**ALUS General Meeting, Tampere University of Technology, 27 November 2018**

**Association Priorities for 2019 and Notes on the Afternoon’s Mini-Symposium**

In attendance:

Jason Finch (ÅA); Lieven Ameel (UTU); Minna Chudoba (TUT); Patricia Garcia (Helsinki Collegium); Salla Toivola (TUT); Markku Salmela (UTA); Juho Rajaniemi (TUT); Silja Laine (Aalto); Aino Haataja (ÅA); Peter Jones (Institute of Historical Research, University of London)

Anni Lappela (via Skype)

The minutes of the morning meeting were taken by Aino Haataja and are contained in a separate document. This report on the overall priorities of the association and on the papers presented in the afternoon was written by Jason Finch.

Overall Priorities for 2019:

1. Bibliography. It was suggested that priorities should be identified, for example individual cities or regions, keywords, methodologies etc.
2. Twitter. Tweet with #alus as part of the message text will help build a presence for ALUS.
3. What is literary urban studies? As a move towards stating that there is a field and we have a specific understanding of it.
4. Words of the decade. In 2019, ALUS could ask members for their words of the decade following the practice of the ACLA. These could then appear on the website and in the newsletter.
5. Keep the strengths. ALUS has grown without membership fees. It is free to take part in and members can be more or less involved.
6. Activities and events. The key event will potentially be the second international conference of ALUS, scheduled to be held Limerick in December 2019 at the Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies.

Four papers were presented in the afternoon. A brief summary of them follows.

**Salla Toivola** introduced her PhD project speaking under the title ‘Experiencing Urban and Rural Spaces in Post-Second-World-War Southern Gothic’. The post-World-War-II US South underwent rapid modernization which in some ways meant the end of a traditional ‘Southern’ regional identity. Hence, in academic Southern Studies, the term ‘Postsouthern Studies’ has been applied to the period. Such work distinguishes between what has remained from earlier Southern identities and what has not. This PhD project looks at fiction in the genre of Southern Gothic during that period, between the 1940s and the 1970s.

As a genre, Southern Gothic differed in important ways from most Southern literature produced in the period from 1900 to 1930. This tended towards the sentimental and the pastoral. An example of the earlier phase is Thomas Dixon, Jr’s *The Clansman: An Historical Poem of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905). In this novel, Dixon wrote ‘Last night I dreamed the South had risen from her ruins.’ In the 1920s, led by William Faulkner, idyll turned into nightmare. Together with contemporaries like Erskine Caldwell, Faulker reinvented the region as, in Toivola’s words, ‘a dark, degenerate, violent place’. Initially, ‘Southern Gothic’ was a pejorative label for this sort of writing. Gothic as a whole hybridized many genres from its origins in the eighteenth century. Southern Gothic shares with earlier subgenres of Gothic an interest in transgressiveness and a sense of a haunting past.

The corpus for this project includes Richard Wright’s 1945 memoir *Black Boy* and several novels: Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* (1952), Davis Grubb’s *The Night of the Hunter*, *Deliverance*, by James Dickery (1970), and Cormac McCarthy’s *Child of God* (1973). The use of the supernatural can alter readers’ understanding of gender and agency. In *Child of God*, the character of the dead girl has more agency through her role as a member of the undead, than does the live woman in Dixon’s novel, who is a mere supplement.

**Patricia Garcia** spoke next on her current book project, using the heading ‘The European City and Fantastic Literature During Modernity (19th-Century Narratives)’. She began with some questions she has frequently been asked following earlier presentations of the work in progress. These include what the added value to literary urban studies is of introducing the fantastic to it, when the literary urban has more often been grasped through realism. Other questions have been about the corpus (are there female writers in it?), about method, and whether fantastic is not more tied to rural settings than to urban ones.

The first example discussed in detail was *Le Diable à Paris* (1845 – 46). Here, the fantastic mode gives a different angle on the city: the visiting devil is an absolute outsider. The 1941 fantastic novel Le Passe-muraille by Marcel Aymé describes what Garcia labelled as the ‘neighbourhood fantastic’ of Montmartre. In these and the other texts covered by the project, both literary urban aspects (how the texts represent the city concerned) and geocritical ones (the presence of the narratives *in* material urban environments) matter.

Different definitions of the fantastic exist. It can be seen as a school of writing practicing anything deviant from realism and thus including science fiction, fantasy, Gothic and other genres. Garcia instead works within the European school of thought on the fantastic, particularly that of Tzvetan Todorov, in which it is used in a much more restricted way. Here, the fantastic is writing in which the logical laws of our world can be detected but so can elements that do not work with those. Typically, such writing uses realistic settings but describes an impossible element breaching everyday normality.

If this impossible element is labelled ‘the ghost’, several research questions could be spelled out. Where is the ghost located? What type of space does the ghost occupy? What critical discourse does the ghost add? What metaphorical conflict is embodied in the ghost?

Attention to ‘the urban dominant’, or the geographical siting of these narratives, enables fantastic metaphors and tropes that connect European literatures across time and space to be apprehended. Attention to the fantastic in this school of thought thus becomes a means of travelling *across* European cultures and not just within them. Furthermore, the research is connected to studies of realism in that the discourse of the supernatural was widely present in spiritualism, entertainment and other areas of culture during the phases of modernity considered here.

Finally, Garcia presented a draft book plan, chapter by chapter. This moves from an opening chapter connecting the supernatural and ideas of *l’esprit moderne* to a second chapter on key types of building in the discourse. These include the antique shop and the haunted urban house. Chapter 3 on categories of people – notably urban revenants – is planned to be followed by others on motion and exposure before a conclusion leaping a century forwards and investigating postmodern revisions of the urban fantastic.

Next, **Peter Jones** in ‘Heterodox City: Railway Arch Theology in the Work of Maurice Davies and Moncure D. Conway’, presented work towards a major funding application to the UK AHRC’s early career main route. He began with an image providing context, of the viaduct at London Bridge station which, constructed in 1836, was the first railway viaduct in London.

The proposed project focuses on the debate over how railway arches should be used. Initially, they were a symbol of technological progress. But viaducts approaching termini blighted districts. Instead of seeing them as socially negative, however, the project looks at ‘valuable strategies which emerged beneath these arches’. Metropolitan population densities meant that the space under the arches, however blighted, had a value. Today, the arches have a specific politics related to the controversial planned sell-off of space under them by the owners of the rail tracks above.

Davies (1828–1910), a spiritualist, and Conway (1832–1907), author of *The Ethical Pilgrimage* (1870), were both experimental religious thinkers who progressed into free thought. Davies surveyed the religious life of the Metropolis in *Unorthodox London* (1874) and its occult life in a sequel, *Mystic London* (1875). Taking these two into account, railway arches can be cast as heterodox and heterotopic. In the period, they became a site for free thought and for ethnographic explorations.

An example is the visit Davies made to the ‘Walworth Jumpers’, a working-class religious community who met in an arch, followers of a woman from Suffolk who they believed to be immortal. This was at Sutherland Street off the Walworth Road in South London. Thus the arches were used to create new narratives: such ‘start-up religions’, as they could be called, were part of the metropolitan *doxa*. Atheists, too, preached under railway arches. As soon as the arches north of St Pancras station were built, radical religion flooded them.

Conway inverts spaces seen elsewhere in the culture as dangerous. Instead, he makes them into heterotopic spaces of refuge, where moving on, the fate of those cast as tramps or wanderers by the police, can be escaped.

So this infrastructure was practically used in various ways. The act of constructing the arches created a great quantity of extra space, ‘spatially connected to the neighbourhood in which it was located’.

Finally, **Aino Haataja** related her doctoral project to ideas of spatiality in a paper entitled ‘The World and Worldliness in Maria Edgeworth’s Fictions of Development: Spatial Perspective’. One spatial aspect of Edgeworth’s fiction is the way it mediates representative spaces and connects those to ethical and developmental arcs or certain social classes: she seems to be exploring the meaning and effect in society of class-bound dwelling types, such as the peasant cottage or the aristocratic castle. Furthermore, Edgeworth often names the dwellings of characters with much creativity, thereby revealing something about the characters themselves: in *Ormond*, for example, Sir Ulick who is very immersed in forms of fashionable sociability such as balls nonetheless lives in Castle Hermitage. Besides, as only a handful of people attend his funeral, elite sociability appears to be in contradiction with true loving relationships.

Most of the events in *Ormond* take place on an island in Ireland, at Castle Hermitage and its vicinity in mainland Ireland, and in Paris. The novel criticizes a big city scorn for areas that are off ‘the continent’ or away from metropolises, were it the Black Islands in Ireland or Britain in Europe, and decentralizes Paris as a prestigious city. The mail and newspapers reach the Black Islands, nor is isolation an impediment to moral improvement, as the characters are amazed at the protagonist’s moral advancement even in the Black Islands. Scholarship has noted the novel’s acceptance of enlightenment outside the metropolitan areas, but that discussion could be enriched with a description of the work’s larger exploration of prestige attached to place and class.

*Ormond* is set in the time just before the French revolution, and in this context Paris is presented as in a state that can never be restored. In post-revolutionary Paris, the visual gains a new significance; the narrator mentions that prior to the revolution there was ‘more to be heard than seen than at present in Paris’, and that now it is a more ‘fine city’.

In her PhD project, Aino situates worldliness in Edgeworth in the context of Romantic-period texts on the *world* and research on sociability and solitude, but this paper demonstrates that there is material for an essay on Edgeworth’s use of different forms of fictional dwelling and their relation to class as well as for a deeper analysis of Edgeworth’s attitudes towards Old Regime Paris in *Ormond*.