
CONFERENCE REPORTS

Transactions and Connections: Memories of the Past in the European Context
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The renewed fascination with the past has been a fervent issue within literary-critical circles in the last decades. In accordance with the pre-eminence of these critical debates, the Department of English, French and German Philology and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Málaga (Spain) hosted the international seminar “Transactions and Connections: Memories of the Past in the European Context” on 9 -11 October, 2013. Characterised by a truly European reach, this seminar gathered both reputed and early-career researchers coming from Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom. Both plenary talks and papers in the parallel sessions were given in English and they encompassed the analysis of the past in a wide variety of historical contexts.

Five papers were presented on (pre)Enlightenment, the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Siân Adiseshiah (University of Lincoln, UK) delved into Caryl Churchill's *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* (1972) and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), set respectively in the Algerian Revolution and the English Civil War in the 1640s. By perusing Churchill's rewriting of the British revolutionary past, Adiseshiah featured memory as a political tool liable to criticize and contest current modes of representation. More theoretical was Miriam Borham Puyal's paper (University of Salamanca, Spain), which dealt with the theory of the novel and the patchwork technique in women writers' fiction from the eighteenth up to the twenty-first century. Specifically, Borham Puyal focused on Jane Barker's and Scarlett Thomas' fiction, on how early novelistic forms still have an influence over current fiction. Maria Grazia

¹ *Editor's note:* the catalogue of the "Haberer Heaney Collection 1992-2013" can be accessed at <<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Collection/vtls000547117>>. The two photos were taken at the 1998 SAES Conference in Rennes. The first photo has Adolphe Haberer on the left and Seamus Heaney on the right. In the second photo, the bearded gentleman in a white shirt is Jean Brihault, then President of the University of Rennes 2, himself a specialist in Irish studies.

Nicolosi (University of Catania, Italy) looked into British colonial history and slavery by analysing the British Caribbean writer David Dabydeen. In a paper which combined literature and painting, Nicolosi paid attention to J.M.W. Turner's painting "Slave Ship", which is in turn deconstructed in Dabydeen's epic poem "Turner" (1994) and further represented in ekphrastic prose in Dabydeen's novel *A Harlot's Progress* (1999). Seeking to contribute to critical debates within Afro-European Studies, Nicolosi hinted at the potential of fiction for retrieving Black history and the experience of slavery from historical forgetfulness. Isabel María Andrés Cuevas (University of Granada, Spain) provided a re-reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) by identifying multiple allusions to the different eras in Britain's past. Finally, María Losada Friend (University of Huelva, Spain) delivered a paper dealing with epitaphs as a literary genre. Anchoring her analysis in the field of Death Studies and After-Dying Studies and drawing on Samuel Johnson's *Essays on Epitaphs* (1740) and William Wordsworth's *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810), Losada Friend argued how epitaphs try to recover the deceased's life by staying between life and death.

The pervading and varied presence of papers dealing with the nineteenth century evinced the never-waning interest in the Victorian era, visible in the critical field of Victorian studies and also in the currently expanding phenomenon of neo-Victorianism. Suffice it to mention that two of the keynote lectures provided interesting revisitations of Victorian Britain via neo-Victorian fiction. In a thought-provoking paper ("Rethinking Victorian Sanitary Science"), Sally Shuttleworth (University of Oxford, UK) analysed two neo-Victorian novels: Matthew Kneale's *Sweet Thames* (1992) and Mary Beth Keane's *Fever* (2013). Kneale's novel deals with Edwin Chadwick, a nineteenth-century social reformer, who worked on health and sanitary conditions. Shuttleworth exhibited in her analysis how class, the city and the body are related, because filth and disease were attributed to the poor and the bourgeoisie was afraid of getting contaminated by the poor. *Fever*, on the other hand, features the psychological insight of a woman identified as a healthy carrier of typhoid fever and portrays the dilemma about what must prevail: individual freedom or government action. Further on, Shuttleworth persuasively established parallelisms between Victorian sanitary science and current environmental issues. For instance, she argued that Victorian scientists, such as Benjamin Ward Richardson, had anticipated current ecology and even talked about passive smoking, and therefore Victorian sanitary science paid attention to issues of high relevance today.

Ann Heilmann (Cardiff University, UK) focused on Victorian culture, neo-Victorian fiction and criminal history in her keynote lecture "Criminal Conversations across the Centuries: Victorian and Neo-Victorian Transactions and Connections". Her lecture dealt with three factual divorce cases and their subsequent court proceedings: the Talbot case (1855-56), the Robinson trial (1858-59), and the Codrington case (1864-66), and the neo-Victorian reconstructions of such cases in Nuala O'Faolain's *My Dream of You* (2001), Kate Summerscale's *Mrs Robinson's Disgrace* (2012) and Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter* (2009). Heilmann demonstrated how these novels try to recapture the silenced voices of the wives in the trials and explore the subversive agency of Victorian women. After providing a compelling overview on the legal proceedings concerning marriage and divorce in Victorian England, Heilmann revealed how the scandalous details of the divorce trials coalesced and were fuelled by the popularity of sensation fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century. In turn, neo-Victorian authors have appropriated historical material to reshape female identity through women's subversive acts of rewriting. Heilmann concluded by asserting that the history of women is a history of repression, of how they stepped out of heteronormativity.

Other paper presentations provided further insights into the Victorian age and its ongoing and persistent influence on contemporary culture. Two papers paid attention to

Victorian culture in relation with science. Elodie Rousselot (University of Portsmouth, UK) deconstructed nineteenth-century scientific discourse by looking into the Canadian neo-Victorian novel *The Evolution of Inanimate Objects: The Life and Collected Works of Thomas Darwin (1857/1979)* by Harry Karlinsky's (2010). This novel, which deals with a fictional son of Charles Darwin, urges readers to reconsider historical figures of Charles Darwin's standing; moreover, it recuperates the Canadian scientific past and therefore it can be read as a postcolonial text. Carmen Lara (University of Málaga, Spain) analysed the figure of the paleontologist and geologist Mary Anning, pointing out how her life and work were fictionalised in Tracy Chevalier's neo-Victorian novel *Remarkable Creatures* (2009). Lara paid attention both to the current in-vogue fictionalisation of historical characters and to the interdisciplinary turn which characterises current fiction, by which literature intersects with other disciplines, such as science.

Rosario Arias (University of Málaga, Spain) applied the use of phenomenology to recent neo-Victorian fiction by presenting a new approach to the past seen as an experience, that is, the perception of the Victorian world through the senses. By analysing Fiona Shaw's *The Sweetest Thing* (2003), which deals with a girl discovering chocolate in Victorian Britain, Arias shed light on this recent trend within neo-Victorian criticism dealing with the senses, converting the Victorian world into an embodied past. Roberta Gefter (University of Trieste, Italy) looked into Julian Barnes's *Arthur and George* (2005), an instance of biofiction dealing with Arthur Conan Doyle and his campaign to defend a wrongly imprisoned solicitor of Parsee origin. Deeply rooted in the ethical dimensions of post-authentic biofiction, the novel evinces the unreliability of memory, the limitations of perception and the difficulties to answer what the truth is. Lea Heiberg Madsen (University of Málaga, Spain) provided a reading of the recent neo-Victorian novel *Gillespie and I* by Jane Harris (2011). By focusing on issues of memory and unreliable narration, she analysed Harris's novel and revealed how Victorian gothic tropes, such as the double or repressed traumas, resurface in contemporary neo-Victorian fiction. Juan José Martín González (University of Málaga) paid attention to the Victorian fin-de-siècle and its characteristic convolution of gender and race discourses. Drawing on a selection of late-Victorian underread texts, namely Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) and Arthur Conan Doyle's non-Sherlockian short fiction, Martín González illustrated how colonial/exotic tropes evince the rise of feminism and the crisis of masculinity in late-Victorian culture. Laura Monrós (University of Valencia, Spain) concentrated on the Victorian interest in ancient plots and myths and their use in Victorian classical burlesque. In a picturesque paper, Monrós scrutinized the reception of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and its symbolic interplay of caves and nymphs on the nineteenth century stage, while disclosing the Victorian world of spectacle. In a similar fashion, Lin Elinor Pettersson (University of Málaga, Spain) illuminated the nineteenth-century show business, paying attention to how it has been portrayed in recent neo-Victorian novels such as Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013). Pettersson focused mainly on neo-Victorian rewritings of the nineteenth-century freak shows and their ethical dimension, which implies moving from the object to the subject and attributing voice, agency and subjectivity to those who were objectified in the past. Finally, Antonio Ballesteros González (UNED, Spain) looked into the figure of Jack the Ripper and the social dimensions of Ripperature through Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* (2000). Setting off from the idea that Jack the Ripper has become an emblem of patriarchal domination and violence over women, Ballesteros González analysed the socio-political aspects of the Ripper myth as portrayed in *From Hell* and concluded that many of the present-day evils can be traced back to the vices and depravities of Victorian culture.

Aware of the forthcoming anniversary of the First World War, the conflict,

alongside its aftermath and the Edwardian era, was remembered from the perspective of female characters and authors. Celia Cruz Rus (University of Málaga, Spain) delved into the recovery of Henry James's typist and relatives in recent neo-Edwardian bio-fiction, particularly Michiel Heyns's *The Typewriter's Tale* (2004) and Cynthia Ozick's *Dictation* (2008). Focusing on such figures could draw certain parallels between Edwardian middle-class working women and women today, for example, in terms of their close relationship with technology and a desire to reclaim their place in history. Similarly concerned with the recuperation of historical female characters in literature, Stefania Arcara (University of Catania, Italy) analysed the interest of female Modernist authors in tracing a genealogy of women, starting with Vita Sackville-West's canonization of Aphra Behn in the biography *The Incomparable Astrea* (1927). According to Arcara, this work anticipates postmodern discourse in that it disrupts nineteenth century biographies and focuses on the relationship between past and present, which turns Behn into a pioneer. Ana Zamorano (UNED, Spain) also focused on Vita Sackville-West by appropriating Paul Ricoeur's sense of history rewriting as the recapture of the silenced to analyse the figure of the author. Finally, Teresa Gómez Reus (University of Alicante, Spain) took us to the Western Front, using Edith Wharton's *Fighting France* (1915), a collection of essays written by the American author while she travelled around France during the First World War, whose stages she had retraced bearing in mind Emily Orley's idea that places have memories. Limited by prohibition against women being near the battlefield, Wharton's descriptions are very different from traditional masculine accounts of the War. Although they feature destructed places, they depict a population determined to maintain the habits of daily life of which the essayist could find some traces in the twenty-first century.

In his keynote lecture, Nick Bentley (Keele University, UK) took a step forward in time by looking at the Second World War and the mid-twentieth century in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). Bentley argued that, although the Second World War is seen in Britain with mild mockery and respect, as a conflict both familiar and distant, recent narratives such as the two above seem to reassess and re-exoticise it, and even challenge theories regarding relationships between past and present. Through an analysis of *The Remains of the Day*, he sustained that (un)reliable nostalgic narrations can have political aims. As for *Atonement*, Bentley revealed that, published in the wake of the postmodernist mode, it questions writing models and shows tension between historiographic metafiction and recent neo-historical fiction. Furthermore, in examining issues such as class, duty, heroism and responsibility, both novels aim to "atone" for the violent past of the twentieth century.

Papers dealing with the recent past were delivered as well. For instance, Martyna Bryla (University of Málaga, Spain) looked closely at descriptions of Eastern Europe in the 1980s provided by American authors such as Joyce Carol Oates and Philip Roth, and found parallelisms with the way in which eighteenth-century authors had mapped the region with subjectivity as a single place disconnected from the West, as if an iron curtain still existed in their minds. Dealing with subjectivity too, Marta Cerezo (UNED, Spain) analysed John Banville's *Ancient Light* (2012), which presents questions of absence and presence as well as the difficulties to know what is true when dealing with past events at a personal level.

If an event has made an impact on our memory, it was the 9/11 attacks. Noemí Pereira and Margarita Estévez Saá (University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain) presented a paper about the problems encountered in representing and verbalizing them, wondering to what extent fiction writings dealing with 11/9 are essentialist and influenced by islamophobia, and arguing that islamophobic prejudices can be considered a temporary ethical response to that shocking event and its aftermath. *The Reluctant*

Fundamentalist (2007), for example, gives an account of the ambivalent reaction of its Pakistani protagonist towards 9/11. On the other hand, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) portrays cultural misunderstandings and unjustified hatred and prejudices against Muslims. Along similar lines, Ahmet U. Yilmaz (University of Málaga, Spain) focused his talk on representations of the terrorist attacks in different international media. He questioned to what extent the proliferation of their virtual representations has turned the event into a global trauma and how selective remembrance of the past works, as opposed to impartiality towards history.

In conclusion, the conference was an excellent opportunity for an exchange of knowledge and ideas among European scholars who, willing to find connections between past and present from very different points of view, engaged in interesting discussions and ended up looking at the future. The cross-European reach of the conference and the varied scope of the papers delivered attest to the growing interest in past-present relationships in literary criticism.