Speaker 1: Welcome to the UP Tech Podcast, coming to you from the New Academic Multimedia Studio on the University of Portland Campus, produced by Academic Technology Services. With your host Maria Erb and Sam Williams.

Sam: Welcome to the UP Tech Talk Podcast, today we have with us Dr. Lora Looney and she is with the International Language and Cultures department here at the University of Podcast, welcome to the podcast.

Lora: Thank you.

Maria: Lora we are really glad to have you here today and we invited you because we are fascinated by your academic technology round table project this year, which has to do with exploring the role that youth protagonists are playing in fiction and film. Exploring issues around the Spanish Civil War as portrayed through the use of youth protagonist in fiction film. Can you tell us a little bit about your project and what you hope to achieve?

Lora: Yes, this project kick started when I went to Cinema 21 with my students to see Pan’s Labyrinth released in December of 2006. Then I saw the film 50 more times and wrote a publication that was accepted in an academic journal and the film stars Ofelia who has to go this mill in the northern mountains of Spain because her step father is busy killing the Maquis who are in 1942 still fighting the war even though the Spanish War ended in 1939. I saw that film with my students, I started teaching it and then I started to notice other films that were featuring juvenile protagonist to tell the civil war and then the dictatorship that followed.

I started to think about why and my students were engaged in that question as well and I believe that that worked with students whether official research assistants or students in my classroom has led me to the decision that this needs to go, live so to speak in a digital humanities way and to sort of the goal would be to educate and … Engage, educate and work with undergraduates nationwide, so that it’s more of an exchange or dialogue than me just standing at a podium and delivering the truth. In this case the truth is that I think Spaniards in 2007, there was, a new law was passed called the Law of Historical Memory. We could call that the defining moment for breaking the silence and then if you allow me to just do a little history lesson of Spain. The war was fought, the Spanish Civil War from ’36 to ’39 after the nationals led by Franco.

They performed a coup and the Spanish Republic ended and so that’s why we call the lapped side or the losing side, the side that didn’t win the Spanish Civil War. We call them the Republicans because they were busy defending the Republic. The war was fought, Franco won and Spain survived a dictatorship that didn’t end until 1975 and the transition to democracy was effective but it included what’s called a … what is in the constitution and called the Law of Amnesty. Which means that there were tribunals, there were no commissions, there was no fact finding, truth finding, no prosecution of any kind on both sides.

It was like let’s wipe the slate clean but this law had a silencing effect on Spaniards. A working theory of mine is that the juvenile protagonists that we see and I have identified 13 films and short stories novels from 1942 forward. The juvenile protagonist, the general theory would be that eludes silence by being young, being more subjective. The experience of the war or dictatorship is very … I don’t want to say child like because they are facing really intense situations like Ofelia and Pan’s Labyrinth who has to deal with I mean violence and conflict and she really has to … want to ask a question?

Sam: No, I was just leaning at a … I was leaning into, just talk about this, the idea of it’s just more approachable when you see the youth or you can have like this emotional attachment to a young character versus an older mature character. That was going through my head as you were talking but …

Lora: Right the subjectivity is hard to explain because sometimes what happens in fairy tale form. Like in Ofelia’s experience, she is busy fighting evil in a parallel alternate world, but that doesn’t mean it’s any less intense or scary. When we see that metaphorically on the screen, I believe the working theory is that, it is safer so to speak to visit painful past histories and conflicts as a society. Another working theory would be that Spain is … this is how Spain … excuse me this is how Spain expresses its national grief about what happened to so many children adolescence and young people.

It’s possible … Spain isn’t the only country who casts youth protagonists in war pictures. We’ve got Life is Beautiful is an example. I think what happens with kids is that their striptive ideology. They don’t politicize or take an ideological side and it’s … yeah what you said Sam about maybe, it’s more emotional but it’s almost like more human if you will and that’s what I mean by subjectivity. When it’s more human, then we can universalize the experience of the youth protagonist and maybe take some lessons and maybe there is a moral right.

Sam: As long as we don’t Disneyfy the story, because I was in a course one time and they were talking about the Disneyfication of history particularly around Poker Hunters. It was just a movie Poker Hunters and we had some teachers that were showing it in [K2-12 00:07:53] classroom and quite a few of the teachers … I was the only person in this course who had issues with them showing this in a classroom. It might have been a break or whatever and the professor was trying to get the people charged around this conversation but everybody is like, “Oh yeah we had to show it in the classroom.” Being a tribal individual myself I was just like, “Wow let’s back up now.”

There’s that that the story is being taken with the younger characters or the story is being taken to a place where they’ve just cleaned it up and made it way too palatable where I think Pan’s Labyrinth is not in that Disney realm as far as the story goes and so I think as long as … I think having those younger characters does help us tie in and become emotionally attached a little bit and makes it more palatable when you are talking about, and we talked about it earlier and I guess I can bring it up or just this idea that we are talking about genocide, you are talking about large numbers of people dying and how do you tell that story without just focusing completely on the genocide part of it but I don’t know if you want to speak more about the genocide part of this because I know that was something you brought up earlier.

Lora: I do and thank you for that perfect transition. Really in my heart the goal of the website it to teach genocide because genocide is still happening today around the world and it is a way of getting students to simply not have the knee-jerk reaction, that’s sad. We are going to define it, how it behaves, how to look for it and what to do about it and art does something, in this case film and fiction does something about genocide, there is no question. One of my favorite quotes is from Professor Mason, a retired emeritus professor and he always told me that literature, literature teaches us our own humanity.

Sam: That’s great.

Lora: Humanity, what’s interesting about Spain going back to the 2007 Law of the Historical Memory. That was 8 years ago and it makes lots of provisions that allow people to break the silence in many, many different ways. Whether it’s social services or history text books, signage but I’ve only noticed in the last 5 years or so that scholars, mostly outside of Spain but scholars have been calling the post war experience a genocide as well as the civil war. How it was fought, there was many what they call extrajudicial killings behind the lines. You couldn’t call it a conventional war but I’m focused on the decade or two after the civil war when they were displacements and assassinations and imprisonments and kids taken away from their parents, put in reformatories for brain washing. Once again how can we tell that story safely without producing more conflict in the same society?

Then getting to the website itself, what I imagine is … so I have maybe 7 working theories depending on the group of films and techs I’m working with, and each theory will send you down a rabbit hole. One theory could be fairy tale, another one could be hunger, maybe national grief could be another … send you down a rabbit hole and not, again not to sort of … certainly not to hand feed you or not to lecture but to engage you and give you the resources you need to go do your own scholarship, right and that’s what we call undergraduate research with faculty. When they work with us, they become independent scholars and that’s the goal.

Maria: When we talked about the website a little bit, you have this idea of having polls and sort of interactive spaces on your website, do you want to say a little bit about how you plan to engage our young people especially in the material?

Sam: Great, so our mini tech talks no longer than 4 minutes as Sam Williams. Mini tech talks to engage and then bibliographies, primary and secondary. I’m not thinking about a lot of images but if I could have some moving pictures, that would be great film clips. Of course as when I’m talking about or excerpts from texts. The engaging the student would happen with quizzes that were more, less fact based and more reflection based. A way of inside that theoretical framework fairy tale producing through the quiz format, reflections about maybe what other fairy tales do for that individual’s memory travel if we want to call it that. I mean just connecting the dots in your world and how could you apply this in a different context. I’m not imagining it as an academic, much more of a … I don’t want to call it moral either but intellectual reflection

Sam: As far as the contributors to the site, do you see yourself as the main contributor to the site, will you be asking students or other colleagues to contribute tech talks or content to the site, I’m just curious to know your broader vision for content contribution.

Lora: Excellent, forms would be a way that students could, at UP, outside of UP could make contributions. I have worked with research assistants and it is true that I will be giving them credit in a very big and bold way for a few of the theoretical frameworks and I may just … they’ve graduated but I may just grab them and say, “Okay, I’m creating the Hunger Portal, I need some help” and absolutely giving credit. The outreach would be the following. I’m going to plum my excavate, plum whatever, all my teaching materials and they are many years of teaching materials and then publish film guides, reading guides.

I think that when I get the word out to colleagues nationwide, there will be … it will start to become and exchange in other Spanish Peninsular professors who want to contribute and not just make use of. Then also establishing some ties with, there are some centers around Spain that are important for 20th century Spanish Peninsular Studies, for example University of San Diego that happened to take a lot of exiles intellectuals coming out of Spain to … there are archives, in fact they have a memory project of their own that I’ve looked at. Reaching out to them or there is a group in Spain that actually propelled the Law of Historical Memory if proposed and promoted and got it passed as would be group to collaborate with.

Maria: Yeah that sounds great.

Sam: I’m really looking forward to seeing what the next year holds because we know that your ATR project is just the seed for this much bigger vision that you have and I will say that I am very happy that you are one of our academic technology round-table fellows this year and you’re able to engage not only with your own project but I know already you were engaged in Dr. Renee Hunsicker in Spain. It sounded like in our last meeting there was a dialogue happening there and he comes from [inaudible 00:17:27] center. I’m just excited to see where this project goes.

Maria: It sounds great Lora

Lora: Thank you.

Sam: Thank you for coming and talking and we’ll get you back on here, I think later in exhibit, really fascinating to see where we’ve come in a short amount of time.

Lora: Right, excellent.

Maria: Thank you.

Lora: Thank you.

Speaker 1: Thank you for joining us for another episode of the UP Tech Podcast, just a reminder, that we post a new podcast every Friday morning and you can find as at techtalk.up.edu.