BORDERS, INTERSECTIONS AND IDENTITY
IN THE CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH

Faculty of Philology - University of Santiago de Compostela
23 and 24 May, 2019

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:
Isabel Carrera-Suárez (University of Oviedo, Spain)
Anne Fogarty (University College Dublin, Ireland)
Paul March-Russell (University of Kent, United Kingdom)
BORDERS, INTERSECTIONS AND IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH’
Santiago de Compostela, 23-24 May 2019

PANEL SESSIONS

María ALONSO ALONSO (Universidade de Vigo) “Ecological Intersections in Contemporary Postcolonial Short Fiction”

Contemporary postcolonial literature highlights the dialogues of power and resistance that emerge from several conflicts while addressing numerous concerns related to subaltern experiences. In order to explore the notion of cultural identification within contemporary postcolonial short fiction, this paper will focus on transnational Caribbean literature as a case study. After the remarkable achievements of Caribbean authors such as Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott and V.P. Naipaul, amongst others, a new generation of authors are putting Caribbean literature in the spotlight once again. Authors such as Marlon James, Kei Miller, Edwidge Danticat, Marcia Douglas and Tobias S. Buckell have published both long and short fictions during their prolific careers in which they have interrogated critical transformations and representations of Caribbean identity. With this paper, it is my intention to illustrate how contemporary Caribbean short fiction relies on ecological intersections as to address issues related to history, race, gender and class. My primary intention is to focus on ecological concerns from the consideration that the Caribbean is an abstract concept, rather than being a specific location. Therefore, after contextualising contemporary Caribbean short fiction within the wider canon of postcolonial literatures, I will focus on two particular texts: British-Caribbean author Pauline Melville’s mock historiography “The Parrot and Descartes” and Caribbean-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson’s speculative short story “A Habit of Waste”. These two texts are set in two antagonised periods and utilise opposing literary styles, yet are perfect examples of how the concern for nature and the environment nurture literary imagination.

Isabel Mª ANDRÉS-CUEVAS (Universidad de Granada) “‘Being Born Something, Somewhere Else’: The Quest for Identity in Ravinder Randhawa’s Dynamite”

Often modelled on her own experience as an Asian woman raised and living in Britain, Randhawa’s characters tend to reproduce the difficulties of this collective as exposed to the pressures derived from being not only an ethnic minority within their own country, but also one subjected to the additional oppression of patriarchy (Upston 2013: 63). In consonance with Hall’s notion of identity as multiple, fragmented and permanently affected by its own intersectionality with other practices and positions (1996: 4), frequently the female characters in these stories, namely “India”, “Sunnì” or “Time Traveller”, struggle to validate their own in-betweeness and gain recognition as subjects by transcending existing notions of traditional Asian or white British culture. As will be discussed, such process of negotiation of these women’s selfhoods results not only in their own social self-affirmation, but also in their questioning of the prevailing notion of femaleness. Through the experiences of Sunni, India or Priya, womanhood emerges as a necessarily complex, dialogic space of interaction with issues such as race, class or ethnicity.

References


Pedro Miguel CARMONA-RODRÍGUEZ (Universidad de La Laguna) “A Backwards Journey to Remake the Future: Globality and Cultural Border-Crossing in Madeleine Thien’s ‘Simple Recipes’ and ‘A Map of the City’”

Small Recipes (2001), a short story collection by the Canadian writer Madeleine Thien, vividly photographs the Canadianness of urbanite individuals who dwell on the border between the global of their vital itineraries and the profoundly local inscriptions of their emplaced identities. Most of the stories unravel a cosmopolitan present from different viewpoints, so as to provide a dynamic portrait of culture: literal and metaphorical circulation of influences, goods and people, the inimical trends of globalization and its mandatory negotiation of provisional subject positions. In that complex panorama, the intersecting cultures inhabit an abiding tension between location and dislocation, border creation and border crossing, which, in the end, also implicates issues of displacement and movement. Using the title-piece “Simple Recipes” and “A Map of the City”, the opening and closing narratives in the collection, this paper delves into the social condition of globality, to argue first that in a two-fold impulse of de/territorialization of difference, the stories scrutinized inscribe in Canada the implicit or explicit traces of a distant past, a visible intertext of an oncoming future of global Canadianness. Then, thanks to the evident border porosity of these stories, the emphasis is placed on how diachronic readings of ethnicity moored to nostalgia compete with synchronic representations of identity to address the current condition of transnational societies in Canada and elsewhere. All along the collection, and very especially in the narratives selected, border-crossing and border-building determine a contradictory dynamics standing for the present condition of individuals in flow, settling and resettling while resituating their enunciation.

Amrapali CHATTERJEE (Western University, Canada) “Exploring the Politics of Storytelling in the works of Thomas King and Lee Maracle”

For centuries, Native Americans have been perceived as the ‘other’ in dominant discourses, resulting in the perpetuation of various negative stereotypes. Sto:Lo writer Lee Maracle and Cherokee writer Thomas King focus on the incorporation of orality and storytelling in their works, in order to reclaim and re-invent Native identity. Lee Maracle, in “Towards a National Literature”, talks about how there has been a dumbing down and over-simplification of stories by the dominant white culture which has led to viewing Native stories as nothing more than “a bunch of funny stories told by doddering old storytellers” (83). Similarly, King often explicates the importance of stories and their close connection with history: “Most of us think that history is the past. It’s not. History is the stories we tell about the past. That’s all it is. Stories.” (2013, 2-3). In my paper, I will be analyzing King and Maracle’s short stories in order to highlight how they debunk mainstream constructs surrounding commonly accepted perceptions of Native identity. Their short stories employ aspects of Native oral traditions and use storytelling as a powerful tool of knowledge dissemination. Through their use of these elements, they show how storytelling is not something that belongs only in the past but is a practice that is still very much alive.

References


Karen CRUZ (Concordia University Chicago) “The Unbearable Weight of Being a Parent: The Colonized Subject’s Pain in the Short Fiction of Judith Ortiz Cofer”

This presentation will focus on two short stories by the late Judith Ortiz Cofer. She was born in Puerto Rico in 1952 and migrated with her family to Paterson, New Jersey in 1956. They relocated again to
Augusta, Georgia in 1967, a move that has attracted consideration about Ortiz Cofer’s place in what US Latinx scholars are calling “The New South.” She was inducted into the Georgia Writers’ Hall of Fame in 2010. Her poems, creative nonfiction and short stories are widely anthologized and her novel The Line of the Sun (1989) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. In this talk, I will examine two short stories “Nada” and “Not for Sale,” which appear in Ortiz Cofer’s multi-genre collection The Latin Deli (1993). “Nada” recounts Doña Ernestina’s loss of her son to the Vietnam War, and her subsequent and incremental relinquishment of all her worldly possessions, an act that her neighbors find perplexing and disconcerting. In “Not for Sale,” a father protects his adolescent daughter with whom he suffers a vexed relationship. With limited English, he comes to defend the young narrator against a proposition for an arranged marriage. This paper will argue that Ortiz Cofer explores the theme of parental anguish as means to demonstrate the ways in which the longstanding and deeply enmeshed colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States operates in overt and nuanced ways to exploit its colonial subjects, and that the form of the short story, too, functions as an apt vehicle for the poignant articulation of the subaltern subject’s pain. It is at the intersection between Puerto Rican and US culture that Ortiz Cofer discovered a productive, artistic tension. What is clear to readers, however, is that both the Spanish language and Puerto Rican culture endow her narratives with a supple texture and layers of meaning. Operating in this interstitial linguistic and geographical space, Ortiz Cofer found her voice and became an important figure in US Latinx letters.

María Paula CURRÁS PRADA (Universidade da Coruña) “Birds of Kafka’s Paradise: The Metaphorical Bird in Naiyer Masud’s ‘Essence of Camphor’ and Andrew Lam’s ‘Birds of Paradise Lost’”

Subaltern and exiled entities’ relation to space and territory has been repeatedly filtered through the Western idea of modernity. Naiyer Masud’s “Essence of Camphor” (1998) and Andrew Lam’s “Birds of Paradise Lost” (2013), however, provide the reader with narratives that recall their authors’ preoccupation for identity and the non-hegemonic individual’s agency in the contemporary world. A fervent translator of Kafka and one of the foremost short story writers in Urdu, Masud never abandoned Lucknow (India) nor wrote directly in English despite his books’ success overseas, enhancing the uncanny traditionalism of his particular literary style. In comparison, Lam’s continuous interest in the Vietnamese-American experience seems to head in precisely the opposite direction, until a common image (the Bird) approximates both authors in their brilliant use of the metaphor. Their stories, indeed, partake the narrator’s admiration and affection for those characters who are rather “victims overtaken by events” (Chakrabarty 119): Masud’s Mah Rukh Sultan, a foreign young woman who dies of an unknown illness, and Lam’s Mister Bac, a Vietnamese-American journalist who commits public self-immolation in Washington D.C. The main aim of the proposed essay is to analyze the relationship between Naiyer Masud’s “bird of camphor” and Andrew Lam’s “bird of Paradise Lost,” contemplating them as reality-haunting objects embodied by the tragic characters of Mah Rukh Sultan and Mister Bac. In addition, my work sets to determine the extent to which such “birds” can be understood as metaphors of the subaltern, taking into account the contrast between Masud’s political subjectivity and Lam’s critique of post-war communist repression. Methodologically, this project has benefited from the extensive studies on Naiyer Masud compiled in the Annual of Urdu Studies whose principal contributor is Muhammad Umar Memon, Masud’s English translator. Regarding Lam, his own book of essays Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora, along with several theorists on modernity and subalternty, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty or Antonio Gramsci, have been of great use for the purposes of my essay.

Olga DZHUMAYLOYO (Southern Federal University Rostov) “Silencing the Other in ‘The Artist’ by Maggie Gee”

The paper explores Maggie Gee’s short story ‘The Artist’, which is placed in the short story collection ‘Blue’ and, due to its title and narrative voice ambiguity, may perplex a reader. Questioning about the artist and moments of his/her connection to reality are lingered on, and capability for artistic empathetic seeing of others is argued to be pivotal. Drawing on ‘Toward a Philosophy of the Act’ by Mikhail Bakhtin, this
paper seeks to examine how one might engage with this new representation of the apartness between the world of life (social and ethnic issues as part of contemporary British condition) and the world of culture. Notably, on a textual level there are many indications of emotional detachment of the would-be artist, her inability to step outside her narcissistic and claustrophobic fantasies and enter the world of the other person without badly aestheticized stereotypes. Here lies deeply ironic message, which makes difference between ‘the point’ and ‘epiphany’ moments, deconstructs banal love story and widespread cultural preconceptions and gives way to a social drama of migrants’ stigmatization and silencing. The critical tools of formal and discourse approaches help to reveal structural and leitmotif patterns (beauty vs sensitivity leitmotifs, etc.), instances of estrangement (Shklovsky), and discourse markers of understatement of the Other in the textual poetics of the short story. Rather than consider 'The Artist' to be a meditation on the ability of art to connect human beings via beauty, we will place sensitivity as a means of revealing the true artist capacity for empathy and responsiveness towards the Other.

José Manuel ESTÉVEZ-SAA (Universidade da Coruña) “‘It is all in my stories’: Melatu Uche Okorie and Direct Provision in Ireland”

Ireland, a country which has historically suffered successive waves of emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, became an allegedly multicultural diverse society in the 1990s on occasion of the economic years of welfare. Notwithstanding, the image of a hospitable Green Eire has been severely questioned by intellectuals and artists who have not failed to denounce racist attitudes detected in Irish society, and to criticise governmental immigration policies implemented in the Republic. The present paper intends to analyse the short stories “This Hostel Life” and “Under the Awning”, published by the Nigerian writer established in Ireland Melatu Uche Okorie in This Hostel Life (Skein Press, 2018). These stories, based on her own experience during the eight and a half years that she spent in direct provision system, expose the conditions of duress suffered by asylum seekers in Ireland under a system which has been not only criticised by the international community but even considered as the Magdalene laundries of contemporary Ireland. In the present paper, I analyse the literary quality of two short stories which deploy the author’s consideration of short story writing as an intersection between her life and her creative impulse—as she has said “I find it easier to talk about myself that way”, “It is all in my stories”. Furthermore, the stories deploy Melatu Uche Okorie’s commitment with the rendering of the immigrant’s experience of liminality in contemporary Ireland.

Margarita ESTÉVEZ-SÁ (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) “Sara Baume’s Cautionary Tales: ‘In the beginning, there was the goldfish’”

Irish writer Sara Baume has gained unanimous critical recognition for her novels spill simmer falter wither (2015) and A Line Made by Walking (2017) where she deploys a series of recurrent concerns such as human isolation, maladjustment, lack of communication, failure and disability, a deep involvement with nature, the environment and non-human animals. These same topics feature prominently in her short stories which, although less known, have been published in prestigious literary magazines and collections, such as The Stinging Fly, Granta, or Davy Byrnes Stories 2014. I intend to analyse Baume’s brilliant contribution to the short story with pieces such as “Fifty Year Winter” (2013), “Dancing or Beginning to Dance” (2014), “Solesearcher1” (distinguished with the 2014 Davy Byrnes Short Story Award), “Green, Mud, Gold” (2016) and “The Infinite Goldfish” (2018). My analysis of these stories, informed by ecocriticism and animal studies, considers Baume’s deployment of what ecocritics deem alternative communities of life. I also study the innovative aesthetics of her short fiction, which is also detected in her experimental novels, as particularly suited for conveying the fragmentary, episodic, provisional and evanescent quality of Baume’s conception and rendering of human and non-human nature. This paper is part of the research activities carried out by the author for the research project “Eco-Fictions: Emergent Discourses on Women and Nature in Ireland and Galicia” (ERDF, FEM2015-66937).
Mónica FERNÁNDEZ JIMÉNEZ (Universidad de Valladolid) “Making a Statement with Form: Jamaica Kincaid’s Short Stories as the Creation of Individual Identities”

One cannot avoid considering the ideas of genre transformation and/or transgression when reading Jamaica Kincaid’s *At the Bottom of the River*. My paper will deal with the way this collection of short stories plays with the very concept of genre to portray the reality of Caribbean female existence. By breaking the conventions of the short story genre, these pieces defy the very impositions that Western culture has always made. Kincaid breaks with 19th century Western linear storytelling, which has defined, apart from formal aspects of literature, the very notions of homeland and roots, affecting to a great extent the conceptualizations made on displaced populations. Even though Jamaica Kincaid avoids creole in her writing, some critics argue that she does so in order to find an independent voice (Réjouis 214). Réjouis explains how creole has been used in fiction as a masculinist code (213) so it can be deduced that Kincaid also tries to escape any kind of categorization. Kincaid’s fiction is always inbetween, like the Caribbean, not only geographically, but in the way its inhabitants, writers, and characters are inbetween cultures and histories – especially women, which is stressed with the stories’ persistence in portraying the female view on masculinity, motherhood and daughterhood, and femininity. *At the Bottom of the River* is one of the few masterpieces that, merely with its form, is making a statement about identity. A true Caribbean literature cannot conform to traditional notions of genre and form imposed by a tradition and a culture which erased that of those islands. Now the Caribbean stands, not confused in fragmentation, but proud in the amalgamation of recovered lost (hi)stories, and the transformation of those that were given – or imposed –, making a beautiful blend. Jamaica Kincaid invites readers to experience the realities of what it means to be both a Caribbean writer and a female individual.

Marta FOSSATI (Università degli Studi di Milano) “‘Minor’ Protagonists? Outcasts and Outsiders as Resistance in Zoë Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*”

The ten short stories in Zoë Wicomb’s volume *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) revolve around the development of the educated, middle-class protagonist-narrator Frieda Shenton, a South African coloured girl born when apartheid began. Given the strong continuity provided by this developing figure, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* has often been interpreted as a novel-like fictional account or *Bildungsroman*. My paper, instead, purports to discuss the importance of the short story form in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* as vehicle of ideological resistance. Indeed, the presence of single short narratives allows for the emergence of different protagonists, – mostly outcasts and outsiders – who, at times, can counteract the predominance (and authority) of the main, educated narrative voice. My aim, therefore, is to examine how the short story genre gives voice to these alternative and liminal protagonists, thereby destabilizing the coherence of major narratives, and, ultimately, of socio-political structures. In particular, the narrative focus on these figures opens up gaps and fissures in the flow of narration, allowing for the construction of new meanings – in the same way as the different short stories, creating gaps in the macro-structure of the volume, allow for the emergence of alternative protagonists. In fact, their unconventional otherness leads them to take on the creative role usually reserved to the protagonist-narrator. Thus, the short narrative form in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* brings to the fore the resistance to colonial appropriation and categorization, a resistance embodied by these liminal, alternative figures.

Ana GARCÍA SORIANO (University of Leeds) “Configurations of Outsiderness in Jackie Kay’s *Why Don’t You Stop Talking*”

My study focuses on how the theme of outsiderness runs through Jackie Kay’s first short story collection *Why Don’t You Stop Talking* (2011). The objective of this paper is twofold. Firstly, I seek to critically examine the concept of outsiderness and its implication and relevance to the short story genre. In order to do so, I will define the concept of ‘outsider’ and explore the relationship between the genre of the short story and the figure of the outsider. Secondly, it attempts to discuss the different configurations of outsiderness in Kay’s short story collection *Why Don’t You Stop Talking*. My analysis of Kay’s work is mainly based on the different configurations of outsiderness found in her short story collection, and on how
Kay attempts to articulate a variety of marginal voices. Within the collection, one can find protagonists in the stories that can be labelled as traditional outsiders, that is to say, whose marginalisation is based on such variables as race, gender or sexual orientation; factors usually linked to labelling and social exclusion. Moreover, Kay also suggests less traditional configurations of outsiderness caused by the absence of love and psychological problems, which make her characters feel the power of exclusion in their daily lives. After the analysis of the collection, one can claim that Kay’s work confirms the continuing validity of the traditional association of the short story and the figure of the outsider, made by authors such as Frank O’Connor or Clare Hanson. In addition, the close study of the configuration of outsiderness shown in this collection illustrates the diversification of Black British Literature beyond issues of race.

Sara GONZÁLEZ BERNÁRDEZ (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) “The Importance of Liminal Spaces for Liminal Identities: Sarah Hall’s ‘Luxury Hour’”

Liminality has been a defining feature of the short story from its very conception, which can perhaps explain its popularity within literatures of the margins, such as postcolonial or feminist currents. This has led many critics to believe “that the short story is particularly suited to the representation of problematized identities” (Hunter 138). Whether this is the case or not, there is no denying that the short story is particularly prone to the expression of the fragmentation and psychological conflict that result from social oppression. However, this is not the whole extent of the liminality present in the genre: it may also appear in a temporal or spatial dimension, and it is the latter that is of relevance to this paper, which is concerned with the relationship between liminal identity and liminal space. The object of analysis is Sarah Hall’s short story “Luxury Hour”, published as part of the collection Madame Zero (2017). In this story, the female protagonist goes swimming and experiences a shock upon encountering her past lover, whom she had met in that very pool. She experiences a psychological crisis prompted by the clash of her current identity (as a wife and mother) against whom she used to be when they were together, which winds up in her lying to him. As such, the main concern of this paper is to discuss the boundary-crossing and transformation that occurs when this female protagonist steps from one identity to another as she steps from one space to the other; the focus is particularly on the importance of the liminal space (the pool). After a discussion of liminality as a concept and a definition of liminal space, the role of this space within the story is discussed as a place where the erasure of the protagonist’s identity – and therefore, an escape from the oppressive roles which have come to define her – becomes possible.

Carmen GONZÁLEZ VARELA (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) “British Women Short-Story Writers and Feminist Literary Dystopias”

In the introduction to their work Gender and Short Fiction: Women’s Tales in Contemporary Britain (2018), Jorge Sacido-Romero and Laura Lojo-Rodríguez point to the broad interest that the short story, as a literary form, still arouses in contemporary literature (2). Their work evolves around the idea that contemporary British women writers rely on the short form due to the genre’s inherent potential as a means for the expression of women’s experience, as well as its critical attitude towards reality and dominant patriarchal ideology (2). In a similar vein, in Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination (2003), Ildney Cavalcanti, departing from Tom Moylan’s notion of “critical utopianism” (1986), points to feminist dystopias as an “intrinsically critical genre” (48), one especially suitable for the representation of female experience and the critique of patriarchy (47, 48). Furthermore, both a short-form and a dystopian trend emerged concurrently in women’s writing from the late 90s, following the Women’s Liberation Movement and second-wave feminism. Departing from these premises, the aim of this paper is to analyse the intersections between both the short-story and the dystopian genres as related to gender in a selected corpus of works by contemporary British women writers. I will be examining how both forms can converge as, paraphrasing Cavalcanti, two inherently critical genres, as well as major vehicles for the representation of female subjectivities. The selected narratives, through the depiction of a variety of women characters, can be seen as belonging to an “affirmative” posthuman tradition, one which, as Rosi Braidotti
suggests (37), has as its central point the search for positive and alternative ways of thinking the human subject and, in particular, the female subject.

Marta GORT (Universitat de Lleida) “Identity in Old Age: Meanings of Ageing through Alice Munro’s ‘In Sight of the Lake’”

Ageing studies is increasingly acquiring more importance as a research domain in the social sciences and humanities, and the study of literature is gaining ground in this interdisciplinary field. Short stories are one of the most suitable literary genres to examine the representations of old age, because they throw light on the subtleties of human psychology from different perspectives. Moreover, due to the brevity of these texts, it is possible to analyse a larger number of sources. This paper focuses on the portrayals of identity in old age through the short story “In sight of the Lake” from the collection Dear Life (2012) by the Canadian writer Alice Munro, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013 as a “master of the contemporary short story”. Although her short stories have been widely studied, the analysis of the depiction of old age in her work is still at an incipient stage. Some studies devoted to this topic are specifically based on the portrayals of ageing in a short story in particular, (Jameison 2004, Jameison 2014, Casado 2013, Spruce 2015 and Stevanović and Arsenijević 2018) or on collections from earlier stages of Munro’s career (Collier 2002). Taking ageing studies as a general framework, this paper analyses how Munro depicts old age as a dynamic source of identity in one of her latest stories. Through a close reading of “In sight of the Lake”, three main aspects related to old-age identity will be examined: firstly, the change of identity propitiated by the protagonist’s internment in a residential home; secondly and closely related to this, the transformation of (age) identity due to Alzheimer’s disease and the importance of the life review to preserve the sense of Self; and finally, even though in a more marginal way, the dissolution of masculine identity following retirement and the subsequent acquisition of feminine traits by older male characters.

Susana JIMÉNEZ PLACER (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) “Intersections behind the Lunch Counter in Anthony Groom’s ‘Food That Pleases, Food to Take Home’”

In Anthony Groom’s ‘Food That Pleases, Food to Take Home,’ an African American girl, Mary Taliferro, inspired by the pictures of the sit-in demonstrations at lunch counters shown in “channel six from Richmond,” persuades her friend Annie McPhee to stage a similar protest at the lunch counter of May’s Drugstore, the local store at their hometown, Louisa. “Dressed to kill” in their Sunday suits, on the appointed date both young women enter the drugstore and sit at the lunch counter ready to face the owner, Mrs. May, and demand their right to be served and eat their food there; but Mrs. May is absent and an unknown white woman is taking care of the lunch counter. As the tension between the black girls demanding their rights and the white waitress grows, Annie notices the presence of someone in the storage room moaning like a baby and slips through the counter gate to get closer and had a better chance to see. When the misshapen figure of a white man is finally exposed behind the counter, Annie is encouraged by the waitress to soothe him by patting his hand in what becomes a moment of revelation for Annie, who had never before touched a white boy. The whole adventure comes to an end when Mr. May enters the store and significantly demands the restoration of the established order by sending the white boy back to the storage room away from public sight and Annie off the counter, while Mary forgets her belligerent demand of her rights and simply pretends “to be interested in the bath soaps.” The attempted sit-in fails and remains unnoticed by almost everybody, but the temporary transgression of the racial and social order dramatically enacted by Annie’s brown hand touching the hand of the white retarded boy behind the counter offers Annie a compelling insight into the human condition. This paper analyzes the devices that Grooms uses in his short story to build this transgressive moment as a means to render visible the plights of those often condemned to invisibility by the established order: sensorial images, bodily postures and movements, and the spatial location of the characters are especially significant in this short story set in the Jim Crow South, where as the segregation laws required, everybody had to know his/her place and remain in it.
Tereza JIROUTOVÁ KYNČLOVÁ (Charles University Prague) “Another Woman’s Trash, No Woman’s Treasure: Mary Helen Ponce’s Literary Study of Gender Violence”

The Jewelry Collection of Marta la güera is an anthologized short story by a Chicana author Mary Helen Ponce. Barely spanning five pages, the short story conveys a multidimensional portrayal of domestic violence; the short story is almost a textbook example of consequences this form of gender abuse bestows on both the perpetrator and the victim as well as on their closest family members, especially their offspring and relatives. Set in a Mexican/ChicanX barrio in LA, the story of a wealthy Mexican-American “boss” who violates his fair-skinned wife’s bodily integrity is narrated by the couple’s daughter’s friend. The narrator establishes her narration not on observation and/or on her being an eye-witness, but on the daughter’s relating of the events. The disturbing effect of the short story is achieved not only through the perspective - a (seemingly innocent) child’s perspective - but most importantly through the fact, that the daughter identifies with her father’s harassment of her mother and aims to perpetuate the violence. Although the narrator makes attempts to distance herself from what she is being told, the association with the abusive daughter is hard to shed as it is informed by harsh disparities in class identity on the one hand, and racial, cultural and religious affinity on the other. The proposed paper thus seeks to analyze Ponce’s short story by employing intersectionality and gender analyses as primary tools for interpretation thereby showing how the boundaries between the categories of narrator, perpetrator, victim, witness on the one hand, and the categories of race, gender and class on the other are intertwined and mutually constitutive.

Richard JORGE (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) “Changing aesthetics: From J. S. Le Fanu’s Anglo-Irish Aesthetics to Bram Stoker’s emerging Irish identity”

Many critics have pointed out the difficulty of defining the short story as a genre. From the American writer Edgar Allan Poe to the critic Charles E. May, many theories have been put forward, none of which has ever been totally successful. Perhaps, this is due to the genre’s flexibility, to its adequacy to deal with all sorts of themes and topics without really delving into the complexities usually associated to the longer narratives. Its aesthetic simplicity is deceptive, however, its shorter form still allowing writers to reflect the ethos of their time. In this sense, the Irish short story has always reflected the concerns and preoccupations of its contemporaries, managing to capture the essence of a time, of a conundrum or of conflict – a context which is not unknown to the Irish nation. Written at the turn of the twentieth century, the short stories of Bram Stoker reflect the changing feelings of Irish society towards their national identity. Further still, these stories also showcase the aesthetic changes which the short story as a genre has undergone from its preceding nineteenth-century counterpart, especially if compared to such nineteenth-century Irish writers as J.S. Le Fanu. This paper aims to explore how the stories crafted by Bram Stoker reflect the incipient national sentiment which would ultimately lead to both the Irish Revival and the (re)birth of Ireland as an independent country, and how this is paralleled by the aesthetics departure from nineteenth-century conventions epitomised in the writings of J.S. Le Fanu, a departure which both shaped and differentiated it from its nineteenth-century precedents.

Carmen LARA-RALLO (Universidad de Málaga) “Liminality and Identity in Roshi Fernando’s ‘Homesick’ and ‘At the Funeral’”

Roshi Fernando’s Homesick (2012) approaches the implications of Britishness in the contemporary transcultural context of East-West migration by exploring different aspects of immigrant life. Born in London with Sri Lankan origins, Fernando was awarded the 2009 Impress Prize for New Writers, and she has been celebrated as “a powerful new voice of the Asian immigrant experience” (Sanai n.p.). Homesick, Fernando’s first work of fiction, is a collection of interlinked short stories narrating the experiences of a group of Sri Lankan immigrants in Britain, set at different points of time. The characters that appear in the stories are gathered in the opening and closing narratives, “Homesick” and “At the Funeral”, which portray, respectively, a New Year’s Eve party in 1982 and a wake almost thirty years later. These two family gatherings take place at Victor and Nandini’s house in south-east London, in an atmosphere pervaded by
memories from the past and by the questions of home and belonging: if one of the characters in “Homesick” claims that “[w]e belong nowhere” (Fernando 19), another voice in “At the Funeral” bitterly states that “[n]owhere is home, nowhere!” (Fernando 290). The liminal status of these characters, feeling inside and outside British society simultaneously, plays a crucial role in the articulation of their identity, which emerges as a multi-layered composite of different dimensions (including, among others, that of the individual, that of the family, and that of the culture). In the light of this, the aim of the present paper is to explore the depiction of identity in the two framing narratives of Homesick, exploring its configuration as a liminal encounter of intersecting dimensions that coexist and overlap in a context of socio-cultural (non)-belonging.

References

Sergio LÓPEZ SANDE (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) “The Weaponised Face: Otherness and the Unethicality of Expression in David Foster Wallace’s Short Fiction”

In Oneself as Another (1992), Paul Ricoeur distinguishes two major meanings of identity, tracing them back to the Latin roots ipse and idem. In his account, idem identity (même) is characterised by the prevalence of sameness in time, thence constituting the ‘I,’ whereas ipse identity (ipséité), freed from such a requirement, constitutes the mutable category ‘Self.’ This dualistic outlook on identity sets sameness in direct opposition to selfhood, the two being indispensable approaches to any consideration on identity that wishes to escape the many aporias that contemporary studies on the matter recurrently encounter. In my paper, I will set out to analyse David Foster Wallace’s “Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders (XXIV),” drawing on Ricoeur’s bipartite take on identity, Emmanuel Levinas’ ethical discussion on the face (1961) and Johan Galtung’s manifold definition of violence (1969), paying particular attention to how the short story as a genre occupies a privileged position with regards to the treatment of otherness and related issues. In this manner, I intend to question the dialogic relationship between self and other in the story in hopes to shed light on how the face, positively signified both in the philosophy of Levinas and in that by his predecessors, has the potential to become the means through which psychological violence may be exerted upon our very sense of identity.

Sylvia MIESZKOWSKI (University of Vienna) “Compassionate Projection: Vulnerability, Resilience and Transitional Identity in Zadie Smith’s ‘The Embassy of Cambodia’”

Zadie Smith, for the moment, has turned away from the conventional narrators she used to favour in her early work. Franziska Quabeck, for instance, reads what she calls the “inauthentic” (2018, 469) first-person narrator in Swing Time (2016) as a product of being “trapped between the intersectionality of race, class and gender” (2018, 461). My talk on the “Embassy of Cambodia” (2013) – which highlights the tension between pre-Brexit, Olympic Games-hosting London’s projected image (as multicultural, open, welcoming) and a black, poor, African, ill-educated, young, female migrant’s experience in the city’s northwest – comes in three parts. The first will introduce the term ‘compassionate projection’ for an oscillating narration that goes beyond “inauthenticity”. Drawing on Stephen Clingman’s “grammar of identity” and his notion that “movement is intrinsic to its constitution” (both 2009, 11) I shall argue, in the second part, that Smith’s story is not only a tale of transition (since it foregrounds different intersectional aspects of its complex border-crossing protagonist as ‘temporarily relevant’ or ‘latent’, depending on location and social environment), but that it makes a case for conceptualising identity as such as transitional. That Smith’s story centrally revolves around vulnerability, suffering, resilience and compassion, bestows on the series of (partially) observed and (partially) described Badminton games, to which it keeps alluding, the status of an allegory. The third part of my talk will offer four interpretations of it (immigrant as
defending'; immigrant as ‘shuttlecock’; immigrant as ‘attacking’; immigrant as the impaired observer, who is excluded and whose view is blocked), and suggest that the paratextual section headings link the four readings of this allegory to narrative mode of ‘compassionate projection’.

Margarita NAVARRO PÉREZ (University Centre of Defense, Murcia) “Articulating Femininity in Oyeyemi’s What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours”

Helen Oyeyemi started her career as a writer from a very young age, and although she is perhaps better known for her novels, she also wrote a short story collection under the title What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours, published in 2016. In the short stories presented in this collection Oyeyemi plays around with the idea of keys that not only lock or unlock stances, but that can also be keys to unlock characters and stories, where intersections of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and belonging intertwine in the constructions of the stories and the characters. In this collection, the natural and the supernatural seem to coexist gracefully, giving way to the carefully woven labyrinths the reader enters in the worlds to be found in Oyeyemi’s short stories. The aforementioned laboriously woven intersections, mirror in many ways their objects of study, where manifold aspects of the constructions of the female characters allow for the study of equally complex subjects such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality and belonging. Thus, a close analysis of these, will lead towards the unravelling and deciphering of the assumptions that lie behind the constructions of the characters’ identities, where, as this presentation will show, intersections and collating prove to be an unavoidable part of the construction of identities.

Inés PARIS (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “Sensuality and Magic Realism as a Challenging Tool to the Heteronormative Narrative”

The use of the body as part of the narrative tension in between the characters as well as the filter of the Magic Realism to understand the world, is key in Carmen María Machardo short stories. However, it is not only a narrative tool, it is also a resistance strategy towards the imposition of the masculine forces in the stories. At the same time this research wants to explore the idea that the use of these two elements is a key part on the different characters’ identities, meaning that, it is not only a way to depict the world but an intrinsic element of their selves, not only as characters but as narrators. It creates new discourses challenging the corrected chronicle of the classic narrative. Magic Realism and Sensuality are used to show the flows of the antagonistic forces in the stories, and to complete the main characters. They create new opportunities in the narrative, challenging the reader, who has to abandon his or herself to the text. This paper aims to prove that the use of sensuality, the body as a tool of communication and the use of Magic Realism, is a challenging force against the violent narrative of the heteronormative realities in which the main characters have to develop their identities in Carmen María Machado short stories. The texts in which this paper will focus on are the ones in the book “Her Body and Other Parties” (2017).

Mª Luisa PASCUAL GARRIDO (Universidad de Córdoba) “Liminality and Secrecy in Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘Hema and Kaushik’”

Although Jhumpa Lahiri’s works comprise two collections of short stories (The Interpreter of Maladies and Unaccustomed Earth), two novels (The Namesake and The Lowland), and In Other Words, a collection of essays originally written in Italian, the Asian-American writer seems to feel more at ease when writing short fiction as this is a genre that seems particularly suited to the depiction of liminal or problematized identities (Hunter 2007:138). Lahiri certainly addresses the issues of hybridity and liminality, as most of her characters do not belong to any particular nation or culture but instead keep wandering around the world as migrants and cosmopolitan travelers. Their fluid, transnational identity makes them feel quite alienated, especially the members of second-generation, who reject allegiance to familial, ethnic or national ties, choosing instead a third space in between the two cultures. Such characters, at the intersection of two
worlds, discard the binary opposition between home/abroad, us/them, as they feel both attracted and constrained by what they imply. Faced by the conundrum of a fluid identity, these characters avoid to position themselves in a single space, make shifting choices and establish conflicting relationships which are usually short-lived. In this paper I will focus on Lahiri’s second collection of short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), examining in detail the short story cycle that closes the collection, “Hema and Kaushik”. The three sections narrated by different voices reveal the complex phases of a relationship between the two protagonists, second-generation Bengali-Americans. The aim of this paper is to analyze the formal aspects of this three-part story to discover how liminality is experienced by the two transnational characters, Hema and Kaushik. I contend that by virtue of its formal features this short story also compels the readers to confront areas of epistemic undecidability, forcing them to move to a liminal space of uncertainty.

Mercedes PEÑALBA-GARCÍÁ (Universidad de Salamanca) “‘I Thought You Would Help Me’: Contemporary Representations of Asylum in Ali Smith’s ‘The Detainee’s Tale’ and Marina Lewycka’s ‘The Dependant’s Tale’”

The series of immigration and asylum Acts that were passed in the years after the Labour government took power and the resulting escalation of asylum issues gained political prominence, provoked writers, filmmakers and artists in post-millennial Britain to respond to a national environment that became increasingly hostile to asylum seekers. During this period, arbitrary detention was the norm and access to subsistence support for asylum claimants was limited. For these refugees, Britain’s internal boundaries and segregated spaces replicated their agonised experiences of national border crossing and illegitimacy. As the situated circumstances of asylum seeking are often overlooked in prevailing critical contexts, this paper addresses how representations of forced migrants intersect with, critique, and even transform the public debate over asylum. Two contemporary short stories, explored in this paper, intricately describe the restrictive conditions under which refugees and asylum seekers live in Britain, and draw attention to the global inequalities that are at the root of forced migration: Ali Smith’s “The Detainee’s Tale” and Marina Lewycka’s “The Dependant’s Tale” are both collected in the first volume of *Refugee Tales* (2016), a twenty-first century version of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* where established writers raise awareness of the plight of modern-day undocumented migrants. These narratives of forced migration testify to the ways in which successive policies of detention, dispersal and deportation have had a lasting psychological impact on the lives of asylum seekers. The United Kingdom is currently the only country in Europe where non-citizens pending deportation can be held indefinitely in detention centres operated by multination corporations. Smith’s and Lewycka’s asylum narratives elucidate the contradictory nature of statelessness: even as forced migrants are increasingly excluded by national immigration legislation, they remain dependent on the existence of nation-states for the possibility of refuge. Against the bleak landscape of asylum in post-Brexit Britain, I argue that short fiction offers a critique of the mediated process through which forced migrants enter the public sphere, and helps shape an alternative to the liminality of the ban: a space of permanence hospitable to the heterogeneous experiences that constitute forced migration.

Gérald PRÉHER (Lille Catholic University) “Hauntings in Elizabeth Spencer’s ‘A Southern Landscape,’ ‘First Dark’ and ‘Owl’”

Leslie Fiedler has famously claimed that “until the gothic had been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin” (143) and Southern literature, with its emphasis on time, has certainly helped promote this assumption. Discussing *southern* writing in her essay “The Fiction Writer and his Country,” Flannery O’Connor felt that the very adjective “conjures up an image of Gothic monstrosities and the idea of a preoccupation with everything deformed and grotesque” (28). Southern fiction is also very often read in terms of myth(s) and ideologies—Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, published in 1936, still holds a special place and it undeniably combines the gothic and the grotesque both in terms of place and characterization. Elizabeth Spencer, who started publishing in the 1940s has also contributed to southern mythologies. Nevertheless her focus is not on the grotesque, though she sometimes depicts characters in
that vein; it is, in its most *southern* moments, closer to the gothic. For example, “A Southern Landscape” features a very gothic location known as Windsor—it also inspired Eudora Welty’s Asphodel in the eponymous story (see Cole). For southerners, as Hunter M. Cole explains, “the word *Windsor* evokes […] the image of the famous ruin” (8) and it helps them establish a sense of permanence. In “A Southern Landscape,” Spencer is concerned with creating a specific atmosphere, which favors the intrusion of mystery, though the story cannot be called gothic. For Spencer, Gothic “implies shadowy, aging places with mysterious things going on—spooks and eccentrics, even dangerous behavior, all inexplicable to rational minds. I would guess that Southern gothic is all of that plus the tendency to recall the past and make it live on in the present.” “First Dark,” one of Spencer’s early stories, is often considered as gothic and it does fit into Spencer’s definition of the genre: it features an aging place, spooky events and characters, and the southern concern with time. “First Dark” is about a woman coming to terms with herself. Another, more recent text, “Owl,” centers on a woman’s reflection upon her life while her husband is away. There is no romantic reverie among ruins in either “First Dark” or “Owl” and, quite significantly, Spencer resorts to third person narrators placing the reader in the comfortable position of spectator. The short story is particularly suitable for such ghost stories for, thanks to its brevity, it can focus solely on the effect of the apparition on the characters at a given time. Frames, thresholds and all such liminal spaces feature prominently, making it possible to clearly picture where the real and the fantasy intersect, when they do not actually clash.

Carmen RUEDA RAMOS (Universitat Rovira i Virgili) “Water and Liminality in Ron Rash’s ‘Something Rich and Strange’ and ‘The Woman at the Pond’”

Ron Rash has repeatedly confessed his fascination for the possibilities of water as a metaphor. His upbringing as a Southern Baptist has allowed him to witness and experience the believer’s baptism by complete immersion in water, in what ultimately is a salvation ceremony where water becomes a powerful metaphor for “both death and resurrection” (Compton Brown, p. 28). In addition, his Welsh cultural background has shown him the liminality of water when he acknowledges that “in Welsh folklore water is seen as a conduit between the living and the dead” (Spill, p. 184). Perhaps not surprisingly then, the notion of water as a liminal space, as a threshold between two places or states of being, is particularly significant for Ron Rash, who has variously written poems, short stories and novels in which rivers, lakes, ponds, and floods have a prominent role. However, it is in the short story form and its liminality that Ron Rash has truly found a genre that projects his particular vision of the world because, as he states, “it is between the novel and the poem that I feel best” (Dupuis, p.121-122). His predilection for the hybridity and in-betweeness of the short story form has proven to be particularly appropriate to write about the Appalachian region, itself a liminal and intersitial space in the US, an internal border, and a place often defined by its “double otherness” (Cunningham, 1996, p.42) in relation to both the South and the rest of the country. This paper will focus on “Something Rich and Strange” and “The Woman at the Pond,” two short stories in *Nothing Gold Can Stay* (2013), his fifth collection, to reveal how this author of the American Mountain South uses water as a liminal space to articulate the in-betweeness of Appalachian identity.

Charles SABATOS (Yeditepe University, Istanbul) “Hybrid Genres and Identities in Elif Batuman’s *The Possessed*”

Elif Batuman’s *The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People who Read Them* (2010) gained considerable critical attention for its distinctive literary form. While ostensibly a work of literary criticism, the book is actually a series of essays in autobiographical style depicting the author’s personal encounters with Russian, Soviet, and world literatures during her graduate studies at Stanford. Batuman first became known for an essay criticizing the American-style MFA (Master of Fine Arts) in Creative Writing for its banalizing effects on the contemporary short story (an argument she revisits in her introduction to *The Possessed* when explaining her reasons for doing a doctorate in Comparative Literature.) Thus, it is ironic that her hybrid mix of criticism and literary memoir resembles a collection of short stories more than a classic academic monograph (including a hilarious parody of a real-life international conference on Isaac Babel, one of the greatest of Russian short-story writers.) An underlying
theme running through the text is Batuman’s own cross-cultural identity as a Turkish-American studying Russian literature, particularly during her experience of study abroad in post-Soviet Central Asia. While her introduction and the concluding essay (also titled “The Possessed”) give the volume some kind of narrative structure, for the most part each piece (including one, “Summer in Samarkand,” that is broken up into three chapters) functions as a self-contained story. While her first novel, *The Idiot* (2017), presents some of the same autobiographical themes (such as her earliest study of Russian at Harvard) in a more traditionally fictional text, *The Possessed* is not only distinctive in its meshing of genres (short story, criticism, autobiography), but also offers a meta-critique of the academic institutions that shape and dominate the interpretation of literature.

**Luisa SÁNCHEZ RIVAS** (Universidad Nebrija) “Liminal Identities in ‘Negocios’ and ‘Invierno’ by Junot Díaz: A ‘fruitful darkness’?”

The socio-cultural scenario of the 21st century has been shaped in a relevant manner by several manifested facts among which we must highlight migration, and with it, new concepts that describe current realities, such as the idea of transnationality. In this climate, self-identity becomes a complex matter: it turns elusive and fragmentary, a perpetual negotiation that hardens to provide definitions. Junot Díaz’s short stories delve into the identity of the migrant subject and have thoroughly portrayed the path of metaphorical darkness that inflicts their experience. The aim of this study is to explore the features and implications of that path of confrontation and its liminal condition in two of his stories, “Negocios” (*Drown*, 1996) and “Invierno” (*This is how you lose her*, 2012), which narratives complete each other. It will also discuss how gender issues interfere with the role that class, and ethnicity play in the Latino community. As well as how the act of story-telling is used by the narrator as a tool of cultural resistance: Yunior, (Díaz’s alter ego), by telling the stories of those around him is attempting to re-write the History of his people. The studies in which Lauro Zavala (1997) and Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergman (2015) develop the concept of liminality as a tool of literary analysis will serve as a theoretical framework for this paper.

**Begoña SIMAL GONZÁLEZ** (Universidade da Coruña) “Playing With (Un)Marked Cards: Intersectionality in Toni Morrison’s ‘Recitatif’”

“Recitatif” (1982) constitutes Toni Morrison’s first self-avowed experiment at withholding racial markers in a narrative, a daring tactic that the writer describes in *Playing in the Dark* and which she will also deploy in her later novel *Paradise*. Using the insights gained from Critical Race Theory, and building on previous scholarship on Morrison’s work (Abel, Jarrett, Morris), I approach Morrison’s narrative strategy as an example of literary tricksterism (itself a homage to African American oral and literary traditions) with which the writer forces us to read “race” back into the text and confront it in all its complexity. “Recitatif” explores the interracial friendship of two young girls, who “looked like salt and pepper,” but the narrator never specifies who is who. The very fact that the writer is playing with marked cards, while we as readers are left with unmarked (identity) cards pricks our curiosity as readers and impels us to embark upon the misleadingly trivial game of deciding who is white and who is black. Morrison leaves behind a trail of intriguing clues, apparently leading readers in one direction, only to drop hints a few lines later pointing in the opposite direction. Many of those readers (and critics) who actively engage in this tricksterly game may even wonder whether it is at all possible to ascertain each character’s ethno-racial identity. In my paper I will show how, in trying to tease out the import of such narrative clues, especially certain slippages and apparent contradictions, we are ultimately forced to reconsider the intersectionality of race, class, gender and disability.
Małgorzata SOCHA (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) “Constructing Identity in Short Stories of Robert Franklin Gish”

North American scholars have exhibited an understandably ambivalent relationship with the genre Western. While on the one hand the popular tales of the Old West were granted a significant position in the nationalist movement, on the other hand some of them proved flexible enough to support the emergence of narratives of resistance. Only few American and Native American authors (such as e.g. Frank Bergon and James Phillip Welch) have entertained the idea of tackling the convention from within; in the last few decades it was mostly shunned as loaded heavily with specific expectations of the audience and the fossilized perception of indigenous Nations and their histories. Robert Franklin Gish, a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, is exceptional in his courage and determination to address the classical mode of narrating the tales of the West: he uses it in order to transform and go beyond the form of the Past which has affected the reality of the Present for generations of indigenous Nations. The paper will explore how selected short stories of Robert Franklin Gish offer a contemporary understanding of the process of identity formation operating in a multicultural environment where border crossing and interrelations of race, gender, ethnicity and culture appear to be natural yet frequently unaccounted for elements of the everyday landscape. The narratives selected from three collections of short stories, namely Bad Boys and Black Sheep: Fateful Tales of the West, First Horses: Stories of the New West, and Dreams of Quivira will be the focus of attention. The intersection of race, ethnicity and culture with a particular focus on the relationship with the Western genre and the implications of its impact on indigenous identity formation is going to constitute the formulaic and thematic framework of the analysis. The paper will make an attempt at exploring the author’s perspective on the Past- and Present-related components crucial in search for identity. Further, the interaction between identity categories will be investigated. Finally, the outcomes of such interaction are going to be put forward as foreshadowing possible paths leading to identities of the Future.

Paul J. STAPLETON (University of Houston) “Fleshing out Words in Benjamin Alire Sáenz ‘The Art of Translation’”

Everything Begins and Ends at the Kentucky Club by Benjamin Alire Sáenz is a collection of short stories set in the bordering cities Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, stories in which characters struggle not only with the societal divisions caused by the Mexican-American geo-political border mapped onto the Rio Grande, but also with personal identities fractured by dysfunctional families, drug abuse and other addictions, sexual liminality, and spiritual doubt. Sáenz received for the collection the 2013 Lambda Literary Award in Gay Fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award in Fiction, the first for a Latinx writer. In “The Art of Translation,” the main character Nick is a Mexican-American college student recovering in his family’s home in El Paso in the aftermath of a violent assault, during which his attackers shouted, “Why don’t you go back to where you came from?” The beating caused a head injury that sent Nick into a coma, and in the course of the story he struggles to piece back together his identity and his once formidable vocabulary. As his mother reminds him, “You couldn’t live without books. You said you wanted to learn all the meanings of every word that existed in the world.” Nick now must also come to terms with a new word, a scar on his back, an unnamed epithet scrawled permanently into his skin by his attackers’ knife. The “somatic word” on his skin and Nick’s attempts to understand it—to “translate” it—bring about his own translation from the world of books and the intellectual fictions they engender and into “the world of the living.” I will discuss Nick’s translation in terms of a somatic, materialist Posthumanism that critiques rationalist-, psychic-, and linguistic-based anthropologies that tend to promote the kind of ontological dualisms that intellectually support the creation of borders in the first place.
Svetlana STEFANOVA (Universidad Internacional de La Rioja) “Home as Fiction – Fiction as Home in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s The Thing Around Your Neck”

In their discussion of home and homemaking in an age of growing refugee crisis and increasing communal segregation, Nicola Frost and Tom Selwyn argue that “homes made and/or remade by people on the move are thought to be in some way less than fully rightful or authentic, and that migration is inherently destabilizing” (2018, p. 1). In The Thing Around Your Neck (2009) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie shows the intimate link between the social and psychological dislocation of her female characters and the destabilization of their notion of home. Their desire to produce a space where they can feel at home is often disrupted by alienating outside world and fractured inner world. Producing a space for Adichie’s protagonists does not mean building a new home, but rather imagining the space they can recognize as home. Elisabeth Bronfen explores the visual representations of home in cinematic narrative and suggests that “the concept home refers to an impossible place”, “a notion of belonging”, “a symbolic fiction that makes one’s actual place of habitation bearable” (2004, p. 73). In the light of Bronfen’s hypothesis, I will read the protagonists’ experience of space as a hybrid assemblage of symbolic fictions of the well-known domestic setting they had to leave behind and the anonymous place they are forced to inhabit and analyse the narrative strategies Adichie adopts to represent this assemblage as porous, provisional, and unstable.

Laura TORRES ZÚÑIGA (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) “Dragons, beasties and Irish cows: Jamila Gavin’s stories for multi-ethnic young readers”

In her first short story collection, The Magic Orange Tree (1979), Jamila Gavin intended to reflect the British multicultural society in which her own children were growing, so her protagonists belong to almost every possible ethnic group present in the contemporary UK: Black, Asian, Scottish, Welsh, Mediterranean, Eastern European, etc. Despite their different backgrounds, however, all the children in this multiethnic cast share a similar liminal position in stories that picture them on window thresholds and garden fences that open up to a world of adventure outside their homes. Gavin nevertheless redistributes the expected paradigm and does not equate the home with the traditional cultural values of these children’s ethnic families, and the outside world with more modern, homogenous Westernized attitudes. This paper will analyze how Gavin’s strategy is quite the opposite: it is in their external adventures where these girls and boys encounter the traditional elements of their multicultural identities. For some, such as the Chinese boy who meets a fantastic green dragon on the Chinese New Year’s, or the Scottish boy who helps a monstrous water creature, the cultural reference is clear even for themselves. In other cases, the cultural element is more obscure and silently articulates the story without direct reference, as in the memories of the Irish girl tending cows on the beach or the joy brought by a magically appeared orange tree in the garden. With this analysis, we will demonstrate how Gavin’s stories can inspire young readers to embrace, like her protagonists do, their multiple identities while they stand at the intersection between modernity and tradition, home and away, reality and fantasy.
Organised by:
Research Project Intersections: Gender and Identity in the Short Fiction of Contemporary British Women Writers (FEDER/AEI – FEM2017-83084-P)
Research Project Eco-fictions: Emergent Discourses on Woman and Nature in Galicia and Ireland (MINECO/FEDER FEM2015-66937-P)
Research Group Discourse and Identity (GRC2015/002, GI_1924), Xunta de Galicia.
Research Network ‘English Language and Literature, and Identity’ (ED431D 2017/17).

In affiliation with:
The ENSFR (European Network for Short Fiction Research).