Decentring and Decolonising the Literary Canon at the University of Minho:

An Intercultural, Interartistic and Interdisciplinary Approach to Victorian Poetry Studies

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. In this paper, I hope to highlight the many interdisciplinary links and interartistic connections that my work establishes and explores, in particular, the interesting and productive ways in which Victorian poetry and poetics both interacts with the major historical and cultural issues of the period and questions traditional values and canonical perspectives. A relevant facet of this research, which indirectly problematises and critiques a mere Anglocentric perspective, has been the one of Intercultural Poetics or the perspective of the Other emerging in several nineteenth-century poems, namely those addressing the Portuguese culture in particular. Besides the notions of Imagology and Representation, another focus of my attention has indeed been the dynamics or interplay of colonial history (nation and empire) with the literary imagination of some Victorian poets.

VICTORIAN LITERATURE AND EMPIRE

There exist multiple points of thematic interface and historical overlapping between the Victorian period and the postcolonial era. The topical continuity of British imperialism between Victorian literature and postcolonial writing remains particularly noteworthy. As Patrick Brantlinger has written (*Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, Edinb. Univ. Press, 2009), any examination of the relationship between Victorian literature and the British Empire must assess the extent to which imperialism influenced fiction, poetry, drama, and other kinds of writing. Because Britain's expanding Empire brought enhanced awareness of national identity, both English and Other, Catherine Hall argues that 'being a coloniser' became an inseparable part of nineteenth-century 'Englishness'. In *Tennyson and the Fabrication of Englishness*, Marion Sherwood (MacMillan 2013) states that the years 1815 to 1902 were 'pre-eminently Britain's Imperial century'. By 1902, the British Empire had expanded to cover a fifth of the world's land surface and exercise authority over a quarter of its

population and, during the century, English national identity had been increasingly defined in opposition to the Empire's Others.

My own research and teaching, so far, has focused on **six** different, but related areas, that are directly and indirectly connected with this more general issue.

The first one is

Victorian Poetic Approaches to Body, Nation, Empire and Exile

'DRAMATISING THE CONFLICTS OF NATION AND THE BODY: DISPLACEMENT IN CHARLOTTE AND EMILY BRONTË'S POETRY OF *HOME* AND *EXILE* DUALITIES' (article in academic journal *Miscelânea*, Univ. of Zaragoza, 2008)

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), pointed to a connection between the history of the nation and individual biography and, in the Brontëan lyric, the conflicts of nation are reflected in the conflicts of the self. In spite of their wild imaginative flights, the Brontës' early writings are, as Carl Plasa suggested (2004), "a striking blend of fantasy and history". The juvenile poetry (written between 1829 and 1839) shows a concern, or absorption, with their country's contemporary dilemmas or challenges, such as the fear of invasion and the fear of revolution. A nationalistic pride and enthusiasm, related to England's victory over the French and her growing expansionism overseas, emerge in the Brontëan compositions that hero-worship soldiers, explorers and missionaries (notably, the characters of Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington). In the fictionalised colonies of the Brontës, the sagas of *Angria* and *Gondal,* one can also find a mixture of fear and attraction for what is culturally and racially different. As Plasa has noticed, in the colonial spaces that the Brontës invented, there is a combination of "fear and loathing of the racial other with desire and fascination" (Plasa 2004). Thus, their poems often portray colonial drama fictionally.

"Recalling the Poetics and Politics of the Exilic and Migrant Other in Some English Women's Poetry" (book chapter in *Transcultural Amnesia: Mapping Displaced Memories*, CEHUM/ Húmus - Braga, 2017)

This chapter addresses the poetic and political trope of the exilic and migrant Other in some English women's poetry, and how the literary representation of this figure of existential displacement has evolved in the specific context of women's writing in England. Personal, cultural and historical contexts (including colonial expansion) for the emergence of this Other Self are thus retraced and analysed, with a reconsideration of the poetic genres and forms that have privileged this approach. Their individual and collective memories serve either as a powerful metaphor or trope for women's

identification with difference and otherness in an increasingly multicultural world or function as a critique of male de-rootedness and historical forgetfulness.

The second researched area is

Intercultural Poetics and Reception Studies (in Anglo-Portuguese Studies)

Within the **research project** *Cultural (Dis)Encounters: Figurations of the 'Other' in Representations of Portugal, Britain and the USA in the Nineteenth-Century Portuguese and Anglo-American Poetry and Novel*) – CEHUM's *INTCULTPOET* Research Group, 2012-2016.

"Felicia Hemans's 'The Coronation of Inez de Castro' (1830): Feminine Romanticism and the Memorialisation of Woman" (article in *Studies in Romanticism and Classicism* e-journal, FLUP, Porto, 2011)

The early Victorian woman poet Felicia Hemans (1793-1835) has been one of the first to appropriate this European myth in her poem "The Coronation of Inez De Castro", inserted in her volume *Songs of the Affections* (1830). Hemans became interested in Portuguese literature while also developing a feminine revisionist poetics. She radically transformed the historical material she absorbed, reconfiguring it according to a new domesticated, gendered and bourgeois class perspective. Hemans's 'cosmopolitan' historiography enhances the poet's exotic cultural displacement in a foreign scene. In its concomitant interest in imaginative historical transport, Hemans's poem is intended as a Gothic 'Tableau' or *ekphrasis* of the tragic figure of Inez in the rewriting of woman's history.

"'A god in an umbrella': The World of Robert Browning seen from a Lusophone Perspective" (longer unpublished essay, 2012)

The essay compares some Portuguese writers, like Herculano and Eça de Queirós, to Browning, with an emphasis on historicism, liberalism, Church criticism and intercultural representations, involving both admiration and despite for the foreign other. Both Eça and Browning were artistic exiles, simultaneously repulsed and fascinated by the foreign culture.

"Robert Browning in Portugal: The Response of Poets, Critics and Readers in the Lusophone World" (article in 'Notes' to *The Journal of Browning Studies*, 2012).

This article traces those features in Robert Browning's dramatic technique, of a depersonalised poetic voice, that most have influenced modern Portuguese poetics and literary criticism (especially, Fernando Pessoa).

"Brief Encounters with an Exotic but Decadent *Other*: The Image and Perception of Portugal (and the Portuguese) in Early Victorian Women's Poetry" (article in Proceedings of *Colóquio de Outono*, CEHUM, 2012)

In this article I explore some poetic representations of Portugal and the Portuguese in early nineteenth-century English women's poetry in terms of the attraction/repulsion in relation to what is foreign. I conclude that, in this 'encounter,' early Victorian women poets re-imagine and reconfigure Portugal by using different literary strategies.

'Dickens's Influence and Reception in Portugal' (paper presented at NAVSA/BAVS/AVSA's joint Conference, Venice, 2013)

The Victorian writer's preoccupations concerning industrialization, urbanization, the conditions of the poor and the need for educational and social reform have made themselves felt in the work of some of his most notorious contemporary Portuguese writers. But Dickens's presence in Portugal from the nineteenth to the twentieth-first centuries is also shaped by an alertness to both the local (identification with London) and the global features of his multifaceted work. I explore the extent to which Dickens has influenced Portuguese artists and intellectuals with his poetic prose, richly dark humour, profound sentiment and pathos, Romantic realism and grotesque representations.

"A Portuguese Reading of the Brontë Sisters' Poetry as Collaborative Representation of Romantic Autobiography" (Paper presented at Christ Church Univ., Canterbury, 2014)

Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell was published in 1846 to considerable speculation regarding its authorship but only selling two copies. Yet, this small volume alternating different poetic voices or *personae* is important in that it was the first attempt made by the three Brontë sisters to present a consistent literary work of collaborative poetic autobiography to the public. In this paper, I propose to read the poems from a Portuguese critical perspective, thus introducing the issues of the reception of Englishwomen authors abroad and challenging literary periodization. If, as novelists, the sisters have become part of the Victorian canon, as poets this classification is not so clear-cut, namely due to their earlier contexts and respective influences in their work.

"The Rescue of *Lusia* by *Albion*: Representations of Portugal in some British Women's Peninsular War Poetry" (article in *REAP, Revista de Estudos Anglo-Portugueses*, no. 25, CETAPS, Lisbon, 2016)

The Peninsular War was a distinctly male-constructed imperial history, but uniquely absorbed, and also artistically interpreted by often neglected and forgotten women. Charlotte Tonna, well known for her patriotic inclinations, saw in these momentous events, taking place in a remote and exotic location designated as 'Portugal', as a precious opportunity to inscribe her voice in a male-dominated British literary history. *The Convent Bell* (1819, published in 1845) recounts the ill-fated romance between a British soldier and a nun living in a Portuguese monastery during the first years of the Peninsular campaign. Dedicated to the Duke of Wellington, it presents an openly official, male-sanctioned discourse on the conflict, being a celebration of the British intervention and its salvational consequences for both Portugal and Spain, whose own efforts in writing their history are diminished, through the (re)presentation of the submissive foreign female figure as the rescued/dominated territory.

'Intercultural Poetics. The Representations of Portugal and the Portuguese in British Poetry of the 19th Century' (Erasmus Lecture, School of Modern Languages and School of English of University of Cardiff, April 2016).

In this talk I addressed 'Anglo-Portuguese Cultural (Dis)Encounters' in terms of 'The Poetic/Literary Representation of the *(Foreign) Other* in the Long Nineteenth-Century', and in the context of a joint research project in the area of comparative studies. The different ways in which the 'Other', understood either as a foreign/strange country or people, is represented in certain nineteenth-century Anglo-American and Portuguese works. The project meant to contribute to the clarification and systematization of Western literary stereotypes or 'imagotypes' (Beller & Leerssen, 2007). My task was to find how poets as Felicia Hemans, Charlotte E. Tonna, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in this meeting of *selfhood* and *otherness*, have substantially contributed through their poetry to *re-imagining and re-configuring Portugal* as a romantic, exotic and passionate country, with a very rich history but also with a markedly decadent and bigoted outlook.

"'A fondness for being sad': Some Portuguese Sources for Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Poetics of Melancholy in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850)" (paper presented at Univ. of Stirling, Scotland, 2012, and published in *Diacrítica,* the CEHUM journal, 2017)

The Victorians often broke with the traditional Renaissance and Romantic attitudes of equating melancholy moods with artistic or poetic genius. This article explores how Elizabeth Barrett Browning tried to resist and escape the disempowerment or abandonment which had affected poets as Hemans

and Landon, and engage in a new poetics of melancholy in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850). She indeed attempts to prove that good poetry can be written *without* melancholy. The article suggests, through a brief comparative analysis, that her contradictory poetics of melancholy very probably derived from a specifically Portuguese poetic tradition, namely the 'fondness for being sad' of Luís de Camões', as well as the sorrowful love of Mariana Alcoforado's epistles (1669) and of Soror Maria do Céu's mannerist poems.

"Tracing Stereotypical Patterns in the Perception of Foreign Otherness: The Poetic Representation of the Portuguese Other in some Victorian Poems" (Paper presented at the British Association of Victorian Studies Conference, Univ. of Exeter, 2018)

In the Victorian Period, the 'foreign' became a cultural trope or fiction – as a figure of 'otherness', he could be turned either into an 'inferior race' or a 'noble savage', through utilitarian or exoticizing discourses (Kohl, 1986). The Victorians generated their own specific figures of the foreign, Protestant individualism and colonial domination, invited extensive comparison with Continental Europe and, in particular, with Southern Catholic countries and their peoples – resulting in a mixture of fascination and disgust. This paper suggests that, in the more specific context of the English poetry of the period (from Hemans to the Brownings, including Tonna and the Brontës), the Portuguese emerge mostly as passive victims of history, prisoners of their past, dreamy and effeminate (as opposed to their counterparts, the Spaniards, who tend to be viewed in more masculine terms), constructing a discursive and poetic tradition which thematised Portugal either as backward or else as a terrestrial paradise.

"Romantic Representations of the Peninsular and Liberal Wars (1810-1830) – Imag(in)ing and Re-creating the Other Europe through Poetry" (book chapter proposed to *Terrible Beauties: Europe, Conflict and the Imagination in Literature and the Arts*, Eds. Porto, CETAPS/Brill-Rodopi, 2018/19)

The chapter recalls the succession of shattering but decisive events that took place in the Peninsula 'just' two hundred years ago; these events (a French invasion, guerrilla warfare, English rule and popular uprisings), did not only radically change the course of European history, and of political thought itself, but also produced a significant body of imaginative literature that refashioned cultural identities and the different arts. The essay analyses earlier and later Romantic texts, by poets like Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Hemans, Tonna and the Brontës, to explain their specific interest and engagement in those scenarios, as well as to trace the evolution of their political and intercultural thought, and respective literary representations of these foreign events. Conclusions are reached as to

how this 'encounter' with the Iberian Other not only radically reshaped those artists' identity and respective writing but also eventually paved the way for later authors.

The third area that I explored was

LITERATURE AND TOURISM/TRAVEL

'Sunny Climes Beyond the Sea': Travel and Imagination in Charlotte Brontë's Juvenile Poetry" (book chapter in *Intertextual Dialogues. Travels and Routes*, UMinho, 2007)

This article analyses the close relationship established between the concepts of travel and imagination in the earliest writings (poetry) of Charlotte Brontë. It discusses, in particular, the importance of English colonial spaces and of British imperial history and characters in the creative process of the author. Brontë's insistence on the nineteenth-century dilemma of whether to 'sail abroad' or to stay behind is recurrent in many compositions. In fact, hero-worship of soldiers, missionaries and martyrs, and the Empire's perpetuation through them, would prevail in Charlotte's compositions of this period. She has poems in which the speakers are colonizing men; instead of suffering as women do the consequences of the colonial struggles in which their mates are implicated, they exploit colonialism for their own particular ends. The fate or experience of the British missionaries abroad, especially in India, seems to have fascinated Charlotte as much as the stories of martyred saints.

'The Modern Dark Poem of Quest and Exile: Travel as 'Travail' in Childe Harold, Childe Roland and Childe Rolandine" (essay in *The Travel Imaginary. Literature, Cinema and Cartoons*, Col. Hespérides, UMinho, 2014)

The nineteenth century had a renovated interest in medieval epic and quest literature. If in Byron's epic travelogue, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* his picaresque pilgrim flees from home (Britain) to travel around a ravaged Napoleonic Europe as both an exile and a sarcastic touristic commentator; in Robert Browning's *Childe Roland to The Dark Tower Came* (1855), Roland is the Victorian poet himself traversing the vast barren expanses of failure and death until he can prove himself a 'self-made man'. In turn, twentieth-century woman poet Stevie Smith (1902-71 converts Byron's and Browning's famous male epics into an ironically eccentric reflection on the unromantic life of a suburban secretary/typist – *Childe Rolandine,* a female epic of London suburbia, which is also a powerful tribute to the 'anonymous woman' exiled under the yoke of modern social exploitation.

"In Search of the Mythical Images of Yorkshire: The Poetry of the Brontë Sisters in the Literary Tourism of Haworth" (book chapter in *Lit&Tour. Ensaios sobre Literatura e Turismo,* Lisbon, 2014)

Tourism is seen as a form of literary adaptation or as a creative system of enhancing or extending reading activity due to its emphasis on the processes of imagination and myth formation. Thus, the production of nineteenth-century literary culture becomes both a nineteenth-century tourist phenomenon – how Victorians *lived out* their reading – and a twenty-first century experience – how we *live out* our experience of reading the Victorians. Few studies have investigated the impact that the *poetry* written by the three sisters had not only in their long process of 'mythification' but also in creating a powerful imagery associated with the real spaces that were inhabited by them. The images present in their poems are instrumental not only in the construction of this mythical process but also in their potential transformation into a high quality touristic product: they are *inseparable* from Haworth, a *part of the place* itself.

"Landscape as Language: Discussing Margaret Drabble's *A Writer's Britain. Landscape in Literature,* of 1979" (chapter in e-book on *Literary Geographies,*Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya, 2014)**

Drabble's book was the first to present an image of Britain as seen by writers of different regions and periods, and also to illuminate the way in which their work has changed the visual attitudes of the British, their taste in landscape. In this paper, I discuss not only how Drabble's paradigmatic book, a classic of literary tourism, pictures British landscape *as* literary language or verbal art but also how modern criticism on literary geographies and cartographies, as well as tourism and heritage studies, might interpret her approach to these issues.

"Transatlantic Exchange and Poetess Tradition in Felicia Hemans and Elizabeth Barrett Browning: "Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England" and "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (Paper presented at the Univ. of Vigo, Spain, 2015)

The involvement of British women writers in the geopolitical changes that occurred in the British Atlantic world has barely been investigated. Feminist critics have reclaimed a tradition of nineteenth-century popular poetesses whose verse circulated broadly on both sides of the Atlantic and who became a vehicle for transatlantic exchange. An important name in early nineteenth-century transatlanticism is the one of Hemans, a poet interested in the rewriting of national imperial history(ies), and who published in 1825 two poems about the colonial enterprise in North America, "The Forest Sanctuary" and "Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England". These portray the

complicated interrelations of desire and displacement that sometimes structured the nineteenth-century transatlantic imaginary. Later on in the century, Elizabeth Barrett Browning foregrounds the constructions of cultural categories, such as 'the struggling poetess', 'the suffering slave' and 'the woman in pain' in her "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848-50) as it becomes a 'place' for multiple cross identifications. The transatlantic poetess tradition thus seeks to convert women's powerlessness and non-belonging to a form of extra national power.

The fourth area that I analysed was
LITERATURE AND SCIENCE / PHILOSOPHY / PSYCHOLOGY

"(Dis)entangling Scientific and Poetic Discourse: Mathilde Blind's *The Ascent of Man* (1889) and Feminine Rewriting of Darwinian Evolution" (book chapter in *(Dis)Entangling Darwin: Cross-disciplinary Reflections on the Man and his Legacy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012)

In a society increasingly being defined in terms of scientific explanations of the natural world, Mathilde Blind´s work articulates existence in terms of struggle, where the success of the 'strong' is bought at the cost of the suffering of the 'weak'. Her epic verse narrative *The Ascent of Man* (1889), mocking Charles Darwin's own in the *Descent of Man* (1871), is an attempt to recast Christian mythological formations and to posit a transcendent, and feminized, alternative to the brutality of the Darwinian struggle for survival. Being aware that poetry conflicted in a fundamental way with scientific modes of cognition, Blind still believed that both were 'universal languages', with power to transform the natural world and to retrieve triumph from defeat (i.e. violence and death). This chapter thus attempts to 'disentangle' both discourses and to unravel their power of transformation in Blind's ambitious poem.

'And do accept my madness' : The Influence of English Poetry in the Sciences of the Mind during the Nineteenth Century **(Panel on Medicine and Psychology, and Proceedings of *Colóquio de Outono, The Humanities and the Sciences,* CEHUM, 2014)**

The relationship between literature and the sciences of the mind has been one of the most prosperous areas of interdisciplinary studies in recent years. Rick Rylance (2000) identified four currents of psychological argument and analyzed the contribution of Alexander Bain, Herbert Spencer and G.H. Lewes for the development of Victorian psychology. The roots of the psychological school of Victorian poetry can be found mainly in the life and work of the young poets A. Tennyson and R. Browning, and their dramatic monologues. The interest of the first of these for the detailed analysis of states of madness and hysteria (male and female), confirming the popularity of his writings among

psychologists, was overshadowed by his personal fear of loss of sanity. The aberrant fascination of the second of these for the scrutiny of the criminal, Machiavellian or manipulative mind, led him, in turn, to research sensational cases in the historical archives of Europe.

"(Re)Discovering a Victorian Karl Marx and a Marxian Legacy in British Arts and Politics" (article in Conference Proceedings, *Marx's Bicentenary*, Braga, 2019)

Karl Marx was exiled in England (from 1849) and there he remained with his family until his death. He was a versatile intellectual, regular attendee of the British Library (blue book research) and an admirer and connoisseur of many English authors, having even written poetry in his youth. I was, therefore, interested in analysing his important legacy in the literature and the arts of the country that received him, but which never granted him citizenship. Like some English novelists, Marx was heavily influenced by the ideas of the political economists. He had close contact with the most radical figures of the period, having witnessed the singular moment of the birth of the class struggle and capitalism in England. Despite his disagreements with the so-called 'utopian socialism', Marx would draw the attention of the socialist poet, artist and activist William Morris. But I argue that one of his major social and political legacies in Britain was his daughter, Eleanor Marx.

The fifth area that I studied was
LITERATURE AND THE OTHER ARTS

"Emily Brontë's Musical Appropriations: From Literary Inspiration to Performative Adaptation" (article in *Via Panorâmica: Revista Electrónica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*, FLUP, 2012)

In comparison with the visual arts, the Brontës' interactions with and depictions of music have received little critical attention, though all the Brontë children were competent musicians. Emily Brontë was a virtuoso pianist, exhibiting a taste in both baroque and romantic styles of composition and a fondness for orchestral works. Critics have referred to Brontë's 'musical matrix', not only her music-making but also the influence of musical ideas in her writing. The sounds of music release her imagination and she sees a transformative power in them. But Emily Brontë's work has also been a source of inspiration for many musicians. Brontë's only novel has inspired two major operatic realizations, several musical-theatre adaptations, and numerous songs settings by composers in the realms of both classical and popular music.

'Ear and heart with a rapture of dark delight': **Music and Wagnerian Motives in the Poetry of A. C. Swinburne (book chapter in *Música Discurso Poder, Col. Hésperides,* UMinho, 2012)**.

The aesthetics of the late Victorian poet A. C. Swinburne, demonstrated in his *Poems and Ballads* of 1866, is always associated with a set of musical ideas and analogies, confirming the famous pronouncement of Pater that "all art permanently aspires to the condition of music". In his poem *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882), he appropriated a dramatic and musical technique – the *leitmotiv* – derived specifically from the operas of Richard Wagner. And his poem *Laus Veneris* (1864) had already treated the transgressive confluence between the sacred and the profane usually present in Wagner. Finally, Swinburne's central section of *A Century of Roundels* (1882-3) contains three poetic compositions that are his most explicit tribute to Wagner and his music.

"Victorian Novels 'without Heroes/Heroines' – *Barry Lyndon* (1844) and *Vanity Fair* (1848): (Mis)Adapting W. M. Thackeray's Picaresque" (book chapter in *Figures of the Hero. Literature, Cinema, Cartoons, Col. Hespérides*, 2013)

William Thackeray created, in the 1840s, two versions of the British picaresque hero: one masculine and the other feminine – Barry Lyndon and Becky Sharp. The respective stories of relentless social climbing develop a series of intrigues and adventures in high British society and in grand historical scenarios. Lyndon and Sharp are clearly anti-heroic figures that reveal a very dubious morality, including the practice of fraud/imposture and crime/murder. Yet these brilliant satirical portrayals are misinterpreted in modern adaptations to the cinema, emerging as beautified and/or regenerated versions, in Stanley Kubrick's classic *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and Mira Nair's post-feminist/post-colonial *Vanity Fair* (2004).

And, to conclude, the sixth area has been
GENDER STUDIES / WOMEN STUDIES

"Representations of Power and Transgression: The Idea of Byron and the Byronic Character in the Poetry of the Brontës" (essay in *Op.cit: A Journal of Anglo-American Studies*, Nº10, Lisbon, 2008).

Through the allusion to some poetic traditions (Sappho and Byron), this study argues that in order to explore and question the complex power relations between 'man' and 'woman' in early Victorian England, the two eldest Brontë sisters make use of several strategies of representation and dramatisation of political and sexual transgression in their respective poetry. While Charlotte chooses

primarily a male perspective to portray instances of female disempowerment in her poems, in Emily's work a female perspective of male disempowerment visibly predominates.

"'Over my boundless waste of soul': Echoes of the Natural World, or a Feminine *Naturphilosophie*, in the Poetry of Emily Brontë and Mathilde Blind", (article in e-journal *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 2011).

Poets such as Emily Brontë and Mathilde Blind have not only questioned the notion of Creation as a male myth but also challenged the prevailing anthropocentric view of life on Earth. Besides exalting community with a living, breathing Nature, Brontë and Blind expound an existential philosophy, whose audacity signals their refusal to subscribe to a particular religious or political system. Both Brontë and Blind denounce human competition and violence and both seek ways of coming to terms with human redemption through love and the imagination. By analysing the constraints that are general to humanity, their respective poems assume a sort of universal relevance and appeal.

"Charlotte Brontë and the Dramatic Monologue: Tracing the Emergence of the Woman Poet in the Development of a Dramatic Poetics of the Self and its Fictions" (Paper presented at the Univ. London, Royal Holloway, 2012)

Before she successfully ventured into the more popular genre of the novel, Brontë both *consciously* and *unconsciously* experimented with different forms of narrating the self – the ballad, the long narrative in verse, the soliloquy and the dramatic monologue. Brontë's initial option for the ventriloquised male lyrical voice, Wellesley, Zamorna or even Crimsworth, would settle into her more definitive female ones, Marian Hume, Mary Percy, Frances and Jane, under different degrees of assertive utterance. Brontë skilfully uses the dramatic monologue and related forms to explore issues of gender, identity, agency, creativity and expression, crucial to herself and the Victorian period. Though she did not pursue a career as a poet, her contribution to the rise and development of the genre should not be overlooked, and she ought to be compared to both Tennyson and the Brownings.

"The Image of the Mythical Woman in Mid-Victorian Gynotopia: Gender and Genre in Alfred Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847)" (Univ. of Oxford's Conference on Tennyson's Futures, and publ. *Diacrítica,* CEHUM, 2014)

This article explores the image of the mythical woman (Athena), in one of the first Victorian works on a feminist utopia, Alfred Tennyson's mock-heroic narrative poem *The Princess* (1847), and how contemporary women poets such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *Aurora Leigh* (1857)

responded to his representation of the feminine, and of the battle of the sexes enacted in it. The poem is a deliberate mixture of different modes and genres: the lyrical and the epic, the feminine and the masculine, suggesting not only innovative experimentation in terms of traditional literary forms but also a problematization of essentialist images and concepts.

"Retrieving Fin-de-Siècle Women Poets: The Transformative Myths, Fragments and Voices of Webster, Blind and Levy" (article in _Comparative Critical Studies,_ Vol.14 'Salvage', 2017)

The poetical works of Augusta Webster, Mathilde Blind and Amy Levy (1860-90) embody the profound and extraordinary changes encompassing the British _fin-de-siècle_, in which the transition from the Victorians to the Moderns implied the transformation or reconfiguration of certain myths or (hi)stories and the critical re-use or 'recycling' of major literary forms. Through close reading and cultural critique, this paper analyses how these three women poets re-use fragments ('verbal ruins') of national and international history, as well as classic myth, in order to question and transform the images and representations of man and woman. Through these hybrid and fragmentary forms, Webster, Blind and Levy literally give voice to unspeakable feelings and situations, in which the anomalous and marginal are made central.

"Negotiating inclusion and exclusion through Poetry: The dynamics of Victorian women poets' social, political and artistic networks" (Chapter in book _The Dynamics of Power: Inclusion and Exclusion in Women's Networks during the Long Nineteenth Century_, Smithsonian Institute, U.S.A., to be publ. 2019).

The article shows how women's political and artistic networking were connected, and how this connection evolved in the particular context of women's poetry in the nineteenth century, respectively the 1820s-30s, the 1840s-60s and the 1870s-90s. And whether the formation and constitution of these different groups and respective poetic movements, some of which were more exclusive and others more inclusive, resulted from/in a specific feminine dynamics of power.

'**Rewriting a New Literary History through Poetry: Temporality and the Hidden Histories and Figures of Webster's and Levy's Female Speakers' (Paper presented at the British Association of Decadent Studies' Conference, Goldsmiths, Univ. of London, 2019**)

These women poets attempt to create an alternative literary history, not just by contributing to relevant literary or scholarly journals (as reviewers), and by writing female biographies, but also by disinterring hidden female figures that, through their dramatic discourses, try to inscribe their unwritten, marginal voices in the partial male historical records: the would-be-scholar Xantippe (the

infamous wife of Socrates), the formidable filicide Medea, the biblical prostitute Mary Magdalen, the medieval warrior-saint Joan of Arc, and the mythical enchantress Circe. They respectively illustrate the specific development of women's writing in the English *fin-de-siècle* (from Realism to Symbolism and Aestheticism to Decadence).