

2015 HUBERT CURIEN INITIATIVES FUND AWARD HOLDER'S REPORT

MEMORY FRICTIONS: CONFLICT-NEGOTIATION-POLITICS (International Conference on Contemporary Narratives in English)

In accordance with the requirements established by the *Academia Europaea* to receive a 2015 Hubert Curien Initiative Fund, the award holder, Prof. Susana Onega, and the organisers of the Conference “Memory Frictions: Conflict-Negotiation-Politics” — Dr. María Jesús Martínez Alfaro and Dr. Silvia Pellicer Ortín — present a report to inform on the event and justify expenditures.

REPORT OF THE MAIN ACTIVITIES

The International Conference “Memory Frictions: Conflict-Negotiation-Politics” (6-8 May 2015) was organised by two members of the Department of English and German Philology of the University of Zaragoza, María Jesús Martínez Alfaro and Silvia Pellicer Ortín, with the collaboration of the other members of the research team “Contemporary Narratives in English” directed by Prof. Susana Onega. This event was part of the scientific activities carried out by the team within the national research project on “Trauma and Beyond: The Rhetoric and Politics of Suffering in Contemporary Narrative in English” (a project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, code FFI2012-32719).

The topic chosen for this conference has proved to be of great interest to those working in the field of literary studies. The scope was limited to narratives in English published from 1990 onwards. The aim of the conference was to illustrate the many and various sides of the so-called “memory boom” and its impact on the literary production of the last decades. In fact, as explained in the call for papers, the 1990s was the time when this “memory boom” turned memory into a central concern in contemporary culture and politics at a global scale. Some of the important contributing factors that were highlighted throughout the conference were the debates surrounding False Memory Syndrome; developments in the academic fields of Holocaust Studies and Postcolonial Studies; the spread of public historical consciousness; and the evolving dynamics of reparation politics and justice, among others. As the scholar Jay Winter points out, the contemporary obsession with memory has to do with multiple social, cultural, medical, and economic trends and developments of a miscellaneous but intersecting nature (2007). The effects of these intersections, as he argues, have not only been multiplicative as they have also made for friction areas, sites of clash, controversy, contradiction and questioning, which became the focus of this conference.

The interest in this field of research was attested by the large number of proposals, approximately one hundred, which were received after launching the call for papers. Once the selection process was over, sixty three participants were accepted to take part in the conference. In addition, there were three keynote speakers, invited by the organising committee on account of their relevant contribution to the field of contemporary literary

criticism, especially in what concerns Memory, Trauma and Holocaust Studies: Prof. Robert Eaglestone (Royal Holloway, University of London), Prof. Bryan Cheyette (University of Reading) and Prof. Jean-Michel Ganteau (Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3). There was a keynote lecture every morning, followed by substantial debates. The titles were the following: “The Powers of Vulnerability: Memory and the Restorative Uses of Elegy” (Prof. Jean-Michel Ganteau, May 6); “The Contemporary Novel, Reality Hunger and the Memory Boom” (Prof. Bryan Cheyette, May 7); and “Telos and Trauma” (Prof. Robert Eaglestone, May 8). As to the conference delegates, they came from a wide variety of countries: Spain, Ireland, UK, Italy, France, Portugal, Poland, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Greece, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the USA, Canada and Australia. Counting on specialists from such different backgrounds made for a very fruitful exchange of ideas and an enriching diversity of perspectives from which to approach the topic chosen as our main object of study. These sixty three papers were grouped into twenty two thematic panels, scheduled during the three days of the conference in the form of parallel sessions:

Session 1: *Playing with Memory: Manipulation and Deception*

Session 2: *Traumatic Wounds in African-American Contexts*

Session 3: *Memories of the World Wars*

Session 4: *Constructing Diasporic Identities*

Session 5: *Memory Fictions, Memory Frictions*

Session 6: *Holocaust Memory and the Perpetrator's Perspective*

Session 7: *Reconstructing Memory in Australian Fiction*

Session 8: *Memoir or Not Memoir, That is the Question*

Session 9: *Depathologising Trauma: Enabling Stories, Enabling Emotions*

Session 10: *The Individual and History: Memories and/of Conflict in Short-Story Collections*

Session 11: *Holocaust Representation and the Jewish Question in Contemporary British Fiction*

Session 12: *Collective Memory and Public Commemoration: Politics, Remembrance, Manipulation*

Session 13: *Gendered Memories*

Session 14: *Memory Spaces: Culture, Criticism, and Perception*

Session 15: *Information Flows: Visitable Pasts, Technologised Presents, Imagined Futures*

Session 16: *Trauma, Memory, and Justice*

Session 17: *What the Dead Leave Behind*

Session 18: *Multidirectionality and Memory: (Hi)stories that Clash and Blend*

Session 19: *Negotiating Memory: Ethnic Discourses, Ethnic Identities*

Session 20: *The Detective Work of Memory: Selves, Histories, and Counter-Histories*

Session 21: *Re-creating the Holocaust: Words, Images, Commemoration*

Session 22: *Reconfiguring Memory, Resisting Trauma*

The following links offer more detailed information on the programme and content of the keynote lectures and papers:

- Programme: <http://cne.literatureresearch.net/conference-programme>
- Book of abstracts: <http://cne.literatureresearch.net/conference-abstracts>

In addition to delegates and plenary speakers, several lecturers and students attended the conference as the organisers and the members of the Research Group had invited them to do so without a need to register. Several announcements had also been previously disseminated through the *Academia Europaea* website, the *Text, Action and Space* (TAS) website, our University website, our research team's website, and mailing lists. Besides, we had with us two representatives of the *Academia Europaea*: Professor Svend E. Larsen (AEM), who delivered a paper, and Dr. Nuria Radó, from the Barcelona Knowledge Hub.

The opening ceremony counted with the presence of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Zaragoza. Prof. Eliseo Serrano's introduction was followed by Dr. Martínez Alfaro's opening address, in which she highlighted the key themes and ideas that would be addressed in the papers to be presented during the conference. Dr. Pellicer Ortín concluded by acknowledging the individuals and institutions that had made this conference possible. These acknowledgments remarked the support of the *Academia Europaea* for its endorsement of the conference and the economic support of the Academia Europaea 2015 Hubert Curien Fund. A special mention was made of two members of the *Academia Europaea*, Prof. Svend E. Larsen and Prof. Cinzia Ferrini, for their willingness to endorse this project and collaborate with it. Thanks were finally given to the Barcelona Knowledge Hub of the Academia for their support and promotion of the conference. A similar speech was delivered by Dr. Pellicer Ortín at the conference closing, thanking all the participants for the good quality of their contributions and summarising the main points that had been discussed in the twenty two panel sessions.

The social activities that were part of the programme also contributed to creating a very friendly atmosphere in which people could share their projects and ideas. The coffee breaks allowed the participants to meet and discuss their research; a Welcome Reception was organised in Hotel Alfonso in the evening of the first day of the conference; and a gala dinner was held in the Restaurant El Principal on 7 May. Tourist information was provided to the participants in the delegate packs so that they could visit the main landmarks of Zaragoza during their free time and the organising committee was always available to help them to find their way in our city or to solve any query they could have.

IMPACT OF THE EVENT AND FOLLOW-ON ACTIONS

As can be inferred from the description above, the scientific impact of the conference has been high due to the high number of proposals that were initially received and because of the presence of speakers from so many different countries, who were all willing to travel to Zaragoza and share their specialist knowledge and reflections on the issue of memory. The diverse papers they presented contributed to throwing light on a variety of areas of friction

where individual and collective memories collide and which show that memory, to put it in Mieke Bal's terms, is a travelling concept.

The most relevant conclusions pointed at the interdisciplinary nature of the field of Memory Studies —a field where philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, politics, and literary criticism come together so as to unveil the palimpsestic and multidimensional dimensions of memory. Countries, nations, and individuals become thus connected in a common construction of a globalised world. News and data are part of an ongoing flux of exchange and relationality, but also memories play an important role in a transnational world; they move, they travel, and they connect human beings who have gone through similar experiences of pain, suffering and conflict.

A wide range of memories were addressed in the contributions to the conference: memories related to the two World Wars and the Holocaust; memories of African-American, Cuban, Australian, indigenous, Native-American and Caribbean individuals and collectivities affected by colonisation, migration and diaspora; gendered and queer memories; etc. All this contributed to defending our claim that literature needs to be (re)considered as a powerful tool for many social groups to claim for their own memories in the public sphere. The role of politics and the manipulative dangers of master narratives also came to the fore in discussing the formation of collective memories and identities, which led to reflection on the way our sense of history, memory and identity is mediated by external forces that escape our control. Moreover, with regard to the study of those literary forms that allow for the depiction of conflicting memories, most of the talks concluded that contemporary writers have crafted formal discourses that allow them to address the unrepresentable nature trauma and the conflicts of memory. Thus, the field of aesthetics appeared as the main area where creative writers can metaphorise and give shape to the obsession with memory that our society seems to be going through. In conclusion, this conference showed that many frictions demand analysis in the political, sociological, psychological fields which we were dealing with during the conference. This event was also proof that frictions make people get together with the common aim to provide answers to some existential doubts on what it means to be human.

We would like to disseminate all these results and share ideas with a wider scientific community by publishing a collection of essays. For this, some guidelines have already been sent to all the participants in case they want to revise and enlarge the papers they presented at the conference. The manuscripts will go through a blind peer review process and a selection of the best will be published with an international publishing house. If enough essays are found to be high-quality work in the areas of literary, Memory and Trauma Studies, we would consider publishing two volumes of collected essays.

To conclude, we would like to thank the *Academia Europaea* for making possible this meeting of scholars from so many different backgrounds. We are confident that this will contribute to future projects and collaborations in the context of international research networks. This will help our research team continue striving for cutting-edge research projects in the field of contemporary fictional narratives in English, as we have done in the last few decades.

EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT OF THE MAIN USES OF THE REWARD

- **REWARD: 5,000 Euros**
- **OTHER INCOME: Registration fees 5,550 Euros**

The registration fee was 125 Euros (general) and 50 Euros (for those delegates that proved their student status).

- 42 participants x 125 Euros = 5,250 Euros
- 6 students x 50 Euros = 150 Euros
- Note: The members of the Research Group “Contemporary Narrative in English” did not pay registration fees. The exemption from payment included the research fellows — Ana Beatriz Pérez Zapata and María Ferrández San Miguel — who also presented papers. This makes 15 delegates that did not have to pay registration fees, which, added to the 48 who did, makes a total of 63 delegates. Postgraduate students from our Department who wished to attend the conference, without presenting papers, did so for free, too.

TOTAL INCOME: 10,550 Euros

• EXPENDITURE

- Expenses derived from the three keynote speakers: 2,441.08 Euros
 - Fees: 1,200 Euros (400 Euros per speaker)
 - Journeys and accommodation: 1,241.08 Euros (in total)
- Conference Venue-Centro Joaquín Roncal (renting of the rooms and assembly hall, use of the technical means and support provided by specialised staff): 1,330 Euros
- Fees for the designer of the posters and other visual materials that were delivered to the participants: 600 Euros
- Photocopying services (posters, stickers for the conference folders, conference programmes and books of abstracts for the participants): 453.97 Euros
- Bags, folders, notebooks and pens for the participants: 243.14 Euros
- Gifts for the participants (Mouse-pads and bookmarks): 444 Euros
- Suralia (fair trade enterprise that prepared the coffee breaks in the conference venue): 928.13 Euros
- Wine Reception at Hotel Alfonso: 1,584 Euros
- Social Expenses (subsistence allowance for the keynote speakers and other expenses): 1,100 Euros*

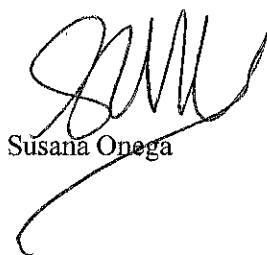
* Those participants who wished to attend the gala dinner (Restaurante El Principal) paid separately a fee of 40 Euros to cover their own dinner expenses, thus, these are not included as part of the conference expenditure.

TOTAL EXPENDITURE: 9,124.32 EUR

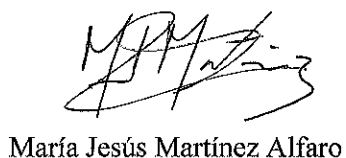
BALANCE: 1,425.68

The remaining 1,425.68 Euros will be used for the future publication of one or, if the number of high-quality papers allows for it, two volumes of collected essays derived from the papers presented at the conference. They will go through a blind peer-review process and those selected will be published with an international publishing house.

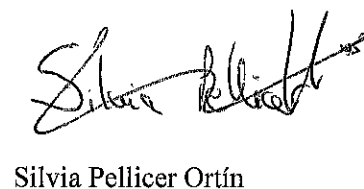
Zaragoza, 04/06/2015



Susana Onega



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