Trauma Narratives and ‘Herstory’

With a special emphasis on the work of Eva Figes,

November 12th – 13th 2010 at the University of Northampton, UK

(in collaboration with the University of Zaragoza, Spain)

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Thomas Michael Stein, University of Mainz (Germany): “An abyss of uncertainties“: Identity Construction in Eva Figes’s Days and Nelly’s Version

Research on Figes’s Days (1974) and Nelly’s Version (1977) seems to agree that both novels investigate various possibilities of the narrators to come to terms with the complex problems embedded in the past. My talk will focus on issues that are responsible for the narrators’ failure to construct consistent identities. Both texts, which thematise ‘subjectivity’ and ‘subjectification’ and which foreground ‘textuality’ and ‘fictionality’, may be labelled narratives of evasion. They are products of distortion featuring lives made of sentences. Writing the past, then, emerges as a cul-de-sac.

While the novels foreground a poetics of memory, memory is in fact edited replacing conventional concepts like plot, causality and teleology by those of consciousness. Thus, Nelly’s Version is not a novel that features a coherent attempt to reconstruct the past in order to construct a plausible identity. Rather, the novel is a text which fictionalises the dissolution of the self. Days registers the narrator’s diasporic life at an early stage: “I did not realize that nobody comes home” (p.11). As the narrator’s life has been dominated by other people (I have never had my own life to lead” p.80) she lacks the ability to liberate herself from a past dominated by failure.

In order to substantiate my reading of Days and Nelly’s Version as novels that lack perspective, keeping the narrators incarcerated in verbal prisons, I will focus on Figes’s use of imagery (photography, puzzle, pattern, mirror, room, house, window, notebook, script echo chamber) and intertextuality ( Donne, the Brontës, Gilman,
Kafka, Elizabeth Coleridge). Figes’s novels, I will argue, fictionalise and manipulate the past. The fictionalisation of memory produces results which refuse to serve as means to construct coherent identities. The various versions of the past (an interesting parallel can be found in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*) remain fragments, isolated tales. Memorizing, forgetting, evading and/or editing the past emerge as inadequate devices to cope with identity crises. They lack coherence and reliable parameters and can at best highlight ambivalence. Each novel is but a textual universe.

I will conclude my talk with observations on Shakespeare’s sententia “What’s past is prologue” from *The Tempest*. In *Days* and *Nelly’s Version* the past is not ‘prologue’ but remains the past. The past is dead. To escape from the “abyss of uncertainties” is wishful thinking.

**BIO**

**Thomas Michael Stein** studied English and German Philology and is Professor of English Literature at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz. His publications include books on Jacobean Drama, Patrick White and a History of English Literature. His recent research addresses contemporary British fiction (articles on Martin Amis, Eva Figes, Graham Greene, Nick Hornby, Ian McEwan, Marina Warner, Fay Weldon and Irvine Welsh), crime and spy fiction (John le Carre, Amanda Cross, Thomas Harris, Walter Mosley and Dorothy L. Sayes) and postcolonial literature (Wilson Harris, David Ireland and George Lamming).

**David Brauner, University of Reading (UK): Jewish Mothers and Jewish Memory in the Work of Jenny Diski, Eva Figes and Linda Grant**

This paper will focus on four works of non-fiction by three Anglo-Jewish women writers: Jenny Diski’s *Skating to Antarctica*, Linda Grant’s *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* and Eva Figes’ *Tales of Innocence and Experience* and *Journey to Nowhere*. In her introduction to *The Mother Mirror: Self-Representation and the Mother-Daughter Relation in Colette, Simone de Beauvoir, and Marguerite Duras* (1996), Laurie Corbin warns of the dangers of reducing women simply to their function as mothers: in reading autobiographical accounts of mother/daughter relationships written by the daughters,
she warns, it would be only too easy ‘to see the mother only in relation to the daughter’ and thus ‘to continue a repression of the mother that has been part of the oppression of women’ (5). Instead of accepting the daughter’s representations of their mothers uncritically, we should strive ‘to read through the daughter’s language to try to catch sight of that other, the mother’ (5). Nicola King, in *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (2000), argues that ‘The late twentieth century has … seen an increased focus on questions of memory as the generations which experienced the atrocities of two world wars die out … a renewed desire to secure a sense of self in the wake of postmodern theories of the centred human subject’ (11).

I will argue that in their non-fiction Figes, Grant and Diski participate in the postmodern deconstruction of the unified Cartesian subject rather than attempt to reconstruct it, producing self-questioning works that disrupt the conventional self/other, mother/daughter binaries in favour of a more interrogative, sceptical inquiry into the relationship between identity, memory, motherhood and ethnicity.

**BIO**

**David Brauner** is the author of three books: *Post-War Jewish Fiction: Ambivalence, Self-Explanation and Transatlantic Connections* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2001), *Philip Roth* (Manchester University Press, 2007) and *Contemporary American Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010). He has published widely on twentieth-century Jewish literature, Holocaust fiction and contemporary American fiction in journals. He is currently co-editing a special issue of *The Journal of American Studies* on the contemporary American fiction writer, Lorrie Moore, and has just been commissioned to co-edit a volume on modern anglophone Jewish fiction for Edinburgh University Press.

**Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud, Université de Toulouse II-Le Mirail. Toulouse (France):** From *Little Eden-A Child at War* (1978) to *Journey to Nowhere* (2008): 'A secret at the heart of darkness opening up', or words at war in Eva Figes's autobiographical work

Mainly known for her essays and her fictional works, Eva Figes is also the author of several autobiographical works, *Little Eden-a Child at War* (1978), *Tales of Innocence*
and Experience: an Exploration (2003), Journey to Nowhere (2008), a list which also includes the shorter work "On the Edge" (published in 1983 in an anthology of short stories and essays called London Tales). These various texts aim to break a life-long silence and explore the various facets of an original trauma whose very nature is gradually disclosed through the act of writing itself.

Reading Eva Figes's autobiographical writings is in many ways getting to grips with the closely related notions of exile and otherness. First and foremost, exile was the harsh experience little seven-year-old German-Jewish girl Eva Figes had to go through when she had to flee Berlin with her parents in order to escape the increasing power of the Nazis and the subsequent deportations of Jews. Her leaving behind the German tongue, an act felt as deeply alienating, is echoed throughout her fictional work in the depiction of wandering characters cast adrift in a chaotic, unfathomable world often haunted by unsettling motherly figures. Similarly, the autobiographical works, which my paper will deal with, bring to the fore the silencing of the self which was imposed on the child by a suffering mother and which makes the eventual confrontation with "the heart of darkness" (Tales of Innocence and Experience) all the more challenging. These writings can be envisaged as the author's crucial attempts to debunk the lures of integration and come to terms with her repressed self and with the existential territory to which she belongs. From the childhood memories of the war period to the story of the family's housemaid which she weaves into her own experience of trauma and chaos, the narratives move through haunting images which all testify to an endless "return of ghosts" ("retour de fantômes", to quote Georges Didi-Huberman's book Génie du non-lieu). My paper is meant to explore the various narrative and rhetoric features at work in these various representations and distillations of often unspeakable truths where the act of writing itself may indeed be "tempted by silence" (George Steiner, Language and Silence).

BIO

Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud is Professor at the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail where she teaches stylistics, translation and British music at the Department of English. Her research areas are enunciative linguistics applied to literature, stylistic analysis of contemporary texts, translation studies, as well as the intersemiotic links between music, ballet and literature. She has devoted close to forty papers to these different
fields and is also co-author of two books on stylistic analysis and translation mainly aimed at students of English. She is an active member of the Société de Stylistique Anglaise of which she has been vice-president since 2009. She is particularly interested in contemporary feminine writing (both English and French), and she has spent much time investigating Eva Figes’s fictional and autobiographical works (including shorter works) for the last few years: she has written nine papers to this day, one of them (to be published soon in the translation studies journal *Palimpsestes*) being devoted to the French translation of *Ghosts* by Nancy Huston, the other works being tackled mostly from a stylistic angle and envisaged as variations on the linguistic (re)construction of the self (a label valid, according to her, both for the fiction and the autobiography).

At the University of Toulouse she is now also in charge of a research programme on music and literature (Intersémioticité Musique / Littérature) in which she has been involved since its creation in 2000, this musical angle being often at work in her exploration of Eva Figes’s novels and shorter fiction. This interdisciplinary programme on music and literature includes seminars and a two-day conference held every year in June and which brings together specialists of musicology, compared literature and linguistics, amongst other fields. Her main affiliation at her university as a researcher is the CAS laboratory (Cultures Anglo-Saxonnes) where she takes an active part in a workshop on the relationship between the arts (Atelier de Recherche à la Croisée des Arts), in keeping with some of her main academic and personal concerns and practices.

**SPEAKERS**

**Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen, University of Zaragoza (Spain):** *B.: 'Emerging from Non-existence into Existence'*

Eva Figes’ experimental novel *B.* (1972) tells the story of a writer, Paul Beard, who retreats himself into his mother’s old cottage in order to concentrate on the writing of a novel on B., a peculiar writer who shows uncanny resemblances to the figure of Mr. Beard himself —“I felt a stab of recognition”, says the narrator-character (16). As he arrives there he feels that organizing his thoughts about the place is not that easy, as everything tends to get distorted and fictionalised, especially when his real everyday life is much more boring than the writing of a book, which “represents a new beginning, a chance to make it this time, like a fresh love”(8). Writing seems to be something Paul
cannot stop doing, like breathing, and the literary act is revealed to him as “[a] defence mechanism intended to obscure identity, which still reveals it” (9).

His past experiences are reinterpreted by his middle-aged self, a writer no longer capable of “real action” (9), and everything that happens to him is so consciously experienced and imagined that he seems to feel split in a sense. His self-consciousness and his deep interest in representation are linked here to Platonism and to the classic figure of the Doppelgänger, as it seems that B. is the narrator’s shadowy double —“He looked as I felt, uninvolved” (17)—, a figure through which the writer can come to feel and live the world (again).

As the analysis will show, the symptomatic discontinuities in the narration — “the whole idea of continuity is an arbitrary line drawn in the mind”, states the narrator—, as well as the extreme overlapping of the different ontological and fictional levels in the text, echo the protagonist’s state-of-mind and his worries about the issue of re-presentation, and carry the reader into a state/stage of complex shadow-playing, where reality and fiction cannot easily be distinguished.

Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen defended in 2010 her PhD dissertation, entitled The Redefinition of Scottish Identity and the Relation Self-Other(s) in the Fiction of Brian McCabe, obtaining the European title. She teaches at the University of Zaragoza since 2007, and has been a postgraduate worker at the University of Edinburgh (2009). She has published several articles on identity and on contemporary Scottish literature, as well as on the short-story genre, some reviews, and some book chapters. She is currently further specialising on Scottish contemporary literature. Besides, she is also translating some British literary works into Spanish.

Cindy Chavez, St. Louis University-Madrid (Spain): Stealing the Pen-is: Re-Membering the Literal and Literary Female Body in Theresa Cha’s Dictee


In Theresa Cha’s Dictee, the poems “memory” and “second memory,” become the feminized disabled body. A body that is helpless, impaired and de-powered: “younger than a child more helpless than a child” (Cha 143). The woman becomes the abjected
marginalized body viewed through a body of layered clothing, clothing that symbolizes oppression and defeat. The wedding gown, conceals the woman of the wounds: the rape into marriage and submission. The apron, used to prevent the woman from progressing and impel the domestic roles, is used to conceal her impaired body once more. But Cha uses this gendered-specific-apparel to enable the disabled woman. The apron, with pockets and orifices that allow objects to enter, such as the pen, becomes an empowering form of clothing: “forefinger on her hand [which] barely reaches over to the shoulder the jacket where the pen is placed inside the pocket” (Cha 143). Speaking through the gendered clothing, Cha’s woman removes the pen from the patriarchal figure, the jacket, and empowers her body through writing. She puts the pen in her pocket. She dictates her life. The woman is able to take her impaired, disabled and wounded body and embrace its uncanniness and begin her story. She begins to write.

In this paper I plan to apply both Trauma Theory and Feminist Disability Studies to three prose poems from Theresa Cha’s Dictee: “memory,” “second memory” and “Memory.” The poems enter the realm of a woman, both a metaphorical and literal woman. This woman has a story. She has a past. She had and has a life. Although the male hegemony and patriarchal figure has dominated and dictated her story, Cha’s woman is beginning to embrace this pen, this phallic power object, and begin to tell her story; she is able to tell her story through a whole, complete writing body, a body that is an entity of empowerment. This body is known as the “centered Other Other” body: a body within, a body that empowers, a whole body.

The final poem, “Memory”, becomes the empowering memory. Through trauma, remembering and the re-membering of the female body, both physical, metaphorical and writing body, a new body begins to emerge from the poetry, a new body emerges from the same impaired body: “She is the same” (Cha 149). The reader is taken into a theatre, and through darkness and incisions, the reader witnesses the woman’s ability to remove the shackles of oppression and give birth to a body that empowers her: “It would not be unforgettable. It would be most memorable” (Cha144). Cha’s woman is a body that cannot and will not fit the conventions of society, but instead embraces the true self that exists: the impaired/dis/abled body.

In the poems, the pen becomes a phallic symbol of rape, oppression, domination and manipulation. It has created his-story and her-story, which has been distorted and
contrived. The power structure has manipulated the past and raped her ability to tell her truth. The female literal and literary body, the writing body, becomes the symbol of the Other Other. The Other Other is the lower form of abjected groups: a group lower than the unconventional human body expectations. She is a being with no being, no body and no history. But through trauma and memory, the woman is able to recall the past and present the reader with a new body and open an orifice that enables her to tell her story.

Through the poems, we are able to see that remembering the woman is also the re-membering of her body: spiritual, psychological and physical body. And through trauma and disability, She is able to live her story and tell her truth. Thus the purpose of this paper is to expose and explain a third androgynous body that is neither gendered nor human, but an entity of power and equality. The abjected third body becomes the body that allows the woman to tell her story, and a body that exposes the reality of the non-existent conventional body that is impeded onto the human psyche. Through Cha’s poems, we are able to see the third body; a third body with an orifice of infinities, an orifice of new beginnings and new stories, and through remembering and memory, the abjected and marginalized body moves away from the hegemonic expectations and becomes a symbol of equal existence. She takes the pen and begins to write. Therefore through trauma and disability, the “centered Other Other” body becomes the tool in which Cha’s woman begins to tell her story.

Work Cited


**Cindy Chavez:** As I complete my MA studies at St. Louis University, Madrid Campus, I plan on continuing and pursuing a doctorate degree in North American Philology with an emphasis in Feminist Disability Theory. Originally from California, I have worked and studied in England, South Korea and Spain. While studying in Spain, I gained an interest and curiosity in the abjected female body. Thus, I became engulfed and hypnotized in the studies of the abjected corporeal ideology. Soon I discovered Feminist Disability Theory and Trauma Theory and how it questions the normative female body construct in literature and society. Through Trauma and Feminist Theory, Disability Studies, and ideologies of the uncanny, I began molding a new true female corporeal ideology using poets such as Theresa Cha, Gwendolyn Brooks and currently
the playwright, Eve Ensler; and, in turn, contributing to the innovative theoretical discourse of Feminist Disability Theory. I received my undergraduate degree in Modern Literature and Journalism from University of California Santa Cruz. I also studied at the University of College London in 2003 and now am completing my double MA degree in North American Philology at St. Louis University and the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid.

Simone Aparecida Aguiar, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte (Brazil): Dislocation and Trauma in Garcia’s Dreaming in Cuban and Loida Perez’s Geographies of Home

The novels Dreaming in Cuban (1992), and Geographies of Home (1999) focus on the gendering of traumas in the context of diasporic movements to the USA. Although trauma is discussed under very different light in both novels, the diasporic movements become significant because they are connected to the traumas the diasporic women characters develop throughout the narratives. These characters have to face hardships in the new reality they are inserted in, such as discrimination, displacement, family disintegration, and rapes. E. Ann Kaplan’s statement that the political-ideological context determines the impact of traumas is fundamental for my analysis of the fragmentation in the diasporic women characters’ subjectivities because they inhabit what Avtar Brah calls “diaspora space.” Through and in this space these characters’ stories and their traumas are mingled, unveiling the several consequences of diaspora. In addition, Kaplan argues that defining how a traumatic experience takes place in the brain is complex because the subject’s individual psychic history and all the contexts involved in its formation are important in defining and understanding the traumas the subject undergoes and the way he or she deals with them. The diasporic characters Marina and Lourdes, and Iliana and Pilar have their subjectivities framed by different discursive practices, some of them deriving from their homelands, the Dominican Republic and Cuba, others from the USA. The shock between these different experiences in both contexts causes different levels of trauma that result in fragmentation for these characters’ subjectivities. Through a comparative analysis of the novels and supported by feminist theories, diaspora studies and trauma studies, the
objective of this paper is to discuss the diasporic movements these characters undergo, and analyze the influence of these movements on these characters’ traumas.

Simone Aparecida Aguiar is currently taking a MA degree in English Literature at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, under the advice of Dr. Sandra R. Goulart Almeida. Her research focuses on the different forms of trauma the women characters undergo in the novels Geographies of Home, by Dominican-American Loida Maritza Pérez, and Dreaming in Cuban, by Cuban-American Cristina Garcia.

Hannah Ho, University of York (UK): Depathologizing Racial Melancholia in Amy Tan’s The Bonesetter’s Daughter and Maxine Hong Kingston’s Woman Warrior

This paper aims to exhibit the revisioning, transforming, facilitating and energizing powers of communication. It seeks to demonstrate this by bringing to attention how the transmission of stories is an important strategy for the reinforcement of female identity, identification and bonding within the mother-daughter dyad. It will discuss how the awakening and developing of intergenerational, intersubjective communicative links is an effective way of dealing with the racial melancholia faced by immigrant mothers and daughters to America. Hence, depathologization of Asian American racial melancholia is to be the main premise of this paper.

The memories and history held by both mother and daughter are facilitated in the oral culture of ‘talk-story’, which provides a means as well as an ends to coping with the feelings of racial oppression faced. The critical process of making productive the suffering experienced is to be the main focus of this paper. Consequently, this paper will seek to highlight the revisionist quality of story-telling whereby the mutual roles and participation of both story-teller and listener illustrate and typify the Asian American act of trans-generational transmission of ‘her-story’.

Converting pains and loss into gains, making productive the losses incurred and sustained, and improving the psychology and physical state of mothers and daughters are to be addressed to exemplify the way the Asian American novels of Maxine Hong Kingston’s Woman Warrior and Amy Tan’s Bonesetter’s Daughter function as literary
pieces of ‘decolonizing writing’. Along this line, the ways in which the process of decolonization, its nuances of social transformation as well psychical liberation, are to be discussed in relation to mother-daughter depathologizing of racial identity.

Hannah Ho is a third year PhD student at the Dept. of English and Related Literature, University of York. UK. My thesis is entitled: Depathologizing Racial Melancholia in Contemporary Asian American Novels. Amongst the areas of my research/interest are: the mother-daughter bond, intergenerational cultural communication, the historic processes of Asian American immigration and assimilation, America's process of racialization, identity politics, vocalization of memory, remembering and forgetting.

Valerie Croisille, University of Limoges (France): Overcoming double victimization in Alice Walker’s Color Purple or the self-healing power of writing “Herstory”

The Color Purple, Alice Walker’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, records the destiny of a black woman, Celie, from adolescence to old age, through the letters she addresses to God, or later, to her long-lost sister Nettie. Through an epistolary form, this trauma narrative bears witness to the power of the written word to overcome a painful experience and bring redemption. As a pregnant means of exploration, discovery and development of one’s self, the letters give form to a revising impulse enabling Celie to re-appropriate her own past and to literally write herself into being.

More particularly relying on Henry Louis Gates’ theories so as to demonstrate the self-healing power of writing, I will try to show that because of her double victimization as a woman and as a black person, Celie has been deprived of her voice both by patriarchy and racist tradition. While rape (first thought to be an incest) has reduced her to silence, she turns to the written form, a medium to which the black community has historically been barred access, thus challenging the male law and white law to give voice to Herstory. Only through a complete reshaping of her identity, hence a re-writing of her day-to-day life, can Celie recover from her traumas, which could be encapsulated by Zora Neale Hurston’ label of the black woman as “the mule of the world” (“de mule uh de world”) in Their Eyes Were Watching God. As Celie’s letters
are never sent to Nettie, whose own letters are for a long time intercepted by Celie’s dictatorial husband, the epistolary mode reveals a tension between the dialogic and the monologic realms, before it can partly be solved by Shug’s discovery and handing of the letters to Celie. The strategy of quilting, that is paralleled in the very process of letter-writing, helps “self-patching”, and permits the reconstruction of oneself and one’s own world through feminine solidarity, as shown by the strong female communitas formed around Celie in the novel. Taking possession of her body thanks to her lesbian love with Shug, and conquering verbal power through her letters finally enable Celie, the initial victim and object, to become an active agent and a subject of her own fate.

Valérie Croisille is a senior lecturer currently teaching American literature in the University of Limoges (Faculty of Arts and Humanities). She is the author of the first PhD thesis ever written in France on African American writer Ernest J. Gaines, on whom she also published a book and several articles. Probing into the questions of memory, orality and writing, her most recent articles deal with slave narratives and early female black writing, as well as XXth century black writers such as David Bradley.

Ema Jelinkova, Palacky University (Czech Republic): Embracing Trauma To Live in Kate Atkinson’s *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*

A group of contemporary Scottish women writers seem to both despair of the ambivalence of their legacy yet embrace it in a very cheerful, even wanton manner. On one hand, they perceive themselves as a marginalized minority within an already marginalized literary tradition; on the other hand they thrive on the very existence of restrictions and walls to break down. The most eminent of them, Kate Atkinson, has embraced trauma in her novels as a paradoxical means of survival. Her fiction is typically structured around young women growing up in dysfunctional nuclear families. Each of these narratives contains a dark, painful and potentially lethal secret, biding its time. The protagonist of *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995) despairs of the impossibility of establishing a coherent perspective on the world, let alone finding a niche for herself in it. She must reconstruct her identity by recreating herself in fiction and by exploding popular myths about provinces of womanhood and being a female writer in Scotland.
Dr. Ema Jelinkova is Assistant Professor in British Literature and British Studies at the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Palacky University in the Czech Republic. She is currently working on her post-doctoral research in contemporary Scottish prose and has recently published a monograph on Muriel Spark.

Sara Lightman, University of Glasgow (UK): Drawing Out Trauma. Artists and artworks from “Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women.

Miriam Katin is the author of the Holocaust memoir and graphic novel “We Are On Our Own” (Drawn and Quarterly 2006). In conversation in 2007, Katin acknowledged how making art:

…[About] one’s history can be cathartic. I don't think I needed to do this, but then I realised that when I told the story of those years of my life [when she was on the run from the Nazi’s], before I drew my graphic novel, I would start choking, and after I had drawn it, this ceased to happen.

Is Katin’s experience unique or have other comic artists had similar healing experiences? And how do the artists use the form of the comic, with its combination of text and image, to communicate these traumatic autobiographical narratives?

In this talk I will reference a number of works in a show I am curating with Michael Kaminer: “Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women”, which opened on October 1st 2010 at The San Francisco Cartoon Art Museum, and is touring to Toronto, New York, and Michigan. The exhibit features the work of 18 international comic artists including: Vanessa Davis, Bernice Eisenstein, Sarah Glidden, Miriam Katin, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Miss Lasko-Gross, Miriam Libicki, Corinne Pearlman, Sarah Lightman, Sarah Lazarovic, Diane Noomin, Trina Robbins, Racheli Rottner, Sharon Rudahl, Laurie Sandel, Ariel Schrag, Lauren Weinstein, and Ilana Zeffren

http://graphicdetailstheshow.wordpress.com/

Sarah Lightman is an artist and curator, currently researching a Ph.D. in “Autobiographical Comics and Graphic Novels” at The University of Glasgow. She has written on autobiographical comics and visual diaries for Studies in Comics and The
International Journal of Comic Art. She is curating “Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women”, with Michael Kaminer, which opened at The Cartoon Art Museum, San Francisco in October 2010. Sarah co-founded Laydeez do Comics, a monthly autobiographical comics forum with Nicola Streeten. Sarah is chairing the conference Women in Comics II at Leeds Art Gallery, part of Comics Forum and Thought Bubble Sequential Art Festival, on November 18th 2010.

Magda Stroinska, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario (Canada): It’s killing me: Cancer as a Metaphor for Abuse

Traumatic experiences do not fit into the everyday narrative. Any experience of trauma alters the world in which the victim lives but this reality altering effect is probably most profound in children and teenagers whose grasp on reality, social hierarchies and authority is still shaky. In this paper, I focus on how young victims of abuse may try to come to grips with their experience by forming an ‘inappropriate’ representation of abuse and, subsequently, creating a narrative that mirrors the fabricated representation. Baird (1996:53) asserts that “[o]ne of the foremost needs of survivors of sexual abuse is to regain a sense of control over their lives. Control was taken from them when they were abused. The symptoms they suffer continue to take away their control.” Self-destructive behaviour usually perpetuates negative effects of sexual abuse and prevents the victim of abuse from establishing meaningful and trusting relationships. And yet, in order to continue with her life and regain some form of control, the victim must move on, see herself as “survivor” and find a meaningful narrative to relate her story.

Narrative therapy helps victims of abuse to reframe their traumatic experience and reassign guilt to the perpetrator. But those victims of abuse who do not or cannot seek professional therapy may invent their own reality that would allow them to re-conceptualize the abuse into something that marks them as a survivor (thus affording them empathy and care) but is less stigmatizing than sexual assault. This paper explores cognitive effects of sexual abuse (cf. Briere 1989) and tries to show how conceptual metaphors offer a way to re-conceptualize traumatic experiences in order to produce meanings that can be communicated or that are more socially acceptable or less shameful to the victim.

Based on the experience of a teenage assault victim, as well as her own attempts
to verbalize what happened to her in a poetic form, the paper uses the concept of metaphor to analyze some of the mechanisms of narrating traumatic experiences, e.g. relating one’s own story using 3rd Person pronouns. Traumatic experiences, just like any intense emotions, are often expressed through metaphors. For example, the trauma of physical abuse can be represented as a disease since disease may be quite naturally viewed as a metaphor for some psychological condition, as pointed out by Susan Sontag (1978). Trauma can be defined as an injury that was inflicted either physically or emotionally, thus making it an area of study or intervention in both medicine and psychiatry. What a disease metaphor seems to be doing, it transporting the mixed emotional and somatic injury that the person is reluctant to reveal to the sphere of physical trauma that is easier to empathize with and less of a taboo.


Magda Stroińska (M.A. Warsaw, Ph.D. Edinburgh) Professor of German and Linguistics at McMaster University, Canada. Areas of research include cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics and cross-cultural communication, in particular cultural stereotyping, language and politics, propaganda, and the issues of language and identity in exile. She edited and co-edited the following volumes: Stereotype im Fremdsprachenunterricht (with Martin Löschmann, Peter Lang 1998), Relative Points of View: Linguistic Representations of Culture (Berghahn 2001) Exile, language and identity (with Vikki Cecchetto, Peter Lang 2003), and International Classroom: Challenging the notion (with Vikki Cecchetto, Peter Lang 2006). She is currently working on the language of totalitarian regimes and its effects in post-communist Eastern Europe, second language attrition in aging immigrants and on the use of metaphor for the purpose of concealing the truth.
Silvia Pellicer-Ortin, University of Zaragoza (Spain): Female Herstories and Trauma in Eva Figes’s *The Seven Ages* and *The Tree of Knowledge*

In the last decades, contemporary British fiction has shown a great concern with trauma narratives due to the latest armed conflicts and abuses suffered by different communities around the world. Among the various sectors of society that have seen literature as the most suitable site to voice their versions of history, women deserve pride of place. Over five decades, Eva Figes has explored the topics of trauma, history and identity in her fictional and autobiographical works and then, a vast part of her production depicts characters that are traumatised by the patriarchal rules that society has usually imposed upon women.

The main purpose of my study is to analyse Figes’ novels *The Seven Ages* (1986) and *The Tree of Knowledge* (1990) from the point of view of trauma studies with the aim of examining the specific narrative strategies used in order to deconstruct traditional versions of history, to challenge the patriarchal code that has usually hovered over our societies and to reveal the traumas experienced by women in the course of history. On the one hand, in *The Seven Ages* Figes re-writes history from the ancients to the present day by creating a contemporary narrator, a mid-wife, who starts telling stories about female experiences of abuse to her daughters and then, she gives way to her predecessors’ narrations. The female universe created in this novel exposes women as the victims of history and relies on feminist theories such as Sherry Ortner’s belief that female slavery has traditionally been grounded on biological reasons. On the other hand, in *The Tree of Knowledge* Figes sets the action in the English Restoration period and she gives voice to John Milton’s daughter, who reveals the abuse her father exerted upon her and her sister because of their sex. Her testimony is the mechanism used by Figes to denounce the hypocrisy of a genius like Milton and to focus on the power of stories to disclose the dark side of official history.

My contention is that in both novels, Figes manages to reunite history and fiction, past and present, myth and reality as a strategy to denounce female inequality and to show the writer’s alliance with the New Historicism rejection of universal history, which has promoted individual stories as the source of historical knowledge. Moreover, I will try to show that in both cases, this author brings past historical events into the present as a reminder that women still have many rights to fight for in our contemporary
world. These works foster the idea that future female generations have the power to continue telling “her-stories” in order to voice the traumatic side of female experiences in literary works such as those illustrated here.

Silvia Pellicer-Ortí is a Research Fellow at the University of Zaragoza (Spain), where she is a member of the excellence research group, “Contemporary Narrative in English”. After completing her Bachelor’s Degree in English Philology at the University of Zaragoza in 2007, for which she was awarded the Extraordinary Degree Award in March 2008, she obtained the Master’s degree in “Textual and Cultural Studies in English” by defending with honours the MA thesis in September 2008. She is currently enrolled in the doctoral programme on English Studies offered by the University of Zaragoza and is currently writing her PhD Thesis on the work of the British writer Eva Figes. Her main research interests include contemporary British fiction, with a special focus on the ethical and traumatic component in the writings of sexual and ethnic minorities, the Holocaust and the question of Jewishness. She has participated in various national and international conferences delivering papers which deal with these topics and some of her articles are going to be published in the next months.

Olga Glebova, Jan Długosz University of Czestochowa (Poland): Trauma, female identity and the trope of splitness in Figes, Lessing, Tennant and Weldon

Questions concerning identity have preoccupied both feminist theorists and women writers from the beginning of the women’s liberation movement in the late 1960s to the present. One of the recurrent thematic concerns of women’s writing has been the examination of the psychological trauma experienced by women living in patriarchal cultures. The devastating effects of patriarchy on female identity have been frequently explored by means of the trope of ‘split personality’ which functions as a metaphorical signifier of the schizophrenic nature of the patriarchal order and its demands on women. The proposed paper focuses on four novels by British women writers in which the divided female self is placed in the centre of narrative: Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Eva Figes’ *Nelly’s Version* (1977), Emma Tennant’s *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* (1989) and Fay Weldon’s *Splitting* (1995). These novels represent different phases in British women’s writing: from the ‘pre-theoretical’, ‘proto-feminist’ phase exemplified by Lessing’s novel to the second wave feminism of Figes’ and Tennant’s works to Weldon’s engagement with the
postmodern notion of identity. The purpose of the paper is to analyse how these authors appropriate and modify the ubiquitous trope of ‘split personality’ to suit their own political and aesthetic agenda.

**Dr Olga Glebova** is Head of the English Department at the Jan Długosz University of Częstochowa (Poland) where she teaches history of British and American literature and conducts BA seminars. Her research interests include contemporary English language novel and literary theory, especially narratology, feminist theory, postmodern theory, author theories and the historical development of authorship, adaptation and appropriation. She has published extensively on these issues and participated in numerous international conferences both in Poland and abroad. She has co-edited two books and edited an international collection of essays on the recent English language novel. She is currently working on a book dealing with the theory and practice of literary appropriation.

**Corina Crisu, University of Bucharest (Romania): An Interstice of Silence:**

Narrating Rape in Oates’s “The Girl with the Blackened Eye” and Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*

In narratives of trauma, the discarded, untold, and unspeakable past can be revealed in strikingly similar ways. Oscillating between *testimony* and *testament* (from the same Latin root, *testis*, “witness”), the text becomes a confession to the reader, a story dictated by the “repetitive structure” that lies at the heart of the traumatic event, whose painful experience is endlessly relived, and whose significance is never fully grasped (Caruth 1996). In a Derridean way, its meaning is infinitely deferred and only partially disclosed according to a whole rhetoric of absence.

The changing function of the textual message between *testimony* and *testament*, as well as the fluctuant roles of the narrative personae between *witness* and *victim* are subtly disclosed in two recent literary texts – Joyce Carol Oates’s “The Girl with the Blackened Eye” (2001) and Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones* (2002). Read together in a complementary way, Oates’s short story and Sebold’s novel are first person narratives, in which two teenage girls are abducted, molested, and raped by serial killers, in the 70s in the U.S. If Oates’s story is that of a survivor, Sebold’s is that of a murdered victim; in
the first case, the focus is on the victim’s traumatic experience, in the second, on the victim’s family and friends.

As the article demonstrates, in Oates’s and Sebold’s texts, the traumatic event can be seen as a “disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence” (LaCapra 2001), so that either the victim or her family members are deeply affected by its belated effects. In both cases, the victims experience an ontological split, a violent separation between a past self placed under erasure and a present self placed under a question mark, experiencing the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud, which is “the central dialectic of psychological trauma” (Herman 1992). By locating the problematics of the traumatic experience within a space of in-betweenness – that interstice of silence created by the unspeakable event, that breach in one’s perception of space and time – the article will further explore the complex relationship between memory and forgetting, confession and secrecy, personal and intergenerational traumas.

Corina (Anghel) Crisu, PhD is a Lecturer at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Bucharest. Her past awards include a Soros-Chevening Fellowship at Oxford University and a Fulbright Fellowship at Oregon State University. She has participated at numerous international conferences, training workshops and joint projects and she has authored more than 30 articles in the field of American Studies and Comparative Literature. Her publications include: Rewriting: Polytropic Identities in the Postmodern African American Novel (Bucharest: Paideia, 2006); “British Geographies in the Eastern European Mind: Rose Tremain’s The Road Home,” in Facing the East in the West, ed. Barbara Korte (Rodopi, 2010), “Bosnian Ways of Being American: Hemon’s Nowhere Man,” in When the World Turned Upside-Down: Cultural Representations of Post-1989 Eastern Europe, Ed. Kathleen Stark (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), “Transatlantic Connections in Charles Johnson’s Middle Passage” (Comparative American Studies, UK, 2008), “‘Tell Nannan I Walked:’ Reconstructing Manhood in Gaines’s A Lesson before Dying” (ZAA, Germany, 2007), “Reconfiguring Female Characters of the American West” (Selected Proceedings of the First World Congress of the International American Studies Association, Rodopi, 2005).
She is also a poet and has contributed to literary journals and anthologies worldwide; her English and Romanian poems have been collected in two bilingual volumes.

**Sorcha Gunne, Warwick University (UK): ‘Walking on Broken Glass’: narratives of trauma and tortured bodies in *Bitter Fruit* by Achmat Dangor and *David’s Story* by Zoë Wicomb**

He glanced down the slenderness of her back, saw the slow pool of blood spreading on the floor, saw his heavy shoes immersed in its dark glow, saw her feet dancing, delicate little steps, on the jagged edges of the broken beer glass.

– Achmat Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*

Postcolonial feminist research – Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather*; Irene Gedalof’s *Against Purity*; and Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence*, for example – has exposed how women’s subjectivity and agency are elided in the conversation between the predominantly masculine forces of colonizer and colonized. Woman, in this schema, is often imagined as a symbol of the nation. The female body, then, becomes synonymous with the conquered and violated land. Indeed, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu appositely contends that women are reduced to ‘*symbolic instruments* of male politics’. Bourdieu notes how ‘Male privilege is also a trap’ because there is a ‘negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances’. Building on the foundations laid by pioneering postcolonial feminists and combining this with Bourdieu’s theory of masculine domination, this paper examines how two contemporary South African writers Achmat Dangor and Zoë Wicomb innovatively narrate female trauma in order to challenge and subvert the edifice of masculine dominance. I argue that in her novel *David’s Story* (2001), Wicomb consciously subverts notions of masculinity and femininity in order to undermine masculine dominance. Primarily, though problematically, it is through the protagonist Dulcie’s torture in an MK camp during apartheid that Wicomb most overtly challenges male privilege. Similarly, in Achmat Dangor’s novel *Bitter Fruit* (2001) the narrative tension between male and female subjectivity is played out through the contestation for ownership over the raped female body. The struggle between Lydia, who was raped by a police officer during
apartheid, and her husband Silas for agency over her rape constitutes an innovative challenge to the status quo. Putting these two novels in conversation highlights how contemporary novelists in South Africa challenge established patterns of gender domination and seek avenues of recuperation.

Sorcha Gunne is an Early Career Fellow at the University of Warwick, where she recently completed her PhD on liminality, gender violence and communitas in contemporary South African writing and also where she teaches literary theory and new literatures in English. She has presented several conference papers on South African women's writing, including the prison memoirs of Ruth First and Caesariana Kona Makhoere. In collaboration with Zoe Brigley Thompson, she edited Feminism Literature and Rape Narratives (2010) and published an article on researching sexual violence in the Times Higher Education magazine (December 2009). Her next project will be in the field of medical humanities and will look at narratives of disease, including HIV/AIDS, in South African writing.

Carmen Melchor Iñiguez and Begoña Camblo Pandiella, Universidad Camilo José Cela, Madrid, (Spain): Aurora de Albornoz, Autobiography, Trauma and the Spanish Civil War

In 1961, Aurora de Albornoz (1926-1990) started writing Poemas para alcanzar un segundo (Poems to reach a second) with a line that marked one of the most significant axis of her literary production: ‘I am already thirty’. She was letting her voice be heard at a moment in her life when the passing of time had become the sole protagonist. From then on, she would reflect about the difficulty of regaining the happiness felt during childhood and the difficulty of returning to that moment in time.

However, more than in that temporary existentialism, we would like to place the focal point in this paper on the way in which - despite efforts made to poetically signal the strength of life’s constant evolution - certain events and memories will leave a permanent and indelible mark in almost every literary work she has written: The sound of bombs, the strike of bullets against the cemetery walls, the clear images of soldiers going across the streets, the exile… These are images that in Albornoz’s texts allude to
the trauma that experiencing the Spanish Civil War left on our writer as a child. She was barely ten years old when she was left with wounds that would always accompany her.

Both limits, the concern about the distance and the detachment of the past, and the constant memory of the war, motivate Albornozian literature to the point of generating both in her poetic and in her prosiest writings an approach that will engage the “genres of the I”. Feminine autobiography is, in this manner, the writer’s most excellent discourse. From her own voice, she will place us before the most transcendental historical events of the 20th Century in Spanish history: war, post-war and political migration. Only through this genre will we discover a kind of literature that shares a most pure existentialism with a light contact with the socially engaged literature. In this writer, trauma is not just a literary drive. It is the origin of any other experience that, from her womanly voice, she profoundly wished to convert into poetry.

**Dr Begoña Camblor Pandiella** read her thesis on Spanish Literary Studies at the University of Oviedo in Asturias, Spain. She currently works and continues to research at the Universidad Camilo José Cela in Madrid. She is the author of the book *Hacia todos los vientos. El legado creativo de Aurora de Albornoz*, (Towards all winds. The Creative Legacy of Aurora de Albornoz) written in 2010 and has also written several articles whose main subjects are feminine poetry in exile and its connection with compromised literature from a social and genre-oriented point of view.

**Dr Carmen Melchor Íñiguez** read her thesis, entitled *El desdoblamiento de lenguas y el uso creativo del bilingüismo en Sandra Cisneros* (Language divide and creative use of bilingualism in Sandra Cisneros) at UNED, Madrid. She was working and living in Oxford for twelve years and during this time became a member of the London Institute of Linguists. She currently works and continues to research at the Universidad Camilo José Cela in Madrid, where she teaches English as a general subject and has designed a course of English Language for teaching at Primary schools.

**Sue Ryan-Fazilleau, Universite La Rochelle (France): Samson and Delilah: Herstory, Trauma and Survival**

The historical trauma of the Aborigines and white Australian nation-building are not simply contemporaneous – the latter is part of what made the former possible. The
subject of black-on-black violence within Aboriginal communities has been a hot issue in Australia for the past few years, more specifically the horrendous violence perpetrated by Indigenous men against Indigenous women and children. Today’s Aborigines demonstrate the paradoxical relation between destruction and survival, the incomprehensibility at the heart of traumatic experience. Aboriginal film-maker Warwick Thornton’s 2009 movie, *Samson & Delilah*, tells the story of two teenagers caught up in this violence. In an interview, he explains his motives for making the 2009 movie: he was angry about the neglect of Aboriginal children in Central Australia – “not only by governments and whites but by Aboriginal people too”. Trauma theory, which focuses on the destructive repetition of violence is an apposite tool for the analysis of this film, repetition being a structural principle in the narrative. For example, Samson’s brother and his friends get out their guitars and play the same monotonous riff day in, day out; Samson repeats the same self-defeating ritual every day – when he gets up, he attempts to participate by grabbing his brother’s guitar and trying out the first few bars of a different melody but every day his brother shoves him roughly aside and snatches the guitar back for himself. Samson then goes off and sniffs petrol to escape from the desolation and neglect, in the throes of what appears to be a post-traumatic death drive. Delilah’s life is equally repetitive but less desolate until her grandmother’s death plunges her into a cycle of violence and horror that also leads to petrol-sniffing and near death. But, in Thornton’s fictional world, the women are the strong ones. Delilah saves both of them from both white and black society and, through ‘herstory’, the film-maker passes on not only the story of a crisis but that of a survival.

**Sue Ryan-Fazilleau** is a Professor of English at the University of La Rochelle, France, where she teaches Australian Studies, Aboriginal Studies, New Zealand Studies and Post-Colonial Theory. She is the author of *Peter Carey et la quête postcoloniale d’une identité australienne* (L’Harmattan, Paris, 2007) and editor of two collections of essays, *New Zealand and Australia: Narrative, History, Representation* (Kakapo Books, London, 2008) and *France & Australia Face to Face/Australie-France: Regards croisés* (Les Indes Savantes, Paris, 2008). Her current interests are contemporary Australian crime fiction, Australian representations of French identity and literary representations – white and black – of Aboriginality. At the moment she is editing two multidisciplinary collected works containing essays on identity construction and identity crises (national, ethnic and group).
Malgosia Godlewska, Ateneum-University of Gdansk (Poland): History and Fiction in the Process of Recovery of Lost Identity in *Tales of Innocence and Experience* by Eva Figes

“Tales of Innocence and Experience” (2003) by Eva Figes provides an insight into the writer’s identity crisis adopting a carnivalesque combination of contradictory genre variants, namely autobiography and fairy tales. The novel attempts to uncover the origin of the sense of rupture from the past and childhood as well as to demonstrate the process of overcoming her trauma through the healing relationship with the youngest member of her family.

The question of history is expressed in the novel with regard to its three dimensions: the global history of the Second World War and Holocaust, the woman’s personal history restrained by the impact of the first level, and the history – mythology which conveys universal truths gathered in fairy tales and Christian religion. The three levels intertwine with the present and participate in the construction of the woman’s identity. The juxtaposition of fiction and non-fiction is an underlying factor of the dualism of the protagonist’s approach to the phenomenon of history blamed for mutilation of her childhood identity and deprivation of its innocence.

The complex issue of history is connected to the dual treatment of time with respect to its linear and circular development. The circular one is achieved by means of intertextual relations with other literary genres and literary texts including fairy tales by the Grimm Brothers, Paul Celan’s “Death Fugue”, T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets” and most predominantly William Blake’s poems “Songs of Innocence and Experience”.

Intertextual relations, proper and facultative ones, decide about the multidimensional character of Figes’s novel and result in a unique method of retelling history independent of the accounts offered by historians and relying on a woman’s perspective. Furthermore, the issue of memory, which makes the traverse between the past and the present possible, should be perceived in terms of its cultural variant, which comprises personal memories of a group as well as stores the knowledge of one’s culture and society.
The motif of history of the Second World War and Holocaust connected to the concept of memory functions as the starting point for the discussion about the humanity, mortality, transitoriness and solitude.

**Malgorzata Godlewska, PhD** is Dean of the Neophilological Department at Ateneum-University, Gdansk in Poland where she lectures on British literature at the English Faculty. Her PhD dissertation defended in 2009 entitled *Memory, Identity, Transitoriness: Intertextual Discourse in the Works of Eva Figes* is a monographic work which connects a variety of intertextual relations with the question of memory and its cultural, historiographic and diasporic versions to uncover the polyphonic character of Figes’s fiction. She analyses the intertextual relations on three levels, text-text, text-genre and text-reality within the novels of Eva Figes and the fictional works of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Doris Lessing, as well as poetry by William Blake and T.S. Eliot. The dissertation relies on literary and philosophical theories which include the works of e.g Paul Ricoeur, Jan Assmann, Ryszard Nycz, Gerard Genette and Julia Kristeva.

Her scientific interests encompass contemporary literature with the special emphasis on postmodernism, feminism, intertextuality and genre mixture. She is currently working on the publication of her PhD dissertation. Her recent articles related to Eva Figes’s works include:


Daniela Babilon, University of Paderborn (Germany): Unreal Realities: Trauma Narratives, Rewriting History, and Magic(al) Realism

Trauma and its testimony present a considerable challenge to traditional forms of literary representation. In this paper, I explore the potential of Magic(al) Realism for rewriting history and for the representation of trauma caused by gender, caste, class and racial violence.

Trauma is perceived as the incomprehensible and unspeakable, as an experience that cannot be integrated into consciousness or memory. Thus, a decisive part of trauma is its unrepresentability — traditional forms of expression must fail. “In particular,” Valentina Adami writes, “realism as a means of historical representation has to be dismissed.” On the basis of this, I argue that the concept of Magic(al) Realism is particularly suitable to (re)present traumatic experiences. Magic(al) Realism is characterized by the non-paradoxical concurrence of realistic and magical elements. In search of alternative truths, it plays with and tries to dissolve the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between the factual/real/realist and the supernatural/surreal/magical. This, I argue, constitutes a significant parallel between Magic(al) Realism and trauma: the experience of an ‘unreal reality’. Thus, I propose that Magic(al) Realism is well suited to a) presenting traumatizing events to the reader, b) reflecting the perceptions of the traumatized persons, and – importantly – c) bearing testimony by documenting the inner experience of trauma, without eliminating its fundamental impossibility or unintelligibility.

Furthermore, I argue that Arundhati Roy’s postcolonial, feminist trauma narrative The God of Small Things displays a specific, rather atypical kind of Magic(al) Realism that is particularly fruitful for the representation of trauma and the rewriting of history. In Roy’s Magic(al) Realism not the events themselves are magical but their perception by the protagonists. Roy’s version, therefore, exhibits remarkable similarities to the experiencing of trauma: just as in trauma, in Roy’s novel things appear to be unreal or surreal, while simultaneously they are nonetheless very much real, authentic and true.

Daniela Babilon, Research Associate in the field of English Literature and Culture at the University of Paderborn, Germany, studied English (Literature, Culture, Language, Didactics) and Art at the University of Paderborn, Germany, and the University of
Aberdeen, Scotland. She received her Degree in Teaching and Education in March 2010 and also obtained a Study Profile Certificate by specializing on ways of conceptualizing and dealing with heterogeneity. She now teaches seminars on British and American Literature and Culture as well as on the Didactics of English Literature in the Foreign Language classroom. Her Ph.D. research focuses on the traumatic gendering, classification, racialization and sexualization of individuals and groups through representations of smell in postcolonial and transnational literature.

**Irralie Doel, University of Liverpool (UK): Light, Monet, and creative process in the work of Eva Figes and Helene Cixous**

In *Light* (1983), Eva Figes explores Monet’s artistic practice and modes of perception as he endeavours to capture the light in his garden at Giverny. Hélène Cixous uses Monet’s practice as a step towards understanding the writing process in ‘The Last Painting or the Portrait of God’ (from her 1991 collection *Coming to Writing and other essays*). Figes and Cixous paint in words, creating impressionistic writing which extends the boundaries of the literary through its reliance on the techniques and formulations of visual art.

This paper will examine the significance of light in these two texts in the context of Figes and Cixous’ use of Monet’s life and work. It will explore the importance of artistic perception and practice in their writing and demonstrate how visual art functions in their literary processes.

**Irralie Doel** teaches in the School of English and the Department of Continuing Education and Professional Development at the University of Liverpool. She also runs creative writing, reading and arts projects at SWAN Women’s Centre in Sefton, Merseyside, researching inclusive practice and arts and health. She is co-director of Reach Consultancy which provides research, CPD, teaching and training for schools and universities, organisations and communities.

Her main areas of research are in twentieth century and contemporary literature, women’s writing, and poetry and poetics. However, her research involves making connections across period and discipline specific boundaries and she has taught and researched in literature and culture from ancient to contemporary. She is interested in literary theory, especially feminist theory and formulations of creativity and creative
processes. She also teaches creative writing and researches relations between writing, reading and creative practice. She has an interest in art history and practice (especially by contemporary women), in how visual texts intersect with literary texts, and in practitioners who employ both.

**Sara Strauss, University of Paderborn (Germany): The Persistence of Modernism in Eva Figes’s Experimental Literary Forms and Modernist Motifs in Light**

Similar to many modernist authors, Eva Figes emphasised the inability of traditional literary forms to adequately express human experience. In her outlooks on British fiction in the 1970s Eva Figes criticised the limitations of the English literary tradition:

> The English social realist tradition cannot contain the realities of my own lifetime, horrors which one might have called surreal if they had not actually happened. For me the old forms are hopelessly inadequate, and can only say things, that are no longer worth saying: we know all about them.¹

Thus, Figes opposes the traditional form of the English novel with her need for experimental modes for conveying her experiences in writing. To Figes the challenge of literature is the faithful depiction of the peculiarities of life, which can only be achieved by new innovative modes:

> Once I would have told you about my aim to create a kind of poetry in novel form. Now I am less self-consciously concerned with the creation of a finished and, hopefully, beautiful artefact, than with finding some way of expressing the peculiarities, awfulness and seemingly ungraspable qualities of life itself. This inevitably involves me in constant literary innovation since familiar fictional modes deal with aspects of living that have long been grasped and have nothing unfamiliar or unexpressed about them. The old modes seem hopelessly inadequate; […].²

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Some years after enunciating these different aims pursued in her writing, Figes publishes her novella *Light* – a “beautiful artefact” which succeeds in fulfilling both of her aims. Here, Figes achieves to present the “seemingly ungraspable qualities of life itself” by means of an innovative and lyrical mode. Similar to her protagonist Claude Monet’s way of grasping a moment in life in a painting, Figes’s impressionist mode enables her to depict one hot summer’s day in the life of her characters. In order to portray the characters’ stream of consciousnesses, Figes employs modernist techniques and experiments with the possibilities to render human consciousness in fiction. Beside of experimental modes Figes also uses motifs reminiscent of modernist literature, such as the focalization through children and artist-characters as well as the imagery of light and shades to convey the atmosphere of the particular moment. By means of an analysis of Figes’s novella *Light*, this paper will elaborate on the persistence of modernist techniques and motifs in Figes’s work.

**Sara Strauss** is a PhD student in English Literary Studies at the University of Paderborn, Germany. She studied English and Spanish (Literature, Culture, Didactics and Linguistics) at the University of Paderborn, Germany and at Universitat de les Illes Balears, Spain. Since 2008 she has been a Research Assistant in English and Spanish Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Paderborn. At the moment she is a visiting fellow at University of East Anglia, UK. Her PhD project is on “Recurring Motifs in Contemporary British and Irish Stream of Consciousness Literature”: My thesis includes a key chapter on Eva Figes’s novella *Light*. It analyses the modes of presenting consciousness employed in novels by Eva Figes, Rachel Cusk, Ian McEwan and Graham Swift and examines the intertextual relationships between these novels and modernist texts by authors such as James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. Research Interests: Narratology, Contemporary British Fiction, Modernism and Postmodernism, Intertextuality, Gender Studies.

**Amy Parker, Sherbrooke University, Quebec (Canada): Intoning Male and Female Voices in Eva Figes’ *Light* and Other Novels**

The novel genre allows a writer ample opportunity to construct a storyline and literary theory will explain how novels express meaning through interpersonal dialogue (Bakhtine). When the lives of the subjects have become fragmented (Ricoeur), this meaning may be expressed in other venues such as abstract expression and
subjectivism. In her novels, Eva Figes manages to withdraw the male voice from most of the story, as well as from its imagery and perceptual realism, thus allowing the book to become Herstory. Allusions to history, philosophy, literature and religion contribute to the coherency of these fragmented, stream-of-consciousness novels.

The Practice

The female characters in the novels have little dialogue with others, and male protagonists are rarely present. Textual ellipses, silence and abstract imagery appropriately express their sadness, pathos and painful memories. The women protagonists are depicted as marginalised, erratic and incoherent, coping with a complete loss of identity. They occupy spaces of instability such as hotel rooms or abandoned farmhouses where dialogical communication between male and female characters is awkward and ineffectual. Nevertheless, the reality is paradoxical and problematical; in some stories, the female voice interacts problematically with the present. In others, she is resigned to it and a male voice is trying to instill a sense of urgency.

What the Intonation Sounds Like

In each novel, the male voice appears to chronologically follow the appearance of the female narrator. His voice is minimalist, sparse, unsentimental and without literary allusions, and if the two voices were to interact meaningfully, he would offer logical solutions and diversions since there often exist loyal filial or patriarchal ties between the two. However the sounds of the male voice seem to her to come from some distance and to be irritatingly discordant and consequently his appearances have little effect on her interior monologue. By limiting and distancing the male voice in this way, the narration and its meaning is acceded uniquely to her.

**Miss Amy C. Parker: M.A., M.T.S., PhD candidate (Littérature française)**

I have completed a Masters of Arts degree at the University of Toronto with an interest in nineteenth century novelists and George Sand and Gustave Flaubert in particular. I help direct the annual conference for the Michigan Academy of Arts and Sciences in Michigan, U.S.A., and co-chair the sections for French, Italian and Women’s Studies. I have edited online and printed journals for elementary school mathematics from
Waterloo, Ontario and have contributed to curriculum writing teams at the Peel Region Board of Education in Mississauga, Ontario, where I am currently on leave from my duties as a French Immersion teacher.

Melanie Grué, Université Paris 7 (France): Trauma and Survival in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, or the power of alternative stories.

In *Bastard Out of Carolina*, lesbian-feminist and incest survivor Dorothy Allison draws the portrait of Bone Boatwright, a little girl who suffers repeated physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather Glen. Narrated by the child-victim herself, this partly autobiographical novel gives precise descriptions of unbearable scenes of beating and rape, and allows the reader to enter the mind of the traumatized child.

Indeed, as Glen physically and psychologically destroys Bone, the girl elaborates strategies of survival, realizing that she can use the horror of her life to shape her identity. Throughout the novel, she learns how to survive violence, overcomes terror, and builds up a whole new fantasy life for herself, a parallel life that helps her keep on living: At first terrorized by horrible nightmares, Bone teaches herself to make the most of her imagination, and ends up inventing gruesome stories and turning herself into the heroin of scary S/M fantasies, in which she is able to defy her abuser and become wonderful in the eyes of an imaginary audience. Bone discovers that these stories are liberating and powerful, and understands that she does not have to be the victim of a male abuser who tries to make her disappear. Instead, she understands that she can “reinvent” herself and become stronger thanks to story-telling. In this sense, the heroin is very close to the author, who says that writing fiction is what helped her survive the trauma of childhood, and heal.

I thus propose to study how Dorothy Allison links abuse and the elaboration of identity in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. I intend to show how the author’s feminist ideals inform her treatment of the abused child’s identity, and how alternative stories (tales and sexual fantasies) allow the victim of trauma to survive male violence, and to decide who she is going to be.

Melanie Grué: After spending two years in the UK as a French Language Assistant, and passing the competitive exam to become an English teacher, I completed my
Master’s Degree in American Literature in 2009. I am now a doctoral student (with a three-year fellowship) at Université Paris 7, where I also work as a lecturer in American Literature. The Subject of my PhD (under the supervision of Mr. Jean-Paul Rocchi) is the work of lesbian-feminist, incest survivor American author Dorothy Allison. My fields of interest are gay, lesbian and queer studies, women’s writing, testimonial literature, and American feminism.

Emma Dominguez-Rue, University of Lleida (Spain): Herstory Unwritten: Trauma, Memory and History in Toni Morrison's Beloved.

“This is not a story to pass on”. One of the epitaphs to Toni Morrison’s novel Beloved operates as one of its main contradictions. In Beloved, memory, identity, story, and history are blended to voice the uninhabited silence in the history of Afro-Americans. This paper will focus on how the history and identity of the black community is formed in opposition to the system imposed by whites, and how the protagonist Sethe’s identity is shaped within — and without — that community. Similarly, memory, herstory and history will be paradoxically united by the ghost of her murdered daughter Beloved, who died without a name and who will come back as a revenant to bring the slave past back to her mother’s memory.

“Sixty million — and more”, the other epitaph in Morrison’s book, anticipates that the book contains more than one story. Changing from oral to written discourse and shifting from first to third person to omniscient narrator to interior monologue, the novel presents fragmented accounts of the characters’ past in Sweet Home, Kentucky. Sethe’s story, inextricably intertwined to the history of the black community, is gradually disclosed through a painful labour of memory. This process is triggered by the ghost of her murdered daughter, who functions as a powerful emblem of both memory and history, standing for all those who did not survive to tell their stories. The characters’ narratives, although partially recovered, show that there are memories of sufferings that are beyond calculation or imagination, even beyond what the mind can recall. Between the objective discourse of history and the subjectivity of individual experience, Beloved stands for the paradox of the untold memories of slavery, necessary to be accounted for but too painful to be remembered. The stories the novel presents are just as ambiguous and contradictory as the revenant girl herself: past and present, positive and negative, beloved and not-beloved.
Emma Domínguez-Rué graduated in English at the University of Lleida (Catalunya, Spain) and studied an MA in English Literature at Swansea University (UK). She specialised in female invalidism in the fiction of Ellen Glasgow and read her PhD dissertation at the University of Lleida (Spain) in 2005. Aside from American Studies, she has also worked on Victorian and Gothic fiction under a feminist perspective. She is currently teaching in the Department of English at the University of Lleida and she is member of a research group working on perspectives of ageing in literature.

Corinne Bigot, UFR Langues et Cultures Étrangères - Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense (France): Locking the door: self-deception, silence and survival in Alice Munro’s “Vandals”.

“Vandals”, a chilling, disturbing and haunting story from Alice Munro’s 1994 collection *Open Secrets*, is centrally concerned with the self-deception that surrounds the sexual abuse of children, the relationship between knowing and of not knowing, silence and survival. “Vandals” is a trauma narrative in that it goes beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or character study, and internalises the rhythms, processes and uncertainties of traumatic experience within its structure (Vickroy, 2002). At the core of the story, the unexplained vandalising of a house by a young woman who was supposed to check on her former neighbours’ house, and the following realisation by the reader that as a child the heroine and possibly her brother had been abused by their neighbour, while the man’s partner seemingly made a bargain not to see and act. As the young woman remembers her childhood and her relationship with the two adults, as she revisits her neighbour’s garden and nature preserve, trees, signs, the grass, and skinned bodies silently speak the abuse that has gone unreported, the abuse the victim has kept and will keep silent about.

I would like to examine how “Vandals” explores the relationship between silence, self-deception and survival, relying on by verbal and visual images, typography, a topography that is both metonymical and textual, and the metaphors of taxidermy, to suggest what is “elusive, inaccessible, and unbelievable about traumatic experiences” (Vickroy). Finally, I would like to examine question of the victim’s silence and the last pages of the story and the final challenges they offer the reader: why it is unclear whether by destroying her abuser’s books and animals and by trashing his house, the young woman is liberating or sealing her own shaded and secret rooms.
**Corinne Bigot:** Since I started working on my PhD, I have devoted most of my research to the work of Canadian short story writer Alice Munro, with particular emphasis on the role of silence, and particular emphasis on her use of typography in representing trauma and haunting memories. PhD in Canadian Literature, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense (France) supervised by Prof. J.J. Lecercle, defended in December 2007. Dissertation entitled: « L’espace du silence dans l’œuvre d’Alice Munro » (The Space of Silence: Alice Munro’s Short Stories). M.A. American literature, defended in 1987, Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle, Paris France. (Dissertation on Vladimir Nabokov’s novels *Ada* and *Lolita*). M.A. English Literature, defended in 1985, Université François Rabelais, Tours, France (Dissertation on Virginia Woolf’s novels *Mrs Dalloway* and To the *Lighthouse*).

**Recent publications**
- «Alice Munro’s “Silence”: from the Politics of Silence to a Rhetoric of Silence». *The Journal of the Short Story/ Les cahiers de la nouvelle*, special issue on Alice Munro. [publication pending- presumably Fall 2010].

**Other :**
- «Selected Bibliography on Alice Munro ». *The Journal of the Short Story/ Les cahiers de la nouvelle*, special issue on Alice Munro. [publication pending].

**Communications**
- « ‘These French clichés are symptomatic’, la mise en évidence des mots français dans *Lolita* de Vladimir Nabokov. » Paper presented at one of Paris Ouest’s seminars February 2010. Accessible on line from the English Department website, since March 2010.
Sonya Andermahr is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Northampton. She teaches 20th and 21st century literature and is Course Leader for the MA in Modern English Studies. Her research interests are contemporary British fiction, women’s writing, especially the representation of mothers, and feminist pedagogy. Her publications include 'Jeanette Winterson' (Palgrave 2009), Jeanette Winterson: A contemporary Critical guide' (Continnum, 2007), and 'A glossary of Feminist Theory' with Terry lovell and Carol Wolkowitz (Edward Arnold 2000). She is currently working on a book about narratives of maternal loss looking at the representation of grief in women's writing.

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