

CONFERENCE REPORT

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Celebrating Women in Literature and the Arts of the Nineteenth Century

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Performance) Research Group
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In-house research seminar

Since recent decades, Victorian and neo-Victorian studies have been gathering momentum in the academic world, both in the fields of literary and cultural criticism. This scholarly interest for all things Victorian is reflected in the numerous academic publications and international conferences devoted to this discipline. Due to this current academic attention, the research group 'Literature, Arts and Performance' (GIUV2017-354) hosted the in-house research seminar "Celebrating Women in Literature and the Arts of the Nineteenth Century" at the University of Valencia on 21 November 2018. This seminar was celebrated under the auspices of the research project "Entorno digital de investigación del teatro en lengua inglesa del siglo XIX escrito por mujeres. Fase 1" (GV/2018/A/106), funded by Conselleria de Educación, Investigación, Cultura y Deporte, and coordinated by Dr. Laura Monrós Gaspar. This research group is made up of literary scholars from several Spanish universities, whose research focuses on the dialogue between literature and the arts in the Anglophone tradition, with a special interest in modern cultural practices, such as reception and adaptation studies. This seminar aimed to open a discussion on the emergence of nineteenth century and neo-Victorian studies scholarship at a national level. Coinciding with the bicentenary of the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), the main purpose of the seminar was to vindicate the role of women as agents and producers of culture in the long nineteenth century and its aftermath in contemporary Victorian revisitations. This event had a national character, given that it included the active involvement of guest respondents from other Spanish universities, such as Prof. Rosario Arias Doblas (University of Málaga) and Dr. Miriam Borham Puyal (University of Salamanca).

The conference began with the opening remarks by Dr. Jose Antonio Calañas, Head of the Department of English and German Studies at the University of Valencia, and Dr. Laura Monrós Gaspar, coordinator of the LAP research group. The seminar was divided into two main blocks: the morning sessions, which were more academically oriented, and the afternoon panels, which included speakers and activities outside academia, whose main ideas revolved around the notion of public engagement.

The morning sessions

The morning sessions were conducted in English and were only opened to PhD students with academic interests in the fields of Victorian and neo-Victorian studies, as well as to members from the LAP research group, who acted as guest respondents. Speakers were asked to elaborate papers related to the research project they had in progress and to circulate them to the other participants in advance. On the date of the seminar, participants briefly presented their pieces, which were later discussed by the respondents and audience.

The notion of nineteenth-century actresses and female playwrights contesting mainstream gender roles was a prominent topic in the seminar. There were two papers dealing with this subject in the first morning panel. Victoria Puchal Terol (University of Valencia) presented her research project, "Displacing Victorian Women: Mid-Nineteenth-Century Popular Drama and the Representation of Female Identity", in which she questions the identity of displaced female bodies in the mid-Victorian popular stage, especially during the 1860s. In order to do so, she carried out a cross-genre analysis of mid-Victorian plays performed in London, in quest of a broader perspective of representation of female identity and metaphors of travel on the popular stage, away from the feminine preconception of the self. Along the same lines, Lucía Casanova Gornals (University of Valencia) delivered the paper "Reconstructing Elizabeth W. Macauley: A Genealogical Approach?", where she aimed to rebuild the biography of nineteenth-century actress Elizabeth Macauley following Bratton's genealogical model, a tool conceived to research women's history in the early nineteenth century. Macauley's life seems to have been obscured by theatre history, and this research project seeks to fill in the gaps of her biography.

Another key aspect in the seminar was the chronological evolution of nineteenth-century literature written by women, and its long-lasting impact until the present. Manuel Hueso Vasallo (University of Málaga) explored how the works of Victorian authoress Dinah Maria Mulock set a precedent in the representation of homosexual men in literature. In his research project, "Dinah Maria Mulock's Silence and Queer Representation", his main purpose is to carry out a chronological analysis of the portrayal of queer bodies in male homoerotic pieces of fiction, from the Victorian period to the present, to prove the still-lasting impact of Mulock's queer representations as disabled and silenced characters. On the other hand, Virginia Coll (University of Valencia) examined the different Spanish translations and the reception of Jane Austen's novels in Spain. The main goal of her dissertation "Publishing Jane Austen: An Editorial Analysis of Austen's Novels in Spain and a Stemmatic Analysis of Her Spanish Translations" was to trace the presence of Austen's novels in the publishing industry in Spain and to explore the socio-cultural conditions that affected their reception. She has conducted a study on the Spanish translations of the author's six main novels by constructing a stemmatic genealogy of the texts, so as to determine whether they were an original creation, or they stemmed from previous translations.

The last morning panel focused on contemporary and alternative portrayals of nineteenth-century women, with a special interest in their presence in popular media culture. Dina Pedro (University of Valencia) tackled this issue in her paper "Representations of Female Traumas in Neo-Victorian TV Series". She explored the frequent portrayal of empowered Victorian female characters and their struggle to work through their family traumas in a corpus made up of several neo-Victorian audio-visual works, including *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016) or *Taboo*

(2017–). Her aim is to figure out whether this current obsession with the representation of female trauma in neo-Victorian fiction attempts to give voice to historically marginalised characters, or if it capitalises on the audience's morbid and voyeuristic expectations. Finally, Andrea Burgos Mascarell (University of Valencia) touched upon the socio-political content of dystopian young adult fiction in her talk “Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Cultural Representations of Human Needs”. Through an analysis of contemporary dystopian novels, such as *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008; 2009; 2010) or *Divergent* (Roth, 2011; 2012; 2013), her main aim is to identify common social and economic problems in dystopias and to relate them to real-life concerns in western societies. She draws on corpus linguistics, discourse analysis and tagging in order to perform a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the abovementioned novels.

The afternoon talks

After the morning sessions, the *Espai Cultural* of the Faculty of Philology, Translation and Communication of the University of Valencia opened its doors to the general public for the afternoon talks. Throughout the academic year, the *Espai Cultural* functions as an open space for cultural interchange, welcoming students, visitors, and professors of the faculty alike. For this reason, the selected venue was optimal for reaching a heterogeneous group, an essential goal that the afternoon sessions aimed at accomplishing. The first afternoon session was the research workshop “Diary of a (neo-)Victorian Researcher Tips for researching the Nineteenth Century”, delivered by Juan José Martín González (University of Málaga), in which he spoke about his experience as a neo-Victorian researcher and provided insightful tips for PhD students and early career researchers. This session was open to the general public, and it offered useful websites and archival collections, databases, or Anglophone associations that students could join and consult for their research projects. The speaker thoroughly explained how to set short-term objectives, keep focused or handle criticism in the academic world. At the end of the workshop, students were welcomed to share their experiences as young researchers, and to openly discuss the topics that he workshop had focused on.

For the afternoon sessions, the seminar counted with the enlightening participation of the guest speakers Juan Insua (Centre de Cultura Contemporànea de Barcelona) and Pedro Ruiz Castell (University of Valencia). Both plenary speakers remarked the need to make the Literature available to a public outside the academic sphere, finding a shared interest in the universal influence of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). The afternoon sessions began with Juan Insua's *La criatura sin nombre / The creature with no name*, presenting a topic of discussion included in the Kosmopolis programme of 2018. The objective of Kosmopolis, a biennial literary event held in the Centre of Contempo-

rary Culture of Barcelona, is to provide a space where Literature can be discussed in relation with the Arts and Sciences. More precisely and under the scope of Kosmopolis, Insua took on the opportunity to comment on the contemporary relevance of Shelley's masterpiece and its relationship to the responsibility of science, the Anthropocene, and climate change. Insua's intervention began with the screening of a YouTube video titled *La criatura sin nombre*, paying tribute to Mary Shelley on the bicentenary of the publication of *Frankenstein*. In the video, Lord Byron's poem *Darkness* (1816) and excerpts from Shelley's celebrated novel foreshadow questions about the environment and engage the public in a debate about climate change and our ability to love and accept man-made ‘monsters’.

Following Insua's talk, Dr. Pedro Ruiz Castell presented *Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo. Diálogos entre ciencia y literatura*. Ruiz-Castell introduced the public to a homonymous temporary exhibition celebrated at the Palacio de Cerveró from November 2017 to February 2018 in the city of Valencia. This exhibition was organized by the Institute ‘López Piñero’ for the History of Medicine and Science (IHMC), linked to the University of Valencia. As main curator, Ruiz-Castell explained that the exhibition had been open to a general audience and had aimed to bring forward the interrelationship between literature and science, highlighting the importance of literature's influence on the public's perception of scientific developments and discoveries. Within the framework of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the exhibition had displayed real scientific objects from the nineteenth century stored by the aforementioned IHMC, as well as notes regarding the nature and use of such scientific instruments beyond Shelley's novel and its consequent screen adaptations. In addition, the exhibition had relied on the public's previous knowledge of Dr. Frankenstein's monster and his experiments as the starting point of debates regarding scientific ethics and the implications of certain research areas for humanity. As a conclusion, Ruiz-Castell discussed the exhibition's success due to its celebration in a public cultural space, yet another example of how bringing literature outside the classroom can entice interest and start a conversation about different aspects of our society.

The round table

The seminar concluded with a Round Table where members of the LAP Research Group discussed the group's ongoing research and common ground. Rosario Arias-Doblas (University of Málaga), Miriam Borham-Puyal (University of Salamanca), and Laura Monrós-Gaspar (University of Valencia) remarked the importance of facilitating forums of discussion for the development of Victorian and Neo-Victorian studies in Spain, as well as the need to continue celebrating and scrutinizing female figures from the long nineteenth century and its aftermath from different per-

spectives. Among the initiatives discussed in the round table, Prof. Rosario Arias Doblas talked about “‘Orientation’: A Dynamic Perspective on Contemporary Fiction and Culture (1990–onwards)’ (ORION). This project, funded by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness (Ref. FFI2017–86417–P) counts with the collaboration of Spanish and international scholars who work on English studies. As contended by Prof. Arias-Doblas, the main purpose of ORION is to employ the notion of ‘orientation’ to study and analyse contemporary fiction and culture published and produced in the UK and the States, in light of today’s globalised environment and during the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century.

After the day’s sessions, where the main point of discussion was the role of women as agents and creators of culture, the group attended a dance-theatre spectacle titled *SALT* at Sala Matilde Salvador in La Nau, University of Valencia. Fil d’Arena, the company responsible for the performance, presented a thought-provoking piece where three female dancers exposed the conditions that female emigrants endure in their journey for a better life outside their homes. To conclude the day, the performers welcomed questions from the audience and discussed the objective of their spectacle, emphasising the role played by women affected by the migration crisis, a current event that reminds us, yet again, of the importance of unmuting silenced voices.