

## 1st SGR Seminar G4RoC (UAB) and CELCA (UdL)

### Programme:

10.00-11.00 Conceptualizing Displacement

11.00-12.00 Chronicles of Time

12.00-13.00 Doctoral/Postdoctoral Round Table

14.30-15.30 Archipelagic Memory

15.30-16.30 Intersections of Conflict

### Round table abstracts:

#### 1- Conceptualizing Displacement: Aesthetics and Imaginaries of Refugee Experiences

**David Owen** (UAB): “Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Displacement Fiction”

Christine Dwyer Hickey’s *Last Train from Liguria* (2009) is a novel that spans multiple timelines, primarily set in 1930s Italy and 1990s Ireland. The narrative weaves together the lives of its characters across generations, touching on themes of love, loss, duty, and the effects of political upheaval. This paper approaches *Last Train* as, in effect, a showcase of how multiple forms of displacement derive from the central dislocational trait, that which describes the (often forced or traumatic) physical movement of people. By assessing these distinct facets, the paper hopes to contribute to furthering the critical understanding of this sub-genre.

In addition to the narratively essential physical displacement (Italy, England, Ireland) described in the novel, I will also consider the following: **Temporal Displacement:** The novel’s non-linear narrative, which jumps between the 1930s and the 1990s, thereby displacing characters in time. **Emotional and Psychological Displacement:** the two main female protagonists experience personal inner turmoil and feelings of being out of place in their own lives. **Political and Social Displacement:** Set against the backdrop of the rise of Fascism in Italy, the novel is shaped by the political unrest of the time, the consequences of which last over decades. **Cultural and Linguistic Displacement:** Moving between Italy and Ireland, English and Italian, the characters navigate the nuances of two distinct worlds, preventing any stable sense of “home”. **Displacement of Memory and Identity:** The novel narratively explores and challenges the notion of stable memory or identity, and displaces these notions with uncertainty.

**Cristina Pividori:** “Make America Great Again”: (De)Colonising Masculinities in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Refugees* (2017)

One of the defining characteristics of Trump’s politics has been the appeal to hatred and fear of refugees and immigrants. Yet, the current xenophobia in the US has deep roots. In as much as the U.S. has been built by immigrants, it has also been built on genocide, slavery, and colonialism. Born in Vietnam and raised in the US, Viet Thanh Nguyen, the author of the best-selling and award-winning novel *The Sympathiser* (2015), has been interested in the lives of those who, like himself, fled war in Vietnam but were also faced with structural violence and exploitation, and with colonising notions of “manhood” in the US. Usually associated with powerlessness, frustration and helplessness, refugees are regarded as “un-American” and are, therefore, marginalised within the hierarchies of patriarchal society. Through the lens of bell hooks’ “love ethics” (2004) and of King-Kok Cheung’s notion of *renwen* masculinity (2022), this paper explores one of the short stories

in Nguyen's *The Refugees*, "The Other Man," with the aim of contributing to the emerging work around the gendered challenges involved in forced migration. While toxic masculinity and Americanness are interconnected in their emphasis of gender exceptionalism in the US, Nguyen's representation of male refugeeness struggles to reconcile his male characters' identities as refugees, Americans, and human beings and tends to reshape what the U.S. stands for, and for the better.

**Nick Spengler** (UAB): "The Experimental Aesthetics of American War Refugee Fiction: From Melville's *Israel Potter* (1855) to Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015)"

It does what it says on the tin, more or less, but the idea is to suggest that there may be some value in comparing two very different novels about American war refugees—Melville's novel about a Revolutionary War veteran exiled in Europe and Nguyen's novel about a Vietnamese refugee in Los Angeles—in terms of their aesthetic and generic experimentation. The conceit is that both novels develop a unique and experimental aesthetics of displacement through their hybridization of literary forms and genres, and that this experimental aesthetics raises ethical questions around the possibilities as well as the limitations of our sympathies not only as readers and critics but also as witnesses or bystanders of refugee migrations on a global scale.

## **2- Chronicles of Time: Exploring Aging and Intergenerational Relationships in Contemporary Literatures in English a**

**Isabel Santaulària** (UdL): "Age and Masculinity in Stephen King's *It*, *Dreamcatcher* and *Doctor Sleep*"

Using three of Stephen King's most well-known novels centred on groups of male friends, namely, *It* (1986), *Dreamcatcher* (2001) and *Doctor Sleep* (2013), I argue that, even though King records men's age-related anxieties as they reach middle age, he does not use his stories to demonstrate that men can age and still be manly, strong, powerful and heroic, as is the case in many contemporary narratives where the ageing male hero reclaims his ascendancy through sheer force of muscle. Instead, King challenges patriarchal constructions of masculinity that impose impossible standards on men, especially as they age. At the same time, he redraws the notion of the heroic that is prevalent in popular narratives, mostly based on the use of singlehanded individualism, violence and aggression. Instead, he draws on qualities such as solidarity, friendship, love and memory as essential in order to battle the forces of evil.

**Emma Domínguez** (UdL): "Negotiating Feminine Identity through the Maternal Bond in Elena Ferrante's *Troubling Love*"

Cultural representations have traditionally portrayed the mother as a one-dimensional figure of sacrifice and unconditional devotion to her children. In the last decades, however, contemporary writing by women has examined the many complexities of what allegedly is the most "natural" of female roles. In her first novel *Troubling Love* (1992), Elena Ferrante (Naples 1943) places the mother figure at the center of feminine identity while presenting motherhood in all its nuances. The narrative of *Troubling Love* unfolds as a thriller in which the protagonist Delia returns to the Naples of her childhood to find out the truth about her mother's death, which will instead reveal the painful knots tying her mother's life to her own. I argue that the violence suffered by both women, while silencing both female voices, has disintegrated the bond between mother and daughter; it is only by recovering

that bond that Delia will finally succeed in reconstructing a fragmented self and regain identity.

**Ieva Stoncikaite** (Universitat Pompeu Fabra): “Intergenerational Relationships and Ageing: Two Examples from Contemporary American Literature”

Although population ageing is to be celebrated, it is also wedded to an increased need for carework that poses new demands on families and care services. This presentation addresses the representations of end-of-life care, intergenerational relationships and later life as depicted in the works of two contemporary American writers - Erica Jong and Mitch Albom. It examines the complexities of ageing from a perspective of cultural and literary age studies with a special focus on mentorship relationship and family support.

**Maricel Oró-Piqueras** (UdL): “Grandmothers in Maria Barbal’s and Penelope Lively’s novels: between generational wisdom and asexuality”

Despite the still prevailing disgust towards the old body, the figure of the grandmother has been considered an accepted image of female old age because, on the one hand, it represents a nurturing figure of future generations and, on the other hand, it is devoid of sexual implications. From their two different settings, Catalunya in the case of Maria Barbal and England in the case of Penelope Lively, at the end of the twentieth century, this presentation will try to discern to what extent their literary grandmothers conform to this limited stereotypical image of old age or, on the contrary, they are nuanced characters who precisely point out to the need to rethink taboos attached to the ageing body and old age.

### **3- Doctoral and Postdoc Round Table**

**Guillem Mas** (UdL): “Of Time and Existence: A Study of Existentialist Constructions of Old Age in English Renaissance Playtexts”

To Shakespeare, the ultimate purpose of theatre is to reflect human nature. Over centuries, theatre has profoundly influenced society’s understanding of social, political, and cultural issues, including age and ageing. This PhD thesis explores portrayals of old age in English plays from 1560 to 1625, examining ageing from cultural and historical perspectives, and aims to deduce (proto-)existentialist characteristics in the Renaissance era. By combining ageing studies and existentialism, the study attempts to reinterpret a limited corpus of Early Modern playtexts. Moreover, it intends to contribute to ageing studies by challenging stereotypes of older individuals and promotes existentialist philosophy through theatre, facilitating knowledge dissemination in philosophy, dramatic literature, and humanities.

**Verónica Vizcaíno** (UdL): “Jackie Kay's Poetic Representation of Female Ageing: Giving Voice to Intersectional Marginality”

Women's experiences of ageing are frequently overlooked and undervalued in Western society. Within her collections of short stories, contemporary Scottish author, Jackie Kay, delves into the challenges that middle-aged and older women encounter as they navigate the aging process in today’s society. This Ph.D. thesis unveils the valuable insights Jackie Kay's narratives offer, by exploring the significant intersections of gender and aging with other forms of social discrimination that appear in her work. By examining some of the author's most highly symbolic narratives, this study aims to highlight the need for a greater understanding of the multifaceted voices and experiences of aging women.

**Yuliia Benderska (UdL):** “Clash of generations in Romantic Literature: Sinful Parents and the Rebel Son in Lord Byron’s *Cain*”

Death and dying are central to the story of Byron’s *Cain*. The play demonstrates how it is viewed and understood by different generations. In this presentation, I will argue that the rim between parents and children in *Cain* becomes wider and wider due to their lack of communication and understanding of one another. With the help of literary gerontology, it will be demonstrated that “Parents and Son” relationship is key to the story since it represents two opposite views in *Cain* and the aftermath of their collision. Mutual respect and understanding are the absent elements in Cain’s family, so he (similar to Lord Byron) uses his rebelliousness as defence. The turbulent family ties of the drama demonstrates the power of (mis)communication between generations which, if not dealt with and resolved in time, might grow into a real tragedy.

#### **4- Archipelagic Memory: Islands and Intergenerational Relationships.**

In this round table we aim at articulating archipelagic memory through Abdulrazak Gurnah’s Zanzibar and Lindsey Collen’s Mauritius. We claim that both Gurnah and Collen’s oeuvre explore archipelagic thinking –the intersection of histories and geographies connected across seas and oceans – by providing a space wherein memory-making practices are enacted through intergenerational dialogue.

**Esther Pujolràs-Noguer (UdL):** Zanzibar

Zanzibar, once the hub of a maritime empire, is now relegated to a speck in the Indian Ocean. Independence from Britain and the 1964 Revolution both bore witness to the crumbling of a previously powerful island power now converted into a tourist venue (Keshodkar). The networks of power within Zanzibar where distinctions of class, ethnicity and religion ruthlessly operated are areas of research that have already been studied by indoceanic scholars (Felicity Hand, Charne Lavery, Esther Pujolràs-Noguer, Meg Samuelson, Tina Steiner,). Therefore, in this presentation I intend to explore the Zanzibari conflict from the perspective of ageing and intergenerational relationships through Abdulrazak Gurnah’s sixth novel *By the Sea* (2001). *By the Sea* (2001) deals with the devastating effects of (de)colonization and exile, but it is also about personal and family tragedies and the healing potential of narrative and I contend that at the crux of its narration, there resides the relationship between Saleh Omar, the old man who is obliged to emigrate and Latif Mahmud, the young scholar who stands as the representative of successful migration. Their respective life stories are linked to the same house in Zanzibar, a house *by the sea* which was the object of dispute between Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud’s family in the past and whose recollection in the present envelops the old man and the young scholar in a shared suffocating homelessness.

**Felicity Hand (UAB):** Mauritius

Lindsey Collen’s fiction invariably hones in on class and ethnic issues that overlap with each other in a small island like Mauritius. In this presentation I will turn to another category that is often omitted in studies of her work: aging. In particular, I will focus on a character from her fourth novel in English *Mutiny* (2002). Mama Gracienne, an elderly woman, forcibly deported from the Chagos Islands, represents those members of society that, despite having “plenty left to offer society [are] shunted aside and made invisible” (Oró-Piqueras 2016: 200). Mama Gracienne, the Creole woman from the Chagos Islands,

incarnates the least privileged sector of Mauritian society: an elderly woman, uprooted from her surroundings, completely alone in the world having lost husband and children, abandoned by the authorities as an embarrassing burden on social services, and left without the comfort of tradition and familiarity. Mama Gracienne is unjustly imprisoned alongside two other much younger women, Juna and Leila, and this presentation will discuss how these three characters forge a newly constructed family. Through the sharing of a cell with Juna, the narrator, who is approximately the same age as her dead daughter, Mama Gracienne also replaces Juna's absent mother. For her part, Juna takes on the role of big sister-mother to fifteen-year-old Leila whose real mother had refused to take care of her. The experience of these three women speak the language of equality while they act out the drama of survival.

## **5- Intersections of Conflict: Exploring Representations of War and Trauma in Contemporary Literatures in English**

**Sara Martín (UAB)**

*The Expanse* (2011-21) is a series of nine space opera novels, by American author James S.A. Corey, the penname of Ty Franck and Daniel Abraham. The series narrates how captain James Holden and his crew deflect the threat posed by a protomolecule engineered by an extinct alien civilization. This protomolecule radically transforms human bodies, which rebel Martian Admiral Winston Duarte (who appears in the last three novels) takes advantage of to enhance his own body and establish a planetary military dictatorship after waging war for control of the portals linking the planets in the Solar system and elsewhere. Following my own work in *Masculinity and Patriarchal Villainy in the British Novel: From Hitler to Voldemort* (2020) and on masculinity and sf, I discuss how posthumanism and transhumanism help enhance warmongering patriarchal villainy. I discuss how Corey's series is a warning not so much about hostile first contact with aliens but about the difficulties of progressing for as long as warmongering male patriarchal villainy persists.

**Andrew Monnickendam (UAB) "Time past is time future"**

Sveltana Boym's impactive *The Future of Nostalgia* (2007) certainly has a suggestive title, indicating that nostalgia certainly has a future. Transforming Descartes's words into the following dictum, "I long therefore I am", she turns her attention to the United States. She proposes, reflecting on the Civil War, that "National memory tends to make a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections." Nostalgia does not belong exclusively to the right or Tory historiography, as, according to Alistair Bonnett's *Left in the Past*, another fascinating title, if "modernity [...] fragments society into atomized, lonely crowds", then clear awareness of social class and other forms of communal solidarity have been shed. We inhabit a world of selfies. Thus, this paper will discuss Georgi Gospodinov's *Time Shelter* (2022), this year's International Booker Prize winner. Like, Boym and Bonnet, he is clearly aware how nostalgia spills over from the personal to the collective. In his novel, a treatment meant to soften dementia: placing patients in a room decorated with objects from the decade in which they feel most comfortable, expands into a macro series of referendums across Europe in which nation states vote to decide which period they wish to live in. In short, you can have a good war, a good repression, but never a good future.