

Between hard covers and the “cloud”: Is a canon to be found?

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Between hard covers and the “cloud”: Is a canon to be found?

It is undeniable that libraries are crucial in the process of canon formation, in the sense that these are sites where choices are made, resulting from policies of book acquisition and donation acceptance, and where librarians face the pressure of space management. The research project that led to the present essay aimed at examining the University of Lisbon School of Humanities Library’s canon, concerning the collections in English, within the more restricted framework of British Victorian women writers. Was there a canon to be found? — was the query I started with.

Although the research expedition undertaken included both the Library’s online catalogue and the manual one, and also the “Ancient book” archive (a space where books no longer considered relevant to contemporary readers and students are stored), one must ask if, in a contemporary library, is print the sole content to be approached, when a vast digital content is available to the reader. With growing access to digital databases from the Library, one has necessarily to take into account e-books and academic journals, thus the former question turns into a rhetoric one (meaning “is print content the sole to be approached?”, the answer being *it is not*); the library’s inclusion in nets of knowledge created to connect similar institutions at a global level is also pertinent, once they expand enormously the scope of information the readers’ community has at their disposal, challenging a traditional concept of literary canon; furthermore, one has to be aware of the unsettled environment of contemporary libraries, as Andrew Stauffer defines it:

Because digital projects are more process than finished product (*i.e.*, they are never ‘done’ in the way a book is), they have tended to elude the reviewers. As a result of this unsettled

environment, digital scholarship still abides in the shadows of the printed monographs, articles, and editions by which we have long measured achievement in the field. (Stauffer 2011)

Thus, one cannot overlook the innumerable possibilities that the emerging field of Digital Humanities offers to the research in Humanities in general, as the researcher involved in such activities perceives when engaging in his own research and the others', as one acknowledges with the appearance of groups and platforms that unite them, such as The Digital Humanities Network, based at the University of Cambridge¹ or HASTAC,² just to name two. As Anne Burdick et al put it, "Digital Humanities is a compact, game-changing report on the state of contemporary knowledge production" (Burbick 2012), as a recognition of its influence. This emerging field of scholarship is making its way through the twenty-first century, challenging researchers and scholars to articulate their former fields of expertise into recently acquired methods, which may provide new insights to those areas of study. It also strengthens scholars' boost towards interdisciplinarity, which is so valued in Cultural Studies.

The undertaken enquiry intersects with former research in the scope of Victorian Studies, focused on women writing, and Digital Humanities, once it provides new data to work with, and which will hopefully enlighten new angles or confirm acquired knowledge. Ultimately, the enquiry will consist of wondering if Digital Humanities may reveal to researchers dedicated to this area a different Victorian Era than the one we have known till now, the one in paper based research.

1. The research environment

Undertaken within the broader field of the Research Project *Libraries and Canon-Formation* of the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES), later under the title World Cultures in English. Digital

¹ The Digital Humanities Network homepage. URL: <http://www.digitalhumanities.cam.ac.uk/> (Accessed 21.8.2016).

² Initials of Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory. URL: <http://www.hastac.org/> (Accessed 21.8.2016).

Humanities, Libraries, Schools, Social Development (*Culturas do Mundo em Inglês. Humanidades Digitais, Bibliotecas, Escolas, Compromisso Social*), this enquiry research matched the purpose of my own work as a researcher (a library user and not a librarian) in the preceding years, focusing on women authors, in different literary genres, as well as reform action, in the Victorian Era.

The next step will be during the course of this data expedition to find out if digital sources provide a new insight into the Victorian Women Writing, for instance by revealing unknown or lesser known authors or, on the contrary, if these sources replicate the canon found in the physical library. At the present stage, the vastness of documents available and the amount of information point out to a wider scope of the corpus. However, this vastness can be misleading because, instead of broadening the scope of authors represented, the digital environment points out to the existence of a canon, mostly a replication of the one found in the paper-based library.

2. Time frame

Before approaching the library's collections, the creation of a corpus of writers proved to be useful for this enquiry, using references such as The Victorian Web (VW) and the Victorian Women Writers Project (VWWP), just to name two, as well as anthologies of the same period, in order to create a starting point upon which to confront the library's catalogues. Curiously enough, one might add that researching ancient catalogues showed several difficulties, among which finding out the gender of lesser known authors (relevant information to this research), who have no Wikipedia³ page about them. However, the "social cataloging" site Goodreads⁴ provided a precious help, including information about the gender of the authors indexed.

Being the focus British Victorian women writers, it was fairly easy to gather a short list of names, in the sense that, be they fiction writers or other genres authors, they are outnumbered by male writers. George Eliot, the Brontë sisters and Jane Austen (although the latter definitely a pre-

³ The choice of Wikipedia as a reference to this matter is due to it being the most comprehensive site that is known.

⁴ Goodreads. URL: www.goodreads.com (Accessed 21.8.2016).

Victorian author, due to the 1837-1910 time frame established to the Victorian Era, acknowledged for the sake of researcher's comfort) hold a secure place, echoing choices made by their contemporaries, by critical theorists and by Victorian communities of readers and from then on. The very designation of the Victorian Era, as well as the dates that frame its boundaries, is a consequence of the belief that this period in History had unique features, granted by the Industrial Revolution, the Empire, legislative output, public reform and franchise, as well as social mobility, namely, in an intensely dynamic and innovative cultural framework.

The scope considered in this essay ranges from 1837 to 1901, as noted before, which guided the search for authors' production and dates of publishing. Nevertheless, publishing until 1914 was regarded, as it is generally accepted that the referred era extends to the outbreak of World War One. However, as Walter E. Houghton underlines, the time frame of the era is not a strict one, as he comments about the dates frame:

(...) the attitudes here under scrutiny are those which were conspicuous from about 1830 to 1870; which is to say that taken together and interrelated, they provide a definition of Victorianism. (...) I cannot doubt there was a common culture for which the term Victorianism, though in a wider sense that it usually bears, is appropriate. After 1870, while many of its characteristics persist through the century, (...) their dominance and their particular coherence were breaking down. Victorianism was dying, and a new frame of mind was emerging, a *late* Victorian frame of mind, which pointed forward to the postwar temper of the 1920's. (Houghton 1975: xv)

These dates, long established as boundaries of the Victorian Age, have been more recently challenged by Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam, in the Introduction of *The Victorian Studies Reader* (Boyd and McWilliam 2), namely by quoting Richard Price, an author included in this anthology, who argues that the so-called Victorian attitudes are, in fact, deeply rooted in the past. The discussion about the time frame of the Victorian Era would be, however, another debate. This discussion is one among the several that engage contemporary Victorian Studies, which witness intense academic production and critique.

3. Moving among catalogues within the library

A library, as an organized space, requires that the reader learns how to move inside it. Once you become familiar with its catalogue(s), and where they can be accessed, one realizes how this space has broad "avenues" and narrower "streets", due to the obvious dichotomy of the visible/invisible (or less visible) authors and books. The reader might even venture to state that the library has its visible contents, and the reserved ones, and even the latter distinguishable from the former due to different layers of exhibition and access permission.

Back to the library's contents, the online catalogue provided a quick access to the main collections; aside from that, one could not overlook the manual catalogue, a vast one and only accessible by special permission. Being organized according to the author's family names, it raised difficulties to the researcher, in the sense that often the author's initials are not enough to inform about their gender, requiring a more thorough enquiry, since the scope of this project only included women writers.

The possibility of existing translations in English of books of non-English authors poses a new problem, when both authors and translators are often referred to by their family name, preceded by the initials of first name. Again: were these women or men? And, above all, were they British or, for that matter, British Empire subjects? The research would not be completed, however, with the access of the manual catalogue. It still required further searches in the library's deposit funds, where a good number of volumes contemplate the scope of the years to verify (again between 1837-1901, the Victorian Era), mainly concerning travel writing, a much-cultivated genre in the referred period.

4. Discussing the canon. Choice, canon formation and power

Having established a corpus of names that stood for a Victorian canon, it was inevitable to approach the debate concerning the canon, the process of canon formation and the non-fixedness of the concept itself. This perspective is indebted to Paul Guillory, who points out that selections, namely considering which authors are representative of a certain period in History and in Literary Theory, are not innocent and unveil a discourse in

themselves, resulting in choices and exclusions: “Literary critics (...) detect beneath the supposed objectivity of value judgments a political agenda: the exclusion of many groups of people from representation in the literary canon” (Guillory 233).

Naturally, and mainly due to budget limitations and space constraints (not speaking of the focus of the area of studies itself), libraries are places where choices have to be made. Librarians have a crucial role in these choices, and their criteria derive in a process that pretends to ascertain what is relevant for the reader, thus contributing to the process of canon formation. This role is underlined by Julianne Buchsbaum, who stresses the importance to the local culture of the college or university and the broader society as a whole for librarians to become more aware of their part in this process and the social construction of knowledge. Consequently, the author underlines the difficulty of balancing the needs of present and future scholars (Buchsbaum 1). From the reader’s perspective, it would be fair to ask if a library with a strong canon is good for the reader. For, in the sense that it will mean exclusions, it will narrow his reading options. Therefore, would an embracing collection be more enlightening for the reader?

Before that, what contributes to inscribe women writers in and out of the canon? The answer to this question involves not only the circumstances surrounding the author, the themes approached in the books, some of them critical issues for the era, like divorce, suffrage, feminism and women roles, as well as book circulation. And namely different positions concerning the Woman Question in the Victorian Era, the ongoing Victorian discussion about women’s nature and societal role, as Thompson argues (Thompson 1). However, theme choice was not the main reason for an author getting included in the Victorian canon or excluded, an issue I have developed in my thesis, approaching the case of Harriet Taylor Mill, namely.⁵

In fact and as stated before, the assumption that the digital canon replicates the paper-based library’s canon is supported mainly on directions conveyed to volunteers for the digitalization process or general guide lines

⁵ Baptista, Cristina (2011). *Mulheres na sombra. Great Victorian women behind great Victorian men*. Doctoral thesis in English Studies. Lisbon: School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon.

of sites where e-books can be found, namely the Project Gutenberg, but also A Celebration of Women Writers, a comprehensive site, with links to titles and book contents, if digitalized.

5. The librarian's task

Once the librarian chooses the contents of donations, according to criteria of relevance, his options will lead to the narrowing of the choices available to the readers, the same being true to acquisitions policy. Furthermore, how does a librarian in a library as the one in question meet the needs of such a large scope of interests as the professors', the researchers' and the students' communities of the University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities? In his role of gatekeeper of culture, what will his attitude be concerning the extra canonical works of a period in which the choice is made? Facing the librarian and the power he holds in the decision-making process, and a strict policy of acceptance of donations, in what concerns ancient or second hand books, as well as purchase policy of contemporary items, within a concern to create a core collection, fringes, or extra-canon books are not likely to appear. In this regard, Charles A. Gardner adds another issue into the discussion, inquiring who should have control in the purchase policy: the faculty or the faculty librarian himself? (Gardner 1985).

In the case of the library in question, being both a heritage library and a contemporary one, in the sense that its collections range from institutional and private donations to acquisitions, a constantly evolving collection, the contents of this library result in a mixed component and result from different policies undertaken along its history by successive managements. Furthermore, the librarian's procedure must be framed in the broader policy of the University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities, knowing that most of the researchers needs are met by the research centres own libraries, and the Main Library meets mostly the undergraduates needs. Nevertheless, at this point, in a contemporary library, the process of digitisation of contents is likely to subvert this equation concerning policies of donation acceptance and acquisition.

With online access to databases, encyclopedias, e-books and journals, the library has expanded immensely the scope of its collections, opening a

wide range of possibilities for readers. The offer is overwhelming not only to read but also to listen to, with sites dedicated to audiobooks. So, what could be faced as a narrowing process can, with current digital resources, be transformed in a widening one in which the concept of canon is totally eroded. Also, different means of production go beyond the digitisation of print books and making them readable online, and have introduced video, television and the social nets in the creative process, resulting in the so-called transmedia, which includes different media in the creative process, with the book or without it.

In such circumstances, is it legitimate to invoke the canon? It is, once and despite the instability of the digital environment, the research points towards the prevalence of a replication of the paper-based canon.

6. Findings

It remains to reveal the findings for this essay in the School of Arts and Humanities' Library, both from the manual catalogue and the deposits: travel writings, mostly, and Empire writing, in what concerns information, mostly geographical, about the colonies, and also the novel, a most cultivated Victorian literary genre.

Being the canonical British Victorian women writers represented in the library shelves, searchable in the online catalogue, the appearance of other authors is framed under the category of curiosities, in the sense that their inclusion does not represent consistent criteria of relevance in the line of acceptance of donations/acquisitions policy. Furthermore, these books, included in the manual catalogue, are not available in the library shelves.

Going into detail, one could establish at first a range of authors. Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Alice Meynell, Christina Rossetti, Dorothy Wordsworth and Maria Edgeworth are represented in primary and secondary literature, and names such as Anna Eliza Bray, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, W.H. Davies, Grace E. Hadow, Vernon Lee and Beatrice Web are represented in literature or essay.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, Josephine Butler, Elizabeth Grey, Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Gaskell, Felicia Hemans, Fanny Kemble, Harriet Martineau, Hannah More, Cornelia Sorabji, Olive Shreiner and Ann Radcliffe are represented in critical works.

Other (very) few names appear in the manual catalogue, such as Evelyn Ashley, Gertrude Atherton, Valentine Baker, Anne Blunt, Ouida and Alice Gardner, among others, who join the authors represented both in the digital catalogue and the manual catalogue, George Elliot, Jane Austen and Elizabeth Bowen. As a curiosity, a selection of Queen Victoria's letters can also be found.

If the first ones were obvious choices, others exposed a random or no intended choice of the library. How each of them arrived in the premises remains to be known, information that will desirably be provided in a further step, as the research will evolve.

Popular, prolific and successful Victorian writer Anna Eliza Bray (1790-1883), a name in the library's Main Catalogue, is a striking discovery. This author is the object of her autobiography, edited by John A. Kempe, the writer's nephew; however relevant, Bray is neither acknowledged by The Victorian Web (VW), nor by the Victorian Women Writers Project, nor by Harold Bloom, whose approach acknowledges only nine Victorian women writers (Bloom 1994). Yet, Bray published, in her long life, a great number of books, *The Borders of the Tamar and Tavy* (1836) considered her most notable one. This author published mainly novels, one of which *The Moor of Portugal*, about foreign life. Her major work being described in the novel and anthropological genre, among a great number of titles, so, in due justice there would be no argument for exclusion. As an argument more, this author's representation in the British Library in London is extensive, from primary sources to critical production about her work. Therefore, according to the indexing of the author's work by the British Library, and once it is clear that the autobiography is not her most important title, its presence in the Faculty of Humanities Library can only be explained by the work of chance and not of a consistent acceptance of donation/acquisition policy.

Cornelia Sorabji is another case, this time not of underrepresentation, as Bray, but of non-representation, with the exception of a master thesis, thus secondary literature.⁶ As an author with an extensive corpus, ranging

⁶ Baptista, Cristina (2007). *O encontro colonial nas memórias de Cornelia Sorabji*. Masters degree dissertation. Lisbon: School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon.

from the autobiographical genre to the anthropological accounts, a British Indian Victorian reformer, her knowledge of India in her time can only be matched by a few contemporaries. Furthermore, the extent of Sorabji's writing goes beyond other British women more common travel writing, due to her deep social reform commitment and political concerns for the development of the country, which shaped her writing. Not forgetting her tireless efforts towards Indian women social condition, while other writers limit their interests to a strict folklore record, attractive as it might have been to their contemporary readers.

This anglicised Indian born author is also depicted as a witness of a changing world, as well as of an in-betweenness experienced by subjects with a double allegiance (Great Britain and India), as this was the case. So, much can be said about her relevance as a source of a counter-discourse in her times, diverging from main-stream and Home Rule prevailing defenders, such as Gandhi. An example is *India Calling* (Sorabji 1934), her *memoirs*, only recently brought to renewed attention by different editors, a biographer and researchers. Not represented in the Library, her unique perspective of the Empire during the Victorian Era will not be available for readers, certainly a loss in the opinion making process about the subject. As for this writer's relevance in a contemporary perspective this enquiry would be answered by the importance she attributed to themes such as domestic violence or gender discrimination in the professional ranks and in society, two major issues that have not yet been overcome in contemporary Europe, namely from the site we stand in, Portugal, much less in India.

Grace Eleanor Hadow is another name overlooked in the British origins lists, namely the VW, and present in the Faculty's Library, as an anthology organizer and editor. Another curious case is Beatrice Webb, although underrepresented in the School of Arts and Humanities Library and only in secondary literature. A well-known case of collaborative production, involving Beatrice and Sidney Webb as political essayists, this author of unquestionable relevance is also not singled out in the VW list of women authors, although quoted in a great number of articles within this site.

7. Conclusion

The bottom line, at this stage of the research, is that a wide Victorian literary canon is fairly represented in the University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities Library. This means that a contemporary assessment of what is relevant to be read not just *from* but also *of* Victorian women writers is available to the average student reader and researcher in the Library.

A major conclusion, so far, is that the digital sources, data bases, platforms and sites available replicate the canon of the paper-based library. This is on the one hand disappointing, in the sense that one might legitimately expect to find a wider range of contents. If to certain extents that is true, on the other hand, names considered significant (like Cornelia Sorabji), unrepresented at the Library, are also underrepresented in the digital environment. This statement has to consider, however, its instability.

A few more ancient books, published during the Victorian Era, which have not survived the test of time, thus were relegated to oblivion, can be found in the content of the manual catalogue or/and the deposits, not available to every reader and accessible only under special requirement. There, a randomized number of books can be found, not only precious ones, but also under the epitome of curiosities, namely coming from donations, thus corresponding to previous individual owners and revealing their own particular choices.

As stated before, the library's collections within the scope of this research match the more relevant, thus canonical, woman authors, if one compares these collections with names included in a number of sources, ranging from the considerably comprehensive VW to the selected Harold Bloom's choice, but including for the sake of suggestions other sources, such as the VWWP, dedicated to less known authors, the Virginia Blain's *Victorian Women Poets. An Annotated Anthology*, and Harriet Jump's *Women's Writing in the Victorian Period 1837-1901: An Anthology*.

As is the case with Sorabji, whose appearance in the School of Arts and Humanities was due to a seminar devoted to women writing in the British Empire, undertaken in the mid 2000's, other less known and non-canonical writers came to the front of the current research, be they theme of masters dissertations, or doctoral thesis. This circumstance can be explained

by the acknowledged effort concerning innovative themes underwent by post-graduate studies programs, as a widespread faculty policy.

This policy has had obvious consequences for the library's collections, broadening their scope, and including names and themes that otherwise would not be represented in the catalogues, in the sense that they do not represent necessarily a consensus of the Department of English Studies, or the library's acquisition policy, rather a more individual attitude, be it the researcher's choice, and considering also the tutor's advice.

As stated before, the School of Arts and Humanities Library, founded in 1859, prides itself of a content ranging from rare ancient books to a vast contemporary collection, either originated in donations or acquisitions, in several fields of knowledge within the scope of the Humanities.

In conclusion, the library contents, as far as contemporary acquisitions and donations, depict the relevance of Victorian Era as it is perceived today. This relevance, however, is not consensual. As an example of the lack of consensus and of the fact that the authors' relevance is reassessed by different and successive reader communities let us recall the statement by Salman Rushdie, in his allusion to Jane Austen, an all times novelist (since her appearance in the publishing market), also revived in contemporary cinema and television. In the recent *Joseph Anton. A Memoir*, Rushdie criticizes Austen's attitude towards the Napoleonic wars, to the extent that this author ignores the conflict and the participation of the British Army, an attitude impossible for a writer to uphold today when, states Rushdie, it is impossible to separate the political from the personal (Rushdie 54). One might conclude, therefore adding to the argument of the canon not being a fixed category that Austen is not included in Rushdie's personal canon as a novelist. This, according to his perspective, because of her production not resisting a contemporary reading and the requirements of writing today, namely in a post-colonial era, when geographical frontiers have fallen and human experience has broadened immensely.

According to the scope of our research, one might state that the library responds to its function, providing relevant reading about the Victorian Era, with a fair bulk of relevant authors; the representation of non-canonical authors, with a short number of names, as the ones referred to before, may be attributed to random choices or donations, and not to a coherent acquisition policy, undertaken and consolidated with time.

Nonetheless, this is a fact in itself, a challenge for researchers and an issue deserving future attention. Books found outside the main canon represent fringes of the publishing at the time, although pointing out to the consistent stream of novels, travel writing, anthologies, geography and anthropological genres, cultivated by women writers at the time. This, nevertheless, does not indicate that the library has made a choice to specialise in these or other themes. Resorting mainly from donations, these few titles reveal the choices of the previous owners of the private libraries they come from, rather than a choice of library policy.

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The Victorian Web: <http://www.victorianweb.org/>

Victorian Women Writers Project. <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/welcome.do;jsessionid=FF0D6A7FC2DEDD1FDB0F7838E6C3976E>

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DIGITAL LIBRARIES: Resources and Projects. <http://archive.ifla.org/II/diglib.htm#projects-europe>

The Norton Anthology of English Literature: <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/welcome.htm>

Nines: <http://www.nines.org/>

Project Gutenberg. <http://www.gutenberg.org/>

ORLANDO. Women's writing in the British Isles. <http://orlando.cambridge.org/svHomePage>

The Digital Victorianist. <http://www.digitalvictorianist.com/>

The Hathi Trust Digital Library. http://www.hathitrust.org/digital_library

The Literary Encyclopedia. <http://litencyc.com/>

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation. www.SNF.org

World Digital Library. <http://www.wdl.org/pt/>

ABSTRACT

The essay sums up the results also of a query, once it refers to a work in progress, developed over two years, in the scope of the World Cultures in English. Digital Humanities, Libraries, Schools, Social Development research project, of ULICES. Although the emerging field of Digital Humanities seems to be mostly dedicated to the possibilities of analysing big data located in the “cloud”, for producing knowledge from that standing point and the analysis of those data, I have wondered in a different direction, even though still taking advantage from the growing field that is offered to Victorianists by digital access and databases. My starting point was the University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities Library and the critical issue the process of canon formation. It is unquestionable that this process is closely connected with libraries, in the sense that these are sites where choices are made resulting from policies of books acquisition and donation acceptance, and where librarians feel the pressure of space management. The current research project I am involved in aims at inquiring if one can define a University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities Library’s canon, concerning the collections in English, within the framework of British Victorian women writers. The research process included the access to the online and manual catalogues, and the Library’s deposit fund, the so-called “Ancient Book”.

At this stage, the Digital Humanities research tools proved to be useful. It was fair to ask if, in a contemporary library, print is the sole content to be approached, when a vast digital content is available to the reader. Growing access to digital databases, e-books, audio-books and academic journals from the Library, or, for that matter, accessed at a distance, has to be taken into account, as well as its inclusion in nets of knowledge created to connect similar institutions, once they expand the scope of the information at reader’s community disposal, challenging the traditional concept of literary canon.

On a second level, my essay aims at inquiring if Digital Humanities will reveal researchers a different Victorian Era women writing than the one we have known till now. Although an unstable environment, the essay stresses the fact that digital

sources replicate the paper-based canon, frustrating expectations of researchers that they might broaden it.

KEYWORDS

Libraries; Digital Humanities; literary canon; Victorian women writers; Victorian Era

RESUMO

O ensaio apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa ainda não encerrada, desenvolvida ao longo de dois anos, no âmbito do projecto de investigação *Culturas do Mundo em Inglês. Humanidades Digitais, Bibliotecas, Escolas, Compromisso Social*, do CEAUL. E, se bem que o campo emergente das Humanidades Digitais se tem dedicado às possibilidades de análise de grandes volumes de dados, localizados na “nuvem” e produzido conhecimento a partir daí, a minha pesquisa evoluiu numa direção diferente, ainda que tirando partido das crescentes possibilidades proporcionadas aos Vitorianistas graças ao acesso digital e às bases de dados disponíveis. O ponto de partida deu-se na Biblioteca Central da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, uma vez que é inquestionável que o processo de formação do cânone está intimamente relacionado com as bibliotecas, no sentido em que constituem locais onde são feitas escolhas, decorrentes de políticas de aquisição de livros e de aceitação de doações, e onde os bibliotecários enfrentam a pressão da gestão do espaço disponível. O projecto de investigação em que me envolvi propõe-se indagar se existe um cânone específico na Biblioteca da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, no que respeita às coleções em Inglês, no âmbito mais restrito das autoras Vitorianas britânicas. Depois de ter acedido aos catálogos manual e *online*, a pesquisa abrangeu ainda o depósito da Biblioteca, designado “Livro Antigo”.

Nesta fase da investigação, as ferramentas usadas pelas Humanidades Digitais revelaram-se extremamente úteis. Assim, é pertinente questionar se, numa biblioteca contemporânea, o material impresso será o único acervo a considerar, numa altura em que um vasto acervo digital está disponível ao leitor. O crescente acesso a bases de dados digitais, livros digitais e audiolivros, e a revistas académicas a partir da Biblioteca, ou até à distância, tem de ser tido em conta, assim como a inclusão desta instituição em redes de conhecimento criadas para ligar instituições semelhantes, uma vez que expandem imensamente o âmbito da informação disponível para o leitor, desafiando um conceito mais tradicional de cânone.

Num segundo plano, este ensaio propõe-se indagar se as Humanidades Digitais poderão revelar uma produção literária ou ensaística das autoras Vitorianas britânicas diferente daquela que conhecemos anteriormente. Considerando embora a dinâmica das plataformas digitais e das bases de dados, este ensaio aponta para o

facto de estas fontes replicarem o cânone que conhecemos até agora, o que redundava numa frustração para os investigadores que legitimamente esperavam que o ambiente digital redundasse numa maior abrangência.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Bibliotecas; Humanidades Digitais; cânone literário; autoras Vitorianas; Era Vitoriana
