generando profundas transformaciones sociales, económicas y culturales. En el caso de Londres, la epidemia de 1665 representó uno de los episodios más traumáticos de su historia, causando la muerte de un cuarto de la población. En este contexto, el protagonista, H. F., ofrece al lector una crónica histórica y pormenorizada de los hechos durante aquel aciago año, en el que la sombra de la Gran Muerte volvió a Europa. Aunque esta crónica se construye varias décadas después—el mismo autor solo tenía cinco años durante el embate de la peste—presenta una riqueza de detalles y anécdotas solo posibles debido a la atenta mirada de Defoe, que une en su obra una colección de testimonios personales—como la del diario de su tío Henry Foe—con informes históricos, censos parroquiales, y textos médicos, erigiéndose así en una suerte de novela periodística e histórica que difícil e injustamente podría definirse como ficción. Cuando el libro vio la luz, el autor ya se había establecido como escritor, periodista y comentarista político tras fundar el

periódico *The Review*, lo que resulta perceptible en la estructura misma del *Diario del año de la peste*, donde la observación crítica de los acontecimientos y la recopilación de datos se combinan con un fuerte impulso narrativo.

Sin embargo, sería erróneo considerar el texto como simple crónica histórico-periodística; Defoe no se limita a registrar hechos. A través de H F., se exploran las múltiples dimensiones sociales y psicológicas que acompañan a una crisis sanitaria de gran escala, describiendo los efectos en la sociedad del miedo y la incertidumbre, así como los intentos por parte de las autoridades de controlar la propagación y ayudar a los más expuestos a contagio. Estas crónicas le sirven al autor para ofrecer un juicio moral no solo de las acciones sino los valores que las subyacen, criticando así frecuentemente la falta de fe, los bajos instintos, o la estupidez que ocasionaría la muerte de tantos, pero también ensalzando los episodios de solidaridad generalizada, que el autor describe como el mayor orgullo del Londres dieciochesco. Asimismo, las distintas situaciones propiciadas por la pandemia permiten a Defoe escribir sus meditaciones sobre la complejidad moral y ética de una pandemia; así, el debate se mueve a veces entre el cuestionamiento de la legitimidad y la utilidad de las medidas de confinamiento y, al mismo tiempo, la necedad de no respetarlas, como la crítica a aquellos que intentan medrar y enriquecerse aprovechándose de la alarma social. Por tanto, el volumen presenta no solo una rica crónica de la época, sino también un acercamiento a sus visiones éticas y morales, todo ello hilado por la aguja de Defoe, que entreteje así un tapiz con entramados de crónica histórica, relato periodístico, ficción novelesca y ensayo teológico-filosófico con ingenio magistral.

En cuanto a la traducción de Antonio Ballesteros González y Beatriz González Moreno, publicada por Cátedra en 2025, podemos afortunadamente apreciar un trabajo editorial a la altura del texto del «padre de la novela inglesa». Si bien ya existían traducciones al español, como las publicadas por Bruguera en 1983 y 1985 y por Alba en 2007, de la mano de Carlos Pujol, o la versión de Impedimenta, traducida por Pablo Grosschmid y con prólogo de José C. Vales en 2007, la edición que hoy nos ocupa, como señalaba más arriba, es la primera traducción y edición crítica en español. El volumen, de 416 páginas, es encabezado por una introducción teórica que, junto con el preámbulo biográfico sobre Daniel Defoe, un capítulo con información acerca de la «Última Gran Peste», un acercamiento reflexivo a las teorías médicas contemporáneas a la obra, su recepción crítica, cronología de la época y un comentario sobre la propia edición, constituye un aparato crítico adicional de casi 100 páginas. Esta sección resulta especialmente útil para los lectores actuales, que pueden no estar familiarizados con las prácticas sanitarias, las creencias religiosas o las estructuras sociales de la Inglaterra del siglo XVII.

Asimismo, esta ingente labor investigativa y editorial, que refleja el tesón de sus editores por complementar el texto con toda la información necesaria para poder valorarlo en su contingencia histórica-literaria, se acompaña de generosas intervenciones editoriales a pie de página, que proporcionan información contextual que ayuda a comprender referencias culturales, religiosas y médicas presentes en el original. Estas notas al pie, que enriquecen la propia información recogida por los editores al inicio del volumen, comprenden tanto las notas aportadas por Ballesteros González y González Moreno, como mucha de la información comprendida en ediciones críticas anteriores, como las publicadas por Norton (Paula R. Backscheider 1992), Oxford Classics (David Roberts 1998) y Penguin (Cynthia Wall 2003). Por tanto, esta traducción ofrece al lector no solo la primera edición crítica en español, sino la condensación de mucha de la información contenida en ediciones críticas inglesas anteriores, fruto de la labor de documentación y selección de los editores.
En cuanto al valor formal de la obra, toda la información es presentada, como es común para el estándar de Cátedra: Letras Universales, con una tipografía clara y limpia. Asimismo, la traducción destaca por mantener una fidelidad pragmática con la obra de Defoe, con elementos lingüísticos menos comunes en el español contemporáneo, que permiten y promueven durante la lectura la inmersión en el Londres que retrata Defoe, sin incurrir por ello en la inclusión de arcaísmos superfluos que pudieran de otro modo dificultar la comprensión o entorpecer la apreciación estética de la novela. Asimismo, los editores han adaptado muchos usos lingüísticos, ortográficos y retóricos de la época, permitiendo así un mayor disfrute del texto para el lector contemporáneo sin perder por ello el estilo o valor del mensaje original.
Este mensaje, precisamente, cuyo interés ha experimentado un renovado impulso tras la reciente experiencia de la pandemia de COVID-19, ha llevado a numerosos lectores a redescubrir textos literarios que exploran el aspecto sociológico y cultural de las pandemias. Sin necesidad de establecer paralelismos simplistas, la lectura del *Diario del año de la peste* permite reconocer ciertas constantes en la manera en que las sociedades afrontan este tipo de crisis: la circulación de información contradictoria, la aparición de rumores y soluciones milagrosas o la tensión entre medidas sanitarias restrictivas y libertades individuales.

En definitiva, esta edición de *Diario del año de la peste* es una contribución altamente significativa, pero, además, muy necesaria. No solo cubre un notable vacío académico al ofrecer la primera traducción crítica en español, sino que ofrece, en el mismo volumen, una riqueza de información contextual y complementaria raramente encontrada en volúmenes críticos, además de documentar, filtrar y condensar parte de la información más relevante en ediciones críticas inglesas anteriores. Este volumen contribuye al enriquecimiento de la obra de Defoe y su presencia en el ámbito académico hispanohablante, y permite a los lectores contemporáneos aproximarse con mayor profundidad a un texto que ocupa un lugar singular dentro de la tradición literaria inglesa. Tres siglos después de su publicación, el relato de Defoe continúa ofreciendo una poderosa reflexión sobre la fragilidad de las sociedades humanas frente a la enfermedad y sobre las múltiples formas en que la literatura puede dar sentido a la experiencia colectiva del desastre.

BOOK REVIEWS · LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

FERNANDO GALVÁN
Universidad de Alcalá

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Eileen. Retrato de un matrimonio

Miquel Berga

Tusquets Editores. 2025. 203 pp.
Traducción del catalán de Mayka Lahoz
ISBN: 978-84-1107-697-5

En 1984 publiqué en las páginas de *Atlantis* (6.1-2: 107-109) una reseña sobre uno de los primeros libros de Miquel Berga, dedicado precisamente a la obra de Orwell que lleva como título ese mismo año: *Mil nou-cents vuitanta-quatre: radiografia d'un malson*. Escribía entonces sobre la honestidad, la seriedad, el profundo conocimiento y la gran capacidad comunicativa del autor, resaltando cómo había «logrado presentar de una manera atrayente y clara el material básico para leer y apreciar la novela» (107). Vuelvo ahora a Berga, cuarenta y dos años después, para reiterar aquella valoración y retornar también a Orwell, ya que en noviembre de 2025 publicó en catalán, en Edicions 62 (el mismo sello editorial de su volumen de 1984), *Eileen. Retrat d'un matrimoni*, premiado con el Joanot Martorell de narrativa 2025 por el Ayuntamiento de Gandía. Tusquets lo editó simultáneamente en español, traducido por Mayka Lahoz. La Eileen del título es, por supuesto, Eileen O'Shaughnessy, la primera esposa de George Orwell/Eric Blair (también conocida como Eileen Blair tras su matrimonio), y el libro no versa únicamente sobre ella pues, como el subtítulo indica, abarca también a su marido. Se trata, por tanto, de «revisitar» a Orwell a través de Eileen (algo muy poco usual), y mediante la mirada de un gran experto español sobre el escritor inglés, como indiscutiblemente lo es Berga. Conviene recordar, para documentar esta última afirmación, que el gran biógrafo de Orwell, Bernard Crick, reconocía ya en 1980 la ayuda recibida de Miquel Berga en la elaboración de esa biografía (Crick 1980, 10; 615, n. 6; 616, n. 13).

El autor, hasta hace pocas fechas profesor de literatura inglesa en la Universitat Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona (ahora profesor honorario de la misma), ha dedicado prácticamente medio siglo de actividad académica a George Orwell y a otros escritores de su generación. Lo ha hecho no solo mediante la publicación de estudios académicos muy bien documentados y a través de labores de transferencia y divulgación (como exposiciones de gran éxito sobre Orwell y aspectos de la guerra civil). Su producción literaria cubre asimismo, emulando los ensayos y publicaciones periodísticas de Orwell, otras contribuciones hechas en la prensa catalana durante décadas (como en su columna dominical en *El Punt Avui*), así como otros libros no estrictamente de investigación académica, además de ediciones y anotaciones de textos (entre ellos, varios de Orwell).

En la lista final de obras citadas hay una muestra, no exhaustiva—pero a mi juicio representativa—, de esas diversas facetas de Berga como académico y como ensayista y alto divulgador de la cultura inglesa. Entre los estudios, además del citado sobre *1984* de Orwell, hay que reseñar su impresionante «biografía anglo-catalana» de John Langdon-Davies (1991), o su colección de diez ensayos de Orwell sobre lenguaje, política y verdad, titulado *El poder y la palabra* (2017), o su libro dedicado a Auden y Orwell, *Quan la història et crema la mà: Auden i Orwell entre dues guerres* (2019), con versión castellana en 2020. Editó y tradujo al catalán *Un hotel a la costa* de Nancy Johnstone (2011), cuya versión española vio la luz como *Un hotel en la Costa Brava* (2012), obra que decidió continuar, en cierta forma, con la fascinante narración de *Un país estranger* (2024), con versión española el mismo año. Su producción periodística, llena de humor

catalano-británico y espíritu crítico, se ha reunido en varios libros, como, entre otros, *Amants i altres estranys. Proses periodístiques* (1999) y *Un aire anglés* (2018), en los que se recogen agudas visiones de la realidad circundante, tamizadas por la óptica de un anglófilo. En tal sentido, el complemento ideal de esos dos libros es una deliciosa y simpática semblanza autobiográfica sobre su primera experiencia en Inglaterra, en el Londres de los años setenta del pasado siglo: *Una educació. Una «memoir» de Londres durant els setanta* (2021), con la que los lectores de su generación no podemos dejar de sentirnos identificados.

Este último libro sobre Eileen O'Shaughnessy (en sus versiones catalana y castellana) es una excelente aportación al conocimiento de la vida de Orwell a través de la relación del escritor con su primera esposa. Se presenta como una narración que, aunque verídica y fiel a la documentación disponible, se cuenta en tono y clave ficcional. No hay notas bibliográficas, ni se acreditan detalles de la documentación, más allá de las tres páginas finales del libro (201-03), en las que Berga hace mención a sus fuentes principales (esencialmente estudios biográficos de Orwell y Eileen, así como algunos documentos históricos) y expresa su agradecimiento a algunas personas que le han prestado ayuda, entre las que destacan sobre todo Richard Blair (hijo de George Orwell) y Quentin Kopp (hijo de Georges Kopp, compañero de fatigas de Orwell durante su estancia en España). La narración consta de veintisiete capítulos, un breve prefacio de apenas dos páginas y un epílogo de ocho páginas. Los capítulos están simplemente numerados, no llevan título, y son relativamente breves: en general tienen entre cinco y diez páginas, aunque hay uno mucho más breve (el número 18, que solo tiene cinco líneas, p. 135).

Los veintisiete capítulos tienen una distribución homogénea y simétrica, de modo que los impares contienen un relato en tercera persona sobre acontecimientos históricos o biográficos, como si leyéramos una biografía o una crónica, aunque siempre aderezada de comentarios que acercan la realidad descrita al lector, con toques de familiaridad y humor. La voz narradora de esos capítulos impares es omnisciente, muy cercana a la autorial, ya que nos parece percibir el tono del especialista, el hondo conocimiento de Berga sobre la vida y la obra del escritor inglés y sus peripecias en España. Simplemente, a modo de ejemplo, véanse solo un par de estos comentarios:

> Aquellos días, Wystan Auden, el poeta de moda, había terminado una de sus cancioncillas, esas que componía para curarse la tentación de la trascendencia. En la última de las doce estrofas decía el tipo de cosas que, al meterse en la cama, a Eric le excitaban la imaginación. (17)
> El 23 de junio de 1937, Eileen, Orwell, John McNair y Stafford Cottman, con papeles del consulado británico de Barcelona, salen en el tren que va a París y tienen la precaución de ocupar mesas en el vagón restaurante para reforzar su aspecto de turistas. Ellos no lo saben, pero, diez días antes, el Tribunal Especial de Espionaje y Alta Traición de Valencia, que lleva la causa contra el POUM, registra un informe en el que se asegura que […] han participado en los Hechos de Mayo junto al POUM […]. Visto eso, es evidente que han hecho bien en salir por piernas. (95)

Los capítulos pares, sin embargo, son narraciones en primera persona, cuya voz narrativa es la de Eileen, una mujer culta, de inquietudes literarias, editora de algunos de los libros de Orwell, con gran sentido del humor, y autónoma e independiente. En esos capítulos la protagonista va contando, a veces en forma de carta dirigida a familiares o amistades, otras veces como si se tratara de un monólogo interior, sus impresiones sobre los acontecimientos que le van sucediendo, a partir del momento en que conoce a quien sería su marido durante nueve años (1936-1945). Sirvan unos pocos ejemplos para ilustrar el tono de la voz de Eileen, como cuando va a encontrarse por primera vez con Orwell o cuando se refiere, con su típico desparpajo, a su vida en la capital catalana:

> La verdad es que me daba pereza ir de Greenwich a Hampstead, ese barrio de ricos que van de intelectuales desganados. Qué te voy a decir a ti, Nora, tú ya me entiendes, pero Rosalind insistió: que necesitábamos un cambio de aires, que una noche de julio sin lluvia había que aprovecharla, que su compañero de piso era un tipo un poco extraño pero interesante. Un escritor, chica: ay, qué miedo. Que no, que no es un pesado ni un estirado, solo un poco raro y alto como un pino y esto y lo otro… (19)
> ¡Barcelona! Pensarías que ya me habrían matado los fascistas, pero todavía estoy la mar de viva. Lo que ocurre es que esta ciudad bulle y nunca había estado en un lugar tan diferente y excitante. Los días (¡y las noches!) se me hacen cortos y no tengo tiempo para escribir a nadie. ¿Me creerás si te digo que la vida social y nocturna de Barcelona es bastante más entretenida que la de Wallington? (65)

Mucho hemos avanzado en el conocimiento de Orwell en las últimas cuatro décadas, por lo que es comprensible que este libro de Berga sea tan distinto de *Mil nou-cents vuitanta-quatre: radiografia d'un malson*. Es diferente, sí, pero en el fondo Berga nos sigue diciendo prácticamente lo mismo con lo que concluía su volumen de 1984, y es que esa terrible novela distópica debería servir a los lectores para descubrir el talento del Orwell escritor más estimulante: «l'Orwell assagista,

periodista i autor de llibres de reportatge» (Berga 1984, 109). Precisamente *Eileen. Retrato de un matrimonio* es un libro que nos ayuda a descubrir al escritor y sus inquietudes literarias y humanas, en muchas ocasiones a través de la fascinante mirada de Eileen.

Es evidente que la bibliografía sobre Orwell se ha enriquecido desde 1984. Pensemos simplemente en el monumental trabajo de recopilación y edición de la obra completa en veinte volúmenes llevada a cabo por Peter Davison (1998), y su complemento en *The Lost Orwell* (2006) (que contenía unas cartas de Eileen a su amiga Norah Myles). Ello le ha permitido a Berga escribir este nuevo libro. Pero incluso más que las aportaciones de Davison—me atrevería a decir—han sido especialmente relevantes las de las biógrafas de Eileen para acercarse a la intimidad del personaje (hasta donde ello es razonablemente posible). Son obras en su mayoría muy recientes, como la de Sylvia Topp (2020) y la de Anna Funder (2024), aunque hay alguna otra obra anterior que Berga reconoce como fuente de inspiración. Es el caso de la novela de Lettice Cooper, *Black Bethlehem* (1947), ya que la autora se inspiró en Eileen para crear el personaje de Ann.

Como conclusión, a mi juicio merece mucho la pena acercarse a este último libro de Miquel Berga, en su original catalán o en la versión castellana, porque nos ofrece una entretenida, detallada y apasionante información sobre la primera esposa de Orwell, una mujer admirable y asertiva, llena de humor y vitalidad, pero malograda por la enfermedad y su repentino fallecimiento, antes de cumplir los 40 años, durante una operación de histerectomía en 1945. ¡Quién sabe cuánto más podría haber influido en la obra de su marido si le hubiera acompañado en sus últimos años, o lo que ella misma podría haber escrito si hubiese vivido unos cuantos años más, sobreviviendo a Orwell, fallecido apenas cinco años después!

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MIGUEL SANZ JIMÉNEZ
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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Los 39 escalones. Manto verde, *de John Buchan*

Edición y traducción de Eduardo Valls Oyarzun

Cátedra (Letras populares. n.º 34). 2025. 660 pp.
ISBN: 978-84-376-4921-4

A finales de 2025, la colección «Letras Populares» de Cátedra, hermana menor de las archiconocidas «Letras Universales» y «Letras Hispánicas», volvió a adentrarse en los misteriosos terrenos de la novela policiaca tras haberlos visitado en la destacable edición de *El sabueso de los Baskerville*, de Arthur Conan Doyle, y, de forma tangencial, en los volúmenes dedicados a los cuentos fantásticos de Raymond Chandler, *La puerta de bronce y otros relatos*, y a *¿Sueñan los androides con ovejas eléctricas?*, la novela de ciencia ficción de Philip K. Dick que inspiró la película *Blade Runner*, obra clave del denominado *neo-noir*.

La entrega número treinta y cuatro de «Letras populares» reúne dos novelas de John Buchan (1875-1940), pionero de la novela de espías moderna. Se trata de *Los 39 escalones* (1915) y *Mantoverde* (1916), las dos primeras aventuras de Richard Hannay, un «ingeniero de minas de profesión» (219). Por accidente, se ve obligado a desbaratar las estratagemas alemanas que buscan acabar con Imperio británico al comienzo de la Gran Guerra, de modo que se convierte en un espía *amateur*, «being a spy purely for the love of his country» (Fletcher 2019, 149). A lo largo de las novelas, este acaudalado exingeniero «demonstrates a skill in improvised action, working his way into a number of roles according to need» (Seed 2010, 236). El editor y traductor del volumen es Eduardo Valls Oyarzun, catedrático de literatura y cultura en lengua inglesa de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid que ya había prologado y traducido novelas de Charles Dickens (*Grandes esperanzas*, 2014) y de Lewis Carroll (*Alicia en el País de las Maravillas*, 2015; y *Al otro lado del espejo*, 2016) para Guillermo Escolar Editor. En esa misma editorial publicó la monografía *James Bond contra el Dr. Brexit* (2020), donde abordaba cuestiones identitarias en las novelas de Ian Fleming y sus adaptaciones cinematográficas y leía a Bond «como la traslación del mundo de Hannay al complejo contexto geopolítico de la Guerra Fría» (116).

Como es habitual en los volúmenes de Cátedra, el libro comienza con una amplia biografía del autor, que se ha titulado con ingenio «El espía que escribía demasiado» (9-35) en homenaje a la célebre novela de John Le Carré de 1963. En ella se explica cómo los parajes agrestes de las tierras bajas escocesas despertaron la pasión por la aventura del joven Buchan. Se relata también lo mucho que le interesaba el sentido de la aventura de las novelas victorianas, por ejemplo las obras de Robert Louis Stevenson y de Henry Rider Haggard, se da cuenta de los más de cien libros que escribió y se incide, con rigor crítico, en por qué se lo considera el padre del *thriller* (o *shocker*, según la terminología que utilizaba el propio Buchan, 37) de espionaje, novelas en que «an isolated, possibly flawed but ultimately justified protagonist struggles against social or political forces too powerful to be overcome» (Priestman 1998, 44). El motivo es que los misterios de Richard Hannay ya prefiguran al «espía como agente y héroe solitario, la circulación secreta de la información, el espionaje como tarea degradante o deshumanizadora […] y la paranoia y la desconfianza como justificación de la identidad (sobre todo nacional)» (10), cuestiones que revisitarían posteriormente las novelas de espías de Eric Ambler, de los mentados Fleming y Le Carré y, ya en el primer cuarto del siglo xxi, la saga *Slow Horses* de Mick Herron.

El editor tampoco se olvida del pasado y dedica la sección «Hacia la novela de espías moderna» (35-45) a repasar los antecedentes que influyeron en la creación de Richard Hannay y cómo las ansiedades socioculturales de la época cristalizaron en la novela de espionaje de la modernidad. Valls Oyarzun explica con estilo ameno pero preciso cómo «la narrativa de finales del siglo XIX empieza a proponer fantasías en las que el Imperio británico se ve sujeto a procesos de 'colonización revertida'» (37), fenómeno que se aprecia en las novelas *Drácula* (Bram Stoker, 1897) y *La guerra de los mundos* (H. G. Wells, 1898), pues ambas ejemplifican cómo la Otredad se infiltra en la metrópolis paulatinamente para degradar, debilitar y destruir el Imperio británico desde dentro. A este respecto, Scaggs observa que dichas ansiedades se observan en la época en que «British Imperial power came under the very real threat of being undermined through the theft of technological secrets or through sabotage […] the spy thriller is a clear response to the political and military climate within which it is produced» (2005, 119-20). Otra novela de principios del siglo XX que el editor y traductor destaca es *El enigma de las arenas*, la novela de 1903 del irlandés Erskine Childers que reelabora la novela de aventuras victoriana «en clave de guerra subrepticia y clandestina, es decir, en clave de espionaje» (42). Childers nos reconstruye la narración de Carruthers, un funcionario del Foreign Office británico, lo presenta como «a potentially unreliable witness, symptomatic of a growing neurosis about the motives of other European Powers, Germany in particular» (Bradford 2015, 99) y anticipa la fórmula que perfecciona Buchan en 1915.

Según el editor, *Los 39 escalones* se distancia de la novela de aventuras victoriana y del wéstern estadounidense en el matiz de que ya no se trata de imponer la civilización occidental en las colonias africanas o en los territorios de los nativos americanos, respectivamente, sino que «el *thriller* de espionaje en general a partir de la novela de Buchan funciona para salvaguardar la civilización, al tiempo que niega su propia fuerza civilizadora» (55). Con esta aporía aparente, el género del espionaje se inscribe en la modernidad y explora cómo un hombre normal y corriente navega un mundo incierto, se enfrenta tanto a las autoridades de su país (a Hannay lo persigue la policía porque es sospechoso de asesinato) como a fuerzas ocultas que escapan a todo control racional y decodifica información secreta, lo cual demuestra que «el mundo moderno ya no funciona con certezas, ni sociales, ni políticas, ni culturales, ni mucho menos morales» (61). En cambio, predomina «the sense that the enemy is 'everywhere'» (Priestman 1998, 45) y un «constant fear of cultural seepage, of civilization being sapped from within as well as confronted from without» (Seed 2010, 237). Gracias a esta introducción, los lectores que se acerquen por primera vez a las aventuras de Hannay comprenderán por qué *Los 39 escalones* se erige como «la obra por la que [Buchan] será siempre recordado, una novela popular de poco más de cien páginas» (33). En el caso específico de esta edición, la novela como tal comprende de la página 135 a la 279.

El volumen objeto de esta reseña también incluye *Mantoverde* (281-631), la extensa secuela de *Los 39 escalones* que demuestra el carácter serial de las novelas de espionaje, en línea con uno de los rasgos que han marcado el género policiaco desde sus orígenes, en los relatos de Edgar Allan Poe, hasta la ya mencionada saga contemporánea de los espías fracasados del MI5 de Mick Herron. En cualquier caso, en *Mantoverde* Hannay ha de viajar fuera de Gran Bretaña, adentrarse en las fronteras enemigas y desbaratar el plan de los alemanes de desestabilizar las provincias asiáticas del Imperio británico al provocar una guerra santa gracias a un falso profeta islámico, el Mantoverde al que se refiere el título. Con esta premisa, *Mantoverde* continúa enfatizando los peligros que acechan a la civilización británica al subrayar que «this barbarism is found in the East, which is both morally and politically corrupt. The East does not stop with Asia but with the Germans, who are the modern Huns […] Spy stories hinted that the war was a struggle between the civilization of the West, namely Britain, and the barbarism of the East» (Fletcher 2019, 218). Como ya sucediera en *Los 39 escalones*, los misterios que ha de descifrar el protagonista se revelan poco a poco y, mientras tanto, suponen un riesgo cada vez mayor para la madre patria. Además, en la secuela los lectores conocen a Von Einem, «una de las pocas mujeres que se cuela en el mundo homosocial de Buchan» (86). El personaje de Von Einem anticipa a la *femme fatale* que explorarían las novelas negras de la tradición *hard-boiled* estadounidense a partir de la publicación de *Cosecha roja*, de Dashiell Hammett, en 1929. Fletcher explica que Von Einem rompe con los esquemas de lo que Hannay considera aceptable en una mujer, pues la primera vez que se conocen la alemana «is seen wearing riding breeches with spurred boots and has a riding whip as a weapon against male servants, this also showing dominance over men» (2019, 217).

La introducción de Valls Oyarzun continúa con la sección «Novelas extravagantes sobre la extravagancia» (90-108), dedicada a analizar el juego de identidades performativas y fluidas que se aprecia en las novelas de Buchan, así como a ponderar cómo lo extravagante marca la obra del autor escocés. En «Buchan y Hitchcock: adaptaciones y negociaciones. La herencia de Buchan» (108-18), el editor comenta la adaptación homónima que filmó el maestro del suspense en 1935 e incide en los motivos *buchanianos* que se aprecian en otras películas de Hitchcock, sobre todo en el *leitmotiv* del falso culpable que adopta por error la identidad falsa de Kaplan en el clásico *Con la muerte en los talones* (1959).

Igual de interesante resulta la sección «Esta edición» (119-24), en la que explica que ha consultado las primeras ediciones en formato libro de las dos novelas y ha tratado de «reproducir la sintaxis sencilla que define este estilo, pero domesticándola al castellano» (123) con el fin de que el ritmo desenfrenado de la trama de espionaje se reproduzca en el volumen de Cátedra. Además, Valls Oyarzun dedica un apartado a las traducciones españolas previas. Sorprende comprobar que *Mantoverde* no se había vuelto a publicar en castellano desde que la editorial Lara reimprimiese varias veces la versión de Mary Rowe en los años cincuenta del siglo pasado. En contraste, *Los 39 escalones* ha gozado de una vida editorial más

activa, gracias a la popular traducción de Teresa Segur que publicó Bruguera en 1982, la misma que conoció este reseñista gracias a su inclusión en la colección «El club del misterio», una «publicación con la que Bruguera intentó popularizar su propio formato de revista *pulp* entre 1981 y 1984» (119), así como en la colección «Best-Sellers Serie Negra» de Planeta, también distribuida en los kioscos. Si bien no se menciona de manera explícita en esta sección, sorprende lo divertida que es la estrategia de traducción que se emplea para recrear en castellano el dialecto no estándar de los personajes de clase trabajadora que aparecen en la novela de Buchan. Sirva de ejemplo cómo se juega con la ortografía en las primeras palabras que pronuncia el picapedrero con gafas que ayuda a Hannay en Escocia: «—¡'Mardito' el día en que dejé el oficio de pastor! —dijo así, para el mundo en general—. Antes era mi propio 'hefe'. Ahora soy esclavo del 'estao', 'encadenao' a la carretera, con los ojos resecos y la espalda 'doblá' como una hoz» (197). Brillante.

Como colofón, se ofrece a los lectores diez páginas de referencias bibliográficas que desglosan las respectivas ediciones de *Los 39 escalones* y *Mantoverde* publicadas en inglés, castellano y catalán, las otras novelas y colecciones de relatos de Buchan que se han publicado en castellano y una bibliografía selecta de la producción del autor escocés, la cual consta de múltiples libros de historia, ensayos, tratados y la autobiografía póstuma *Hold-the-Door* (1940). Por último, se aporta una relación de los estudios críticos citados en el presente volumen.

Las ediciones de «Letras Populares» sustituyen las extensas notas a pie de página que caracterizan a «Letras Universales» y «Letras Hispánicas» por un apéndice de notas finales, de modo que el volumen cierra con noventa y nueve notas dedicadas a *Los 39 escalones* y doscientas treinta y tres a su secuela. En su mayoría, se trata de apuntes históricos acerca del Imperio británico y datos geográficos con detalles sobre las colonias donde Hannay se hizo rico. También hay notas para explicar el significado de las expresiones en francés, alemán y turco que figuran en las dos novelas, en consonancia con la decisión del editor de «introducir cierto grado de extranjerización en la traducción, al efecto de afinar el tono de novela de aventuras, misterio y exploración que resuena en ambos textos» (123).

Se trata de una contribución valiosa no solo para los entusiastas de las novelas de espías y de misterio, sino para los estudiosos de la literatura en lengua inglesa, porque recupera el clásico de Buchan, lo retraduce al castellano y lo contextualiza en un mundo de identidades performativas y líquidas. No se lo pierdan y acompañen a Richard Hannay a perseguir y custodiar los secretos de las postrimerías del Imperio británico en dos misiones peligrosas que resuenan en nuestros tiempos convulsos y disparatados.



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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

OIER QUINCOCES

Universidad del País Vasco/
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, UPV/EHU[1]

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No leas poesía, *de Stephanie Burt*

Traducción de Natalia Carbajosa

Vaso Roto. 2026. 296 pp.
ISBN: 978-84-19693-52-5

Publicado originalmente en inglés como *Don't Read Poetry. A Book About How to Read Poems* (2019), este ensayo de la crítica literaria, profesora y poeta estadounidense Stephanie Burt, autora de otros títulos como *The Forms of Youth: Twentieth-Century Poetry and Adolescence* (2007), *Close Calls with Nonsense: Reading New Poetry* (2009) o *The Poem is You: Sixty Contemporary American Poems and How to Read Them* (2016), trata no tanto sobre el hecho poético en sí, sino sobre la forma en la que nos aproximamos a él y las motivaciones para hacerlo. En ese sentido, se trata de un libro que puede leerse en paralelo a otras contribuciones al estudio de la poesía, su consideración y recepción en la actualidad, también procedentes de Estados Unidos. Estoy pensando en *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* (2011) de Charles Bernstein, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015) de Jonathan Culler o *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016) de Ben Lerner, traducido al español como *El odio a la poesía* y publicado en 2017 por la editorial Alpha Decay. De hecho, en cierto sentido el libro de Burt dialoga con este último. Respecto a sus posibles antecedentes, la autora menciona como modelo el estudio de William Empson *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).

En lo que a la estructura se refiere, el libro comienza con una introducción en la que, entre otras cosas, expone sus motivos para escribirlo y el porqué de su título, ciertamente provocador: «Titulé este libro *No leas poesía* porque, si estás buscando razones para leer o escribir eso que llamamos poesía, probablemente ya lo estés haciendo mal. […] Yo no leo (ni estudio, ni enseño) poesía sin más, leo y enseño la obra de poetas concretos que escriben poemas» (19-20). Burt se muestra reacia a adoptar una concepción general y uniforme de la poesía, entendida como abstracción, y propone, en su lugar, partir de los propios poemas para indagar en las diferentes razones por las que pueden ser leídos. El ensayo identifica seis de esas razones y dedica un capítulo a cada una de ellas: «Sentimientos », «Personajes», «Formas», «Dificultad», «Sabiduría» y «Comunidad». A modo de cierre, se incluyen los agradecimientos de autora y traductora, los permisos para reproducir los poemas seleccionados y un índice de términos y títulos. No se proporciona, en cambio, una bibliografía como tal con los estudios y trabajos académicos citados a lo largo del libro.

La introducción también informa sobre el público para el que está pensado el libro: «Leo mucha poesía, así como muchos libros sobre poesía. Pero estoy escribiendo éste principalmente para quienes apenas la leen, al menos de momento» (16). Esto se puede apreciar en las frecuentes referencias a la cultura popular que inserta la autora en su discurso, si bien de forma puntual también se sirve de terminología bastante técnica—la relativa a los pies métricos, por ejemplo—, que no se adapta debidamente al tipo de lector al que supuestamente se dirige. Ello implica que en ciertos momentos sea difícil determinar el tono del libro, quedándose a medio camino entre la divulgación y la escritura más académica. En cuanto al corpus de poemas seleccionados, Burt también especifica sus características. Aunque se aprecia un esfuerzo por abarcar otros cánones y tradiciones literarias, hay un claro predominio de poemas escritos en inglés y compuestos, además, en las últimas décadas, siendo esta última una elección plenamente consciente: «la poesía de 1998 y 2008 y 2018 está

ampliamente sobrerrepresentada. Dicha sobrerrepresentación no es un error sino una característica: quiero mostrar lo que está sucediendo ahora» (25).

Como ya se ha avanzado, el primer capítulo está dedicado a los sentimientos y, más concretamente, a los poemas líricos, aquellos que, en palabras de Burt, «anteponen el sentimiento» (28) y están muy próximos a la canción. La autora argumenta esto último apoyándose en la historia de la poesía cantada y en el mito de Orfeo, mientras que concluye lo siguiente a propósito de la primera característica: «un poema puede compartir sentimientos que imaginamos que el poeta—o alguien en alguna parte—ha experimentado, sentimientos que puede que también tú experimentes; así es como los poemas pueden ser líricos» (64). Equiparar el yo del poema con el del poeta o asumir que la poesía lírica «te permite mostrar cómo te sientes […], a la vez que te invita a ponerte en el lugar del poeta» (34) son presupuestos que remiten a una concepción romántica de la poesía, que puede no ser la más idónea para acercar los textos seleccionados al lector contemporáneo. A lo largo del libro se expresa de forma recurrente la idea de que existen poemas adecuados para cada lector y que incluso «pueden cambiarte para mejor o ayudarte a llegar a ser quien eres, o quien te gustaría ser» (26). Aunque se haga con el fin de atraer nuevo público, atribuir estas propiedades a la literatura—y a la poesía en particular—puede resultar algo engañoso. Reconocerse o identificarse con lo leído debería ser un efecto colateral y no una meta hacia la que tengan que dirigirse las expectativas del lector. Curiosamente, el propio ensayo parece alinearse con esta idea más adelante.

El segundo capítulo se centra en los personajes que a menudo se nos presentan en los poemas, tal y como apunta la introducción: «Descubriremos cómo construyen personajes los poetas que, sin lugar a dudas, no son él mismo, que hablan y se comportan como sobre un escenario» (21). Uno de los procedimientos principales para la creación de estos personajes a los que remite el texto es el monólogo dramático. Sin embargo, si la autora parece tener claro el carácter ficticio de estos poemas, no parece ser así cuando comenta otro tipo de composiciones a las que se refiere como «autorretratos» o «poesía confesional». Burt no solo da a entender que dichos poemas pueden leerse como una biografía, sino que también permiten conocer a sus autores: «La lectura de un poema puede compartir un conjunto de sentimientos, pero también puede ser percibida como un modo de conocer a alguien. No es de extrañar que tantos poetas se hayan presentado a sí mismos al nombrarse en sus poemas» (75). Este tipo de afirmaciones, además de ser discutibles, contradicen en cierto modo lo que se plantea en otras partes del libro y en el propio capítulo. De hecho, ni siquiera cuando el poeta decide «autonombrarse» en el poema pierde este último su estatus de ficción, por mucho que se engarce con lo autobiográfico.[2] Por tanto, el que aparece en el poema sigue siendo un personaje, aunque se mueva en esa ambigüedad.

La forma y la técnica son el tema principal del siguiente capítulo y la tercera razón que se da para leer poemas. El placer estético, derivado de la fascinación por el logro formal o la destreza del poeta, es para la autora un gran valor en un poema, aunque este deba contener «cierta emoción» para no ser una mera «acrobacia» (106). A través de los diferentes textos comentados, se incluyen diversas reflexiones sobre el uso de la técnica. Esta puede mostrar la voluntad del poeta de pertenecer a un grupo o de ingresar en una tradición: «Escribir sonetos o cualquier otra estrofa antigua supone reconocer tu pertenencia a una comunidad que viene de muy atrás» (124). Por otro lado, se explica cómo a través de la adopción de determinadas formas, la invención de otras nuevas o el establecimiento de restricciones a la hora de escribir—como el lipograma—se estimula la creatividad y se favorece el placer estético. Por último, también me gustaría destacar la idea de la pulcritud técnica a la que puede aspirar el poema como vía para afrontar o aliviar la conciencia de un mundo caótico e ingobernable.

En el cuarto capítulo se aborda la dificultad y, más concretamente, el carácter desautomatizador del lenguaje de ciertos poemas como uno de los principales alicientes para su lectura: «El lenguaje opaco, o reticente, o incluso agresivo de tales poemas puede servir para romper los hábitos que llevamos a cuestas en el mundo más allá de los poemas; tal vez insuflen vida a nuestro día o nos ayuden a ver las suposiciones tóxicas y las ilusiones frágiles propagadas por el habla informal, la vida cotidiana, o poemas más fáciles» (21). Aunque de modo muy tangencial, Burt alude al concepto de *extrañamiento* (*ostranenie*), desarrollado por el formalismo ruso, como antecedente teórico de esta premisa. Asimismo, a través de diferentes ejemplos, enumera una serie de beneficios y virtudes próximas a esa idea de dificultad: la posibilidad de deconstruir otros lenguajes—como el político, el publicitario o el periodístico—, de abrir las expectativas del lector y estimular su participación; la creación de un estilo o código propio, pensado para un grupo concreto de lectores; la representación de una realidad ontológicamente compleja o ininteligible; el cuestionamiento o desvío de determinadas convenciones y estructuras sociales, etc.

La quinta razón que propone Burt para leer poemas es la sabiduría que se puede extraer de ellos. A su modo de ver, estos pueden contener consejos, sentencias e incluso «instrucciones para la vida […]; afirmaciones sobre cómo actuar y qué creer» (192). Pese a que a lo largo del libro se puntualiza en más de una ocasión que esta categorización no es excluyente y que, por tanto, no cierra la lectura de los poemas en torno a una de estas razones, la autora parece incurrir en la falacia intencional al asumir que existen «poemas dedicados a la sabiduría, que tratan de decirte algo que el poeta cree que debes saber» (199). A partir de esa concepción moral del arte, el capítulo ahonda en las diferentes clases de sabiduría que

pueden encontrarse en los poemas, así como en los distintos modos en que esta se transmite a través de ellos y en sus posibles aplicaciones.

El sexto y último capítulo plantea una reflexión en torno a las posibilidades que ofrece el poema de crear comunidades a partir de sus lectores. Para ello, se ofrecen ejemplos de poemas que interpelan a determinadas identidades o colectivos y que han podido contribuir a cimentar una solidaridad a nivel regional, nacional, étnico, profesional, etc. A ese respecto, resulta interesante la exploración de nuevas formas literarias que responden a la necesidad de representar de manera adecuada a grupos sociales históricamente silenciados: «tantos estilos y clases de poemas […] proceden de la decisión de un poeta de traer a la poesía a un grupo de gente, una manera de usar la lengua e incluso una clase de espacio geográfico que no haya sido representado con precisión hasta entonces» (240-1). El texto también indaga en cómo se relacionan con la tradición los poetas que introducen estas formas.

Finalmente, es preciso poner en valor la traducción de Natalia Carbajosa, que no se limita al ensayo en sí, sino que también abarca la gran mayoría de los poemas citados, con todas las dificultades que entraña enfrentarse a tantas y tan variadas poéticas. La riqueza del corpus es una de las fortalezas del libro, si bien es verdad que cuando la autora se detiene en cuestiones más formales se echa en falta el texto en su lengua original, aunque las notas de la traductora tratan de suplir esa carencia. Por otro lado, los comentarios a los poemas tienden a ser breves y, en ocasiones, se introducen de forma algo brusca digresiones que pueden desviar la atención del lector de los temas centrales del ensayo. Del mismo modo, varias de las afirmaciones que se hacen sobre la poesía podrían aplicarse a la literatura en general. Con todo, la panorámica ofrecida puede resultar sugerente, especialmente para quienes tengan interés en la poesía contemporánea en lengua inglesa.

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2 Puede consultarse el libro de Laura Scarano *Vidas en verso: autoficciones poéticas* (2014) para profundizar en este particular tipo de textos.

BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

JAVIER AMANN CÁNOVAS
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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Bodas de sangre: en una adaptación de Marina Carr

Traducción e introducción de Melania Terrazas Gallego y Salma Errami Fennane

Logroño: Universidad de La Rioja. Servicio de Publicaciones. 2025. 134 pp.
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La aparición de nuevas traducciones teatrales en el panorama editorial español sigue siendo, en 2026, un pequeño pero celebrado acontecimiento cultural: un recordatorio de que el teatro, incluso cuando se lee, amplía nuestra sensibilidad y nos conecta con voces que, de otro modo, quedarían fuera de nuestro alcance. De ahí que *Bodas de sangre: en una adaptación de Marina Carr*, publicada por la Universidad de la Rioja en 2025 y traducción de *Blood Wedding* de Marina Carr, basada a su vez en la obra original de Federico García Lorca (1931), suponga una auténtica invitación a descubrir otros ritmos, otras miradas y otras formas de entender la escena. Melania Terrazas Gallego, doctora en Filología Inglesa, profesora titular de la Universidad de La Rioja y directora del centro de estudios irlandeses Banna Bond, junto con Salma Errami Fennane, doctoranda en Filología Inglesa por dicha universidad, realizan esta versión en el marco del proyecto «Intersecciones post-humanas en las literaturas irlandesa y gallega», financiado por el MICIU y «FEDER Una manera de hacer Europa». Ambas estudiosas abren, así, una ventana a una tradición dramática, la irlandesa, y a una dramaturga, Marina Carr, que han marcado la escena europea y que, en España, encuentra lectores y espectadores cada vez más atentos.

Esta tradaptación[1] llega en un momento político y social en el que los roles de género, el feminismo y el control del deseo vuelven a ponerse en entredicho, por lo que supone un reto, especialmente entre las nuevas generaciones. Las autoras-traductoras justifican en su introducción el motivo por el cual regresar a Lorca y su tragedia rural es importante. Si, en primer lugar, Carr crea su versión de *Bodas de Sangre* desplazando la tragedia a las Midlands irlandesas y actualizando a sus personajes femeninos, posteriormente Terrazas y Errami retornan esta versión a la Andalucía rural, dotándola para ello de una oralidad espléndida y logrando el objetivo marcado de reimaginar un Lorca más accesible y actual, si cabe. En esa misma lectura política del presente, la introducción recalca que *Blood Wedding* se publica en un contexto irlandés atravesado por debates legislativos sobre derechos reproductivos (por ejemplo, se menciona el referendo de mayo de 2018 relativo a la Octava Enmienda), un encuadre que enfatiza la contemporaneidad del texto con respecto a los conflictos de género y autonomía (Terrazas Gallego y Errami Fennane 2025, 13).

En la versión de *Carr*, el desplazamiento geográfico no elimina el conflicto trágico de la original, favorecida principalmente por las similitudes entre España e Irlanda. El poder de la religión en la sociedad y en el modo de vivir, y la existencia de conflictos bélicos civiles en ambos países, permiten que la obra funcione paralelamente en ambos territorios sin la

necesidad de alterar la trama y sus temas, pero sí los reconfigura, por ejemplo, dotando a las mujeres de un pensamiento más contemporáneo, en el que luego ahondaremos. A esto se suma un rasgo distintivo que aporta teatralidad: el uso de una variante del inglés irlandés, el hiberno inglés, que permite crear un imaginario muy concreto a la hora de leer y, sobre todo, ver representada la obra.

Del mismo modo, las traductoras hacen este viaje de vuelta sin sacrificar las capas aportadas por Carr. Aunque sin fijar un espacio-tiempo cerrado, la traducción se enmarca en una Andalucía rural evidenciada por el singular modo de representar el idiolecto de los personajes. Este idiolecto, plasmado a través de la fórmula del dialecto visual, es el que permite al lector acercarse a la oralidad teatral y, en consecuencia, crear ese Lorca más accesible y necesario. Cabe mencionar que esta accesibilidad no constituye una simplificación narrativa ni una pérdida de la poética presente en la pieza original: es la propia actualización del clásico, en sus personajes, en su forma, la que permite que *Bodas de Sangre: en una adaptación de Marina Carr* sea una versión óptima para el ahora.

El idiolecto que construyen Terrazas y Errami se materializa en una escritura deliberadamente oral que remite al imaginario lingüístico del sur peninsular. Esta estrategia se sostiene sobre recursos ortográficos reiterados, como la aspiración con la inclusión de *haches* finales («toah», «esah», «niño»), los apócopes («pa», «to», «na») o la pérdida de la «d» intervocálica («cansao», «enamorao»), entre otros. De hecho, en la propia introducción se explica este fenómeno como una traslación del «dialecto visual» del original—formas abreviadas en inglés como las terminaciones recortadas—hacia abreviaciones equivalentes en español (Terrazas Gallego y Errami Fennane 2025, 33), como se demuestra en los parlamentos, de los cuales ofrecemos el siguiente ejemplo:

> Hijo.– ¿Quiereh subí a lah tierrah conmigo?
> Madre.– ¿De qué te serviría yo allá arriba?
> Hijo.– (*La toma en brazos, y le da vueltas*) Serviríah de ehpantapájaroh. (Terrazas Gallego y Errami Fennane 2025, 63)

Por un lado, el acceso al texto meta puede resultar exigente en las primeras páginas, si bien una vez aceptadas sus reglas adquiere ritmo, musicalidad interna y un pulso que favorecen la imaginación, y, sobre todo, se vuelve claramente decible, que es donde este libro hace su apuesta. Pero por otro, elegir una grafía concreta implica dejar muchas formas orales fuera y esa estandarización dentro de la obra no puede ser llevada a escena al pie de la letra porque, precisamente, se crearía un «nuevo acento del sur» inexistente y alejado de la realidad. En ese marco, la propuesta puede entenderse—y aquí está su virtud—como una invitación a que cada intérprete aporte su propia oralidad sin traicionar el tono general del parlamento. Si el fin último de un texto dramático es ser representado, esta guía oral permitirá que el reparto pueda estar formado por personas de distintos orígenes, siempre ligados al sur de España, y que aporten su habla específica dotando a la representación de un marco aún mayor.

Sin embargo, la obra también introduce marcas de estigma y origen vinculadas a «La Manchita», y el propio conflicto se articula por familias y linajes. La prueba está en cómo el texto hace que la Madre nombre ese linaje con una violencia explícita, llegando a llamar a La Manchita «la ehpiga gitana» y a subrayar que «esa es la sangre» de la que viene la Novia, de nuevo señalando el origen como argumento de deslegitimación (Terrazas Gallego y Errami Fennane 2025, 64). En este sentido, cabría preguntarse si hubiera sido posible (y útil) un trabajo algo más diferenciado de voces, no para «estigmatizar», sino para hacer audible la distancia entre las familias existentes. Las traductoras advierten con acierto del riesgo de caer en estereotipos y quizá por eso opten por una oralidad más unificada, que deja la variación en manos de dirección e intérpretes. Del mismo modo, al existir una diferenciación entre las dos familias principales, la del Novio y la de la Novia, la posibilidad de explorar dos maneras de habla diferenciadas (una de montaña y otra de valle) podría dotar de una riqueza mayor y ahondaría en la distancia que existe entre ambas.

Delattre señala que las lenguas de «ritmo acentual» (*stress-timed*) como el inglés tienden a reducir vocales átonas tanto en duración como en calidad (Delattre 2021) entre otras características. Sin embargo, el castellano, en tanto que lengua de «ritmo silábico» (Prieto et al. 2012), presenta mayor cantidad de sílabas abiertas y no muestra esa reducción vocálica. Por estos motivos, a pesar de que la traducción posee una prosodia española, los recursos utilizados permiten que los patrones y la musicalidad de la lengua origen se evoquen como parte del efecto escénico.

Como se apuntaba anteriormente, Carr revisa los personajes femeninos en su tradaptación, dotándolos de una individualidad reflejada en el derecho a opinar, contestar y anhelar la libertad. Quizás este último punto ya existía en Lorca, pero sus personajes asumían que el lugar que ocupaban era inalterable. No obstante, en la traducción española esas mismas mujeres tienen una voz propia, más actual y con voluntad de cambio, aun cuando estén en un contexto opresor. Esta circunstancia se observa específicamente en dos personajes homólogos: La Novia y La Mujer. Si bien es cierto que la Mujer muestra cierta sororidad con la Novia lorquiana: «Mujer: No me gusta que penséis mal de una buena muchacha»

(Lorca 2005, 13), esta versión suma en este personaje el derecho de queja sobre su situación. La novia es consciente de lo que ocurre, y aunque su destino es inevitable se expresa en estos términos:

> ¿Y a ónde te vah ahora? ¿A la montaña otra veh? ¿A por ella? Yo soy tu mujéh. Soy la madre de tu hijo, y ehtoy embarazá der segundo. ¿Te creeh que soy tonta y no sé lo que ehtá pasando? Noh ehtáh convirtiendo en un hazmerreí. Yo soy la que debería ehtá montá en tu kabáyo blanco. (Terrazas Gallego y Errami Fennane 2025, 75)

De igual manera la Novia, inspirada por el personaje creado de su madre «la Manchita», anhela una libertad y en esta ocasión, al reclamarla al final pidiendo la muerte, se le concede, cerrando así un círculo trágico distinto al original.

Si, como afirma Braga Riera (2024, 102) sobre la traducción teatral, «la representación es su fin último, [y] el mayor peso otorgado a los valores performativos implicará desligarse de la esclavitud sintáctica o semántica del original en aras de la teatralidad», se ve con claridad que si, en primera instancia, Carr se desligó de la pieza de Lorca en pro de esta teatralidad, Terrazas y Errami han hecho lo propio con la versión hiberno-inglesa para re-imaginarla en un escenario rural andaluz. De este modo, la versión final no considera la traducción como un medio, sino como una propuesta escénica en sí. La elección, poco convencional, de crear el idiolecto mencionado permite que el conjunto posea un carácter de partitura escénica y no solo textual, animando a su representación, ya que el escenario es lugar ideal para vivenciar el texto. Es más, y sin ignorar la poética preexistente, la claridad editorial y el enfoque escénico de *Bodas de sangre: en una adaptación de Marina Carr* la convierten en una propuesta muy recomendable para aulas y compañías que quieran acercarse bien al clásico bien a su traducción irlandesa de modo más accesible, actual y expresivo.

1 Término acuñado por Michel Garneau que combina traducción y adaptación y que pone el acento en la «jouabilité» (*jugabilidad*) de una traducción teatral al ser trasladada de un idioma y una cultura a otra. En una entrevista, el poeta señala cómo este neologismo surgió al adaptar *La Tempestad* de William Shakespeare al francés de Quebec, y específicamente para ser representada al aire libre (Hellot 2009, 86).

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

TAMARA ROJO-CASTRO
Universidad del País Vasco/
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, UPV/EHU

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Transnational and Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Western American Culture: The Nomadic West

Ángel Chaparro Sainz

Routledge. 2025. 230 pp.
ISBN: 9781032830759

As the scholar Gala Knörr eloquently suggests, "[...] the Western allows us to create alternate realities or surrealities, an infinite, incessant formulation of interactions of the essential act of being human" (2025, 196). This sentiment serves as the heartbeat of *Transnational and Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Western American Culture: The Nomadic West*, edited by Ángel Chaparro Sainz. Published as part of a growing movement to deconstruct frontier mythology, this collection challenges the static, old-fashioned icons of the past. By examining the West not as a fixed point on a map but as a 'nomadic' and fluid concept, Chaparro Sainz gathers a diverse group of scholars to map out where the myth ends and a new, transnational reality begins.

In the introduction, with a personal anecdote Chaparro Sainz reinforces how the romanticized idea of the American West remains a ghost that haunts our modern culture. Therefore, with a great fluidity, the collection explores how these romanticized visions persist while simultaneously introducing 'new ideas' of the West; versions that are seen through the lenses of immigration, indigenous voices, and global influence. Historically, Western scholarship has often been compartmentalized into rigid historical or literary categories. Chaparro Sainz addresses this by highlighting a shift in current trends, moving away from 'The West' as a purely North American phenomenon and toward a transnational perspective. That is why the editor's introduction is particularly effective, as it meticulously justifies the selection of each section. The titles of these segments are concise yet accurate, providing a sharp framework for an otherwise expansive topic. Chaparro Sainz argues that the West must be analyzed not just as a historical era that has concluded, but as a living, breathing entity that requires an interdisciplinary approach to be fully understood.

The first section, Moving Images, succeeds in opening the transnational dialogue, though it varies in accessibility. Sergei I. Zhuk provides a dense, data-heavy foundation regarding the Soviet interpretation of Westerns; while the

sheer volume of data can occasionally feel heavy and difficult to navigate, the insight into how different Soviet generations adopted specific Western tropes is invaluable. This is balanced by Marek Paryz's refreshing look at contemporary Westerns, where he argues for new sensibilities without diminishing the value of entertainment this genre used to have, specifically through the lens of disability and evolving male heroism. James I. Deutsch continues this investigation into masculinity by analyzing *Bad Day at Black Rock*, challenging traditional myths through the concept of the "Post-Western." Although Natalia Mirón-Florido's chapter suffers from a lack of fluidity in its introduction, her analysis of *Shanghai Noon* provides a breath of fresh air by expanding the American frontier to include the Philippines and Hawaii, effectively proving the editor's goal of showing the West's geographic and cultural elasticity and therefore, closing the section with strength.

In Competing Words, the second part of this book, the collection moves into literature with a mix of poetic grace and some uneven critical depth. Ariadna García Carreño opens the section with great fluidity, illustrating how the California landscape empowered poets like George Sterling, whose work views the West as a "paradise that poets inspire to inhabit" (2025, 76). However, the section encounters some friction in its gender analysis. While Isabel Oliveira provides a necessary deconstruction of male identities and the traditionally auxiliary roles of women in Proulx's work, her argument that Western tropes merely replicate and reinforce abuse can, at times, feel somewhat reductive. Similarly, Garbiñe Maruri Pérez's examination of Willa Cather characters feels slightly outdated; specifically, the use of the term "Girlboss" in the title introduces a neoliberal tint that suggests equality is merely a result of individual hard work rather than structural change. Lastly, David Rio grounds the section with a strong analysis of roadtrip narratives, arguing that in an era of reduced physical mobility, the "imaginary places" and hopes of protagonists serve as a vital replacement for geographical movement, keeping the myth of the West alive in the contemporary mind.

Part number three, Different Voices, stands as the most structurally sound and fluid portion of the book, successfully achieving the editor's purpose of showcasing the West's multifaceted nature. Eider Gómez Sainz offers a moving account of Japanese-American intergenerational trauma, where silence is revealed as a tool of survival. This is complemented by Kalenda Eaton's chapter on African-American identities and "Africanized spaces" in Utah, noting that early publications were "key to locating the beginnings of a redefined African-American identity" (2025, 155). The section further dismantles the American Dream through Amaia Soroa-Bacaicoa's smart analysis of Latinx DREAMers, which rejects idealized versions of migration in favor of the harsh realities of undocumented status. Closing with Silvia Martínez-Falquina's work on Indigenous displacement, the section proves that the West is a site of inherited trauma that must be acknowledged to build a more equal mythology. The high level of research in this section provides the reader with a thorough, rather than superficial, understanding of marginalized Western experiences.

The final section, Drawing Art, brilliantly connects the Western mythos to visual and diasporic memory. Gala Knörr provides a contribution on the Basque-American diaspora and how creators use the Western aesthetic to "contest old systems of power and hierarchies" (2025, 195). Her reflection on the "elastic capabilities" of the genre serves as a perfect summary for the entire book's mission: showing that the West is an adaptable concept open to constant experimentation. This theme of transformation is echoed in Susan Bernardin's analysis of Indigenous comics and world-building. Bernardin highlights how artists like Arigon Starr achieve "gender justice" and imagine "vibrant Indigenous futures" (2025, 206) through graphic storytelling. By ending on this note of mobility toward a transformative future, the book successfully moves from historical deconstruction to a forward-looking vision of what Western American culture can become.

In summary, *Transnational and Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Western American Culture: The Nomadic West* successfully demonstrates how the American West maintains its cultural relevance through a process of constant reinvention. As Ángel Chaparro Sainz notes in the introduction, the West possesses a "romanticized shadow that is presented through time and space" (2025, 2); a shadow that this collection pursues across cinematic, literary, and artistic borders. By moving the conversation away from a fixed geographic point and toward a nomadic concept, the book proves that the Frontier is less a place and more a fluid, globalized state of being. The volume is exceptionally well-organized; the division of chapters and the precision of the section titles allow the reader to navigate a vast array of topics with ease. However, there is a slight sense of missed potential in the final section, Drawing Art. While it provides a refreshing vitalization by concentrating on intersectionality and modern visual media, it is a pity that such a vital and contemporary perspective is limited to only two chapters. Thus, expanding on these hyper-mobile forms of representation would have further balanced the weight of the more traditional literary analyses found earlier in the text.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the strength of this volume lies in its profound interdisciplinarity. By blending cultural studies, geography, and film analysis, Chaparro Sainz offers a sophisticated roadmap for how the West *could be* and *needs to be* analyzed in the coming years. Consequently, this book can be an essential reading

for anyone interested in how myths are built, broken, and ultimately reborn. It is a vital contribution for scholars and enthusiasts alike who recognize that the idea of the West is not a dying relic of the past; it is a living, breathing entity, evolving into something more complex, diverse, and undeniably relevant to our modern world.[1]

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

PAULA RUSTARAZO GARZÓN
Universidad de Málaga

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Rape Narratives that Paved the Way for #MeToo. The Crack in the Wall

Marta Fernández-Morales

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Rape Narratives that Paved the Way for #MeToo. The Crack in the Wall is a volume that examines a decade of rape memoirs in the context of the emergence of the #MeToo movement. Fernández-Morales argues that these eight works written by English-speaking women opened a crack in the wall of silence around sexual violence that the 2017 campaign started to erode. The author has extensive experience in the field of American Studies exploring American literature, film, and television, which she has researched for over twenty-five years. It was conceived for Routledge's Auto/biography Studies series, which publishes outstanding new work in autobiography, life writing and identity studies using an interdisciplinary lens that engages with other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology, among others.

Fernández-Morales states that this monograph's main novelty "is giving rape memoirs a central place" (2025, 16). With certain exceptions, scholarly literature about the Me Too movement has not considered storytelling as the main object of study. The book's general aim is to demonstrate "that survivors' testimonies are vital in order to conceptualize, make visible, and effectively explain sexual violence" (2025, 12), and, in order to achieve this purpose, she lists seven specific objectives: establish a representative corpus of rape narratives that contribute to #MeToo, discuss them within fourth-wave feminism, perform a close reading of those works, expand the conversation about their authors or update the existing discussion, broaden her own research on sexual violence, contribute to the conversation about violence against women, and participate in the development of auto/biography studies. I argue that the author successfully stays within these specific objectives, managing to explore the many layers of sexual violence from a perspective that makes space for the personal, the social, and the political.

This monograph achieves its purpose through an approach that "puts life-writing scholarship in conversation with affect theory, trauma studies, phenomenology, memory studies, social psychology, philosophy, law, criminology, and victimology" (2025, 3). Always keeping fourth-wave feminism and its key concerns on the fore of her analysis, Fernández-Morales's focus on these rape memoirs is unwavering and extremely relevant. Writings about the self entail an encounter between the writer and the reader, as the former invites the audience to understand the other's perspective, creating proximity and encouraging empathy (Schmitt 2017, 91). These memoirs "carve a place in our culture to testify about rape and to promote critical thought, empathy, accountability, and different forms of justice" (Fernández-Morales 2025,

207). Leo, Connor, Gay, Gurba, Miller, Vanasco, Ensler and Elva's works are imbued with "a sense of responsibility" (Frank 1995, 17) for the other. These are not only telling stories about their personal experiences, but also opportunities for the readers to act as caring witnesses and for society to become more aware of the multiple ramifications of sexual assault in survivor's lives.

The book opens with a foreword written by artist and survivor Jana Leo, who introduces the reader to the importance of storytelling as a means to achieve accountability and fight against "the seal of silence" (2025, viii). In a society that punishes and shames the victim rather than the perpetrator, texts written by victims of rape break the silence and act against patriarchal control. Rapists benefit from silence and are able to go unpunished for their crime, but when authors present their private experiences and make them public, "the crack they opened is making silence, shame, and impunity tremble" (2025, xi).

In the introduction, Fernández-Morales states that "sexual violence seems to have always been present in our culture" (2025, 1). She provides an overview that takes the reader from mythological instances of rape to the feminist struggle against it since the 1970s to the time of publication of this book. She introduces the memoirs that are considered in her analysis, explaining their importance within the dawn of the #MeToo movement. These works became pillars for conversations on sexual assault, and they made the personal political: dispelling myths, helping survivors cope with trauma, and addressing the deficiencies in the justice system. Moreover, this section provides a history of the origins of the #MeToo Movement, also addressing its deficiencies, such as the fact that not all stories are granted the same level of attention from the public. Then, she proceeds to list the objectives of her book, provide context for life-writing and explain the terminology and the sections that make up this volume.

The first chapter, "Why Him?: Investigating Rape and the Rapist" introduces the concept of *epistemic injustice*, which is often applied to women and children whose criterion tends to be questioned, undermined and ignored within patriarchy. Fernández-Morales illustrates the feminist struggle against women's discrediting and the fourth-wave's fight for including first-person testimonies to create an "intersectional discussion – encompassing sex, gender, class, and race – of the structural inequalities of the American society and their consequences" (2025, 47). Within this framework, the author analyses two narratives: *Rape New York* by Jana Leo (2009) and Joanna Connor's *I Will Find You* (2016), and justifies their inclusion in the corpus as works that mix the personal with the political in "ways that are relevant to a feminist understanding of the contemporary US" (2025, 31). Both narratives, portrait their rape while also performing an analysis into their rapists and the system as a whole.

The next chapter takes into account sexual violence from the perspective of a woman of colour, Roxane Gay. It is titled "Something Terrible Happened": Roxane Gay's *Hunger*" and it follows a phenomenological approach that critiques a culture which sustains individual accountability for women's bodies, over the aftermath of rape and the intersubjective nature of our existence (2025, 59). The impacts and ramifications of sexual violence, responsibility, agency, and accountability are at the centre of Gay's narrative in a story that "navigates uncomfortable truths about what it means to live in the body of a fat Black woman in today's America" (2025, 88). This chapter, which is divided into three sections, utilizes affect theory, shame, and body politics to consider how Gay's resulting trauma after rape manifested in a changed embodiment, since she resorted to gaining weight to feel protected. *Hunger* pushes for a more empathetic and encompassing notion of responsibility and the consequences of sexual assault, arguing for dismantling rape culture and myths in favour of the victims instead.

The third chapter, called "Myriam Gurba, or the Power of Being Mean," analyses Tarana Burke's *Mean* (2017). She is a queer Chicana writer whose work "looks at sexual violence through an intersectional prism and extends beyond the victim to examine the culture that enables the perpetrators" (2025, 95). Hers is a narrative that includes stories from other survivors and murdered victims, one that is constantly haunted by the ghost of Sophia Castro Torres, a woman who was sexually assaulted and killed by Burke's rapist. In her autobiography, the author interlaces both lives, telling a story that, even if she herself admits is not hers to tell, Sophia Castro cannot do, either. This "culturally-charged way of reflecting Gurba's PTSD and rootedness in the Mexican and Chicana literary traditions" (2025, 107) also has the perk of serving as criticism against White venerated authors, White appropriation and the myth of the perfect victim, which usually entails being young, white and beautiful enough to be raped. *Mean* challenges likeability and complicates the classical rape narrative, dismantling it, re-stating the author's roots and portraying her rape in a way that is not only personal, but also collective.

The start of the following section provides a context for sexual violence in American universities, delving into the movements and efforts made to fight against public shaming and perpetrator impunity. Its title is "Memoir Without Memory, Justice Without the Justice System," and in it Fernández-Morales close reads Chanel Miller's *Know My Name* (2019) in relation "to the issues of survivor memory and the forms of justice available (or not) to victims in the twenty-first-century USA" (2025, 138). Her approach discusses "the dialectic between the presence and absence of memories in Miller's rape narrative, and the gendered implications of this dialectic" (2025, 141). In her work, Miller examines

the absence of memories of her sexual assault and the way this was used against her by the predatory defence during her trial. Miller situates the epistemic injustice phenomenon that questions women and children at the fore of her memoir, and vindicates for "the survivors' way of knowing" (2025, 150). The author questions the importance given to memories after rape, asserting female testimony and autobiographical subjectivity as tools against silencing, rape culture and biased criminal justice systems.

The final chapter in this book, "Beyond Accountability: Apologies and Forgiveness After Rape," delves into the debate "taking place among feminist authors about justice and its conceptualizations, limitations, and praxis" (2025, 164). From punitism to abolitionism, Fernández-Morales close reads three memoirs that move beyond these perspectives, works that invite the reader to "imagine a world where there is room for retribution and restoration after rape" (2025, 165) in the shape of restorative justice. The memoirs are Vanasco's *Things We Didn't Talk About When I was a Girl* (2019), Ensler's *The Apology* (2019) and Elva's *South of Forgiveness* (2017). These texts place the survivor's voice at the centre, as they control the narrative of their rapes, while introducing the perpetrator's acknowledgement of the sexual assault. Fernández-Morales argues that they each "achieve their own forms of justice through conversations with their rapists" (2025, 167), disrupting the expectations of rape memoirs by including the assailant's voice and incorporating apology and forgiveness to accountability. These works denounce patriarchy and vindicate for the protection of women and girls while showing how the authors found alternative justice on their own terms.

Lastly, the final section, aptly named "Victory Is Never Final. By Way of Conclusion," serves as a reminder of the importance of "talking about and researching, teaching, and fighting against rape culture" (2025, 208) if we do not want the Me Too movement to become a thing of the past. The author encourages the reading, buying and gifting of memoirs written by women who have experienced sexual violence, to support their stories, keep them alive and give them "epistemic and testimonial justice, which has been denied for them too long" (2025, 208). The Me Too movement, together with the voices that preceded and will follow it, make tangible "the desire for a global transformation" (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir 2021, 3). These women's voices are an echo that go further than their own stories, serving as acknowledgements of a solidarity and shared experience that transcend individuality.

All in all, *Rape Narratives that Paved the Way for #MeToo* is a book that delivers on its promises. Fernández-Morales's wealth of knowledge and experience on the matter come across in every page, alongside her empathy, care for the topic and awareness regarding the limitations of her work, which is conditioned by time, length, funding and skill. She wishes for future studies that include representation of certain voices such as disabled survivors or Native Americans. Despite this, her volume stands supported by ten years of narrative praxis about rape, and includes authors of different races, sexualities and economic backgrounds whose works not only enrich the #MeToo movement, but also participate in the active fight against patriarchal silencing and shame. It succeeds in its goals and constitutes an important contribution to the study of sexual violence that is sure to be useful to researchers of life writing and gender studies, among its many other fields of interests.



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IRATI JIMÉNEZ-PÉREZ
Universidad del País Vasco/
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, UPV/EHU

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The Posthuman Condition in 21st Century Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Insights

María Ferrández-Sanmiguel, Esther Muñoz-González and Carmen Laguarta-Bueno, eds.

London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2025. 282 pp.
ISBN: 978 3 031 83701 2

The publication of Cary Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* in 2010 and Rosi Braidotti's The Posthuman in 2013 outlined a decisive shift in the humanities by demonstrating the need to move beyond the traditional anthropocentric paradigm. Hence, these foundational works determined the widening of literary and cultural studies' limits by challenging human exceptionalism and opening the field to interspecies ethics, technological entanglements and new materialism. Indeed, as N. Katherine Hayle argues in her seminal research, How *We Became Posthuman* (1999), "the posthuman does not mean the end of humanity [...] it signals the end of a specific conception of the human" (286). Following the critical perspective of some other recent publications, such as *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism* (2022) or *Posthumanism in Practice* (2023), the contributors of this volume explore this shift from the autonomous liberal subject to a more interconnected entity.

Edited by María Ferrández-Sanmiguel, Associate Professor at the University of Zaragoza; Esther Muñoz-González, Associate Professor at the University of Zaragoza; and Carmen Laguarta-Bueno, Assistant Professor at the University of Zaragoza, The Posthuman Condition in 21st Century Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Insights (2025) also counts on the support of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. As the editors mention in the introduction, the main objective of this work is not only to address the posthuman condition from a theoretical perspective, but also to combine discussions about its presence "in very recent novels, short stories and other (screened) popular cultural products produced in the first and second decades of the twenty-first century" (18). Thus, through the exploration of the impact of the nonhuman turn on different formats, this volume constitutes an essential work for those taking an interest in cultural studies across a wide range of genres and areas.

The structure of the book contributes to the aim of approaching the posthuman from a varied cultural and format approach. Organised in five different parts, the volume covers the multiform nature of the perspectives on the topic. The opening section, entitled "Human Enhancement, Transhumanism and Techno-posthumanism," covers transhumanist

philosophy from a critical perspective and also deals with its ethical consequences. On the one hand, Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, analyses the Star Trek's Borg "as a cultural symbol that condenses some of the risks humanity undergoes when advancing along the path of the transhuman" (Collado-Rodríguez 2025, 30). On the other hand, Ruxandra Teodorescu extensively studies Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice (2013) with the objective of examining "the potential for AI to evolve into functional systems that operate autonomously and integrate seamlessly into our planetary ecologies" (Teodorescu 2025, 50).

The second section, "Feminist, Gender and Queer Approaches to the Posthuman," addresses the links between feminist, gender, queer and posthumanist theory through the problematisation of traditional views of gender and sexuality based upon essentialist perspectives. First, Rocío Carrasco-Carrasco analyses the TV series The Power and determines that it denounces "every instance of power imbalances" and proclaims "the need to find ways to construct our world inclusively once it becomes clear that binarism is not desirable" (Carrasco-Carrasco 2025, 76). Second, Laura Larrodera-Arcega contributes with an analysis of Annalee Newitz's Autonomous (2017). From the perspective of the intersection between critical posthumanism and queer theory, she focuses on how the biobot may be related to trans and nonbinary conceptions and how it consequently challenges the conception of the "human." Third, Susana Onega's contribution about Sarah Hall's The Carhullan Army (2007) highlights "the disturbing consciousness of environmental catastrophe haunting our near future" (2025, 106) and its consequences and implications in the relationship between human and nonhuman forms of life.

The third section broadens the book's scope by covering perspectives related to the material and ecological dimensions of the posthuman. In chapter seven, Ana Chapman applies vulnerability and posthuman theory to the analysis of Joma West's Face (2022). Through the examination of the novel's fragmentary narrative, her analysis covers the topic of "human categorization [...] in terms of the effects on material-discourse embodiment" (Chapman 2025, 127), bringing out questions "from the relational and affective standpoint" (Fernández-Sanmiguel et al. 2025, 20). In this way, Chapman proposes a reconsideration of natural and affective responses from an ecological standpoint. Chapter 8, "Beyond the Human/Nonhuman Binary: Fluid Borders in A.S. Byatt's Onto-Tales," María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro analyses three stories by Byatt, arguing that they approach "the human in nonhuman terms" (Walezak quoted by Matínez-Alfaro 2025, 158). Hence, through her analysis, she contends that Byatt depicts an interconnected reality, highlighting literature's usefulness as a means of encouraging change.

The volume's fourth section, entitled "The Human and the Nonhuman Animal," explores the dismantling of the human/animal divide and its ethical implications. In chapter nine, Giulia Magro analyses Linda Hogan's Solar Storms (1995), acknowledging the possibility of creating an alliance between Indigenous and posthumanist perspectives when considering the nonhuman world and reorienting it "toward issues of settler colonialism, (neo-)colonial governmentality, land sovereignty, and Indigenous self-determination" (Magro 2025, 168). In the last chapter of this section, Luca Lunardi and Fabiano D'Este provide an analysis of some recent works in the field of ecocinema and "slow cinema" that involve a "reversal of our gaze on nonhuman animals" (Lunardi and D'Este 2025, 187).

The volume's fifth and closing section, "Opening New Theoretical Horizons Through Improbable Connections," is devoted to the examination of unknown areas in the field of critical posthumanism. In chapter eleven, Sherryl Vint, drawing on Sylvia Wynter's conception of humanism "not identical with the human species as a whole" (Vint 2025, 205). In this respect, she highlights the usefulness of science fiction in reconceptualising reality, enabling us to "differently experience, ourselves and the world" (Vint 2025, 206). In chapter twelve, Miriam Fernández-Santiago proposes "phenomenalogy," a theoretical framework rooted in quantum physics that views the human as an emergent result of material and discursive interactions. In the third and last chapter of this section, Ivan Callus explores the intersection between posthumanist rhetoric and the concept of grace, building a compelling case for "posthuman grace." By drawing on diverse sources, such as Dante's Paradiso or Alain Badiou and Thom Gunn, he discusses the political and spiritual implications of hope in an apocalyptic context, offering a reconsideration of the posthuman condition.

In sum, the publication of The Posthuman Condition in 21st Century Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Insights not only constitutes an invaluable source for the field of posthuman theory but also contributes to the broadening of this discipline's scope. In this way, by including a manifold perspective that explores approximations to the posthuman through a varied ensemble of cultural productions, this work offers an opportunity to appreciate and reconsider the influence of these ideas on twenty-first-century literature and culture.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

SARAI RAMOS CEDRES
Universidad Internacional de Valencia (VIU)

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El Teatro de Brian Friel: Bailando entre la Ficción y la Memoria

María Gaviña Costero

Peter Lang. 2025. 236 pp.
ISBN: 978 1 80374 461 2

Motivada por el desconocimiento formal de la obra y persona del dramaturgo norirlandés Brian Friel dentro del entorno teatral en el territorio español, la doctora María Gaviña Costero, profesora en la Universitat de València, nos trae de su mano un volumen que nos acerca, de manera exhaustiva, a la obra del mismo. Una rápida búsqueda parece aseverar el convencimiento de la autora de que, pese al creciente interés académico por el teatro de Brian Friel, éste sigue siendo un gran desconocido por el público en general y por el mundo del teatro español o en español. De hecho, la producción académica al respecto producida en lengua española—parte de la cual está escrita por la misma Gaviña Costero—parece no ser particularmente abundante.

Dicha producción académica en español se centra primordialmente en el análisis específicamente de obras o personajes concretos dentro de la producción teatral de Friel, como ejemplifican artículos como: *La teoría de la traducción en Translations de Brian Friel* (2003), *Convergencia de pasado y presente en el personaje de Gar O'Donnell: Philadelphia, Here I Come! de Brian Friel* (2005), e *Identidad, identificación y acción escénica. La traducción de nombres propios en Translations, de Brian Friel* (2023). Por el contrario, *El Teatro de Brian Friel: Bailando entre la Ficción y la Memoria* destaca por su estudio cabal de la dramaturgia y evolución artística de Brian Friel, lo cual convierte a este volumen en una contribución valiosa para dar a conocer la obra del dramaturgo norirlandés dentro de la crítica académica en español, llegando así a un público más amplio.

Gaviña Costero divide su análisis en cinco capítulos principales— aparte de las consabidas introducción y conclusión—, cada uno centrándose en las obras producidas por Friel durante periodos de tiempo específicos. Cada capítulo ofrece una breve introducción con el contexto sociopolítico vivido en Irlanda en cada momento, el cual influyó tanto en el autor como en su obra, tal y como demuestra la autora de este volumen. Tras esto, Gaviña Costero procede al análisis de las obras producidas durante cada época, detallando los temas tratados, las innovaciones artísticas llevadas a cabo en cada caso e identificando la aparición de los personajes arquetípicos del *trickster* y el chamán en las obras correspondientes, haciendo notar el uso que hace Friel de ambos personajes, siendo el *trickster* el vehículo a través del cual se transmite la ideología del autor, mientras que el chamán es una representación del artista, de su faceta oscura y que se ve apartado de su entorno social por su arte.

El primer capítulo, por ejemplo, se centra en la obra teatral inicial de Friel producida entre los años 1964 y 1970. En este capítulo, Gaviña Costero señala el incipiente carácter experimental de las primeras obras de Brian Friel tras dejar

atrás su etapa de redactor de relatos para revistas norteamericanas y escritor de obras radiofónicas para la BBC. Según Gaviña Costero, esta primera etapa se caracteriza por la exploración del dramaturgo norirlandés del tema del amor, particularmente en las obras: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1966), *Lovers: Winners and Losers* (1967) y *Crystal and Fox* (1968). Esta exploración del amor se ve entrelazada con otros temas como, por ejemplo, el tema de la emigración, ejemplo de lo cual son las dos primeras obras mencionadas. En estas obras se apunta al núcleo familiar y la incomunicación entre sus miembros como el origen del conflicto. Asimismo, en estas obras el autor ya hace uso del humor como facilitador para la revelación de la trágica realidad—recurso que se perpetúa a lo largo de su obra—, y muestra cómo la memoria es un elemento ficcionalizado a través de la transformación individualizada de los recuerdos. Gaviña Costero cierra esta etapa con *The Mundy Scheme* (1969), la cual se diferencia de las anteriores obras por su marcado carácter político y por no estar relacionada con el tema del amor. Esta obra se centra en la relación de los políticos retratados en la obra con el país y en cómo buscan el interés propio en vez del común. En cierto modo se trata de una crítica a la americanización del país.

El siguiente capítulo se dedica al periodo de tiempo comprendido entre los años 1971 y 1979. Gaviña Costero argumenta que durante esta etapa las obras del dramaturgo muestran un mayor compromiso con la comunidad, derivado de los conflictos causados por los cambios políticos del momento en Irlanda. En este capítulo, Gaviña Costero se centra en las obras: *The Gentle Island* (1971), *The Freedom of the City* (1973), *Volunteers* (1975), *Living Quarters* (1977), *Aristocrats* (1979) y *Faith Healer* (1979). La violencia a diferentes niveles, y más concretamente la violencia ritualista, está presente en estas obras y muchas veces se encuentra justificada a través de manera histórica. Todas las obras estudiadas en este capítulo se definen por una perspectiva postcolonial, mientras que el autor reflexiona sobre cuál es el papel del artista en tiempos tan convulsos; Gaviña Costero indica que, de su obra, la respuesta a la cuestión del papel del artista "radica en la capacidad de cuestionar las narrativas de verdad absoluta presentes en la historia, la tradición y la memoria" (45). Además, se continúan explorando cuestiones como la familia como epicentro del conflicto, la creación de mitos y relatos individuales y colectivos ligados a las memorias individuales y colectivas, lo cual está ligado a la construcción de la memoria en sí misma, "la ineficacia comunicativa del lenguaje verbal" (93), o el uso de la música para expresar lo que las palabras no pueden.

El tercer capítulo explora obras estrenadas entre 1980 y 1989. En esta década, Brian Friel crea la compañía teatral Field Day en colaboración con el actor Stephen Rea, con la cual comienza "la etapa más pública y comprometida del autor" (109). Debido a sus responsabilidades como portavoz de la compañía, la producción de Friel durante esta década se limitó a las tres obras estudiadas en el capítulo: *Translations* (1980), *The Communication Cord* (1982) y *Making History* (1988). La lengua se convierte en el epicentro de las dos primeras obras: en la primera se explora cómo la lengua se utiliza para "ejercer dominio" en una comunidad colonizada "dada la conexión intrínseca entre los topónimos y la memoria colectiva de un pueblo" (113); es a lo que la autora de este volumen se refiere como "colonización lingüística y cultural" (112). En la segunda se hace un estudio de las dificultades comunicativas desde un punto de vista cómico, al utilizarse la lengua para obstaculizar la comunicación de distintas maneras. En la tercera obra se retoma el tema de la memoria, enfocándose en "las divergencias en la memoria colectiva de una nación" (131) y la creación de mitos contribuyentes a dicha memoria.

Las obras recogidas en el cuarto capítulo, que comprende desde 1990 a 1999, contienen elementos autobiográficos, dándoles así el autor un enfoque más personal. Gaviña Costero opina al respecto que "lo personal funciona como un medio a través del cual Friel continúa explorando las cuestiones estructurales de su comunidad" (146). Las obras en cuestión son: *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), *Wonderful Tennesee* (1993), *Molly Sweeney* (1994) y *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* (1997). Los temas que aparecen en estas obras son variados, aunque algunos son recurrentes en la obra de Friel en general, como por ejemplo la importancia de la lengua para ejercer poder y para "embellecer la realidad sin negarla" (148), la memoria o la violencia; otros temas que se recogen en estas obras son "el poder de lo irracional sobre el ser humano" (157), el misterio y "el anhelo de la humanidad por algo que nos trasciende y que no podemos comprender" (157), el paso del tiempo o la dicotomía entre "ser un escritor popular o uno íntegro" (188). No obstante, el denominador común de estas obras parece ser el uso de la música y el baile como medio para realizar una búsqueda espiritual y expresar lo que las palabras no pueden; el silencio sustituye a la música como elemento que trasciende las palabras en la última obra mencionada en este capítulo.

El quinto y último capítulo, dedicado a los años entre 2000 y 2015—año en que fallece el autor—, recoge las únicas dos obras originales del dramaturgo: *Performances* (2003) y *The Home Place* (2005). La primera se trata de una obra corta en la que el autor retoma sus reflexiones sobre la figura del artista; Gaviña Costero reflexiona sobre la posibilidad de que en esta obra Friel esté pensando en "la vida póstuma de su dramaturgia" (200). *The Home Place* es de carácter histórico y tiene como tema central "el sentido de lo que llamamos hogar" (207), sobre todo en un momento en que se están realizando cambios en la estructura de poder. En esta última obra, Gaviña Costero argumenta que la música sirve en este caso para evocar "nostalgia por un pasado perdido, lo cual refuerza irónicamente la noción de hogar para cada uno de los personajes" (211).

Como se ha podido observar, *El Teatro de Brian Friel: Bailando entre la Ficción y la Memoria*, se distingue y destaca, sobre todo, en el análisis detallado que hace de la trayectoria dramática de Brian Friel desde su comienzo hasta el momento del fallecimiento del autor. Gaviña Costero estructura este volumen de manera eficiente y lógica por décadas, prestando atención a la situación sociopolítica de cada momento, la cual tuvo una gran influencia en la obra del dramaturgo, tal y como la autora demuestra. Además, las obras mencionadas en cada capítulo suponen ejemplos concretos del carácter innovador del teatro del autor norirlandés y de su compromiso y preocupación con el estado sociopolítico de su país. Así pues, esta obra constituye una gran aproximación detallada a la obra dramatúrgica de Brian Friel, al igual que es también una gran contribución dentro de la producción académica escrita en lengua española sobre el dramaturgo y su obra.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

PILAR MORENO PICAZO
Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia

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Hermeneutical Narratives in Art, Literature, and Communication. Bloomsbury Academic

Małgorzata Haładewicz-Grzelak and Paula García-Ramírez, eds.

London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2024. 312 pp.
ISBN: 9781350405431

Hermeneutical Narratives in Art, Literature, and Communication, edited by Małgorzata Haładewicz-Grzelak and Paula García-Ramírez, is a monograph that sets the path to understand communication as a series of "hermeneutic encounters" (xvii). This volume explores how humans interpret their world and themselves through various creative mediums. The authors utilise philosophical hermeneutics, particularly the theories of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, to examine the deep connections between artistic expression and self-knowledge. By analyzing diverse subjects—ranging from Baroque religious paintings and Russian Silver Age art to African literature and sign language—the text illustrates how interpretation serves as a bridge between the familiar and the alien. A central theme is the concept of the "self as a stranger," suggesting that engaging with art allows individuals to navigate their own internal hiddenness and achieve spiritual or intellectual growth. Ultimately, the monograph posits that all forms of communication, whether visual, verbal, or musical, function as transformative encounters that shape human identity.

To fully understand the true contribution of this volume, one must compare it to recent landmarks in the field. A key point of comparison is Elina Gertsman's *The Absent Image: Lacunae in Medieval Books* (2021). While Gertsman also explores "lacunae" and the generative power of "nothingness," her work is strictly historical, focusing on Gothic manuscript culture. In contrast, the 2024 Bloomsbury volume takes this concept and applies it transdisciplinarily, proving that the "lacunae" found in a medieval manuscript are cognitively related to the "gaps" we find in contemporary "post-truth" communication. Furthermore, compared to broader reference works like *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History* (2024), which provides a comprehensive overview of narrative across the social sciences, the Haładewicz-Grzelak and García-Ramírez collection is more theoretically focused on the phenomenological act of interpretation. While the Routledge handbook is a more exhaustive "mapping" of the field, the Bloomsbury volume offers a more "surgical" and innovative intervention through its focus on "epistemic spaces" and "multimodal stancetaking." It does not just describe narratives; it provides a heuristic tool for understanding the structure of interpretation itself.

Thus, the central conceit of this volume is that "narrative" serves as the essential connective tissue between diverse modes of human expression. The editors argue that whether one is navigating the silent, symbolic architecture of a Baroque painting or the ephemeral, polyvocal space of a contemporary blog, the human impulse remains the same: the construction of meaning through narrative synthesis. This collection is particularly ambitious in its scope, moving beyond the traditional "interdisciplinary" model toward a transdisciplinary methodology that seeks a unified semiotic language. By focusing on "neomatic lacunae" –the meaningful gaps within an aesthetic object–, the contributors invite the reader to consider how interpretation is an active, co-creative performance rather than a passive reception of data. That being said, my main take is that this book succeeds in its mission to modernize hermeneutic inquiry, making it an essential resource for scholars seeking a unified semiotic language in a "post-truth" world.

For this volume, the editors bring a specialized background in linguistics, semiotics, and cultural studies, which is reflected in the book's rigorous interdisciplinary structure. Their primary objective is to demonstrate how meaning-making is a "diaphanous" process, where the interpreter and the object of interpretation are in constant dialogue. Consequently, the volume is organized into three distinct yet theoretically linked parts: Part I. "Noematic Lacunae" (Art); Part II. "Hermeneutic Diaphaneity" (Literature); Part III. "Epistemic Spaces" (Communication).

1. "Neomatic Lacunae*" in Artistic Discourse*

This first part focuses on the visual and performative, where contributors tackle the "neomatic lacunae" found in artistic expression across painting and music.

David Jaeger and Evan Underbrink open by arguing that the person is inherently a "stranger to itself" (3) and that art serves as a hospitable intermediary for welcoming this self-estrangement: "how do we welcome the stranger that is ourself to ourselves?" (4). They propose guidelines for self-understanding through art based on Aristotelian categories: *aesthesis* (active consumption), *poiesis* (imaginative participation), and *phronesis* (the ethical response) (11-18) to reach a "richer" sense of self-experiencing.

Drawing on the cultural ethos of the Russian Silver Age, Stocksdale argues that artists such as Vasily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, and Nikolai Roerich viewed their work as theurgic, believing that art "not only telegraphed divine messages, but the act of art was divine work" (23-24). Stocksdale notes that for Kandinsky, true art was born from internal necessity. For him, "art should express the artist's inner feelings; inner reality" and that "true art would not conform to the standards of any given epoch. [...] Rather, the artist should express a sacred inner spiritual *feeling"* (34). This perspective connects to Malevich's view that art is a path to "cosmic consciousness" (30). Stocksdale highlights his belief that "each painting represented an 'event' in the artist's spiritual state at the moment of creation," a process he named "the forming element," which "documented 'the journey of the soul' towards divine perfection" (34). Moreover, Stocksdale recounts how Roerich, similar to his peers, also believed in the human component of art and viewed it as the best international language for unification, stating that "'perhaps physically separated souls can begin to understand one another through Art, the language of the highest blessings'" (40). Ultimately, Stocksdale shows how their work functioned as "hieratic communication" designed to chart a godly future for civilization.

Moreover, Andrzej Kozieł explores the iconography of the "Kisses of Mary and St Joseph" in Baroque Silesia. He interprets these sensual motifs as visual signs of *unio mystica*, the mystical union of the soul with the divine (Figure 3.2, *The Kiss of Mary* by Unknown painter, 56). Kozieł emphasises the role of painter Michael Willmann, who designed these images to be both visually attractive and universally understandable, allowing even uneducated viewers to participate spiritually in the scene through emotional identification, eventually achieving a pan-European significance (58-65).

Finally, Marta Falces Sierra explores the boundaries of musical hermeneutics by questioning how absolute music communicates a "story" without words in her study of Elgar's Cello Concerto, Op. 85 (71-84). Drawing on George Steiner's theories, Falces Sierra treats the musical performance as a "discourse situation." She argues that the listener undergoes a process of "transmutation," where abstract musical motifs are interpreted as human gestures or rhetorical statements (77). The chapter illustrates how music employs "cohesive tools" to ensure the "text" remains coherent. She concludes by claiming that while music cannot "narrate" in the traditional literary sense, it builds a "music story" through the "rhetoric of discourse" shared between the soloist and the orchestra (73).

2. Hermeneutic Diaphaneity in Literary Studies

This second part deals with the ways in which literature makes human truth visible through the medium of narrative. The focus is on "artistically marked texts" in literature, with a particular emphasis on African voices and dystopian landscapes.

First, Violetta Jojo Verge creates a methodological bridge between the Adinkra symbols of the Akan people and West African women's literature, treating these visual symbols as a "pre-text" for "re-presentation"—a second chance to present female identities previously silenced by male peers (87). On her part, Beatriz Valverde utilises Yuri Lotman's concept of the "semiosphere" to compare the works of Graham Greene and Abdulrazak Gurnah (110-12). She identifies "frontier characters" who challenge colonial normativity by engaging with African semiotic spaces through egalitarian encounters: "The border of the semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position, giving substance to its semiotic mechanism" (112).

Moreover, Almudena Machado-Jiménez analyses Meg Elison's *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife*, exploring the "women's plague" as a trope for structural patriarchal violence which results in women having to face the consequences of surviving the plague: sexual exploitation. The protagonist, Machado-Jiménez states, "gathers the shared struggles of female survivors of the plague as if it were a communal hermeneutical approach to the illness" (127).

The section concludes with Paula García-Ramírez's study of Christopher Okigbo's poetry, where she identifies the "lament" as a cross-cultural poetic mode that prophesizes the tragedy of the Biafra War, where "members of the Igbo ethnic group in its majority attempted to build an independent state in 1967," leading to one of the bloodiest struggles of the twentieth century (152).

3. Epistemic Spaces in Communication

The final section grounds hermeneutics in the "geopsychic universe" of everyday communication. Fatima Ez-zahra Benkhallouq and Wahiba Moubchir examine Amazigh proverbs as "living words" (*awal idderr*) that reflect the oral transmission of indigenous knowledge and thought patterns "that traceability does not highlight" (168). These proverbs encompass "a shared reality" and "come to illustrate lived situations" of its speakers. In this way, Ez-zahra Benkhallouq and Moubchir, define 'proverbs' as "'folk hermeneutics' of encountered phenomena" (168).

This is followed by Joanna Lubos-Kozieł and Małgorzata Haładewicz-Grzelak's investigation into the "thirdspace" of the Karpacz holiday resort. They argue that tourists engage in a "phenomenological dialogue" with a scripted urbanscape that uses skeuomorphic references to history and regionality to create a sense of safety and immersion (180). Moreover, Valentyna Ushchyna applies "objective hermeneutics" to online COVID-19 discourse, demonstrating how individual "stance-taking" practices create shared epistemic spaces in virtual "ideological bubbles" (206) as a response to the need of "giving explanations to the processes of social semiosis in postmodern, heavily computerized and highly virtualized world," a claim supported by the idea "that meaning is a social category" (206). Ultimately, Ushchyna concludes by saying that objective hermeneutic and speech behaviour can become good instruments for the construction of discourse stances built in today's world online communication. Marta Wrześniewska-Pietrzak addresses the plight of the Deaf community in Poland, detailing the creation of a diagnostic tool to assess the bilingual competencies of deaf pupils in both Polish Sign Language (PJM) and written Polish (223-24).

Finally, the volume closes with Katarzyna Mazur-Włodarczyk et al.'s analysis of the Chinese concept of wenming ("civility"). They frame this political and social engineering strategy as an "edusemiotic" marker, where the cultivation of the environment (ecology) is linked to the Gadamerian concept of Bildung (formation through culture) (241-62).

However, the book's breadth is also its greatest challenge. While the introduction does an admirable job of grounding the diverse essays in the traditions of Ricœur and Gadamer, the transition between some sections can feel abrupt. For example, the transition between the study of "Adinkra symbols" and "deaf pupils in Poland" may require a bit more mental flexibility from readers. Nevertheless, this "fragmentation" actually reinforces the book's thesis regarding the "gaps" (lacunae) in narrative understanding: meaning is found in the gaps between our different ways of seeing. Overall, the scholarship is rigorous throughout, though perhaps a more unified concluding chapter synthesizing the disparate findings would have been a welcome addition.

To conclude, *Hermeneutical Narratives in Art, Literature, and Communication* offers a reasoned and sophisticated assessment of how meaning is constructed across divergent media. The scholarly rigor and the innovative focus on "neomatic lacunae" provide a new perspective of immediate interest to the humanities. In fact, Haładewicz-Grzelak and García-Ramírez have curated a collection that does not just talk *about* hermeneutics, but actively performs it across the messy spectrum of human expression. This volume is highly recommended for scholars of comparative literature, semiotics, and phenomenological research, as well as those interested in intercultural communication and postcolonial studies. Overall, it provides a robust theoretical platform for understanding how humans construct their identities through the maze of communicative activities. Ultimately, the book delivers on its promise to show that hermeneutics remains the vital pathway to self-knowledge in an increasingly complex and changing society.

BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

CLAUDIA ISABELLE MILLER
Independent Researcher

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Living and Learning with Feminist Ethics, Literature, and Art

Dominique Hétu, Libe García Zarranz, Amanda Fayant and Marie Carrière, eds.

University of Alberta Press. 2024. 269 pp.
ISBN: 9781772127713

Written during COVID pandemic, Dominique Hétu, Libe García Zarranz, Amanda Fayant and Marie Carrière's edited volume *Living and Learning with Feminist Ethics, Literature, and Art* challenges the limited and exclusionary nature of dominant feminist care ethics. Each contributor offers a singular approach to care theory by showcasing relationality as central to reading, researching, listening to, witnessing and encountering experiences of struggle. These chapters reflect on systemic colonial, racist and environmental violence and pinpoint specific experiences that are habitually underrepresented in critical enquiry. These intersectional and interdisciplinary approaches to feminist ethics, literature and art demonstrate putting these practices into action through scholarly and creative encounters—an example of academic accountability that aligns with the volume's intentional relationality.

Living and Learning with Feminist Ethics, Literature, and Art is deeply influenced by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's watershed article "Idle No More and Black Lives Matter: An Exchange" offering thirteen chapters of contributions that intentionally and deliberately speak and listen to connections among each other—what editors Dominique Hétu and Libe García Zarranz call "a constellation of ideas" (xv). These interdisciplinary connections draw on foundational concepts from affect theory, Indigenous methodologies, decolonizing methodologies, gender studies, queer studies, critical race studies and crip theory to uncover the limitations of care, adding to current scholarship on Rob Nixon's concept of slow violences. However, the structure of the volume does not divide or group any of the chapters into categories or sections but rather offers the entire conversation as a seamless whole grounded in the central theme of care, relationality and responsibility.

Following the introduction by editors Hétu and García Zarranz, the volume dives straight into a multi-authored, interdisciplinary and creative chapter especially relevant to readers and researchers interested in an embodied practice and performance of giving and receiving care in the process of placemaking. In "Learning to Be Good Relatives: Building Nokom's House," Kim Anderson, Amina Lalor, Sheri Longboat, and Brittany Luby offer their experience building a land-based research center at the University of Guelph Arboretum. Their reflection on the organization of ethical engagement with Indigenous stories within a creative space paves the way for Mylène Yannick Gamache to challenge ongoing problematic literary encounters with Indigenous literatures in the university classroom in the next chapter: "Becoming Critical: On the Limits and Possibilities of Learning with Indigenous Womxn's Stories." In response to

difficult experiences within the classroom, Gamache proposes narratives of Indigenous joy as an ethical and reciprocal response that can promote relationship and care. In the same vein, "I'm Still Not Done Talking about Zombies" by Junie Désil challenges the same pattern emerging from the consumption of black narratives of death.

Continuing the conversation, Erin Wunker's chapter "On Living with Ghosts" turns inwards to discuss the negative feelings produced within the reader when witnessing experiences of struggle. Wunker's encouragement for readerly response that can enable a network of care is then put into practice in Alexandre Baril's "Learning to to 'Live with' Death" which calls for the embodied practice of listening to and being attentive to the need to talk about suicide as an ethics of care. Likewise, Erin Soros's "Here is a Broken Word: Psychosis and Ethical Accompaniment" offers another perspective on staying with and listening to experiences of mental health and psychosis. Along the lines of physical suffering, Veronika Schuchter writes on the intergenerational networks of care that can emerge around encounters with narratives of menopause in "Synergies of Solidarity: Unlearning with Feminist Menopause Imaginaries in Canadian Writing."

Positionality remains central to all contributions in this volume, as, for example, in Élise Couture-Grondin's chapter "Learning with Joyette Marchessault's Decolonial Feminist Critique through Her Autobiographical Relations." Couture-Grondin's approach to Marchessault's text is replete with her own experience as "a feminist lesbian Québecoise with Indigenous heritage" (118) and serves as a catalyst for her academic engagement with Marchessault's texts. Similarly, Larissa Lai uncovers the connections between Chinese Canadian and Black labor experiences on expropriated Indigenous lands governed by the Canadian state in "The Poethical Tao: Chinese Canadian Situated Solidarities on Turtle Island." True to the ethics of care proposed in the introduction, each chapter depicts a reciprocal relationship among the authors and the selected text, artwork, or experience. The most notable example of this would be Libe García Zarranz's chapter "On Trans Aliveness as Feminist Praxis: Ivan Coyote's and Syrus Marcus Ware's Ordinary Archives," an in-depth study of the ordinary as a site of care for trans life, which closes with a copy of her own letter of admiration and encouragement sent to one of the artists.

The final chapters bring the entire volume full circle, demonstrating practices of care within and without the classroom. Anne Quéma illustrates that analysis can unlearn colonialist frameworks by bringing Indigenous art and literature into an ongoing conversation with other artists and writers in her chapter "(Dis)(Re)Learning with Liz Howard's *Infinite Citizen of the Shaking Tent*." Interconnectivity is also front and center in the Stephanie Oliver's reading of Rita Wong's *undercurrent*. The chapter "Breathing in the 'Pulmonary Commons': Conspiring against Canada's 'Settler Atmospherics' in Rita Wong's *undercurrent*" points to the need for land-based decolonial feminist ethics that are attentive to neocolonial atmospheric violence. Sissel M. Bergh's "Learning Landguage" touches on the essential points made by each contributor by walking the reader through a revision and demonstration of Saami stories in her artwork that relearns language through land-based practices and re-establishes Saami presence in Norway.

At its foundation, *Living and Learning with Feminist Ethics, Literature, and Art* is a pragmatic and exemplary collective of artists, scholars, writers and researchers who live and learn with the stories that are being told around them. Their attentiveness to these stories goes beyond listening and responding because they actively look to further the conversation in a dialogue that is not limited to normative academic practice.



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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

IRENE VELASCO CONDE
Universidad de Salamanca

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Affect, Performativity, and Chinese Diasporas in the Caribbean: Hopeful Futures

Elena Igartuburu García

New York: Routledge. 2024. 174 pp.
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Absence, belonging and the archive are intrinsically and intimately interwoven, and constitute some of the central concepts examined when approaching contemporary postcolonial theory. Although the validity of the archive has long been challenged in the realm of the field, being official histories labelled as "[a]n account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (Spivak 2010, 36), reframing, redefining, and renaming histories through alternative spaces in the postcolonial frame are an ongoing, constantly revised activity. The affective turn in postcolonial theory brought a new lens through which rewriting the archive and bringing to the fore voices that had long before been obscured and termed mere absence were made possible in a variety of ways.

Elena Igartuburu García entangles all these different nuisances and approaches that permeate contemporary Postcolonial theory when approaching the Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean. In the introduction to *Affect, Performativity, and Chinese Diasporas in the Caribbean: Hopeful Futures*, Igartuburu acknowledges previous studies of the Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean, focusing specially on the theme of absence and erasure that seems to have labelled and delimited the academic archive of the field. Igartuburu pushes the reader past this preconceived absence when approaching Chinese-Caribbean diasporas and focalises her approach to that of the affective and the archive, creating a theoretical lens in line with authors like Sara Ahmed, Toni Morrison, and Homi Bhabha. In doing so, the book challenges traditional western renderings of archive, memory, and the building of identity and belonging in the Caribbean context. It is with this approach in mind that Igartuburu aims to bridge a new affective archive for the Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean, moving past teleological conventions and colonial ethno-racial structures that seem to demarcate creolisation in the Caribbean, analysing performativity and specific affects such as melancholia, nostalgia, hope together with imaginative spaces.

Affect, Performativity, and Chinese Diasporas in the Caribbean: Hopeful Futures is comprised of seven chapters, including the already mentioned introduction. The second chapter, "Chinese Diasporas in the Americas. Theoretical Boundaries and Textual Possibilities" delves into the specifics of naming when approaching Chinese Diaspora in the context of America. The connection to colonial and postcolonial ethnical structures, marked in this case by the nature of indenture by which most of the Chinese migrants arrived to the Caribbean—although not all, as Igartuburu deftly points out by making

sure to properly address the diversity found in Chinese migrants in the Caribbean, aptly avoiding the homogenisation the community has undergone—, are omnipresent when addressing this naming, accurately denoting the social and historical contexts for readers. Igartuburu even acknowledges the problematics of the usage of diaspora in order to refer to Chinese migration to the Caribbean, and its connection with notions of identity, hybridity, and creolisation that often characterise the Caribbean post-colonially. Bringing to the fore the existence of these specific terms that exist surrounding the Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean helps to highlight the voices and existence of Chinese peoples in the Antillean area, already challenging the gap and absence that has been commonly associated to both the field and the community.

The third chapter, "Between Diasporas. Community as Solidarity," addresses notions of belonging, performance, and identity that were advanced in the introduction of the book. These themes are tackled focusing on Dominican American author Angie Cruz's novel *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005), approached through the frame of the national imagery as seen by critics such as Paul Ricoeur and Judith Butler, intertwined with Bhabha's notions of the duality of invisibility and hypervisibility in the case study of Chinese migrants. These concepts are set to build the specifics of difference and belonging in the Caribbean, which Igartuburu analyses by questioning concepts such as multiculturalism and creolization in the Caribbean context. Igartuburu instead puts forward ideas for alternative belongings constructed through affect, as seen with the case of hope and nostalgia in *Let It Rain Coffee.*

Chapter four, "Melancholic Belonging. Colonial Violence and Resolution," directly challenges Western conceptions and imagery built around migration—specifically migration as a hope or pursuit of improvement—and instead centres itself around melancholia and nostalgia, loss and grief which are able to build intergenerational communities and belonging, like in the case of Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*. This approach also breaks with teleological concepts of adaptation and belonging typically associated to migrants, and incorporates the influences of Chinese epistemology to the Caribbean by highlighting both the importance of the title of the novel in its context and its performing role when linked to melancholic attachment. Igartuburu especially focuses on the palimpsestic nature of violence that characterises the Chinese diaspora in the area, highlighting how this is represented intergenerationally in García's novel. This chapter also tackles the possibilities of resolution—specifically affective resolution—for the violence experienced by Chinese migrants in the Antillean context, which seem to be impossible to grasp and can only be escaped through death, grief, or disappearance. Igartuburu clarifies how this impossibility and irresolution is productive nonetheless affectively, as it allows for the bridging of these experiences to be voiced through speculative and imaginative spaces, which make these violent and colonially-reproducing systems visible for the shared stories of Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean.

The traditionally Eurocentric genre of the Bildungsroman is the focus of the fifth chapter. Igartuburu begins the chapter re-framing the genre and its adaption in the Caribbean context, as such already subverting and challenging the neoliberal and oftentimes conservative subtones that denote the genre. To this avail, Igartuburu employs Kerry Young's *Pao* (2011), analysing its connection with traditional Bildungsroman novels, its ties to the national and how many of these conventions are left behind in an effort to break away from neo-colonialist structures and ideals within the context of the building of independent nations in the Caribbean. Although Igartuburu acknowledges the novel as not a complete break from traditional ideas of the Bildungsroman, with the presence of some neoliberal themes in the novel—which as she clarifies, align with the building of national imagery of postcolonial Caribbean, in this case Jamaica—, she focuses on the productive affects that *Pao* employs in order to build the Caribbean Bildungsroman. Igartuburu highlights how notions of belonging related to hope in Pao are non-conventional and non-conforming, challenging ideas such as the nuclear family or ethnic colonial systems, making empathy as a form agency central to the novel. In contrast to the previous chapter, through the analysis of Pao, Igartuburu approaches notions of visibility—against the immanent erasure that seems to permeate Chinese diaspora—with a more hopeful tone, focusing on the non-passive acceptance of the heritage of colonial systems in the Caribbean and centring affect in the building of communities past individual neoliberal thinking.

The sixth chapter, "Countervisual Narratives. Visualities, Imaginaries, Archives" undertakes the visual language of the imagery of colonial and postcolonial narratives in the Caribbean, with the intent to visualise Chinese diasporas that 'interrupt' official prerogatives linked to consumption and exploitation. A theoretical introduction relating to concepts such as imagery and visuality, as conceived by authors such as Édouard Glissant and Michel Foucault are presented at the beginning of the chapter in order to frame the 'subject-object' relations that are traditionally ensued visually in colonial contexts in order to enforce narratives of consumption. For this endeavour, Igartuburu employs Richard Fung's film *Sea in the Blood* (2000) in order to explore the duality of the visual in post-colonial regimes, locating resistance within the building of visual imagery in the Caribbean and beyond, constructing narratives of counter-visuality, dialoguing and negotiating the colonial ethnic and heteropatriarchal gaze. The chapter highlights the rejection of teleological visual narratives, and centres affects such as love and empathy together with touch as forms of embodiment and connection, which can be seen through different symbols in the film such as water, re-signifying official histories relating to what pertains to the visual—that is: what is meant to be seen and touched and what is meant to be glanced away from—as such building an affective counter-visual space.

The last chapter entails the conclusion to Igartuburu work, neatly encompassing the various frames employed in the previous chapters in order to make readers visualise, imagine, and truly see the affect and effect of Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean. Igartuburu delves into the possibilities that the field can offer when intertwined with the frames of Posthumanism and the Anthropocene, further expanding the spaces she explores while highlighting the intersectional approach to the field of study of the volume.

On the whole, *Affect, Performativity, and Chinese Diasporas in the Caribbean: Hopeful Futures* bridges a diverse variety of theoretical framings in order to tackle the complexities of Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean, reconciling and reframing ideas around the nation, imagery, colonial and postcolonial structures, community, and belonging through affect, and as such, revealing to readers the enforced illusion of the absence of Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean, opening alternative spaces for the field to flourish.



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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

CARLA RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ
Universidad de Oviedo

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El mundo está fatal (pero hay esperanza...). Reflexiones de una ecomujerista blanca

Chían López Rodríguez

Oviedo: KRK. 2024. 426 pp.
ISBN: 978-84-8367-846-6

El mundo está fatal (pero hay esperanza…). Reflexiones de una ecomujerista blanca (2024) is the latest monograph by Chían López Rodríguez, published in the leading gender and feminist studies series *Alternativas* at KRK Ediciones. The volume brings together rigorous reflection on post- and decolonial theory, as well as on feminist and gender perspectives, interwoven with personal and academic trajectories, which the author presents as fundamentally inseparable. The result is a hybrid mode of writing that, as López Rodríguez herself acknowledges, parallels Drusilla Modjeska's proposal in *The Orchard* (1994), where intellectual work coexists with lived experience and poetic expression. This same logic strengthens the text's deployment of Arturo Escobar's *sentipensar* (2014), rendering an embodied mode of academic work inescapable. The book reconstructs an affective and intellectual transnational genealogy of women, articulated through an account—or even a form of confessions—of the author's academic journey from the outset of her career to the present, "from knowledge gained since" (2024, 49).

The book is organised into nine main unnumbered sections, preceded by an introduction by Socorro Suárez Lafuente, which are at times further subdivided, tracing a fluid cartography of critical positions and experiences. This structural principle is prefigured by the epigraph by Rosi Braidotti, in which writing appears as a cartographic practice: a situated form of intellectual mapping that provides orientation yet remains open-ended, making it possible to move across diverse conceptual terrains instead of settling into fixed coordinates. In this way, the volume functions simultaneously as cartography and as labyrinth: it charts affective and epistemic connections and at the same time invokes postmodern thought—which has played a central role in the author's scholarly trajectory—and through which disorientation becomes a way of thinking. The reader is thus invited to navigate the text and simultaneously lose their bearings, encountering the author through sections that stage a process of ongoing revision. These sections revisit concepts previously taken as stable, subjecting them to re-evaluation, and at the same time advance new proposals that move beyond oppositional paradigms towards more dialogic forms of academic and personal understanding.

One of the book's most interesting contributions is precisely this willingness to expose the provisional nature of its own frameworks. It combines a remarkable breadth of cultural references—testament to the author's extensive erudition—and hinges on intellectual self-reflexivity and honesty, qualities that remain rare in academic writing, where positions are more often asserted than reconsidered. This commitment to honesty permeates the entire volume, reaching far beyond

those passages in which the author explicitly positions herself as a white *ecomujerista*, and acknowledges the aporia inherent in appropriating—through academic privilege in white European contexts—knowledge produced in the Global South by racialised subjectivities. This tension is further encapsulated in her formulation of the seemingly contradictory position of a "decolonial feminist" who is also "European" (2024, 323), as well as in her self-reflexive questioning of whether she may be "occupying spaces of enunciation at the expense of others" (2024, 170).

Such honesty is equally evident in her willingness to recognise the obsolescence of earlier perspectives (2024, 123), a gesture that underlines the continuous re-situating of her own academic subjectivity and the ongoing rethinking of the ontological assumptions that ground it. By returning to these questions, the author initiates a broader interrogation that extends beyond the self to address the intellectual and institutional structures of academia itself. This includes a sustained critique of the dominant academic conventions of "impersonality" and "objectivity" (2024, 266), in favour of more situated modes of knowledge production that recognise "pluraversality" and the coeval existence of infinitely diverse experiential worlds (2024, 166), which together constitute human experience in its projection towards, and entanglement with, the more-than-human.

The book's genealogical reconstruction is explicitly rhizomatic and fragmentary, and in its very form it echoes another of the author's central fields of enquiry, Sapphic studies, to which she devoted an earlier monograph, *Ginealogías sáficas: de Katherine Philips a Jeanette Winterson* (2012). Here, the fragment operates as a textual remnant—as in the case of Sappho and other women writers whose works survive only in partial form—and also as an epistemic unit. It embraces, equally, the residual traces of historical violences—colonial, sexual and broadly exploitative—including those reproduced among certain strands of white and trans-exclusionary feminisms. In this sense, the fragment becomes a site of dis/identification (2024, 230) and constitutes a mode of relational thinking that resists closure.

The resulting space is deliberately provisional and liminal: a border zone oriented towards dialogue, where ideas and ways of inhabiting pluriversal worlds intersect. It is conceived as a crossing of perspectives—"among white and Black women, heterosexual and lesbian subjects, and cis and trans* positionalities" (2024, 326)—in which difference is regarded as the very condition of exchange and not as an obstacle.[1] Crucially, this dialogic openness is grounded in the author's sustained re-evaluation of earlier academic mis/encounters. These experiences function as a catalyst for a renewed reflection on epistemological ethics and scholarly practice, ultimately leading her to adopt the position of a cultural "inoutsider," in the sense articulated by Obioma Nnaemeka (1995), where humility is constitutive of responsible knowledge production.

In the genealogical cartography articulated in the book, motherhood occupies a central position, understood as a creative and generative force. It is approached through the embodied experience of the author as biological daughter but also extends to forms of academic and cultural motherhood, expressed in the creation of networks of knowledge and support among women. The possibility of forging such networks is encapsulated in the recurring image of the garden, which functions as a symbol of life and continual regeneration and becomes a heterotopic space that is at once "a sanctuary and a boundary, a refuge and a cell" (2014, 305). Yet this space is not conceived as static or enclosed. Instead, it gestures towards the transgression of localised rootedness and its condition of "bounded realitiy," opening onto an archipelagic configuration of the relational self. In this reconfiguration, subjectivity is continuously reshaped through encounters that give rise to "ideological and ontological networks, unbounded and intimate" (Armstrong 2023, ix, 2), in which connection appears as expansive and situated.

Ultimately, the book advances a clear and demanding proposition: that academic work must be rethought as a relational and ethical practice grounded in responsibility and accountability. This perspective recalls bell hooks's understanding of love and care as a practice enacted through commitment: "The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (2000, 4). In a similar way, López Rodríguez's *El mundo está fatal (pero hay esperanza…)* presents an approach to academia that is situated and deeply implicated in the difficult, ongoing work of relating to others with care and responsibility. From this perspective, the book's significance extends beyond its specific conceptual arguments to its relevance for broader contemporary academic debates. The volume will be of particular interest both to scholars specialising in feminist, gender post- and decolonial studies, and to readers seeking to explore some of the most significant debates that have informed these fields over the past decades.

1 I have translated into English all Spanish-language quotations reproduced in this review.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

LETICIA DEL TORO GARCÍA
Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

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Masculinities in Contemporary Science-Fiction Television

Sara Martín and Michael Pitts, eds.

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Masculinities in Contemporary Science-Fiction Television belongs to the "Library of Gender and Popular Culture," a series published by Bloomsbury, edited by Claire Nally and Angela Smith. The series is devoted to the study of popular culture and gender in contemporary television, cinema, art, and fashion. This book analyzes how the idea of masculinity is built within a group of television science-fiction series, paying special attention to the presentation of characters, the repetition of unwritten patterns, and the deconstruction of existing norms about what it means to "be a man" (Edley, 6-51; Reeser, 17-53).

Studies on masculinity consolidated at the end of the twentieth century. One of its precursors was Raewyn Connell with her book *Masculinities* (1987), where she coined the influential term "hegemonic masculinity" (31). From that moment on, three key aspects have attracted the attention of critics, as well as that of the authors of the text at hand: masculinity perceived as a social construction; masculine marginalization due to questions of sexual orientation, gender or age; and the necessity of fulfilling certain physical and social patterns to be considered a "true man" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832-40; Kimmel 1996, 4-10).

Film studies on masculinity also evolved at that time, although they were devoted to very specific films. However, the novelty of the present work lies in the fact that, for the first time, a single volume covers the analysis of a group of contemporary science-fiction series. Its thirteen authors trace not only a chronological but also a theoretical trajectory of the ways in which masculinity has been represented in these series covering approximately the period from 2002 to 2020.

> The volume presents an in-depth analysis of how men and masculinities are represented in these series to offer constructive criticism aimed at improving the on-screen representation along anti-patriarchal, pro-feminist lines. Men have been object of scholarly attention regarding SF cinema, but science-fiction television series are still largely unexplored territory, which this volume covers in a first (and fresh) approach. (3)

The critical framework contained in this book makes it a valuable tool for scholars working on the representations of masculinity in contemporary times. Centered on science-fiction, the analysis highlights how the prototypical male figure found in these series is white, heterosexual, and of European descent, which leaves little space for other ethnic groups and queer characters, and is commonly accepted as "normal" by the majority of viewers, an idea which is questioned by one of the series analyzed in the book.

> *Sense8* forces spectators to abandon preconceptions and open their minds to other possible worlds, to displace certainties and taken-for-granted stereotypes, and replace them with provisional and undefined possibilities that give hope for a better human future based on love and communal cooperation. (95)

Consequently, this volume may also be of great interest to spectators who wish to develop a critical eye for what they see on television. The fact that many people follow these series, where "hypermasculinity" is assumed to be the masculine ideal, calls into question the kind of "education" viewers receive through them.

Structurally, this book brings together thirteen essays that could be grouped into three major thematic lines. The first block examines representations of masculinity shaped by traditional roles, including hypermasculinity, heteropatriarchal systems, dominance and emotional detachment. The second attracts the attention towards series that challenge these convections, introducing characters who break with fixed or inherited patterns. Finally, the third one turns the attention towards ageing and paternity as supposedly necessary conditions for the attainment of full manhood.

Within the first thematic block, which would be constituted by the majority of the essays in the book, the protagonists of the series personify the key characteristics of hypermasculinity, including power, dominance and emotional detachment. A clear example is Chromartie, in *Terminator: Sarah Connor Chronicles*, a cyborg who employs violence as his primary means of achieving his objectives. Similarly, *Altered Carbon* centers on Kovacs, an individual who, unable to find fulfillment in his reality, reacts by emotionally detaching from the world. As Rocío Carrasco affirms, this represents a type of masculinity that has traditionally functioned as a way to alleviate anxieties about male identity.

> Hard men have always dominated the screen with different purposes, sometimes to foreshadow gender worries, sometimes to offer alternative ways to calm the anxiety or crises of masculinity. They are, ultimately, socio-cultural constructions that speak about gender and body politics. They are also a mockery of the male condition intimidated by means of anatomical exaggeration […]. (178)

Other authors explore the dangers arising from the application of traditional "stereotypical gender characteristics" (147) to socio-cultural groups. This is the case of Kimberly Yost´s analysis of *The Handmaid´s Tale*, a series depicting a dystopian society in which patriarchal values reach their fullest expression through a group of male characters who establish their will through fear and violence.

> masculinity and male leadership are reduced to the power of physically controlling others, particularly through the control of bodies and actions, which leads to psychological and emotional control due to an overwhelming fear of physical torture by the targets of male domination. (143)

Similarly, Miguel Sebastián Martín analysis of *The Man in the High Castle* highlights the close relationship existing between patriarchy and fascism. Martin considers the series as a warning against the rise of neofascism in our societies.

> In this context, *MHC* seems to have revived as a timely reminder of the risks of taking for granted the twin assumption that fascism is totally gone or that it can never return. Spotnitz´s series brings home again PKD´s original message with an added side warning that patriarchal masculinities can be instrumental, if not pivotal, in allowing such a return. (110)

The second block includes a much smaller number of series, since few television shows deviate from the archetypical hypermasculine white male protagonist. One of these series is Sense8, whose protagonists are a group of queer characters with a special ability: "has telepathic and telekinetic powers allowing them not only to be physically connected but also to body swap" (82). Building on this idea, Juan Carlos Hidalgo departs from Zygmunt Bauman´s concept of "liquidity and fluidity" (2000, 1-228) to explore alternative approaches to masculinity. Another series would be that of *The Umbrella Academy*, which centers on a group of anti-heroes whose dysfunctional family relationships form one of the central themes of the story. Breaking with the idea of the perfect hero, its protagonists "struggle to save the world while they cope with personal issues, including domestic violence, child custody, divorce, drug addiction, transition, sibling rivalry, and post-traumatic stress disorder" (192).

The third block focuses on two popular contemporary series, *Star Trek: Picard* and *The X-Files*. Both illustrate how television series must adapt to the ageing of their main characters. Age becomes a key factor in the analysis of masculinity because it implies physical and psychological changes. According to Bridget Kies and Sara Martín, Picard and, even more so Mulder, feel the necessity to reinforce their manhood through paternity. In fact, Martín argues that, in the case of *The X- Files*, the entire structure of the series loses its strength when the narrative is reduced to the idea that Mulder becomes a "complete" man once he is able to make Scully pregnant (Doucet 2018, 90-170; Seidler 2006, 93-102).

> spectators learn for the first time that fatherhood is for Mulder an essential aspect of his identity. Chris Carter […] reframes […] the whole meaning of the series, normalizing Scully´s deviant fertility and placing her together with Mulder in a normative heterosexual relationship which confirms the agent´s virility. (120)

The chronological organization of the essays also proves to be an effective editorial strategy, providing cohesion to a broad and diverse corpus. Most of the series analyzed imagine alternative futures in which characters are either endowed with extraordinary abilities or are integrated into mechanical bodies. Through this deconstruction of the human body, these studies suggest that masculinity is not exclusively determined by biological conditions, but is also shaped by cultural factors and the persistence of inherited traditions (Connell 2005, 67-70).

> Gender is a concept describing the psychological, social, and cultural characteristics of the biological categories of male and female that are artificially constructed, learned behaviors acquire through socialization (Gamble and Gamble 10). Judith Butler´s theory of gender performativity considers gender as "culturally and socially constructed by repeating a set of discursive performances, entailing whatever a person is socially allowed to say and act" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 162). (147)

This chronological criterion also allows readers to recognize that, in a significant part of these series, the futuristic worlds they recreate are inspired in past historical periods in which masculine dominance was taken for granted. In some cases, men imposed their will through violence and terror, while in others this dominance was justified by God´s will. An example of this is *Westworld,* whose action takes place in a theme park inspired by the American Far West (128). In this setting, a group of wealthy men are allowed to exercise gratuitous violence against other beings, in this case, robots, which represent the most vulnerable side of society, as they are unable to defend themselves. These robots embody both helpless masculine and female figures.

In quite a similar way, *The Housemaid´s Tale* strongly recalls the Puritan period in the United States (144), a feature that is particularly pronounced in the series through the characters' costumes (Riello and Rublack 2019, 1-34) that mark their social status(146). In fact, "Nadia Der-Ohannensian aptly describes the series as a "dystopian retro-future (578) where the future society depicted has regressed to a past based on misplaced nostalgia for traditional gender roles combined with a fundamentalist religious ideology" (144).

And the same that happened in Puritan times, men justify their power by appealing to divine will: "Men hold the power and make the decisions because they are not just inherently rational based on their misconceptions of biological difference, but they are given their rationality and authority by God "(148).

Following Linda Hutcheon, these returns to the past should not be seen as mere reproductions, but as reinterpretations shaped by present concerns (Hutcheon 2006, 7–8). In this sense, the repeated appearance of these models of masculinity suggests that the past functions as a legitimizing framework: if these structures were accepted in earlier periods, their reappearance in speculative futures seems to validate their continuity. Paradoxically, then, these futuristic settings often end up reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies rather than challenging them.

To sum up, it is possible to say that this book achieves its objective of offering a projection of how contemporary science-fiction series works using a critical perspective is unlikely to leave readers indifferent. Through its reading, readers can easily recognize how contemporary science-fiction series still contain many features of a nostalgic past in which heroes were hyper-muscular white men who use force to pursue their interests, not always to the benefit of others. Its reading is both engaging and didactic. Scholars of masculinities will find a well-structured critical analysis that enhances their knowledge and supports further research. Viewers can also develop a critical eye towards television content, recognizing sexist patterns and resisting their normalization beyond the screen, whether in science fiction or other artistic forms.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ANE B. RUIZ-LEJARCEGUI
Universidad del País Vasco/
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, UPV/EHU

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Masculinity in Contemporary Science Fiction by Men: No Plans for the Future

Sara Martín

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The intersection between gender and genre fiction such as Science Fiction (SF) has been a popular area of interest since the rise of feminist New Wave SF in the late 1960s and 70s. As part of the Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies series, Sara Martín's *Masculinity in Contemporary Science Fiction by Men: No Plans for the Future* (2025) contributes to this rising concern by offering an exhaustive account of the representation of men and masculinity in twenty-first century Anglophone SF literature written by men of diverse backgrounds. Martín contends that, while female and non-binary authors often use the genre to imagine new forms of gender expression, sexuality and non-normative identities that challenge the hegemonic order in search of fairer futures, male authors seem to have "no plans for the future," as indicated in the volume's subtitle.

As Martín notes in her introduction, both in the fields of Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities and SF studies, research seems to have predominantly focused on the authorial role of (feminist) women/queer writers or the representation of female characters (Attebery 2002; Yaszek et al. 2023). Few works, however, address the topic of masculinity directly; some exceptions include Michael Pitts' *Alternative Masculinities in Feminist Speculative Fiction: A New Man* (2021) and Kac-Vergne's *Masculinity in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (2018), the latter focusing on how the Hollywood film industry fails to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

What makes this volume particularly valuable, I would argue, is Martín's interest in the role of authorship—how and why a work is composed—and the author/character interaction. Altogether, informed by acute readings of the novels, author correspondence and interview materials, this volume effectively demonstrates how contemporary male SF authors are increasingly depicting more nuanced and candid portrayals of men and masculinity in a way that reveals their dissatisfaction with patriarchal hegemonic masculinity. Martín argues that such representations divert from the legacy of idealised masculinity inherited from SF pulp magazines, but remains critical of the slow pace at which change is happening. Although, indeed, these portrayals self-reflect on the inadequacy of patriarchy, showcasing the system's

shortcomings while daring to represent existing masculinities in a harsher light, they nonetheless lack a sense of direction towards a common goal: imagining non-patriarchal futures.

Against the backdrop of current SF research and gender studies informed by Butler's, Connell's and Kimmel's theories, this fourteen-chapter volume analyses the masculinities portrayed in more than forty SF novels written by seventeen authors, which is, in and of itself, an ambitious and impressive achievement. The volume inaugurates its first chapter by analysing the rather contradictory gender discourse in Robert Charles Wilson's *The Chronoliths* (2001), which illustrates how "patriarchal masculinity reproduces itself by announcing its continuation, and even triumph, in the future" (25). While the plot seems to denounce patriarchal systems by having its colonising threat be toppled by an Indian lesbian hero, Martín maintains that Wilson is "too forgiving" (21) towards the gender bias of his narrator—a failed family man depicted as a non-heroic witness to the fight. Ultimately, while individual flaws are acknowledged and criticised, patriarchal values remain unchallenged.

Chapter two studies gay masculinities amidst the taboo incestuous relationships depicted in Geoff Ryman's *Lust: or No Harm Done* (2003) and Samuel R. Delany's *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* (2012). Although the volume could have benefitted from providing other examples of queer relationships, some with less controversial topics, Martín contends that these novels represent narratives of male self-healing and self-respect that demonstrates how queer joy can operate "at the margins of respectability" (36). However, I would disagree with her claim that "no attack against society" (36) is implied by these relationships, since the very depiction of queer happiness in spite of—or due to—said graphic taboos constitutes exactly that: an attack against society, rendered through an unpleasant reader experience.

Transhumanist dreams of human consciousness transfer are discussed in chapter three's analysis of Richard K. Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs trilogy (2002-5). Martín argues that, although its (anti-)heroic male protagonist has a nuanced political agenda and takes action towards creating a better future, he still participates in patriarchal compliance. Sexual assault is not acknowledged for what it is, directly contradicting his anti-patriarchal ideals, and the wounded, albeit nuanced, "hard-boiled" hero is thus perpetuated. Similarly, she criticises Morgan's disinterest in exploring the dissident gender identities and sexualities that the body-swapping *novum* in the narrative offers.

John Scalzi's *Old Man's War* (2005-15) series, analysed in chapter four, is for Martín another example of how seemingly progressive alternatives to hegemonic models of masculinity can also endorse conservative ideologies. While the series appears to offer a promising, caring domestic masculinity through its soldier-turned-family man character, in truth, Martín argues, this diversion from hegemonic masculinity ultimately endorses what Freeman (2010) calls "chrononormativity": the shift is prompted by upholding the traditional model of heterosexual marriage and family dynamics, where women are reduced to narrative tools through which to assert said masculinity.

Similarly, chapter five also illustrates how hegemonic masculinity can be perpetuated within anti-patriarchal stories, as seen in the Culture series' *Surface Detail* (2010), by Iain M. Banks. Although its world-building imagines a non-patriarchal utopian society where such masculinities have not arisen as cultural constructs, Martín criticises its wasted potential: the villain—himself a cautionary tale about the threat posed by neoliberalism and tech billionaires—is defeated not by this care-based community, but by a traditionally "heroic" man. Ultimately, she contends, the narrative belongs to a non-transgressive "macho fantasy" (88) that deprives female victims of the agency needed to avenge their abuse.

Chapter six offers critical commentary on Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011) and *Ready Player Two* (2020). While masculinity is not asserted through aggressiveness or sexual prowess, Martín notes how there is a narrative of self-empowerment that nonetheless endorses the patriarchal foundations upon which neoliberal dreams of virtual immortality are based. Escaping victimhood is thus achieved not by imagining solutions to collaboratively undermine social and economic inequalities, but by becoming the enforcer of the system itself, which is, for Martín, a disappointing step backwards.

However, in Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck's critique of heroic masculinity in *The Expanse* (2011-21), analysed in chapter seven, Martín finds a step forward. The protagonist's hero journey is progressively framed by the authors as a selfish quest to assert his vulnerable American masculinity through "heroic" deeds. In fact, the series eventual de-mythification of the hero narrative does not celebrate the character's final sacrifice, but rather denounces it. Hence, Martín argues that, while no collective form of resistance is suggested, the novels expose the ineffectiveness of actions carried out by individual heroes when fighting patriarchal, totalitarian regimes.

Chapter eight compares the "resilient masculinity in the context of disaster" (119) found in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) and Andy Weir's *The Martian* (2011). Martín's choice to study both works together seems substantiated by their focus on the everyday mundaneness of survival, depicting a masculinity where men's worth is not contingent on heroism but on "the value of their efforts" (132), which prioritises hard work and problem-solving skills to the detriment of emotional intelligence. However, the second reason for comparison—the narrative implications of reader character-

construction regarding race—could have been further expounded, since it is addressed in Whitehead's case, but is barely developed in Weir's analysis.

Indigenous SF is explored in chapter nine, which offers a reading of Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse* (2011) and *Robogenesis* (2014) that opposes its critical acclaim. Claiming that Wilson has been "excessively protected from negative criticism" (135), Martín contends that the duology falls short on its gender perspective. The depiction of collective action to fight against world-threatening AI, while in line with Indigenous futurism, is undermined by the patriarchal discourses embedded in its heroic "warrior" masculinities, which diminish the depth of female characterisation and father/son relations in the novels.

Chapter ten argues that, unlike in Scalzi's series, Ian McDonald's *Luna* trilogy (2015-19) does present an alternative, domestic masculinity focused on paternal love that rejects patriarchal gender roles. While such patriarchal binary systems still remain in place within the larger narrative, Martín sees an inherent optimism in its alternative future, since fatherhood is presented as key to developing an ethics of care that challenges hegemonic models of masculinity.

In chapter eleven, Martín makes a provocative case for reading Yoon Ha Lee's *Machineries of Empire* (2016-19) as an "incidental queer/trans* (or trans*/queer) text" (168), interpreting the series as a tale of queer alliance against patriarchal villainy that metaphorically speaks to trans experiences. While the chapter is supported by pertinent queer theory, I believe this reading may nonetheless downplay the gravity of the gender violence from which this "trans" embodiment emerges. The series' non-consensual female/male merging of consciousness could be viewed as an appropriation of the female body, where assimilation is done through complacency and then rationalised as mentorship. Furthermore, the extent to which this assemblage and/or narrative may indeed apply to trans experience could have also been expanded on.

The study of Tade Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy (2016-19) in chapter twelve starts with an informative overview of history and terminology pertinent to African SFF and Afrofuturism. Addressing contradictory author/character tensions, Martín deftly highlights how its male protagonist operates as narrative scapegoat in order to maintain "the moral integrity of the heroic women" (183). Ultimately, she dissents how sexist, patronising and verbally abusive male characterisation persists in an apparently "anti-colonial, pro-queer, feminist" (192) future where alien colonisation is thwarted by collaborative efforts.

Chapter thirteen offers a poignant examination of Neal Stephenson's *Fall; or, Dodge in Hell* (2019), displaying, once again, Martín's sharp criticism towards overtly simplified transhumanist visions of virtual realities under capitalism. She acknowledges the optimism in the "classic American self-made man" (195) character whose masculinity is asserted through emotional maturity and familial love, but contends that it falls short due to the novel's anticlimactic duel for dominion over digital afterlife, since it concludes in patriarchal hierarchies being maintained.

Lastly, in examining Kim Stanley Robinson's *Ministry for the Future* (2020), Martín contributes to scholarly discussions on the intersection between anti-patriarchal and eco-conscious narratives. She ponders on the implications of having humanity's "plans for the future" be an outcome of ecoterrorist actions to stop climate change, which ultimately forces anti-patriarchal men to enact violence and prevents alternative masculinities from emerging.

All things considered, this volume represents a valuable contribution to the study of gender in SF, particularly regarding the intertextual and extradiegetic contexts that inform each analysis. In considering both the commercial nature of SF novels as products of consumption, and the socio-political and cultural environments in which they arise, Martín contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations on the topic. Her commentary on the models of masculinity that likely developed as a result of the current political climate in the United States particularly stands out as pertinent and much needed, especially amid the rather apolitical stances of some authors she discusses. Furthermore, the volume's engaging prose is also praiseworthy, since its highly accessible summaries allow for a full submersion into novels with extensive world-building. Understandably so, however, the volume's limitations lie in its ambitious nature: the corpus selected mostly includes works by white American cis-heterosexual men, "the ones dominating the field" (6), but it does encourage further research on SF not covered by the volume due to length constraints.

In conclusion, *Masculinity in Contemporary Science Fiction by Men* successfully provides a timely commentary on the portrayal of masculinities in twenty-first century Anglophone SF and acts as a pressing call for action. In noting their shortcomings, the volume encourages male SF writers to develop the socio-political agenda for achieving "anti-fascist, anti-patriarchal futures in which men are satisfied with their masculinities," (1) which has long been explored by their female and non-binary counterparts. All in all, acknowledging this shift towards non-hegemonic masculinity, Martín remains hopeful that the path towards liberated masculinities, albeit gradual, is already underway.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

PATRICIA ÁLVAREZ SÁNCHEZ
Universidad de Málaga

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Desde lejos. Antología de cuentos y otros textos multiculturales

Alejandra Moreno Álvarez y Luisa Campuzano, eds.

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Desde lejos. Antología de cuentos y otros textos multiculturales (2024), edited by Alejandra Moreno Álvarez and Luisa Campuzano, is a compelling anthology that brings together the translation into Spanish of twenty-four texts written by authors—many are women—from diverse multicultural backgrounds. The collection, carefully translated by women philologists from various Spanish universities—most of whom have been or are affiliated with the Universidad de Oviedo and possess extensive experience in postcolonial literature and gender studies—offers a rich tapestry of voices that explore their experiences and traditions.

The anthology begins with a short prologue by Moreno Álvarez that situates the stories within a multicultural framework and mentions that most of the works were originally published in the Cuban magazine *Revolución y Cultura*, in the section titled "Desde Lejos," between 2011 and 2018. The stories' treatment of tradition and modernity reflects Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) well-known notion of the 'third space,' a space where hybrid identities emerge through intense intercultural dialogue. Each translated text is preceded by a black-and-white photograph and a brief biographical note on the author, a paratextual feature that helps the reader situate the narratives. All the texts also include illustrations by Hanna Chomenko, a Cuban visual artist of Polish descent, who combines ink and watercolours to create her drawings. Together, they reflect diverse voices that explore identity, gender, and social constraints, and all certainly deserve our attention. However, given the number of chapters, it would be impossible to summarize every story without oversimplifying the collection. I will therefore focus here only on a selection of stories, while acknowledging the richness of the anthology.

Among the selected stories, Sia Figiel's "The Dancers" opens the volume and stands out as a richly layered, dreamlike narrative. Figiel was a Samoan writer and painter whose work often explored indigenous people's lives, identity, power, and sexuality, while also reflecting on the impact of colonial influence on everyday life. As Edward Said observed in *Orientalism* (1978), literature can correct misrepresentations when it gives voice to those who were silent in dominant narratives. This is evident in Figiel's first and best-known book, *Where We Once Belonged*, which won the Commonwealth Prize. "Los bailarines," Paloma Fresno Calleja's translation of the short story presented in *Desde lejos*, also serves as a counter-narrative to Orientalism, as it narrates the experiences of a woman navigating personal and cultural expectations in her Samoan community. The depiction of the island, its people and their relationships contrast sharply with the Orientalised paradise portrayed in Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928).

One of the longest chapters is Isabel Carrera Suárez's translation of a series of fragments from "The Asian Disease" by Simone Lazaroo, an Australian writer of Eurasian descent. The story weaves a deeply personal narrative that reflects on illness, migration, and racism in Australia. Told from the perspective of a woman named Miss Nazario, the plot begins with her visit to her ageing father in a nursing home in Perth and later moves to memories of her father's life as a Eurasian man who migrated from Singapore to Australia. The father's illness becomes a metaphor for the effects of colonialism, displacement, and racial discrimination. Through this intergenerational perspective, Lazaroo interrogates how "Asian" identity has been feared and gradually reconfigured within Australian society, revealing the intimate costs of assimilation.

Many of the stories translated in the anthology offer a kaleidoscopic mosaic of women's experiences across different cultural contexts, revealing both the constraints imposed by social expectations and the strategies of resistance that emerge from them. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) argues, transnational feminist perspectives reveal how women's struggles and agency are shaped by the intersection of structures of power and cultural specificity. This framework is particularly relevant, for example, in Unoma Azuah's "The Rebel," translated by Cristina Cruz Gutierrez. "La Rebelde" powerfully depicts female friendship, love, and sexual identity, and shows how women can assert their agency despite societal and family expectations. The story follows Alice, a young woman pressured by her father to marry, and her friend Ladi, who encourages her to live her life independently. Through their bond, the narrative examines the ways women support each other in difficult situations. Similarly, Ambai's "Yellow Fish"—translated by Alejandra Moreno Álvarez—offers a lyrical meditation on women's lives, memory, and loss. Beautifully written and set against the rhythms of fisherwomen at work, the narrative centres on a yellow fish discarded on the shore, struggling for water. Its vulnerability becomes a catalyst for the narrator's memories of her daughter, who died when she was a baby. Through the parallel between the fish's return to the water and the child's imagined rebirth—the original story says "la que nace del agua [she who rises from the waters]" (2024, 66)—Ambai blurs the boundaries between loss, death and life. The story thus reframes maternal grief as a negotiation between grief, memory, imagination, and the persistence of life. On the other hand, Nalo Hopkinson's "Riding the Red," translated by Carolina Fernández Rodríguez, reimagines Little Red Riding Hood through a grandmother's perspective, blending folklore, female sexuality, and bodily experience. The story explores puberty, desire, and survival, and emphasizes how women share practical knowledge across generations.

Mary O'Donnell's "Women of the World (Or Jen's Truth in Two Parts)," translated by Pilar Villar-Argáiz, extends this exploration by presenting two different forms of violence against women. In the first part, the protagonist's anxiety on her wedding day is managed through sedation, arranged by her mother, revealing a form of maternal authority and abuse. The second part shifts to the unexplained disappearance of Lavinia, a female neighbour, situating women's everyday lives within a landscape of persistent threat. Together, these episodes expose forms of violence that differ in visibility: one enacted privately and normalized through familial authority, the other abrupt and public. However, while only the latter is immediately legible as violence and punishable, the former is equally abusive.

In contrast to O'Donnell's exploration of violence against women, Hiromi Goto's "Cuentos de la leche," translated by Belén Martín Lucas, shifts the focus to women's experiences of recent maternity, presenting them with sharp irony. The story reveals how breastfeeding is presented as something natural, instinctive, and fulfilling, while the mother's physical pain, exhaustion, and emotional distress are constantly dismissed by medical discourse, family members, and her partner. Maternity becomes a site of coercion and bodily alienation rendering women's suffering invisible in the name of the child's well-being. The story's ironic conclusion makes evident that the protagonist is well aware of the physical and emotional cost of maternity.

A recurring theme throughout the anthology is the experience of being an immigrant across different spaces and generations. This resonates with Stuart Hall's (1990) idea that cultural identity is never fixed but continuously negotiated. Sneja Gunew's stories "Mo[t]he[r]/H[t]ome[r]" and "Reading" exemplify this theme. The first title in English reminds the reader of the immigrant experience, as the words can be read *mother* and *home*, but they also suggest *other* and *otherness*. In María Socorro Suárez Lafuente's translation into Spanish, "Madre/Matrix," the title preserves the metaphorical depth and evokes a generative space. In the short story, the narrator reflects on her mother's attempts to construct a home and preserve family continuity in a foreign country, exposing the tensions between aspiration and the necessity of cultural adaptation. "Reading" shifts to the narrator's interior world and explores how memory and languages serve as tools to claim personal identity in a foreign country echoing some of Derrida's reflections in *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (1996). Together, these stories illustrate the emotional and psychological dimensions of migration.

Adding to the anthology's linguistic diversity, Margarita Blanco Hölscher's translation of Seher Çakir's "Hanna's Briefe" (originally in German) brings another unique voice to the collection. Born in Istanbul in 1971 and living in Vienna since 1983, Çakir writes across Turkish and German, engaging with themes of exile, identity, and the everyday lives of women. In "Las cartas de Hanna," the story unfolds through the letters of Zehra, which reveal moments of domestic violence. Following the epistolary tradition of previous narratives, Çakir offers a portrayal of resilience, fear, and agency within a female-centred narrative.

One of the stories deals with animal rights, although other interpretations are also possible. Jeff Noon's "Specimens"—translated into Spanish by Lucía Prada González—follows a series of mysterious cages that appear on the streets of Manchester, each containing a progressively larger animal. The public and authorities respond in escalating ways: a tram crushes the worm in the first cage with no apparent concern; the mouse in the second cage draws minimal attention; but when a dog is found confined in the third cage, bystanders, police, and media converge and the animal is rescued. This pattern highlights society's selective responses to vulnerability and suffering. The cages' origin and purpose remain a mystery, and the story culminates with the appearance of an empty cage with an open door. Through this imaginative and unsettling progression, Noon transforms the narrative into an allegory about ethical responsibility and the fragile boundaries between human and nonhuman life. The tale resonates with the anthology's broader concerns, exploring how societies perceive and ethically engage with displacement and vulnerability.

The anthology's geographical scope is striking. It moves conceptually from the antipodes to the Caribbean, with Cuba as its centre, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and other countries, illustrating a thoughtful map of global intersections. From Sia Figiel's "Los bailarines," which merges Western literary genres with Samoan oral storytelling, to Beatriz Rivera's "Pasiones africanas," set in New York, the anthology traverses a wide array of social and cultural landscapes. Continuing this geographical and thematic diversity**,** Lidudumalingani Mqombothi's "Memories we lost" ("Los recuerdos que perdimos" in María Jesús López Sánchez-Vizcaino's translation) is set in a South African village and recounts the narrator's experiences of growing up with a sister who suffers from schizophrenia. Through vivid depictions of family, community rituals and the siblings' secret ways of connecting, the story highlights resilience, love, and memory despite significant difficulties. Similarly, Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), a Canadian writer of Mohawk and English descent, brings her bicultural perspective to "The Deep Waters," translated by Alicia Menéndez Terrazo. The story retells a Squamish flood legend alongside an Iroquois version. By blending Indigenous oral traditions with her unique viewpoint, Johnson emphasizes communal and gendered efforts in survival.

Across its myriad narratives, *Desde lejos* illuminates the entanglements of postcolonialism, gender, migration, and globalization, revealing how everyday experiences are shaped by larger social, historical, and cultural forces. By bringing together celebrated authors and lesser-known writers, the book foregrounds both the diversity and continuity of multicultural storytelling. Its geographical and cultural scope underscores the interconnectedness of human experiences and shows how identity, memory, and community resonate across spaces. In addition to its literary richness, the anthology exemplifies the potential of translation as a tool for education and cultural exchange, as it fosters cross-cultural understanding among readers in Spanish.

Overall, *Desde lejos* is a remarkable contribution to contemporary literature that broadens readers' horizons to multiple cultures and perspectives. While the texts had previously appeared in *Revolución y Cultura*, their publication here in book form recontextualises them as the stories gain in resonance when read together. As Lawrence Venuti (1995) has argued, translation is never a transparent act but a form of cultural mediation that shapes how texts travel and are received. From this perspective, the anthology thus reminds us that translation and literary exchange are not merely acts of reproduction but rather acts of dialogue and ongoing negotiation of meaning in an interconnected world.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

MANUEL RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ
Universidad de Salamanca

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Modernist Belongings: Studies on Community, Identity, Adscription

Juan L. Pérez-de-Luque and Paula Martín-Salván, eds.

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Nowadays, to talk about community and belonging means to interrogate the very fabric of the nation, the State, and the self. Jean-Luc Nancy, in his revolutionary volume *The Inoperative Community* (1991), reminds us that the individual "can be the origin and the certainty of nothing but its own death" (3). Therefore, communitarianism rejects the liberal atomic focus on the individual, advocating instead for mutual responsibility and a sense of the communal as surrender to the collective. From these opposing tendencies emerges the question of *community*, which challenges us to think about new models of socio-political organization and communitarianism, and its aesthetic and literary representations. At a time of rising political polarization, global economic and environmental crises, and increasingly tense international relations, studies on community have become an imperative. For Nancy, the first task for theorizing about community is to focus "on the horizon *behind* us. This means questioning the breakdown in community that supposedly engendered the modern era" (9; emphasis in the original). And this is precisely what Juan L. Pérez de Luque and Paula Martín Salván set out to do in their volume entitled *Modernist Belongings: Studies on Community, Identity, Adscription* (2025).

This collection, born from the contributors' belonging to the academic community, discusses modernist literary concerns with community, belonging, and identity around two main axes: socio-political belonging and aesthetic ascription. As such, Pérez de Luque and Martín Salván's volume offers a transatlantic overview of some of the most representative exponents of modernist anglophone literature, from Virginia Woolf and James Joyce to Ezra Pound, among many others, in an attempt to unravel the enigma of community (Jiménez 2013) and to investigate new forms of thinking and writing about belonging.

In the early 20th century, the onto-epistemological shift of Western society from religion and spirituality to a deterministic and fully materialist understanding of reality triggered a collective sense of psychological unrest, furthered by the rising secularism after the destruction of World War I. Such philosophical breakdown led to the apparent dissolution of the concept of community itself and to a yearning for its recovery. Indeed, Nancy explains how "the thought of community or the desire for it might well be nothing other than a belated invention that tried to respond to the harsh reality of modern experience: namely, that divinity was withdrawing infinitely from immanence […] and that the divine essence of community—or community as the existence of a divine essence—was the impossible itself" (10). On this basis, the dominant scholarship on modernist literature often revolves around themes of solipsism, alienation and dissolution of traditional institutions (Lukács 1963; Eagleton and Williams 1989; Bradbury and McFarlane 1991). Considering

this and in our time, *Modernist Belongings* offers a new and critical approach to modernist rootedness, formally and aesthetically wise, departing from conceptions of Modernism as an estranged movement and introducing an innovative perspective on alternative forms of belonging by focusing on this horizon behind us.

Part I, concerned with dynamics of belonging and estrangement, begins with Pilar Botías Domínguez's "A Portrait of National Melancholia in James Joyce's *Dubliners*;" a chapter that presents a comprehensive reading of two short stories revolving around the concept of Joycean ambivalence, "Evelyn" and "A Little Cloud." Integrating readings of Joyce's works as illness narratives and their autobiographical inflection, Botías' analysis draws from Sigmund Freud's seminal article "Mourning and Melancholia," to explore how Joyce's depictions of local melancholia encompass a wider panorama of national stagnation. This chapter thus offers an insightful approach to melancholia as a source of alienation and identity loss and the complexity and interconnectedness of human relationality, as associated, ultimately, with Joyce's attempt to understand the paralysis of his home country in his exile from it.

Joyce's supranational influence is further considered in the next chapter by Julián Jiménez Hefferman, where he proposes a thoroughly researched interrogation of Jacques Derrida's study of Joyce's work and Umberto Eco's foregrounding of Derridean scholarship on the Irish author. Framed within an encyclopedic knowledge of Eco's *opera*, Jiménez's work acknowledges Derrida's speculations on Joyce's *Ulysses*—as "inventive and [having] something to say . . . something, that is, that may arguably disturb perceptions and conventions in philosophy of language" (41)—also demonstrating a critical attitude towards Derrida's choice of Joyce's masterpiece for his lecture in Frankfurt. Subscribing himself to Rodolph Gasché's (1994) criticism, Jiménez ultimately proves that "Eco exposed the *parodic* logic of Joyce's hypertextuality before Derrida, and [how] this anteriority limits the originality of some of the latter's claims" (31; emphasis in the original). In this manner, the chapter presents new critical evidence on Derrida's accidental choice of Joyce's work (Jiménez 41) and a tribute to Eco's influence on literary criticism.

In the third chapter, "From *Mrs. Dalloway* to *Clarissa*: A Community Study," María Valero-Redondo departs from Irish literature to focus on Virginia Woolf's speculation on community through fiction and her stream of consciousness writing technique. Aligning her analysis with Nancy's (1991) theorization on inoperative communities, Valero-Redondo positions Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as "an exploration of unworked communities" (65). The author centers on the characters of Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, and their interpersonal relationships, to rethink traditional understandings of community through exposition to death, vulnerability, and alterity. Hence, Valero-Redondo's reading subverts individualistic understandings of community, highlighting how Woolf's stream of consciousness allows readers an intimate exploration of characters' psyche and to understand narrative fluidity as reflective of fluid configurations of community; ones that challenge the isolation of the self and "the boundaries of the ego, immunity, or enclosure" (64). On this basis, this chapter presents a critical interrogation of operative communities as connected with the nation-state—and its manifestations: patriotism and its symbols and rituals—and its rigidity, cause of social stagnation in post-World War I England. Thus, Valero-Redondo presents a reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* that investigates "the exploratory enactment—the experimental dramatization—of imagined communities" (Jiménez 2) and the possibilities opened up by Woolf for more genuine forms of community, based on an openness to vulnerability and alterity.

The fourth chapter inaugurates a new section in this collection, one devoted to aesthetic ascription to Modernism and questions of literary transmission, interpretation and adaptation (Pérez de Luque and Martín Salván, xi). This essay by Leonor María Martínez Serrano, entitled "A Natural History of Curiosity: Ezra Pound on Literate Culture and Reading," takes as its object of study the American author's essay "How to Read" (1931) and his long length works *ABC of Reading* (1934) and *Guide to Kulchur* (1938). Under the premise of Pound's sense of curiosity, his fascination with books as a physical medium and their craftsmanship, and his desire to educate others, Martínez presents readers with a catalogued description of Pound's attempt at creating his own portable *Weltliteratur*. Martínez thus recovers Pound's lists of essential authors, a textual body of work that honors his production, both poetic and critical, and his effort to produce a universal literary education.

The following chapter continues with the discussion on modernist aesthetics. In it, Juan L. Pérez-de-Luque illustrates how H. P. Lovecraft, despite his rejection of modernist trends and experimentation, shared many of the movement's features, both formally and thematically. As such, Pérez-de-Luque provides a close reading of Lovecraft's work, articulated around three main axes: linguistic expression, aesthetic, and ideology. Accordingly, the author places Lovecraft's work within modernist literature, based on the American author's denaturalization of language, corruption of the pastoral, and alignment with fascism. A linguistic, thematic and ideological breakdown that reflect a belief in the 20th century decline of Western civilization and that allow Pérez-de-Luque to propose this new reading of Lovecraft's work as adjacent to, if not unwillingly connected with, the modernist tradition. Also opening future lines of research into Lovecraft's oeuvre, such as his use of myth or the role of history.

María Luisa Pascal Garrido concludes investigations of aesthetics and ascription with an essay outlining the reception and translation of E. E. Cummings' poetry in Spain. This chapter begins with a historical and formal introduction to Cummings' poetic experimentation and his initial reception in the States, which offers a rigorous introduction to the

poet's voice, style and shattering of the English language. Pascal then continues by reviewing translations into Spanish of Cummings' work, through lists and comparisons of different editions from the 1960s to 2023, and evaluating the success of editors and translators in rendering the American poet's subversive verse into Spanish. Considering this, Pascal's review proves to be a detailed catalogue of translations of Cummings into Spanish and a rigorous guide for approximating this author's work, one that reveals the increased interest and improved representation of his poetic legacy in Spain.

In the seventh chapter, María J. López examines Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy* (1951 - 1953) through the lens of transparency and opacity, inscribing the Irish author's work within Critical Transparency Studies. A relatively new and interdisciplinary field of scholarship, Critical Transparency Studies draw from different disciplines—political science, sociology, anthropology—to interrogate the dialectics of transparency and opacity in an increasingly digitized world. In this context, explains López, "critics and theorists have turned their attention to literature as a discourse that radically challenges the rhetorics and implications of transparency" (123). As such, this essay focuses on the Beckettian subject and his unknowability—mainly represented through a breakdown in communication—and the possibilities it offers for resisting transparency in a technocratic age of hypervisibility. Consequently, López's reading of Beckett positions his characters as a "radical, absolute exemplification of […] [Glissant's] right to opacity" (139), revaluing Beckett's *Trilogy* in the face of the ideologization of transparency.

Paula Martín-Salván concludes this collection with her chapter entitled "Community, Immunity and Auto-Immunity in Flannery O'Connor's 'The Displaced Person'." Framed within studies on community by Jean-Luc Nancy, Roberto Esposito, and Jacques Derrida, this chapter proposes a tentative analysis of immunity as a constitutive principle of community and how said immunity can lead to auto-immunity, triggering the community's self-destruction (Martín-Salván 143). Martín-Salván therefore explores racial and class tensions in O'Connor's *novella* as reflective of Southern rural communities in the States and her commentary on "racial politics, post-war economics, and US international policies on refugees" (148). In this sense, this essay suggests an intersectional reading—focusing on issues of class, ethnicity, and gender—of this story, illustrating, firstly, a community's auto-immunitary response to the arrival of an ethnic and religious other, and, secondly, its subsequent dissolution. And so, revealing "the auto-immunitary dynamic of the Jim Crow era social system" (Martín Salván 159) and the inoperancy of auto-immune practices in multicultural contexts.

Withdrawing from traditional interpretations of Modernism, *Modernist Belongings: Studies on Community, Identity and Adscription* focuses on modernist authors' search for community and belonging. Organized in a comprehensive manner, by following the dates of publication of each text, this volume presents a thorough examination of canonical modernist authors, as well as more marginal ones, which subverts hegemonic discourses on solipsism and alienation. This collection, with its varied selection of essays, considers Modernism as a space for questioning "the very notion of community, and […] [for proposing] alternative forms of belonging, shaped through enigmatic communitarian bonds" (Pérez de Luque and Martín Salván, x); hence, approximating readers to a new understanding of this literary movement and its subversive potential for theorizing about new forms of relationality. Ultimately, this book not only redefines our vision of Modernism, but also illustrates the movement's influence on current cultural narratives of belonging.



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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ANTONIO REBOREDO
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC)

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Reading Wayde Compton: Geohistorical (Re) Constructions of Black Vancouver.

Fernando Pérez-García

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Fernando Pérez-García's *Reading Wayde Compton: Geohistorical (Re)Constructions of Black Vancouver* offers an ambitious contribution to the fields of (Black) Canadian literature, Spatial Literary Studies and, more generally, (Afro)diaspora studies. Published as part of Routledge's *Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory* series, this monograph sets out to provide the first comprehensive, book-length study of the literary production of Black Canadian author Wayde Compton, positioning his poetic and narrative work at the intersection of race, urban space, and transmodern identity formation. In doing so, Pérez-García addresses a notable gap in scholarship, as Compton—despite his moderate influence in the local context of Vancouver—has remained relatively underexamined within both Canadian literary studies and the broader literary criticism dealing with the Black diaspora.

The central thesis of the book is that Compton's literary production can be best understood through a geohistorical and transmodern lens that foregrounds the co-constitutive relationship between urban space and Black identity in multicultural—and polyvocal—Vancouver. Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework that blends Spatial Literary Studies, Hip hop epistemology, and decolonial transmodern theory—the last two extensively discussed and developed by the author himself—Pérez-García argues that Compton's work reimagines Black belonging at the margins of the Canadian urban (Afro)diaspora while fostering coalitions with Indigenous and other racialized communities of the country. This approach allows the author to situate the city of Vancouver and the wider environment of British Columbia—often peripheral in discussions of Black Canada and the (Black) Afrodiaspora—as a crucial site of diasporic articulation and (cross-)cultural production of its minority and marginalized black population.

In the introduction of this monograph, Pérez-García provides a thorough overview of Compton's multifaceted career as a poet, essayist, urban activist, academic, anthologist, and fiction writer, emphasizing his role in recovering the history of those spaces especially significant to the Black community of Vancouver and shaping a potential Black literary canon in British Columbia (Compton 2001). The book thus aims to articulate and complement those existing debates in Black Canadian studies, engaging with other national key figures of (Black) Canadian literary studies, such as George Elliott Clarke, Rinaldo Walcott, and Winfried Siemerling. By framing Compton's work within tensions between diasporic and cultural or nation-centered approaches to Blackness (Black nationalism, Afrocentrism, Afropessimism), Pérez-García also

convincingly demonstrates the relevance of his project and that of a methodology specially developed for the historical context of the Black population of Vancouver, where the latter have never exceeded 1% of its total inhabitants:

> Repetitive and self-referential models such as Afrocentrism or Black nationalism do not fit well with the reality of Vancouver's Black racial experience, so the ontological void of this node is generative and filled through the cross-cultural interpellation and adaptation of Afro-diasporic elements and those of other cultures. (Pérez-García, 171)

The monograph is structured into five chapters, each addressing different aspects and literary genres of Compton's oeuvre. The first chapter focuses on Hogan's Alley—a historic urban section of the city with a predominantly Black population, destroyed and abandoned by its inhabitants following a failed urban renewal project—as a site of possible remembrance and resistance against processes of gentrification. Here, the author examines how Compton's poetic work in his collections *49th Parallel Psalm* (2005) and *Performance Bond* (2008) could participate in these potential processes of urban commemoration and cultural recovery of the lost Black spaces of Vancouver. Pérez-García compellingly shows how Compton's role as a poet and writer intersects with local grassroots initiatives and heritage practices of the Black community, arguing that these efforts contribute to the re-rooting of Black Vancouver. At the same time, however, the same analysis raises questions about the efficacy and limitations of such commemorative practices, particularly when they are not accompanied by material forms of restitution or structural change. At this point, the author's own methodology, drawn from some of the main authors critical of the modern and contemporary urbanism and spatialities—such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Katherine McKittrick, Dolores Hayden or Mike Davis—also marks a possible limit to these commemorative actions stemming from literary production and activism.

The second and third chapters explore the role of Hip hop aesthetics and the figure of the trickster in Compton's work. Pérez-García introduces the concept of "Hip hop epistemology" as a key theoretical contribution, defining it as a "form of spatial, transmodern knowledge linked to Hip hop" (19) and therefore rooted in urban, local, Black vernacular cultures and the broader Afrodiaspora. This framework allows him to read Compton's use of collage, remix, and intertextuality *techniques* as both aesthetic strategies and modes of collective knowledge production.

This emphasis on Hip hop as a communal and dialogic practice is particularly attractive, highlighting how Compton's texts construct a collective voice that speaks for and with the Black community of Vancouver:

> Hip hop epistemology operates as a system of social explanation. It is a detour from the detached, objective historian and hegemonic historiography, both aesthetically and politically, and spatially aware of this global form of Black vernacular culture. Thus, the poetic persona in Compton's Hip hop poems becomes a communal 'we' that speaks for the community of Vancouver and Hogan's Alley and allows for the construction of communal bonding, grassroots institutions, and collectives. The community, the streets, the neighbourhood, and other spaces became sites of learning, of pride, struggle, and resistance through vernacular knowledge. (18)

Nevertheless, while the notion of Hip hop epistemology is very productive here, it also risks essentializing certain aesthetic practices as inherently "Black" or "vernacular," without sufficiently accounting for the historical and material conditions of their emergence. Some techniques such as collage, montage or remix can have complex genealogies that extend beyond Hip hop culture and are deeply entangled with broader developments of the capitalist modes of (cultural) production. A more explicit engagement with these specific histories—potentially through dialogue with Marxist or post-Marxist cultural theory—would mitigate the risk of dehistoricization of these modern techniques. In fact, not only would the history of collage in those static visual and narrative media, such as painting (Didi-Huberman 2000) or architecture (Tafuri 1980), allow us to increase the scope of this new method of Hip hop epistemology, but the very origins of montage or remix rooted in avant-garde Black music (Merlin and Rizzardi 2022) would even allow us to reconstruct a genealogy specifically linked to the production of Black culture associated with the Afro-diaspora of North America.

Chapter four analyzes some of Compton's speculative fiction, particularly *The Outer Harbour* (2014), reading it through the lens of transmodernity and decolonial thought. Pérez-García argues that these texts move beyond a dialectic of conquest toward what he terms "transmodern coalitions of solidarity" (104), envisioning alternative forms of coexistence among Black, Indigenous, and other racialized groups, such as Asian communities. This chapter successfully connects literary analysis with broader theoretical debates about decolonization, cosmopolitanism, and the future of multicultural societies. The concept of "transmodern cosmopolitanism" proposed by Pérez-García—"a new term with which to address this tension between space, identity, and transcultural coexistence, that is informed by some of the theoretical foundations of Rodriguez Magda's and Dussel's transmodern perspectives" (20)—is especially noteworthy.

This terminology offers a nuanced framework for thinking about identity and belonging beyond the limits of liberal and mainstream multiculturalism as the prevailing ideology of the Canadian nation-state, rooted in the experiences of settler colonialism and Indigenous land dispossession.

The final chapter extends this argument by examining Compton's engagement with multiculturalism from below, emphasizing popular practices and community-based forms of knowledge, primarily from the continued study of the speculative fiction stories contained in *The Outer Harbour* and in *Performance Bond* (2008). Here, Pérez-García also convincingly demonstrates how Compton's work challenges official narratives of Canadian mainstream multiculturalism, exposing their limitations while proposing alternative, more inclusive models. At the same time, the analysis underscores the importance of space—not merely as a backdrop, but as an active agent in the formation of identities and social relations:

> Compton's narratives help to shed light on the experiences and demands of those subjects marked as outsiders, adjacent to the nation, who, rather than retreating into identity-based enclaves, move towards the construction of solidaristic forms of coexistence and spaces of belonging. These developments come with no guarantee of success; they are agonistically negotiated within the framework of everyday coexistence and interaction, where misunderstandings or ulterior motives may arise. Nevertheless, they contribute to the progression of a truly cosmopolitan literature that captures the complexities of existence in the contemporary transmodern city. (164)

Throughout the book, Pérez-García's close readings are detailed and attentive, supported by a solid theoretical foundation and a wide range of secondary sources. His engagement with spatial theory, particularly the work of scholars such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Doreen Massey, is both rigorous and productive, allowing him to foreground the centrality of space in literary analysis. The incorporation of decolonial and transmodern perspectives adds an important dimension to the study, aligning it with current trends in literary and cultural criticism. Additionally, although issues of race, space, and identity are thoroughly explored, class dynamics—particularly in relation to urban inequality and gentrification—are less consistently addressed. Given the book's emphasis on spatial transformation and the "droit à la ville" (Lefebvre 1967), a more explicit engagement with class-based analyses, including those informed by Marxist and post-Marxist urban theory and especially those related with the creation and development of the gentrification theory (Glass 1964; Smith 1996), could provide in the future a more comprehensive account of the socio-economic forces shaping Black Vancouver.

Regardless of these observations, *Reading Wayde Compton* represents a significant contribution to the study of Black Canadian literature and to the broader field of Afrodiaspora literary criticism. Pérez-García succeeds in demonstrating the importance of Compton's work not only as a literature but also as a critical intervention in debates about race, space, and belonging in contemporary Canada. By foregrounding Vancouver as a key site of (Afro)diasporic experience, the book challenges dominant narratives that have traditionally centered other regions—especially North American (Black) Literary studies—thereby expanding the geographical and conceptual scope of Black Canadian studies themselves.

Altogether, Pérez-García's monograph is a well-researched and thought-provoking study that will be of interest to scholars of Canadian literature, diaspora studies, and urban cultural theory. The book offers valuable insights and opens up new avenues for research, specially for the Spatial Literary Studies (and the broader urban studies, even), regardless of its object of study and the specificities of Compton's oeuvre. As its author primary intended aim, it also provides a comprehensive and critical account of Wayde Compton's work, while highlighting its relevance to ongoing discussions about (Black) identity, urban space, and cultural production in the transnational and transmodern context of the Afrodiaspora.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

NORA RODRÍGUEZ-LORO
Universidad de Salamanca

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Henry Constable. The Complete Poems

María Jesús Pérez-Jáuregui, ed.

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María Jesús Pérez-Jáuregui's critical edition of *Henry Constable: The Complete Poems* (2023) restores to prominence an accomplished poet whose contribution to the Elizabethan sonnet vogue and to the cultural history of English Catholicism has long been understudied. If earlier criticism tended to dismiss Henry Constable as a minor figure, this volume decisively revises that judgement. Through extensive first-hand examination of primary sources and an exacting reconstruction of the circumstances of production, circulation and revision of the poems, the editor gives Constable his due as a writer deeply embedded in both Continental and English literary and intellectual traditions.

Pérez-Jáuregui's is the most complete and authoritative edition of Constable's poems to date, having identified six new items (sonnets 15b, 32b, 60b, 64, 65 and 66). With the identification of a manuscript at Berkeley Castle containing four additional sonnets (78, 85-87), the corpus of Constable's verse now stands at eighty-seven poems. The volume significantly surpasses Grundy's earlier edition, establishing a landmark contribution to Constable studies. The edition is also remarkable in that it includes both secular and spiritual sonnets, allowing for a comparative study of the two. Pérez-Jáuregui's volume reflects her long familiarity with the material, and every textual decision rests on years of sustained archival research, meticulous collation and sound knowledge of the manuscript tradition.

There are compelling reasons to read this edition beyond its exemplary scholarship. First, it restores to view Constable's significant contribution to the development of the English amatory sonnet sequence. Writing at the height of the Elizabethan sonnet vogue, he deftly incorporates Continental and English influences, demonstrating a refined sensitivity to elite literary tastes and courtly expectations. Constable's verse reveals an elegant reworking of Petrarchan conceits, positioning him within the evolving tradition shaped by Sidney and his successors.

Equally important are the *Spiritual Sonnets*. Never printed during Constable's lifetime and circulating early among a limited readership, they nonetheless rank among the finest achievements of late sixteenth-century devotional poetry. Their theological insight and formal control invite renewed consideration of Constable not merely as a courtly aspirant or confessional exile, but as a poet of sustained artistic and spiritual depth.

Chapter 1, "Henry Constable: A Biographical Account," offers a solid documented life grounded in archival research. Particular emphasis is placed on the Catholic connections of Constable's family and the role his father played in facilitating his early career as a courtier. Evidence from the Beinecke Library reveals the poet's association with Leicester's circle in the Netherlands and his engagement with William Allen's defence of Stanley and York's surrender of Deventer and Zutphen. This early treatise, which circulated in manuscript but was never printed, bears witness to Constable's self-fashioning as a Protestant loyalist and to his proximity to powerful networks around Walsingham, Leicester and the Sidney-Essex circle.

Constable's amatory and dedicatory sonnets emerge as intimately tied to the events and patronage structures of the Elizabethan court. His elegies on Sidney, his sonnets to Sidney's sister, the countess of Pembroke, and to Penelope Rich (Sidney's 'Stella'), and his evident desire to position himself as Sidney's successor underscore the necessity of an authoritative edition capable of disentangling literary ambition from retrospective myth. Constable's network of alliances—with the Earl of Leicester, the Sidney-Essex circle, the Princess of Orange, the Dutch poets and the French diplomat Jean Hotman—situates him within a transnational Protestant and Huguenot milieu, even as his later trajectory complicates that affiliation.

The biography carefully traces his attempts to secure preferment under shifting regimes. Constable sought favour with Henri de Navarre and later King James Stuart, composing sonnets to curry patronage and cultivating connections with figures such as Sir John Harington. His sonnets to Penelope Rich, his involvement in the Rialta affair and his double manoeuvring between Arabella Stuart and James reveal a poet acutely aware of the political uses of verse. Yet this career was ultimately jeopardised by his conversion to Catholicism, which forced him into exile on two occasions.

Pérez-Jáuregui identifies multiple motivations for his conversion to Catholicism, which likely occurred sometime before 1590: intellectual engagement with confessional debate, frustration in career advancement, disappointment in personal affairs (notable the thwarted hopes surrounding Grace Pierrepont) and private spiritual conviction modelled on Augustinian renunciation. Conversion entailed material loss (inheritance, preferment, stability) and inaugurated a life of exile.

From 1591 onward, Constable's life unfolded largely in France and Rome, where his residence at the Collège Mignon and involvement in English Catholic initiatives placed him within expatriate networks. During this period he composed the *Spiritual Sonnets* (c. 1595), reflecting a reorientation of his poetic vocation, even as he continued to pursue political aims, including efforts to persuade James to embrace Catholicism. His return to England in 1603, his participation in the Hampton Court Conference, his subsequent imprisonment and his final departure for France in 1610 reflect the precarious position of Catholics under the early Stuarts, particularly after the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. Although he briefly recovered his inheritance, he ultimately depended on patronage and died in France in 1613, his political ambitions unrealised but his religious commitments intact.

Chapter 2, "The Amatory and Dedicatory Sonnets," situates these poems within the dynamic culture of manuscript miscellanies that shaped literary circulation in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Constable's secular sonnets survive in a variety of manuscript collections as well as in the printed editions of *Diana*. Their wide distribution attests both to their early popularity and to the complex channels through which lyric poetry moved between manuscript coterie networks and print. Pérez-Jáuregui suggests convincingly that Constable himself may have exercised some degree of agency in the circulation, particularly in the early stages of his career, when the sonnets functioned as instruments of patronage and social advancement.

The discussion of miscellanies demonstrates that these collections were anything but passive repositories. Compiled by individuals or households for recreation, memorialisation or sociability, miscellanies frequently reorganised poems, altered headings and incorporated or excluded texts according to the compiler's interests. Some witnesses appear to preserve traces of authorial organisation, particularly where sonnets are carefully arranged or accompanied by specific headings that explain their occasions of compositions. Others reflect priorities of later compilers who rearranged poems in accordance with their own literary tastes or political concerns. By discussing Constable's sonnets within the culture of manuscript miscellanies, the editor clarifies the ways in which early modern readers actively reshaped poetic texts.

The chapter also examines the printed transmission of *Diana*, first published in 1592 and expanded in a later edition, which played an important role in the sonnet vogue of the 1590s but complicates the textual history. Questions surrounding the authorial status of the title, the involvement of the publisher Richard Smith and the second edition's mingling of Constable's poems with those of other writers suggest limited authorial control and disrupt the thematic coherence found in some manuscripts. By comparing printed and manuscript witnesses, Pérez-Jáuregui shows how print both broadened Constable's readership and introduced new textual instability. The chapter concludes with a reconstruction of the stemma, proposing three lost authorial archetypes that reflect successive stages of composition and revision between roughly 1585 and 1590, and demonstrating how the sonnets were continually revised and reshaped as they circulated through manuscript and print in Elizabethan literary culture.

Chapter 3 addresses the textual history of the *Spiritual Sonnets*, which differs markedly from that of the amatory verse. Unlike the secular sonnets, these devotional poems were never printed in the early modern period and circulated only in a limited number of manuscript copies. For centuries they attracted little attention and were largely absent from discussions of Constable's work. Pérez-Jáuregui's critical editing of the sequence therefore represents one of the edition's most significant contributions.

The chapter analyses two principal manuscript witnesses. While one manuscript, long considered the only surviving copy, suggests limited circulation within a restricted religious context, the second reveals a far more carefully structured sequence of twenty-one poems organised in according to theological hierarchy and numerological principles, suggesting authorial design. The manuscript's authorial ascription, closely resembling Constable's signature, further underscores the complexity of openly Catholic devotional writing. Through detailed comparison, Pérez-Jáuregui's shows that the two witnesses represent different stages of revision: the earlier preserving a less structured version and the later presenting a refined arrangement. Her analysis of variants and questions of attribution highlights both the limited circulation of Constable's devotional poetry and its place within broader poetic traditions.

Chapter 3 also situates the *Spiritual Sonnets* within a wider European devotional culture. The poems draw on traditions of Counter-Reformation spirituality and on the affective devotional languages associated with writers such as Vittoria Colonna and other Italian religious poets. Their intense introspection, penitential tone and eroticised spiritual imagery reveal how Petrarchan language could be adapted to express religious longing. The sequence as a whole reflects Constable's personal circumstances as an exile seeking spiritual consolation.

Chapter 4, "Henry Constable and the Sonnet Form," moves from textual history to literary analysis by situating Constable within the development of the English sonnet tradition. The editor emphasises Constable's position within the Elizabethan sonnet vogue and his awareness of elite literary tastes. Constable's verse draws on both Continental and English models, particularly the French poet Philippe Desportes and Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. Yet the chapter avoids reducing Constable's poems to mere imitations. Instead, Pérez-Jáuregui shows how he adapts Petrarchan and Neoplatonic conventions for specific social and political purposes.

Formal analysis plays an important role in this discussion. Constable frequently employs the Italian octave followed by varied sestets ending in a couplet, and he occasionally adopts metrical innovations associated with Sidney. Such technical choices demonstrate his familiarity with contemporary poetic practice. At the same time, the editor challenges earlier critics who dismissed the amatory sonnets as lacking emotional sincerity. Rather than judging them by modern standards of authenticity, she reads them as sophisticated engagements with literary conventions withing a courtly culture where poetry functioned as a social performance.

By editing the two corpora together, Pérez-Jáuregui reveals thematic continuities between them. The rhetoric of patronage in the dedicatory sonnets finds a parallel in the language of intercession in the religious poems, while erotic imagery frequently overlaps with devotional expression. In both cases the poet adopts the stance of a supplicant seeking favour, whether from earthly patrons or heavenly mediators.

Chapter 5, "The Critical Reception of Constable's Poetry," traces the changing reputation of Constable's verse from the late sixteenth century to the present. The chapter demonstrates that his standing has fluctuated considerable over time. In his own lifetime Constable enjoyed considerable prestige: the success of *Diana*, the admiration of poets such as Drayton and Jonson, and references to his work in contemporary literature all attest to his early prominence. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, his reputation declined, and he came to be remembered primarily as a minor poet or as a figure associated with Catholic recusancy.

The nineteenth century witnessed a gradual rediscovery of his work through the efforts of editors and antiquarians, while the twentieth century sat renewed scholarly attention, particularly through the archival research of George Wickes and the publication of modern editions. Nevertheless, these earlier editions often worked with incomplete information and sometimes reached overly dismissive judgments about Constable's poetic achievement. By situating her edition within this history of criticism, Pérez-Jáuregui demonstrates both the necessity and the originality of her work. The recovery of neglected manuscripts, the careful reconstruction of textual relationships and the integration of the secular and devotional poems provide a fat more comprehensive picture of Constable's literary career.

A final chapter sets out the criteria guiding the establishment of the text, defining the canon of Constable's poems and explaining the choice of copy texts, editorial conventions and textual apparatus. The poems themselves are presented with exemplary clarity: each sonnet occupies its own page and is accompanied by a record of sources, textual variants and a glossary of obsolete and archaic words. The amatory and dedicatory sonnets are ordered according to the editor's reconstruction of the poet's final intentions and are followed by the *Spiritual Sonnets*, while extensive explanatory notes supply historical, biographical and literary context. The volume further includes a bibliographical description of the principal textual sources and several appendices comparing the arrangement of the poems in different manuscripts, and a full set of indexes and bibliography. These features make the edition both a reliable critical text and an exceptionally useful research tool.

Pérez-Jáuregui's edition shows that Constable's poetry deserves renewed attention not only as a historical curiosity but as an important contribution to the literary and religious culture of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This edition is a work of restitution. Yet here restitution is achieved not only by textual recovery but also by situating Constable within the shifting political, religious and literary contexts that shaped his career.



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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ADRIÁN ARANA ARMESTO
Universidad del País Vasco/
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, UPV/EHU

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Rewriting War in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Beyond Post-Memory

Cristina Pividori and David Owen, ed.

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ISBN: 9781032663661

Rewriting War in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Beyond Post-Memory is a compilation of various academic articles edited by Cristina Pividori and David Owen. This work consists of an intellectually cohesive collection of essays that, from diverse prisms and angles, interrogate how contemporary literature and cultural production revisit, reshape, and ethically negotiate the memory of twentieth-century wars. One of the features that characterise this work is its positioning within the field of "beyond post-memory." Therefore, the volume questions Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which has traditionally been linked to Holocaust studies, the field the author originally explored. Hirsch states that "Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 2008, 103). The volume does not reject Marianne Hirsch's influential concept but rather updates it and subjects it to critical refinement. The result is a rich, interdisciplinary exploration of war representation that foregrounds aesthetics, ethics, and narrative form alongside memory transmission.

As mentioned in the preface, the book emerges from a conference held under the auspices of a research group dedicated to conflict representation. Therefore, this origin is reflected in the coherence of the thematic line maintained by all contributions, despite the different periods, places, and works analysed by the respective authors. Likewise, *Rewriting War* benefits from a clearly articulated critical framework established in its introduction and explained by the volume's editors, Cristina Pividori and David Owen. This framework is later sustained throughout the two main sections of the book: "Post-Memorial Engagements" and "The Aesthetics of War." Across its twenty-two chapters and a concluding conversation led by Kate McLoughlin, Rachel Seiffert, and Jay Winter, the collection addresses a broad range of conflicts. Some of the conflicts examined from these perspectives include the World Wars, the Holocaust, the Spanish Civil War, the Nigerian Civil War, the Troubles, the Armenian Genocide, and the Falklands/Malvinas War. Therefore, one of the most remarkable features of the volume is the wide variety of conflicts examined. These conflicts, despite being radically different in many respects, share the fact that they remain firmly anchored in a shared set of conceptual questions about memory, mediation, and responsibility.

As mentioned above, the introduction by Pividori and Owen situates the collection within contemporary memory studies, acknowledging the "memory boom" of recent decades. However, one of the first and most relevant points made by the editors is that memory is not static but dynamically shaped by language, form, and cultural context. To demonstrate this point, the authors employ the seminal works and concepts of thinkers such as Andreas Huyssen, Eva Hoffman, Jay Winter, and Kate McLoughlin as theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the editors frame war representation as inherently fraught, ethically charged, aesthetically challenging, and perpetually incomplete. Consequently, one of the key points of war representation is that it both resists representation and demands it. Indeed, as Kate McLoughlin states, "the representation of war is inherently anxiogenic (…) even if it resists representation, conflict demands it" (McLoughlin 2011, 6). This paradox underpins the entire volume.

The book argues for a reassessment of postmemory. As mentioned, Hirsch's model has been foundational for understanding second- and third-generation engagements with trauma. However, despite the usefulness of Hirsch's theories, the authors advocate for the evolution of this concept and its adaptation to current needs, as the editors are attentive to critiques that highlight its conceptual elasticity and the potential risks of overidentification, appropriation, or dilution. For instance, as the authors note: "Long asks how the imaginative aspects of postmemory can be regulated 'to prevent appropriation or even usurpation of the other's experiences'" (Pividori and Owen 2025, 150). Rather than abandoning postmemory, *Rewriting War* proposes to move "beyond" it by examining how contemporary texts negotiate the balance between imaginative investment and ethical restraint, between subjective engagement and historical specificity. This nuanced positioning allows the volume to function as an intervention in ongoing debates within memory and trauma studies.

The first section, "Post-Memorial Engagements," focuses on how later generations creatively re-encounter inherited conflict. One aspect that caught my attention most is that several chapters stand out for their innovative use of postmemory across diverse cultural contexts. For example, María Gaviña's analysis of Stacey Gregg's Shibboleth explores post-Troubles Northern Ireland. To this end, the author examines the metaphor of peace walls and liminal identity. In this way, the chapter shows how postmemory not only operates across generations but also within socio-economic and political transitions. Thus, the chapter compellingly demonstrates how inherited conflict shapes contemporary subjectivities even in ostensibly post-conflict societies.

Likewise, beyond the diversity of conflicts analysed, the interdisciplinarity of artistic analysis and the various artistic representations and manifestations examined is also noteworthy. For example, beyond classical novels, this volume also focuses on visual and graphic narratives. A particularly notable example is María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro's chapter on Nora Krug's Belonging. This analysis offers a sensitive reading of the "turn to the perpetrator" (Crownshaw 2011; Adams and Vice 2013; Morag 2018) in Holocaust literature. Similarly, in his chapter, Umberto Rossi argues that Jacques Tardi's graphic memoir foregrounds "collaborative memory" as a narrative strategy. In doing so, as Rossi claims, the author inserts himself into his father's wartime experience, in order to destabilise linear temporality and conventional testimonial authority.

In addition to the plurality of artistic representations, the volume also examines different intersectional parameters in terms of oppression. For this reason, gender studies and their perspectives on war memory form another important thread. A clear example of this is Paula García's chapter on Nigerian women writers. Here, the author examines the relationship between gender, race, and culture, which plays a fundamental role in armed conflicts. In this study, García foregrounds the disproportionate impact of the Biafran War on women and children. In this way, the chapter expands postmemory beyond Eurocentric frameworks. Similarly, Ravenel Richardson's examination of Renata Laqueur's Holocaust diary and its troubled publication history delves into the roles of gender, authority, and the marketability of trauma. One of the main points of this chapter is therefore to show how memory transmission is shaped by institutional and commercial constraints. Altogether, these chapters underscore the importance of intersectionality in postmemorial studies.

Subsequently, the following chapters focus on a notion of vital importance: the use of fiction as a postmemorial strategy. In this respect, the analyses by Pividori, Sokołowska-Paryż, and Branach-Kallas of works by Isabel Colegate, Peter Balakian, and Bahia Kiared, respectively, are particularly revealing. The three authors demonstrate how hybrid forms negotiate personal memory, collective history, and national identity. For example, Anna Branach-Kallas offers a decolonial reading of Algerian experiences of the First World War. In doing so, the author challenges Western historiographical hierarchies.

Finally, Thomas Jay Lynn examines the importance of silence as a strategic resource. To this end, the author analyses how Adichie employs silence as a narrative and ethical strategy in Half of a Yellow Sun to represent the human cost of the Biafran War and to give voice to suppressed experiences. Similarly, Žmuida analyses how Salt to the Sea and Crabwalk recover marginalised and silenced histories of the Second World War, exploring shared and contested memories through acts of remembrance and deliberate narrative recovery.

On the other hand, the second section of the volume, entitled "The Aesthetics of War," delves into formal and ethical experimentation in various literary works and genres. This section examines the way narrative strategies mediate the representation of violence. Some of the methods the authors examine for experimenting with ethics in war include silence,

irony, humour, and temporal disruption. For example, Stéphanie Noirard's chapter on Scottish war poetry explores imagined and indirect visions of war. In this way, the author shows how experimental poetry, and more specifically poetic abstraction, can convey trauma without resorting to mimetic excess. Moreover, Alberto Lázaro explores how contemporary British novelists reconstruct the Spanish Civil War. He does so by analyzing historically researched but narratively mediated fiction. This way, the author critically assesses the limits of these representations. Similarly, Antía Román-Sotelo analyses how O'Donnell's short story recovers marginalised Irish experiences of the First World War. The author argues that fiction becomes a crucial space for ethical remembrance, challenging dominant nationalist narratives and historical erasure. Furthermore, Andrea Bellot's analysis of Steven Berkoff's Sink the Belgrano is insightful as it highlights the paradox of aestheticism, i.e., the idea that aesthetics can simultaneously resist and reproduce dominant ideologies.

As mentioned above, various genres are examined and, therefore, a relevant point is that popular and genre fiction are treated with equal seriousness. Nicola Paladin's discussion of Will Eisner's war comics interrogates the paradoxical coexistence of humour, sexism, and mythmaking in representations of the US Army. Meanwhile, Phyllis Lassner's chapter on Jo Nesbø's The Redbreast examines the construction of historical memory through crime fiction. In this sense, these contributions demonstrate the volume's commitment to dismantling hierarchies between "high" and "low" culture in war representation.

Finally, several chapters in this section explicitly engage with the ethical questions raised by war. For instance, David Owen's analysis of narrative silence and non-remembrance, and Katia Marcellin's discussion of "telling the war backwards" in Sarah Waters's The Night Watch, both foreground the moral implications of narrative form. Likewise, Christine Berberich's chapter on contemporary crime fiction dealing with the Nazi past further illustrates the dualism and paradox of genre conventions, as they can both illuminate and obscure ethical responsibility.

The volume concludes with a conversation between Kate McLoughlin, Rachel Seiffert, and Jay Winter. This dialogue opens new lines of inquiry about civilianisation, belatedness, and the future of war memory. Particularly noteworthy is its conversational format, which underscores that the study of war representation must remain open, dialogic, and responsive to changing historical conditions.

One of the significant strengths of *Rewriting War in Contemporary Literature and Culture* is its methodological plurality. Literary analysis is enriched by insights from cultural studies, visual studies, history, and ethics, without sacrificing conceptual clarity. At the same time, it is worth noting that the book resists prescriptive conclusions, allowing contradictions and tensions to remain productively unresolved.

To conclude, *Rewriting War in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Beyond Post-Memory* contributes to contemporary debates on how wars are depicted, remembered, rewritten, and reimagined. Hence, by critically engaging with postmemory rather than simply applying it, the volume opens new avenues for understanding the ethical and aesthetic stakes of representing conflict.[1]

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1 This publication has been developed during the period of participation in the PhD Training Program for NonDoctoral Research Staff of the Department of Education of the Basque Government (2025/26), and under the auspices of the consolidated research group REWEST (Research in Western American Literature and Culture) from the University of the Basque Country.

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

SANTIAGO RODRÍGUEZ GUERRERO-STRACHAN
Universidad de Valladolid

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El espíritu «romance»

Ezra Pound
Traducción y edición de Jorge Braga Riera

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ISBN: 9788419672506

Ezra Pound ha tenido una presencia constante aunque no demasiado destacada en la cultura española. No ha sido de los poetas que han estado en boca de una mayoría pero sí aparece su rastro en la obra de Juan Ramón Jiménez, en concreto en *Tiempo* (1941), también en su vida pues mantuvieron correspondencia en unos años en que Pound estaba en St. Elizabeths. Sin duda el momento, si no de mayor influencia, sí de mayor reconocimiento por parte de poetas españoles lo protagonizan los Novísimos. Pere Gimferrer escribía «mármol en la Dogana como observaba Pound» (Gimferrer 1988, 57) en «Oda a Venecia ante el mar de los teatros» (1966) y Antonio Colinas publicaba «Encuentro con Ezra Pound» en *Sepulcro en Tarquinia* (1974). Antes estuvo Juan Ramón Masoliver, quien colaboró con Pound en *Supplemento Letterario* en la década de 1930.[1] El interés fue recíproco, al menos en la juventud del poeta norteamericano, pues viajó a España en 1906 dispuesto a escribir su tesis doctoral sobre el gracioso de Lope de Vega bajo la dirección de Hugo A. Rennert. Ya en España aprovechó para interesarse por el *Cantar de Mio Cid* (c. 1200) y viajar a Burgos para luego proseguir su viaje por Italia. No mucho años después dio a la imprenta *The Spirit of Romance* (1910).

Jorge Braga Riera traduce y anota el libro al que añade un estudio introductorio que ayuda a situar en el contexto histórico la escritura y los fines del libro. Por la editorial en que ha sido publicado, Fundación Universitaria Española, dentro de la colección «El arte de la crítica», es, sin duda, una edición pensada para un lector español que busca información sobre el autor y el libro sin caer en lo erudito. Esto no implica que la edición sea descuidada o pobre el estudio preliminar; al contrario, cumple bien con los rigurosos propósitos divulgativos de la editorial sin abrumar en ningún momento con un exceso de datos.

Braga Riera ofrece un estudio introductorio en que cuenta, a modo de justificación, el papel que Pound ha tenido en España centrándose en los Novísimos y trayendo a colación *Ezra Pound in the Spanish World* (2024), editado por Viorica Patea, John Gery y Walter Baumann y galardonado con el premio para estudios culturales en lengua inglesa de la Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-norteamericanos en 2024, y libro de referencia en el tema que nos ocupa. También dilucida la aparición de España en los *Cantares*, editados de forma magistral por Javier Coy (1994-2000).

Continúa con un resumen de la vida del poeta, en el que estudia la temprana fascinación que Pound sintió por la literatura española al tiempo que señala que tal fervor decayó pronto y que incluso hubo un momento en que Pound la criticó de manera acerba. Pasa luego a explicar detalladamente la composición de *The Spirit of Romance*. Los capítulos fueron antes conferencias que pronunció en la Politécnica de Regent Street a principios de 1910. Pound debía de tener una idea muy clara de lo que quería presentar al público pero sobre todo a los lectores pues el 20 de enero de 1910 entregó la mitad de los capítulos del libro a su editor y el 23 de febrero la otra mitad, poco después de que el ciclo de conferencias acabase.

Apunta el editor de la edición española, apartándose de otras interpretaciones, que si bien es cierto que *El espíritu «romance»* no es una obra filológica sí que es un estudio filológico. Moody, por ejemplo, señala que el libro ni siquiera

contiene una teoría propia de crítica (2007, 117), algo que por cierto, el mismo Moody lo señala, fue un reproche que le hicieron en el periódico neoyorquino *Nation* el 2 de marzo de 1910. Sin duda a Pound la filología le interesaba de manera secundaria. Cierto es que por aquel entonces los estudios filológicos aún tenían la impronta del ensayismo decimonónico de autores como Walter Pater pero no lo es menos que Pound estaba elaborando una poética que fuera la base de su renovadora poesía y para ello necesitaba modelos literarios de los que aprender, entre otros aspectos determinados, modos de expresión, por ejemplo, el del amor.

La introducción concluye con un epígrafe dedicado a los criterios que ha utilizado para la traducción, no sin antes resumir los principios que guiaron a Pound, sobre todo la fidelidad al espíritu del libro más que al contenido y la sintaxis del verso. Para Braga Riera la profusión de textos en occitano o italiano es un desafío para el traductor, pues el mismo Pound o Rossetti en muchos casos los tradujeron al inglés, por no hablar de los textos en español traducidos al inglés. En todos los casos Pound los analiza al nivel elocutivo de la retórica del texto. Braga Riera ha elegido traducciones españolas de traductores de probado prestigio—Martín de Riquer, por ejemplo, para la poesía provenzal—y da, cuando tiene constancia de ello, el nombre del traductor al inglés que Pound escogió. En general todos los traductores elegidos por el editor de la obra en español son acertados aunque a este reseñista le queda la duda de por qué ha elegido la traducción que Bartolomé Mitre hizo en 1922 de la *Divina Comedia* de Dante y no la de Ángel Crespo que publicó entre 1973 y 1977, caracterizada por su fidelidad al original al mantener el terceto encadenado, con rima y metro en español.

El recorrido por los poetas trovadorescos provenzales, la continuación con los poetas toscanos, principalmente Guido Cavalcanti seguido de Dante hasta llegar a Lope de Vega y Luis Vaz de Camões, y por último los llamados poetas latinos, entre los que incluye a Baldassare Castiglione y Miguel Ángel Buonarotti, tiene un doble propósito: dar a conocer tales autore en una Gran Bretaña que apenas los conocía y señalar las similitudes entre la poesía tardomedieval y renacentista y la época de la Vanguardias, el llamado *Modernism* angloamericano. Todo el libro recuerda ese momento auroral de los inicios del siglo XX que Pound emparenta con el medieval: el primer capítulo lo titula «La aurora fantasma» y el segundo "Il miglior fabbro," con las posteriores resonancias eliotianas a causa de la dedicatoria en "The Waste Land" (1921).

La traducción del ensayo de Pound es buena, leyéndose con claridad y ligereza. Las notas incluyen las que el propio autor escribió, las que señalan los diferentes traductores y algunas que el editor y traductor de esta versión añade. Son pocas pues, no hemos de olvidar que el lector ideal al que se dirige es un lector interesado por la literatura que no es un especialista, en gran medida el mismo que buscó Pound.

La edición es buena tanto por la introducción como por la traducción, las notas y la bibliografía, aunque en este apartado habría que señalar un reparo. Las ediciones de los textos traducidos aparecen bajo el nombre de los traductores y no de los autores de los poemas. Así, Luis Antonio de Villena aparece como autor de los sonetos de Buonarotti o Mitre de la *Comedia* de Dante, sin que aparezca en ningún momento su papel de traductores. Sí que aparece en otros casos como en el de Fernando Molina Castillo que es traductor de *Convivio*.

1 Para una información más detallada acerca de las relaciones de Pound con escritores españoles puede consultarse Viorica Patea: "'A Dream Spain': The Legacy of Spain in Pound's Oeuvre" (2023, 5-32).

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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

CLAUDIA GARCÍA PAJÍN
Universidad de Oviedo

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Sapphic Adolescent Girls in Irish Young Adult Fiction: Queering Girlhood

Iria Seijas-Pérez

Routledge. Routledge Studies in Irish Literature. 2026. 224 pp.
ISBN: 978 1 00 386433 2

In 2016, Susan Cahill participated in the collective work *Girlhood and the Politics of Place* and asked: "Where are the Irish girls?" (2016, 212). In her text, she examined early notions about the presence of girls in modernist Irish literature. Ten years after Cahill's question, discussions about visibility have remained prevalent in the burgeoning field of girlhood studies applied to Irish culture, and *Sapphic Adolescent Girls in Irish Young Adult Fiction: Queering Girlhood* by Dr. Iria Seijas-Pérez is one of the latest contributions to the conversation. Seijas-Pérez, who received her doctorate in 2024 at the University of Vigo, has published extensive research on the field of young-adult Irish literary studies. *Sapphic Adolescent Girls* is her most recent addition to the subject and her first monograph. It has been published as part of Routledge's series "Routledge Studies in Irish Literature," a collection defined by its focus on literature as an agent for societal change in Irish culture. Seijas-Pérez's monograph's is born from observing a gap in the research of Irish literary studies. Examining a rising tendency in fiction publications that depict the experience of young sapphic girls in Irish YA fiction, she intends to catch academic criticism up to date. In seven chapters she forefronts ten novels from the 2010s and 2020s by six Irish authors. All of the novels of this extensive corpus centre the experience of young sapphic girls and their coming to terms with their sexuality contemplating the cultural and historical complexities of queerness in Ireland. The author further defines her object of study by maintaining an intersectional approach in her selecting of the corpus and her own reading of the works, contemplating an array of different experiences defined by the cultural categories of class, race and religion. Seijas-Pérez's close reading is supported by extensive investigation and palpable expertise in the fields of queer, feminist and girlhood studies. The resulting monograph is the product of years of thorough and careful research, demonstrating not only scientific rigor and quality, but a profound care, tenderness and respect for the corpus examined and the matter at hand.

After a clarifying introduction, Seijas-Pérez offers a chronological overview of the history of LGBTQ+ YA literature, focusing specifically on Irish works. She organizes the information of such an extensive topic in a Matryoshka structure, starting by analysing the inception of the queer YA novel with John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969) and finishing with a queering of Irish YA literature. In her outline, Seijas-Pérez agrees with other authors in the field in that early iterations of queer characters in twentieth-century YA literature follow a pattern: male, white, gay, middle-class and ultimately headed towards tragic endings. The inclusion of the queer character often seemed to function as a cautionary tale. Other possibilities included having a queer supporting character as a plot device for the heterosexual

protagonist who had to learn how to accept their friend's sexual orientation. Seijas-Pérez defines a sharp shift in YA LGBTQ+ literature at the turn to the century, specially during the 2010s, when the general tendency in YA novels shifts from plot to character-driven stories that allowed for a further and more nuanced exploration of such topics, turning these works "more authentic and inclusive" (Seijas-Pérez 2026, 23). It is during this time that she also notes that there is further inclusion of sapphic characters. In Irish literature, the rise of LGBTQ+ literature went hand in hand with the decriminalisation of homosexuality (1993) and the later legalization of same-sex marriage (2015). Seijas-Pérez notes two factors for invisibility of Irish sapphic characters: the overall tardiness of queer stories to arrive in Ireland and the general hierarchization within queer literature. Because of this, she finds that the rise of their representation in the 2010s and 2020s is "highly notable" (2026, 43). She praises the quickness of Irish Sapphic YA literature in catching up to date with current debates of intersectionality and states that their new complexity "merits critical attention" (2026, 44).

Over the next six chapters, Seijas-Pérez conducts an exhaustive literary analysis of ten novels. She organizes the different sections according to three main thematic axes that can be identified in her analysis. In chapters two and three she ponders on the relationality involved in the stories of the sapphic protagonists. Chapter two focuses on the setting of the Catholic school, a relevant landmark in the coming-of-age of Irish girlhood. Through the novels *All the Bad Apples* (Moïra Fowley, 2019), *Like Other Girls* (Claire Hennessy, 2017) and *Not My Problem* (Ciara Smyth, 2021), Seijas-Pérez analyses how young sapphic subjects navigate the oppressive and oftentimes isolating space of a school where the dominant discourse is that of religious shaming on LGBTQ+ lifestyles. The protagonists have to negotiate their positions and identities within the schools by challenging and interrogating these discourses and in their doing so, a strong emphasis is placed on the importance of friendships and support networks (Seijas-Pérez 2026, 71). The matter of relationality is brought up again in chapter three, where *Like Other Girls* and *Not My Problem* remain in focus and *The Falling in Love Montage* (Ciara Smyth, 2020) is added to the corpus. In this chapter, Seijas-Pérez carries on her analysis on friendship and incorporates the relational aspects of the family. She reads these novels as texts that go beyond the archetypal concerns of YA LGBTQ+ literature, such as "coming out." Instead, the lives of the characters are shown as being affected by challenges prevalent in many coming-of-age experiences, such as stranded family relationships, female friendship dynamics, diseased parents and dealing with addiction. In this sense, the focus that Seijas-Pérez places on these aspects broadens the critical analysis of sapphic narratives and shows that the construction of these characters is not built solely around their sexuality. Their sexuality does not define them entirely; it cuts across their life rather than standing at its centre.

In chapters four and five, focused on the novels by Adiba Jaigirdar, Seijas-Pérez carries out a study on the intersection of sexuality, race and religion as represented in the novels *The Henna Wars* (2020), *Hani and Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating* (2021) and *The Dos and Donuts of Love* (2023). Chapter four focuses on matters of race. Jaigirdar's protagonists navigate their stories as sapphic subjects of South Asian ascent living in Irish communities. She explores the different personalities that the characters feel obligated to perform depending on whether they are around White or racialised peers. Seijas-Pérez recognizes that feelings of unbelonging that the characters experience in Ireland are further problematized by acknowledging that those sensations would also appear in their South Asian communities. In chapter five she continues analysing her works and concentrates on the intersection between sexuality and religion, focusing on Islam and Catholicism. Nishat and Hani, two of the protagonists examined, have their experience as sapphic subjects shaped partly by their religious faith. Both embrace their faith and challenge stereotypes, tokenism and fixed cultural categories. Seijas-Pérez emphasises the relevance that these characters have within discourses about representation, highlighting a quote by Jaigirdar herself: "I want [queer Muslims] to see a reflection of themselves, one that I didn't have growing up. And I want those who are different to me to celebrate my identity with me" (Jaigirdar 2021, n.p.). The inclusion of these aspects to the analysis becomes particularly relevant since, as Seijas-Pérez notes, the South Asian diaspora has been growing and evolving steadily for a few decades now (2026, 134). Thus, her choosing of Jaigirdar to partake in her corpus is culturally sensitive and perceptive.

Chapters six and seven explore how elements of witchcraft, magic and folklore intersect with questions of sexuality in these works, echoing the fundamental relevance of Celtic paganism to Irish culture and the reclaiming of the figure of the witch as a symbol for power and resilience by radical feminists during the 1970s (Seijas-Pérez 2026, 165). In chapter six she returns to *All the Bad Apples* and includes *Other Words for Smoke* (Maria Griffin, 2019) and *Perfectly Preventable Deaths* (Deirdre Sullivan, 2019). In these works, Seijas-Pérez finds a parallelism between witchcraft and lesbianism: there are elements of secrecy and shame, characters come to terms with their sexuality and their powers simultaneously and they are ostracised by Catholic societies. The protagonists, however, embark in a journey of acceptance of both their sexuality and powers, finding courage and agency in those qualities. Chapter seven further develops the analysis of these novels but also incorporates *Precious Catastrophe* (Deirdre Sullivan, 2021). Here, Seijas-Pérez explores the uses of magical realism and the gothic as a means to explore Ireland's culture of silence, shame and secrecy (2026, 11). The use of elements like ghosts and banshees serve as representation of the Irish grappling with the painful acknowledgement of their history with violence against women. Seijas-Pérez references the Magdalene laundries, mother and baby homes and industrial schools (2026, 214). Beyond these specific historical landmarks, she recognises that Catholicism is the ultimate spectral figure looming over the lives and stories of Irish women in general and sapphic Irish girls specifically.

Through her monograph, Seijas-Pérez has brought a form of literature previously unseen, ignored, or disregarded into Academia. As the production of Irish YA novels written under the polyhedric prism of the sapphic young experience has grown since the 2000s, her analysis feels timely and particularly pertinent. She merits the value of these works maintaining the relevance of the politics of representation (Hall 1997, 3) to actively shape social reality. By foregrounding YA works that centre the experience of marginalised subjects, traditional notions of who exists in the centre of culture and who exists in the margins are challenged. She demonstrates the ability to analyse an extensive corpus, characterized by a wide-ranging scope, and still give meticulous attention to each novel. She provides the reader with a sense of the works' essences and proves the relevance of every one of the novels to achieve a well-rounded analysis of Irish sapphic YA literature. Her rigorous research on the fields of queer, feminist, Irish and girlhood studies shines in the apparent theoretical rigor of her analysis. If Seijas-Pérez's goal was to fill a gap in the research within Irish studies, I would state that she effectively succeeds at her objective. *Sapphic Adolescent Girls in Irish Young Adult Fiction* has the potential to become mandatory reading for anyone interested in researching YA Irish fiction and for the field of girlhood studies.



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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

MARÍA PORRAS SÁNCHEZ
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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Landscape Aesthetics: Toward an Engaged Ecology

Alberto L. Siani

New York: Columbia University Press. 2024. 256 pp.
ISBN: 9780231213677

Alberto L. Siani is an associate professor of aesthetics at the Università di Pisa. He has also authored *Hegel and the Present of Art's Past Character* (2023), which delves into Hegel's notion of the "end of art." In this recent essay, which won the 2025 International Original Work Award granted by the Italian Society for Aesthetics, Siani traces a pragmatic, original and refreshing approach to landscape from the perspective of aesthetics as a dynamic and culturally embedded concept.

Siani's project stems from a combination of crises: the environmental crisis, the crisis of the humanities and the crisis of aesthetics within landscape studies, where it occupies a marginal role (2024, xx). For Siani, landscapes should be addressed in their plurality and contingency, not as a set of binary oppositions (environment vs. human; matter vs. art; natural sciences vs. humanities, etc.) into which they have been frequently cornered, since, succinctly, landscapes "are specific configurations of the concrete units of sense we experience, institute, and inhabit" (2024, xxiv). His essay is succinct (256 pages), original and theoretically solid, very carefully structured and pleasant to read, and I would fully recommend it for scholars from cultural and literary studies interested in expanding their views on landscapes, as well as for scholars of aesthetics and environmental humanities. It also provides examples extracted from his personal experience that might serve as a model for future studies analyzing landscapes, something that I find especially stimulating.

Landscape Aesthetics includes a preface, a prologue and six chapters: the first two explore landscape-related philosophical notions, the following two combine the philosophical approach with critical and political theories on landscape and the last two apply previous ideas to case studies. This is a wise choice in terms of structure since it opens up critical and theoretical avenues and offers combined and applied approaches for scholars of different disciplines.

The prologue, "Where are Landscapes?", replaces the question "what are landscapes?" with a focus on landscape as topos. Siani tackles Kant's notion of 'habitat' as "the space of the presence of freedom in nature" (2024, 7) and defines landscapes as "the concrete, experienced, lived presence of habitats" (2024, 13), wherein "mood, disposition, imagination, knowledge, and memories play an essential but elusive role" in identifying them (Siani 2024, 2).

Chapter 1, "A Game of Landscapes: Methodological, Linguistic, and Conceptual Rules," amplifies the notion of landscape, distinguishing it from akin concepts such as 'environment' and 'territory' to highlight how landscapes are performative configurations made by humans to make sense of the world, displaying the tensions between the contingency of nature and the human need to establish a certain order upon it. Inspired by Wittgenstein's notion of 'language-games,' by which speaking is performative and therefore both linguistic and non-linguistic, Siani argues that (1) landscapes are subjective, dynamic and performative too and (2) their meaning emerges through the implicit dualisms we impose on them (subject/object; freedom/nature, etc.), which are constantly being readjusted.

Following the linguistic approach of chapter 1, chapter 2, "Landscape and Aesthetics," explores the aesthetic dimension implicit in the word 'landscape,' addressing the repudiation of aesthetics in the institutional and academic discussions on landscape and reclaiming an alternative way to frame it. Drawing greatly on John Dewey's classic on aesthetics, *Art as Experience* (1934), it proposes a "holistic, antidualistic, and anti-exceptionalist aesthetics" (Siani 2024, xxvii), which illustrates one of the main findings of the essay: how landscapes can be aesthetically meaningful forms of interacting with the world. Moving beyond the merely contemplative aspect, landscape becomes an "experience," comprising humans and other living entities, wherein "art and aesthetic […] are the marks of both the continuity and the discontinuity of the human being with respect to the rest of nature" (Siani 2024, 45).

Chapter 3, "Patterns of Encounter I: Aesthetic Matters," identifies patterns in interpretation and art that can contribute to the intersection of landscape and aesthetics. Siani argues that landscapes, like artworks, do not have a single fixed meaning determined by an author or by nature itself. Instead, meaning arises through interpretation and is shaped by experience and cultural context. Drawing on environmental philosopher Emily Brady and semiotics scholar Umberto Eco, Siani claims that interpretation should aim not only at pleasure or knowledge but at a richer engagement with the world. Landscapes are seen as products of both perception and imagination, blurring the line between nature and art. This makes aesthetics central to everyday life, environmental understanding and public decisions about places, since art and other practices such as gardening and mapping can help people form more respectful and interactive relationships with the environments they inhabit.

The next chapter, "Patterns of Encounter II: Landscape Matters," tries to intertwine the notion of landscape + aesthetics with current environmental discourses on crisis, albeit focusing mostly on landscape policies. Siani hails the European Landscape Convention (2000) as a "ground-breaking political text" (2024, 103) and a practical framework for thinking about landscapes, defining them as central to identity, cultural diversity and democratic participation. The chapter stresses that landscape politics is necessarily pluralistic and participatory, but also challenging since it is culturally situated and threatened by nationalism, tourism and exploitation. It also introduces the idea of a "right to landscape" (Siani 2024, 107), distinct from a mere right to a safe environment in that landscape is connected to memory, identity and belonging; thus, losing the right to landscape is especially harmful for migrants (Siani 2024, 109-11). Siani also argues that "landscape education" can be more productive and effective than traditional environmental education because it focuses on lived experience, local knowledge, history, storytelling and practice rather than relying exclusively on abstract environmental principles (2024, 112-16).

Shorter than the rest, chapter 5, "Building Common Ground: Landscape Character and Its Assessment," discusses "landscape character as a principle of unity" (Siani 2024, 162). Closely related to the European Landscape Convention's (ELC) definition of landscape, "landscape character" (LC) and the method of "landscape character assessment" (LCA) are "part of the attempt to overcome the modernist, aestheticist, elitist landscape paradigm" (Siani 2024, 124). As an alternative, the chapter proposes a pragmatist framework in which LC is not a fixed set of objective properties but an evolving product of interactions between people and their environments. Drawing on Georg Simmel's idea of landscape "mood" (2024, 133-34), Siani suggests reframing LC as a dynamic, negotiated unity that integrates subjective and objective dimensions. In this view, landscapes are dynamic, experienced and culturally embedded, so assessment should be more participatory, pluralistic and transparent about the values it constructs.

The last chapter, "Lived Landscapes: Three Sketches," departs in content and tone from the rest of the essay and includes sketches or "readings of landscapes" (2024, 138) in Italy, Germany and Turkey which bear a personal connection with the author. Through these examples, Siani stresses the centrality of temporality and spatiality when it comes to addressing landscapes that are inextricably connected with memory and history. His depictions of landscapes include natural wonders but also other topographic accidents, references to population, their occupations, art and architecture, agriculture, local economy and crafts, among other aspects, providing "an aesthetics of the continuity between nature and culture, environment and art, territory and work, the ordinary and the remarkable, the utilitarian and the contemplative" (Siani 2024, 148). I have enjoyed this chapter immensely since it serves as an application of the previous philosophical and political ideas as well as a model and source of inspiration for analyzing other landscapes.

I greatly recommend Siani's essay to any reader interested in landscapes, landscape aesthetics, landscape politics and landscape practices. Scholars working on environmental studies from an Anglophone perspective will surely be surprised by the notorious absence of references to this field, but this is not a limitation of the essay, which is, after all, a philosophical work. On the contrary, it can be very useful should they wish to establish an original framework for discussing habitats and resituating landscapes within their own field. Far from establishing an ethnocentric approach, in Siani's essay landscapes bear witness to human fragility as much as to human power in the Anthropocene. His work can be a powerful toolkit to build bridges between landscape and environmental studies, between policies and practices, including artistic practices but not exclusively, and between philosophical and cultural approaches to landscape.

BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

MAR NIEVES-FERNÁNDEZ
Universidade de Vigo

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Reloading and Unleashing Cultural Studies: New Trends and Perspectives

Adriana Taboada-González and Celia Veiga-Pérez, eds.

Servizo de Publicacións da Universidade de Vigo. 2025. 186 pp.
ISBN: 978-84-1188-071-8

With the publication of John Storey's *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (1997), new pathways opened up in the examination of what constitutes culture is and how it should be studied. In the three decades that have passed since Storey published the first edition of his monograph, the field of Cultural Studies has received considerable attention from diverse lenses. The present volume, edited by Adriana Taboada-González and Celia Veiga-Pérez, both from the Universitat de les Illes Balears, proves that the study of pop culture enjoys great popularity, particularly among younger scholars. As the title suggests, Cultural Studies had been reloading at the Universidade de Vigo long before this volume was unleashed. Three editions of an academic event aimed at students and early-career scholars culminated into this edited collection, which brings together ten chapters addressing different aspects of culture from diverse theoretical stances. In doing so, the volume offers new perspectives on the blurry boundaries which are characteristic of mass culture.

The volume opens with a foreword by Andrea Ruthven, which effectively contextualises the field of Cultural Studies, outlining its subject-matters as well as the criticism it has faced since its early days. This is followed by the editors' introduction, which provides a detailed account of the motivations behind the compilation of this work.

In Chapter 1, Sara Tabuyo-Santaclara explores the rise of extreme-right groups in the United States after President Donald Trump's election. More precisely, she draws on the character of Serena Joy from The Handmaid's Tale franchise to examine the role of white women in far-right and alt-right political activism. Building on Banet-Weiser's work (2018), Tabuyo-Santaclara contextualises the rise in popularity of feminist ideals outside the academic sphere and the consequent rise of misogynistic discourse in certain internet circles, framing the latter as a "backlash" against the former. These anti-feminist currents have contributed, among other consequences, to the increasing visibility of so-called "tradwives." These "traditional wives," who are seen—and see themselves—as the perfect 1950s homemakers, are clearly reminiscent of the Wives in The Handmaid's Tale. The contradictions inherent in this role are embodied in the media by the figure of Serena Joy, who struggles within the social and political structure she helped to build. Similarly, the tradwife movement can be

understood as a misogynistic mechanism which encourages women to feel empowered while simultaneously reinforcing "long-sustained male-dominated patriarchal structures" (Tabuyo-Santaclara 2025, 31).

The connections between girlhood, lesbianism, witchcraft and sexuality are the main pillars upon which Chapter 2 is constructed. Iria Seijas-Pérez situates the metaphor of the witch as a woman rebelling against patriarchal rules and explores the role of witchcraft and sexuality in three Irish young-adult novels which portray young girls' sapphic experiences: Moïra Fowley-Doyle's All the Bad Apples (2019), Sarah Maria Griffin's Other Words for Smoke (2019), and Deidre Sullivan's Perfectly Preventable Deaths (2019). This chapter is a reminder to the reader of the fact that Ireland's architecture of containment continues to affect a generation which has perhaps not directly endured its horrors, but which is nonetheless shaped by their consequences.

Ian R. Matthews' exploration of the concept of "Encoded Empathy" through the analysis of the role-play videogame Disco Elysium (2019) conforms Chapter 3. The author reflects on the necessity of the gamer to display a certain degree of empathy towards a game's narrative in order to consider the product engaging. Game creators are aware of this, and, to this end, they attempt to tailor their products in such a way that they will demand an emotional answer from the gamer. Thus, a form of dialogue between the game—and therefore the creator—and the player is established, in which the player is compelled to confront certain choices as their own. This dynamic becomes central in the game's design and development, as it aims at facilitating player participation in the most meaningful way possible. Matthews concludes that the analysis of Encoded Empathy and the careful measure affect remain under-researched topics in the field of media studies, emphasising the need for a more precise measurement of engagement.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the influence of Irish folklore in the creation of Japanese media. From a cybertranscultural approach, Noelia López-Fernández and Silvia Vázquez-Lorenzo investigate the liminal spaces in which cultural products overlap, particularly the animated series Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion and the Fate franchise. The authors frame both texts as multilayered cultural manifestations. On the one hand, Code Geass interacts with the Irish notion of geis, which takes the form of an ancient power bestowed upon the protagonist, Lelouch, to aid him in his attempt to overthrow the empire. Like the original geis, this geass functions as a double-edged sword, enabling Lelouch's success at the cost of those he once held dear. On the other hand, the Fate series engages more actively with Celtic mythology and Arthurian traditions, particularly through elements such as the quest for the Holy Grail. Both examples of Japanese media emerge as culturally hybrid and, as such, call for an updated analytical framework capable of addressing their transcultural complexity.

Feminist studies come return to the forefront in Chapter 5. María Ventoso Prado contributes to this volume with an insightful analysis on how the BBC series Fleabag (2016–2019) challenges the conventions of mainstream postfeminist ideas characteristic of media products from the 1990s and early 2000s. The author provides a solid framework, examining the rise of postfeminism as a reaction to second-wave feminism and guiding the reader through a careful exposition of its influence in well-loved series and films. Against this background, the analysis of Fleabag that follows provides a strong contrast. Through the use of irony and metafiction, the series presents an anti-heroine explores and subverts concepts like hypersexualisation and empowerment, ultimately questioning the postfeminist narratives in which female characters, once successful, capitalistic, and sexually liberated, are portrayed as having no need to maintain or articulate feminist ideas.

In Chapter 6, Maria José Salazar García examines the portrayal of feminist aesthetics in Greta Gerwig's Barbie (2023). After a brief overview of the influence of Barbie dolls on young girls—particularly in regard to the way these young girls perceive and reproduce notions of gender, femininity and womanhood—the author turns to the film itself, structuring the analysis around a two-act division. Act I presents Gerwig's representation of Barbieland, a place in which Barbie is idolised as the embodiment of the perfect woman. In this context, Salazar García explores the notion of plastic feminism, whereby feminist discourse is adapted and distorted in order to reinforce gender inequality. Act II explores Barbie's attempts to break free from the patriarchal structures which constrain her. The author concludes by emphasising the paradoxical use of a symbolic product such as Barbie to criticise the objectification of women and the male gaze, thus proposing a reconfiguration of the figure of Barbie for future generations.

An insightful take on food studies is at the core of Chapter 7, where Alexandra Simón López examines how gender shapes an individual's relationship with food based on an analysis of The Menu (2022), directed by Mark Mylod. This film constitutes an example of the 'food film genre': audiovisual products in which food is at the centre of the narrative, providing both reasons for conflict and the path to the resolution (Lidenfeld and Parasecoli 2013, 15–16). In The Menu, food is used to open new sections in the film and even sets a particular tone for each of the acts. Moreover, it also serves to construct power relationships which revolve around who eats what, who is allowed to eat, who is willing to do so, and who has the authority to determine or comment on other's eating habits. In this context, the production and consumption of food become mechanisms through which hierarchies are established, a system which closely mirrors gender dynamics. Simón López centres her analysis in the character of Margot/Erin who, by refusing to partake in

the restaurant's rituals, sets boundaries and resists the power structures embodied by the chef and the elite culture he represents, as well as by the customers who perpetuate those structures.

The consolidation of the Vampire Myth across different cultures is the focus of the eighth chapter of this edited volume, which examines Uli Edel's (2000) film adaptation of the novel Der Kleine Vampir (1979). Natalia Mirón-Florido traces the historical evolution of the vampire narrative from its origins in Eastern Europe, exploring its cultural relevance through the figures of Dracula in Victorian England and Count Orlok in Germany. After an insightful background section, the author turns to her analysis of The Little Vampire (2000), an adaptation of Angela Sommer-Brodenburg's homonymous children's novel (1979). Both products challenge the traditional depiction of the vampire as a purely evil creature by presenting them as characters designed to elicit sympathy from readers and viewers. The film adaptation relocates the narrative from Germany to Scotland, a change that Mirón-Florido interprets as highly significant: according to the author, the use of the vampire myth in this context reflects a cultural unease associated with a perceived fragmentation of the national unity at the dawn of the century. Edel's film draws on the stereotypical figure of the aristocratic vampire and employs it to challenge preconceived Orientalist views on religious practices and anti-foreign sentiments.

The impact of social media in the literary sphere is explored in Chapter 9 with special attention to the rise in popularity of Instapoetry. Irene Martínez Misa's provides a detailed account of the features which define this new subgenre and explores the new ways readers engage with literary texts in the age of social media. Instapoems are generally short, concise compositions which often lack punctuation and capital letters and which strongly depend on the concept of relatability. Instapoets aim to convey powerful and emotional meanings through brief statements which can be easily read while scrolling on an app. Poetry, according to Martínez Misa, has historically been the domain of the higher classes, and access to the genre by marginalised voices has often been restricted. However, in the digital age, social media platforms have transformed this dynamic, providing new spaces for these voices to express themselves and to interact directly with readers. The author concludes by considering how the new possibilities brought about by the digital culture have contributed to the democratisation of poetry, challenging the traditional association of the genre to elitism and Eurocentrism.

To wrap-up this volume, Teresa Cousillas Lema re-examines Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing (1600) from a feminist perspective. The extensive body of research on the play provides the author with fertile ground from which to pursue a central line of inquiry: the ways in which the characters of Beatrice and Hero have consistently been portrayed and analysed in dichotomous terms. Cousillas Lema argues that, at the heart of the play, Beatrice and Hero are dear to each other, and the interpretation of their dynamic as an example of female rivalry is shaped by gendered expectations. Their relationship, grounded on mutual understanding despite their contrasting personalities, is exemplified in Kenneth Brannagh's 1993 film adaptation, which frequently depicts the two women together in frame, supporting one another and sharing moments of joy. In this chapter, the author challenges the traditional perceptions of the two women though a specialised literature review and highlights the importance of the affective bond between the two cousins.

In short, within this edited volume, readers can expect a collection of studies by young researchers shedding light on different aspects of culture worldwide from diverse theoretical frameworks, including Feminist Studies, Transculturalism, and Food Studies. This volume constitutes a revindication of the wide range of subject-matters within Cultural Studies, a field which, as Ruthven (2025, 24) put it in her foreword to the volume, "cannot remain static" and which constitutes "a powerful field for change" (2025, 22).



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BOOK REVIEWS · LITERATURE AND CULTURE

DAVID WALTON
Universidad de Murcia

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Baladas escocesas: Selección, edición crítica y traducción

Julio Rubén Valdés Miyares, 2025. 322 pp.

Ediuno. Ediciones de la Universidad de Oviedo.
ISBN: 979-13-87540-15-9

Although interest has been shown in the British ballad tradition by scholars and translators in the Spanish-speaking world, Valdés Miyares' new book fills an important gap in relation to one aspect of traditional Scottish culture. Scholars, historians, and editors, like many of their English-speaking counterparts, have tended to absorb Scottish ballads into the wider Anglo-Saxon tradition, rather than focus on the particularities and importance of the Scottish contribution. A case in point is Montezanti, who is Valdés' only significant predecessor in making a volume of traditional English ballads available in Spanish translation; however, like important ballad editors such as Child (1965), his selection melds Scottish and other British ballads together. Montezanti was, of course, working within the Argentinian tradition, which reflects the idiomatic nuances of Argentinian Spanish; and while there is some overlap in this respect, Valdés (no doubt influenced by Menéndez Pidal's editing of Asturian and other Spanish romances, 1953) serves his readership by firmly situating the translations within the Iberian Spanish tradition. In this way, the reader is alerted from the outset to the necessity and originality of this new translated collection; however, the book's interest and cultural significance extend far beyond this.

Scholars working in Spanish academia will already be aware of Valdés' expertise as commentator, historian, and translator of ballads written in English (1993, 1998, 1999, 2005, 2007), which makes him particularly well suited to achieve the aims he sets himself. These aims are succinctly captured in his subtitle, "Selección, edición crítica y traducción," the tripartite structure that provides the architectural basis upon which all elements are assembled and cohere. A brief overview of the book's structure will precede a discussion of the merits and importance of each section.

The edition opens with an extensive introduction that provides important cultural context and draws on the work of key writers on ballads, such as Willa Muir (1965) and Francis James Child (1965), as well as Luis Moreno's (1995) work on the Scottish nation. It also outlines the publishing history of ballads beyond the Scottish tradition. The themes addressed in this opening chapter include the tradition of popular song, the ballad as a literary genre, Scottish ballads, and a final section comprising reflections on Valdés' aims, the structure of the book, and his approach to translation.

These opening sections are particularly useful for students or scholars approaching the ballad tradition for the first time. Most scholars with a background in English studies will be familiar with literary ballads, particularly those of Coleridge, Wordsworth, or Wilde, and Valdés wisely begins with this tradition before broadening the discussion to define the form in its various guises. He also addresses debates concerning whether the ballad originates with individual authors or communal processes, and explores its relationship to popular song in terms of lineation, versification, and narrative structure.

Given Valdés' wider academic interests, there are references to the revival of the ballad form in 1960s folk culture and to songwriters such as Tom Waits, Nick Cave, and Mike Scott of The Waterboys, who adopt core elements of the form in their compositional styles. This point, while seemingly incidental, is well made, as it extends the cultural relevance of the ballad and highlights its compositional features: simple rhyme schemes, direct lyrics, clear narrative structures, and the importance of sentimentality.

This prepares the reader for a discussion of the Scottish tradition, including its provenance, regional variation, and performance and publication history. This includes the "Ossian" controversy, in which Dr Johnson accused James Macpherson of fabricating translations of third-century Gaelic poetry. Despite its contested authenticity, Valdés argues that this episode stimulated wider interest in ancient Scottish song, particularly during the Romantic period. Valdés also emphasises the importance of women in the transmission of Scottish ballads (something not shared by all cultures with strong traditions of balladeering).

Before presenting the translations, Valdés outlines dominant thematic concerns, including religion, nationhood, crime, the supernatural, matrimony, courtship, and sexuality. These themes inform his decision to organise the ballads thematically (31), a relatively uncommon approach that allows for comparative analysis while facilitating future research. For example, themes such as the Scottish border may be compared with the ballads of the Christian–Islamic frontier of medieval Spain; similarly, attention is drawn to matriarchal cultures in ballads about "witches" or "matriarchs," and to Anaga mythology in supernatural ballads involving fairies and spells.

A final preparatory section discusses Valdés' source materials, noting that his selection is based on the most representative ballads published by Child between 1882 and 1898 (1965). While he does not attempt to emulate Child's impressive editorial achievement, he follows in the tradition of collectors and editors such as Percy, Herder, Scott, Buchan, Kinloch, and Motherwell (to name only a few), who helped disseminate Scottish ballads in English.

Valdés also explains his system for identifying translations by title, collection number, and Child's variant lettering, while acknowledging that he does not always agree with Child's preferences. He further emphasises that translation is inherently interpretative, every new version or variant being an interpretation (even though written in the original language) which is, in my view, a crucial hermeneutical point for anyone embarking on research (and not only of the ballad tradition).

In discussing translation methodology, Valdés states that, like Montesanti before him, he does not aspire to 'improve' on the rhymes (like Walter Scott did) but he does not attempt to "improve" the rhymes but to reproduce them as faithfully as possible, even retaining weaker consonant rhymes (including repetition) and allowing for assonance and metrical flexibility. He also justifies certain grammatical deviations in Spanish as a means of preserving the dramatic immediacy of the originals. These principles are admirably realised in the translations themselves.

As for the translations themselves, Valdés presents 55 ballads, many with useful variants, each preceded by a concise introduction, that augments in more specific detail, the more general discussions in the introduction. The formatting is exemplary, with original ballads presented line by line as parallel texts alongside the translations, enabling direct comparison without reliance on footnotes—indeed, the complete absence of footnotes is noteworthy.

The ballads are organised into nine thematic categories: Spells, Borders, Apparitions, Adventures, Crimes, Fairies, Witches, Matriarchs, and Tragedy. Longer ballads, such as "The Battle of Otterburn" (63f.), "Kinmont Willie" (81f.), "Berwick and Graham" (93f.), and "The Outlaw Murray" (102f.), to name only four of the eight lengthier ballads, show how resourceful Valdés is when navigating the originals. If earlier he demonstrates his skills as a researcher here he reveals his creative prowess, sensibility, profound knowledge of the sources, and his resources when it comes to an understanding of Scottish English. It is here that his exceptional ability in rendering the tone and styles of the ballads in a distinct linguistic and cultural mileu is foregrounded. Only by reading the translations is it possible to appreciate his linguistic gifts, competence and creative proficiency.

This volume represents a significant contribution to the study of Scottish ballads, combining rigorous scholarship with exceptional translation. It serves as an ideal point of entry for readers—especially Spanish-speaking scholars—interested in the Scottish ballad tradition. Its chief merit lies in its clear focus on Scottish material as a distinct cultural and literary corpus, rather than subsuming it within a broader Anglo-Saxon framework, as earlier translators and editors have tended to do. By situating his translations within the Iberian Spanish tradition, Valdés also provides a linguistically and culturally coherent approach that enhances accessibility for his intended readership.

The volume's tripartite structure—selection, critical edition, and translation—ensures both scholarly rigour and usability. The extensive introduction offers valuable contextualisation, addressing the history, form, and thematic range of ballads, while also engaging with key debates in the field. Particularly noteworthy is the thematic organisation of the translations,

which facilitates comparative analysis and opens new avenues for research, especially in areas such as border traditions, gender, and the supernatural. Valdés' translation methodology, prioritising fidelity to form and tone over aesthetic refinement, demonstrates both technical skill and critical awareness.

The book is impeccably researched, organised, and written, with only minor oversights. For example, Luis Moreno's *Escocia, Nación y Razón* (1995) is cited but not included in the bibliography. An index might have been useful, although the thematic organisation compensates for this. While Valdés discusses form and translation strategy, he does not address in detail the limitations or challenges of translation, somethig that would, admittedly, be out of place in the book being reviewed here—but it is something that could be explored in future work and, as shown by this book and his previous publications, Valdés has shown that he is more than qualified to carry out such a task.



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IN MEMORIAM

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Javier Ruano García: Magisterio, compromiso y generosidad

Pilar Sánchez García y Miriam Borham Puyal
Departamento de Filología Inglesa (Universidad de Salamanca)

En la tradición de la Universidad de Salamanca pervive la célebre expresión de Fray Luis de León, "decíamos ayer…", que evoca la continuidad del magisterio y la permanencia de la palabra académica más allá del tiempo. Hoy, sin embargo, esa continuidad se ve interrumpida. Javier Ruano García ya no está entre nosotros, y su ausencia deja en suspenso una voz que merecía seguir resonando en nuestras aulas durante muchos años más.

Javier fue, ante todo, una buena persona. No lo expresamos como fórmula de cortesía, sino como certeza que nace del trato cercano, de los años compartidos y de incontables momentos. Quienes tuvimos la fortuna de conocerle recordaremos siempre su discreción, su amabilidad constante y esa forma suya, tan poco común, de llevar el saber con ligereza y sin ostentación.

Su trayectoria académica estuvo indisolublemente unida a la Universidad de Salamanca, institución a la que dedicó su talento, su trabajo y su vocación. En ella se formó como alumno y en ella desarrolló toda su carrera hasta convertirse en profesor titular de universidad. Había alcanzado ya la acreditación para el cuerpo de catedráticos de universidad, culminación natural de una trayectoria brillante y de una dedicación ejemplar a la docencia, la investigación y la gestión universitaria, si bien su fallecimiento repentino impidió su nombramiento.

El suyo es uno de esos ejemplos que una universidad contempla con legítimo orgullo: alumno, investigador, profesor y maestro de generaciones de estudiantes. Toda una vida dedicada a la Universidad de Salamanca, a la que sirvió con lealtad inquebrantable y entrega ejemplar. Por eso su pérdida resulta especialmente dolorosa. No solo despedimos a un compañero querido y a un académico brillante; despedimos a una de las personas llamadas a desempeñar un papel decisivo en el futuro de nuestra institución. Su ausencia deja un vacío difícil de llenar y la sensación inevitable de futuro truncado.

Javier fue un lingüista riguroso y profundamente comprometido con su trabajo, de los que crean escuela. Pero, por encima de todo, fue una persona que nunca permitió que la erudición se interpusiera entre él y los demás. Su conocimiento era inmenso, pero lo ofrecía con naturalidad, cercanía y una elegancia intelectual poco frecuente.

El trabajo nunca le asustó. Fue coordinador de Grado, coordinador del Programa de Doctorado, responsable de programas Erasmus y subdirector de Departamento, además de desempeñar numerosas tareas de gestión que asumía con naturalidad y sentido del deber. Como organizador de encuentros y conferencias, contribuyó de forma decisiva a situar a la Universidad de Salamanca y a nuestro Departamento en el mapa internacional de los estudios sobre variación lingüística del inglés, de la historia de la lengua inglesa, la dialectología y sociolingüística históricas y la lexicografía dialectal. Su impulso académico y organizativo convirtió a Salamanca en un punto de encuentro para investigadores de referencia mundial.

En estos días, el eco de su ausencia ha trascendido ampliamente el ámbito de nuestra Universidad. Hemos recibido numerosos mensajes de colegas y amigos de todo el mundo, testimonio del alcance internacional de su trabajo y de la estima que despertaba. Kathryn Allan (University College London), Anthony Esposito (Oxford University Press), Joan Beal (University of Sheffield), Merja Kytö (Uppsala University), Helen Barton (Cambridge University Press), Raymond Hickey, entre muchos otros, han querido acompañarnos con palabras de afecto y reconocimiento. A ello se suma el asombro y la tristeza de tantos antiguos alumnos, que aún no dan crédito a su pérdida y que siguen recordando su magisterio con admiración y gratitud.

En lo personal, su pérdida tiene para nosotras una dimensión aún más honda. Desde que lo conocimos como alumno en 2002 o lo tuvimos como compañero de fatigas doctorales, hemos tenido el privilegio de compartir con él años de trabajo, proyectos y amistad. Hemos recorrido juntos un largo camino, dentro y fuera del ámbito académico, y hoy resulta difícil imaginar el día a día sin su presencia, su consejo y su cercanía.

Guardamos especialmente la memoria de su forma de escuchar. Javier escuchaba de verdad, con atención plena, con respeto y con interés sincero. Respondía siempre con precisión, medida y justicia. En un mundo a menudo apresurado, él sabía detener el tiempo en una conversación.

Hoy cuesta aceptar su ausencia: no llegarán sus palabras, su consejo sereno, su mirada clara y sin estridencias. Cuesta, sobre todo, imaginar los pequeños momentos cotidianos, cuando nos esperábamos al salir de clase para tomar un café y comentar las clases y el día a día.

Sin embargo, queda algo que no se pierde: su ejemplo y su legado. La manera en que vivió, con integridad, humildad y respeto profundo por el conocimiento y por las personas, seguirá acompañándonos.

Recordarle es, para nosotras, volver a su sonrisa, a su voz tranquila y a su presencia siempre acogedora. Y es, sobre todo, una forma de gratitud: por lo aprendido, por lo compartido y por lo vivido.

Gracias por tanto, Javier.

Paula Schintu (Universidad de Salamanca)

Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee.
Ben Jonson, “Timber: or, Discoveries” (1641)

Hace ya más de diez años y aún como estudiante de Máster, fui sola a mi primer congreso. No era un congreso de jóvenes investigadores (de hecho, no había ninguno), y yo presentaba parte de mi trabajo de fin de grado. Aquello era aterrador. Cuando llegué a la sala donde tendría que presentar, la tercera después de dos investigadores más que consolidados, uno de ellos, al que, por supuesto, no conocía, se acercó. Me preguntó si yo era Paula, de Salamanca. Intentando (sin mucho

éxito) disimular los nervios, contesté que sí. Me sonrió. Me dijo que estuviera tranquila, que todo iba a salir bien, que no le dijera nada, pero que mi tutor le había llamado para decirle que yo estaría allí, y que me cuidara. Mi tutor era Javier Ruano.

Se hace tremendamente difícil honrar a alguien que nunca buscó ser honrado. Hay personas en la academia cuya huella se mide en índices, publicaciones, proyectos o cargos; hay otras, mucho menos frecuentes, que dejan además una forma de estar en el mundo que transforma silenciosamente a quienes trabajan y aprenden junto a ellas. Javier Ruano era una de estas personas. Javier pensaba, trabajaba, hacía y enseñaba sin pretensiones, discretamente y en silencio, únicamente con la ambición de aquel que ha consagrado su vida a algo que va mucho más allá del saber. Javier vivió para aprender. De todo, de todos. En la sombra, para él. Y, desde esa sombra, inevitablemente brillaba.

Con los años, Javier desarrolló una trayectoria vital y académica extraordinaria, y se consolidó como un referente internacional en el estudio de la historia de la lengua inglesa, la dialectología y sociolingüística históricas y la lexicografía dialectal. Lo hizo del mismo modo en que hacía todas las cosas: sin estridencias y con una dedicación comprometida y honesta. Gracias a su trabajo constante y apasionado, impulsó proyectos fundamentales para el estudio de las variedades del inglés; entre ellos destaca, por ejemplo, su papel central en el desarrollo del *Salamanca Corpus*. Sus numerosas publicaciones, más allá de índices, impacto y prestigio editorial, contribuyeron a rescatar aquellas hablas frecuentemente olvidadas en el estudio de la historia del inglés. Allí donde se había explorado la norma, lo convencional o lo prestigioso, Javier quiso escuchar otras voces: las periféricas, las humildes, las dialectales. Su trabajo consistió, en cierto modo, en devolverles la palabra. Le interesaba no solo qué decían, sino cómo lo decían, qué querían decir y por qué elegían decirlo de una determinada manera. Y en esa pasión minuciosa por el detalle lingüístico había, en realidad, una profunda preocupación humana. Para Javier, el lenguaje nunca fue únicamente un sistema abstracto de reglas y estructuras, sino una forma de articular quiénes somos, de habitar el mundo y de dejar huella en la memoria compartida. Por eso, entendía que la variación lingüística no era solamente una herramienta para explorar la evolución de un idioma, sino también un vehículo para comprender las elecciones lingüísticas cotidianas y a aquellos que las toman; en definitiva, un camino para comprendernos mejor a nosotros mismos.

Sobre todo esto publicó en algunas de las editoriales, revistas y volúmenes más prestigiosos de su campo, escribió monografías como *Early Modern Northern English Lexis: A Literary Corpus-Based Study* (2010) y *Etymological Collections of English Words and Provincial Expressions* (2018), impartió conferencias, desarrolló proyectos, dio clases, dirigió tesis. Todo ello reflejo del rigor, el mimo, la paciencia y la minuciosidad que caracterizaban su manera de investigar, y que forman ya parte de su valiosísimo legado. Pero reducir a Javier a sus logros académicos se me hace imposible. Su huella académica e institucional ha sido también, y por encima de todo, humana. Durante años sostuvo buena parte de la vida académica y cotidiana del Departamento de Filología Inglesa de la Universidad de Salamanca desde la discreción, el trabajo, el compromiso y los cuidados, asumiendo responsabilidades y contribuyendo a construir lo que realmente debería ser la comunidad universitaria. Lo hizo siempre con una generosidad poco común y con una convicción profunda de que la Universidad no debe basarse únicamente en la excelencia investigadora, sino también en el conocimiento compartido, el tiempo, la atención, la colaboración y el apoyo que unas personas dedican a otras. Todo esto consiguió, sin pretenderlo, trasladarlo a cualquier espacio en el que se integraba, y, sobre todo, contagiarlo a quienes crecimos académica y personalmente de su mano.

Quienes fuimos sus estudiantes, compañeros y amigos recordamos no solo a un profesor e investigador fuera de lo común, sino a una persona amable, atenta, cercana, generosa y profundamente inspiradora. Javier enseñaba incluso cuando no parecía estar enseñando. Enseñaba a ser curioso, enseñaba a observar, a pensar despacio, a cuestionar y cuestionarse, a ser paciente, a ir paso a paso, a dedicar tiempo y respeto. Enseñaba a apasionarse, a esperar, a compartir, a celebrar, a estar. En la academia, en la clase, en el mundo. Enseñaba y se mostraba por cómo hacía las cosas, y no por cómo hablaba de sí mismo. En un mundo dominado por la prisa y la inmediatez, Javier paraba, escuchaba y ayudaba. Javier se reía, tomaba café sin azúcar, se cruzaba de brazos y entornaba los ojos. Intentaba que se le dieran bien las plantas. Javier bebía vino, caminaba, escuchaba la radio y viajaba. Sacaba fotos al mar, a las fachadas y a los escaparates. Javier se levantaba demasiado pronto, comía brócoli y desayunaba despacio. No le encantaban los emojis, pero descifraba las letras más diminutas de los manuscritos. Pensaba en Lisboa, Londres, Italia, Ahigal, y evidentemente le gustaba el indie. Veía *Los años nuevos*, hablaba de la vida. Trabajaba mucho y era feliz.

Cuidaba, quería y, mucho más de lo que él imaginaba, Javi Ruano era, y siempre será, profundamente querido.

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Association of Young Researchers on Anglophone Studies (ASYRAS)

Javi fue el primer presidente de ASYRAS, y le debemos en gran parte la existencia de nuestra asociación. Siempre luchó por dar voz a los jóvenes investigadores, ofreciendo su ayuda incansable, su mano amiga, y su sonrisa eterna. Su compromiso con la filología y su calidad humana dejan una huella imborrable en todos los que tuvimos la suerte de trabajar y compartir momentos con él. Es nuestro deber mantener vivo su legado.

Javi, siempre te recordaremos con una sonrisa.

Sociedad Española de Estudios Americanos (SAAS)

Lamentamos profundamente la pérdida de una persona tan cercana, apreciada y valorada por su dedicación y calidad humana. Su recuerdo permanecerá siempre con quienes tuvimos la oportunidad de conocerle.

La Junta Directiva de SAAS

Sociedad Hispano-Portuguesa de Estudios Renacentistas Ingleses (SEDERI)

Javier era miembro de nuestra asociación, y fue parte del comité organizador de uno de nuestros congresos recientes. Fue, además, un excelente filólogo, cuyo trabajo sobre dialectología histórica del inglés permanecerá como una parte incuestionable de su legado. Y fue sobre todo una persona respetada y querida por sus colegas.

International Society for the Linguistics of English (ISLE)

Javier was a distinguished scholar whose work significantly advanced the study of historical language variation. His research focused in particular on regional dialects of the early and late modern English periods, and he made important contributions to historical sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, historical dialect lexicography, and manuscript editing. Over the past decade, he played a central role in the development of the Salamanca Corpus, where he was responsible for curating literary texts representative of the Lancashire dialect, as well as editing glossaries compiled by women such

as Sarah Sophia Banks and Angelina Parker. His meticulous scholarship and deep commitment to uncovering the voices of the past enriched the field in lasting ways.

Beyond his academic achievements, Javier was, above all, a passionate dialectologist whose enthusiasm for his subject was deeply inspiring. He had a rare ability to combine rigorous scholarship with genuine curiosity and intellectual generosity, encouraging those around him to engage more thoughtfully with language and its history.

Those who had the privilege of knowing Javier will remember not only his intellectual brilliance but also his warmth, kindness, and unfailing approachability. He was an exceptionally generous colleague, always ready to share his knowledge and offer support, and a dedicated teacher and mentor who cared deeply for his students and took great pride in their growth. He did not just study language; he lived it, with a warmth that touched everyone he met.

Javier's passing leaves a void that will be keenly felt across the academic community and beyond. He will be remembered with deep respect, admiration, and affection, both for his scholarly contributions and for the remarkable kindness and humanity that defined him.

In the words of the nineteenth-century Lancashire poet Samuel Laycock:

> "Farewell, thou gifted singer! thy sweet songs
> Have charmed the ears of thousands in our land:
> Now thou art gone, we feel that we have lost
> One of the greatest of the gifted band."
> Rest well, Javier.

By Paula Rodríguez-Puente on behalf of the ISLE Executive Committee

Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo Norteamericanos (AEDEAN)

Resulta difícil encontrar palabras que hagan justicia a la dimensión humana, académica y afectiva de quien fue, para tantos, mucho más que un colega: un amigo entrañable, un compañero generoso y un pilar fundamental de la comunidad AEDEAN.

Si algo puede expresar la magnitud de su huella es la certeza compartida de que este mundo sería mejor con más "Javieres Ruano." En su persona se aunaban cualidades extraordinarias: una bondad sincera, una serenidad elegante, una inteligencia afable y una capacidad única para hacer sentir a los demás escuchados, acompañados y valorados. Casi de puntillas, con esa discreción que lo caracterizaba, fue dejando una huella hondísima en quienes tuvimos el privilegio de conocerle.

Javier fue, sin duda, una figura excepcional en el ámbito académico. Su vocación y dedicación hacia sus estudiantes y colegas fueron ejemplares, así como su compromiso con su Departamento en la Universidad de Salamanca y con la asociación AEDEAN, a la que tanto quiso y a la que tanto dio. Como tesorero y miembro de la Junta Directiva, fue no solo un colaborador eficiente y responsable, sino también un verdadero hermano para quienes compartieron con él ese trabajo.

Quienes tuvimos la fortuna de coincidir con Javi en la organización de los congresos AEDEAN—especialmente en las ediciones 47, 48 y en los preparativos del 49—sabemos bien de su entrega incansable, su eficacia silenciosa, su disposición constante y su actitud siempre agradecida. Trabajar a su lado fue un honor y una experiencia entrañable. Su sonrisa bondadosa, su calma y su genuino deseo de disfrutar de los buenos momentos permanecerán imborrables en nuestra memoria.

Pero más allá de su valía profesional, Javi deja una huella aún más profunda en el plano humano. Fue querido por todos y todas, como demuestran los innumerables mensajes de afecto y dolor que han llegado desde todos los rincones. Su generosidad, su cercanía y su forma de estar en el mundo hicieron de él una persona irrepetible.

> Descansa en paz, querido Javi.
> Goian bego, lagun.
> Que la tierra te sea leve.

Juntas Directivas de AEDEAN (2022-2026)

IN MEMORIAM

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Pilar Abad García: La armonía de un orden sereno

Pilar Garcés García (Universidad de Valladolid)

Hay personas que dejan una huella por lo que hacen y otras que la dejan por la manera en que habitan la vida. Pilar Abad García pertenecía a estas últimas. Primera catedrática de Filología Inglesa del departamento tras casi tres décadas, abrió caminos con la serenidad de quien no necesita imponerse para ser referente. Su autoridad nacía del conocimiento, pero también de una forma profundamente honesta de entender la universidad y las personas.

Había en ella una rara belleza de equilibrio. Sus ojos azules, siempre amables y atentos, parecían mirar con esa calma que precede al juicio justo. Y su melena rubia, cortada con esa precisión simétrica que casi parecía una declaración de principios, reflejaba algo más que una elección estética: era una extensión de su carácter. Pilar amaba el orden, la estructura y la coherencia. Todo debía tener un título y un subtítulo; todo debía encontrar su lugar exacto, su sentido y su razón. No era rigidez: era respeto por el pensamiento y por el trabajo bien hecho.

Como Defensora de la Comunidad Universitaria fue admirada por su rectitud y su capacidad para escuchar sin prejuicios. Hoy queda su ejemplo: una inteligencia luminosa, una bondad discreta y la certeza de que algunas personas ordenan el mundo simplemente estando en él.

José Manuel Barrio (Universidad de Valladolid)

Mi amiga y excelente compañera María Pilar Abad García, que tristemente nos dejó hace unos meses, nació en Burriana (Castellón) un día de abril de 1947. Cursó sus estudios y toda su carrera profesional en la Universidad de Valladolid, en el Departamento de Filología Inglesa, donde llegó a ser catedrática y directora del departamento, entre otros cargos. No me voy a extender en sus muchos méritos, investigaciones o publicaciones, que ahí quedan fruto de su esfuerzo. Voy a hablar de ella en lo que representó nuestra amistad y nuestra colaboración a lo largo de más de treinta años. Tuve el honor de conocerla en 1986, cuando me incorporé a la disciplina del Departamento de Filología Inglesa, procedente del Colegio Universitario de Soria. Pronto establecimos una relación de compañerismo, luego de amistad y colaboración, hasta que se jubiló y se marchó a Valencia con su inseparable Vicente. Pilar era una persona muy profesional, seria, sensata y muy responsable, académicamente perfeccionista. Sus valiosos consejos y su interés por la poesía calaron desde el primer momento en mí y, gracias a ella, la poesía ha sido y es una constante en mis asignaturas y en mis traducciones. En lo cercano era una persona muy sensible, con gran capacidad para emocionarse, algo que pude comprobar en las conversaciones distendidas durante los cientos y cientos de cafés que tomamos juntos a lo largo de treinta años y en las caminatas de regreso a nuestras casas cruzando el puente de Poniente. Colaboramos mano a mano y muy fructíferamente en dos proyectos de investigación y sobre todo en la organización de las Jornadas de Literatura en Lengua Inglesa de los siglos XX y XXI, que se celebraron desde 1991 hasta el año 2004 en nuestro departamento y que quedaron plasmadas en los ocho volúmenes publicados bajo nuestra coordinación editorial. Pilar siempre se sintió muy orgullosa de aquellas jornadas y las recordaba con mucho cariño. También me gustaría destacar su gran dedicación durante unos años a la Secretaría de Redacción de la Revista *ES* (*Revista de Filología Inglesa*), una de las más antiguas de nuestra especialidad, así como a la organización en la Universidad de Valladolid del XVI Congreso AEDEAN (1992) de la Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-norteamericanos, en el que desempeñó el cargo de Secretaria General del Comité Organizador y contó conmigo para la Tesorería y la edición de las actas. La figura de mi amiga Pilar ha sido y es para algunos de nosotros una parte fundamental en nuestra vida académica. Me siento orgulloso de haberla conocido y nada me duele más que estar ahora escribiendo esta necrológica, aunque siempre vivirá en nuestro recuerdo y en sus trabajos. Descansa en paz, amiga.

Alberto Lázaro Lafuente (Universidad de Alcalá)

Recuerdo con gran cariño y admiración la figura de Pilar Abad. La conocí siendo estudiante en la Universidad de Valladolid cuando ella iniciaba su carrera académica, realizando su tesis doctoral sobre Gerard Manley Hopkins bajo la dirección de quien después también dirigiría la mía. En aquellos años la veía como profesora; años después, tuve la fortuna de conocerla como compañera. Ya en la década de los ochenta admiraba sus publicaciones sobre poetas británicos e irlandeses—Hopkins, Yeats, Heaney, Eliot—, y pude comprobar la calidad de su trabajo cuando reseñé para la Annotated Bibliography for English Studies su libro Cómo leer a T. S. Eliot (Ediciones Júcar, 1992), una magnífica guía de lectura de complicados poemas como "The Waste Land" o "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Pilar tenía la virtud de hacer parecer sencillo lo que era tremendamente complejo. La recuerdo como asidua participante en los congresos de AEDEAN. Me hizo especial ilusión verla en el congreso de 1994, organizado por mi departamento en Alcalá, y en 1997, cuando la invitamos a un ciclo de conferencias que organizábamos con el British Council, donde ofreció una magnífica presentación de la poeta Jane Duran. También tuve ocasión de conocerla como organizadora de las *Jornadas de literatura en lengua inglesa del siglo XX* de Valladolid, a las que asistí en varias ocasiones, siempre incansable y pendiente de la calidad de las actas. Recuerdo también su brillante conferencia plenaria sobre Carol Ann Duffy en el congreso de AEDEAN de Valencia de 2004. En ese mismo congreso pasé a formar parte de la Junta de AEDEAN y, desde esa posición, fui testigo de excepción de su incansable labor defendiendo la Filología Inglesa en la Comisión de Coordinación del Proyecto Conjunto ANECA, durante el arduo proceso de elaboración de los planes de estudios, luchando por nuestros intereses cuando se quería dejar fuera nuestra especialidad del Catálogo de Títulos de Grado. Hoy, al recordarla, siento gratitud por todo lo que aportó a nuestra formación intelectual y humana. Permanecerán su obra, su ejemplo y el recuerdo afectuoso de quienes tuvimos la fortuna de conocerla y compartir con ella algunos momentos de nuestra vida universitaria.

Berta Cano Echevarría (Universidad de Valladolid)

Pilar Abad no cambiaba. Desde que yo la conocí en el año 1989 hasta que se jubiló, su imagen permaneció apenas alterada, con una apariencia juvenil, casi de niña, con una melenita rubia y lisa que reproducía la pulcritud de su atuendo. Creo que quien la conoció recordará esa imagen.

Pero Pilar tuvo muchas facetas: investigadora, directora de departamento, directora de innumerables tesis, defensora de la comunidad universitaria, gestora de planes de reforma de títulos, compañera y mujer comprometida. En estas líneas, sin embargo, yo quiero recordar una, su faceta como profesora o, como se dice ahora, docente.

A mí sólo me dio clase en los cursos de doctorado, cuando estos se cursaban en dos años tras haber hecho una licenciatura de cinco y cuando después se hacía una tesina que ocupaba al menos un año más. Ella se preparaba esas clases escrupulosamente, cada curso presentaba a un autor o grupo de autores nuevo, siempre poetas, cada vez más modernos, innovadores y revolucionarios. Me consta que aquellos cursos de doctorado dieron pie a muchas tesis. Pilar buscaba nuevas voces que presentarnos, se iba a Londres a comprar libros que luego cedía al departamento y nos animaba a presentar los poemas que leíamos en torno a una mesa. Esto puede parecer normal hoy, pero en la universidad masificada de los 90, era un soplo de frescura. De ahí salieron tesis sobre A. K. Ramanujan (1929-1993), Adrienne Rich (1929-2012), Tony Harrison (1937-2025), Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) y la mía propia sobre Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), un autor algo más clásico que los demás, pero igualmente revolucionario para su tiempo.

Cuando la licenciatura se transformó en el grado y hubo que cambiar los planes de estudio, Pilar participó en la elaboración del nuevo grado y puso empeño en dar protagonismo a la Teoría Literaria que era, junto con la poesía, otra de sus pasiones académicas. En sus clases (cuyo contenido yo conocía a través de sus exámenes) se esforzaba porque los alumnos aplicaran las teorías a los textos convirtiendo la asignatura en una suerte de Teoría de la Literatura Aplicada. De este interés combinado salió su libro *Poetología, teoría literaria y poesía en lengua inglesa* (2001). También investigó desde época muy temprana sobre cuestiones de género. Como consecuencia de ese interés diseñó una asignatura "Gender and Genre in English Literature" que tenía mucha demanda entre los alumnos del *Máster in Advanced English Studies: Languages and Cultures in Contact* (UVA-USAL); en ella combinaba estudios de la mujer con los estudios de género literario, buscando siempre cruces y ecos entre los temas que a ella más le interesaban. Y así fue dejando su huella en varias generaciones de estudiantes.

Aunque he empezado diciendo que Pilar no cambiaba, la universidad sí ha cambiado mucho desde que se jubiló. Los que quedamos de esa época, aun a sabiendas de que el sistema que hemos dejado atrás tenía muchos defectos, recordamos con cariño esos años, y su imagen, al menos en mi memoria, es parte fundamental de ellos.

Pilar, antes que mi maestra, mi madre académica.

Enrique Cámara Arenas (Universidad de Valladolid)

Let us find ourselves a gap, an illogical space within logical poems, an unexpected opening beyond Eliotian know-hows and methodologies, a place where we can sit for a while and converse, now that the cycle is closed, mother among dusty books, to chat, you and I, as we should have done more often, with an exchange of knowing silences presided by the smile I will remember, the full and deep smile that will remain when everything else is gone, the smile by which I will certainly recognize you when we meet again, when all of it recapitulates into a 'yes', and we close this piece of ours with a single, yet all-encompassing, fully satisfactory, and totally uncommented conclusion.

In Memoriam, Pilar Abad García (1947-2025)

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