



Therapeutic storytelling or a challenge to manage anxiety? The nuts and bolts of writing a PhD thesis on literature and trauma

Friday PhD Talks #10
PhD Programme on English Studies
Universidad de Zaragoza



Alejandro Nadal
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Aula II (Ed. Central FyL)



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Abstract:

This Friday talk intends to give an overview of my PhD research project, which tackles the representation of trauma in Jean Rhys' interwar novels. To put it in a nutshell, I set out to bring together trauma studies and an autobiographical approach to assess how the constraints imposed by the experience of trauma—shocking, unlocatable and grasped only belatedly—problematise the demand for truthfulness in autobiographical writings. Accordingly, I explore Rhys' four modernist novels from the lens of Leigh Gilmore's "limit-case" narratives (in *The Limits of Autobiography*, Cornell UP, 2001), a term referring to a literary genre comprising self-representational trauma narratives that test two limits in autobiography: (i) the boundary between truth and fiction; (ii) the limit of representativeness, that is, to what extent the individual testimony of trauma ties in with the experience of other people and communities.

As I briefly explore the aims, methodology and main results of my project, I will take the time to explain some difficulties and challenges I have faced during the process of drafting, writing and revising my thesis. Some of the highlights (no spoilers) have to do with structure, motivation and finding a niche in such a well-trodden area as Rhysian studies. If you want to know more about these dilemmas (and many others), see you on 2 December 😊

Bionote

Alejandro has been a PhD candidate at the University of Zaragoza since September 2018, after finishing the Degree in English Studies (2017) and the Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching (2018). In September 2019, he completed a MA in English Literature at the National University of Distance Education (UNED for short). In the same year, he was granted a predoctoral contract that enabled him to immerse himself in a project that is aiming to define and explore the literatures of the so-called Transmodern paradigm. He is currently working as a full-time assistant teacher at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, in Teruel, and is trying to finish off his thesis on trauma and autobiography in Jean Rhys' modernist novels, under the supervision of Dr Bárbara Arizti.