

# Panels and Abstracts BACLS-WHN Loughborough 2018

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## Bodily Affects

### **To Hold His Body: Liminality and Mourning in *Lincoln in the Bardo***

Emily Direen (University of Melbourne)

Propelled by recent critical claims that childhood is a major theme in contemporary fiction (Eaglestone, Dodou, Schneider), this paper seeks to investigate what Richard Kuhn has called “the enigma posed by the fictitious child ... and the topography of the universe in which he moves” (6) by offering a critical analysis of George Saunders’ novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017). In Saunders’ Man Booker winning novel President Lincoln’s beloved eleven-year-old son is laid to rest in Georgetown cemetery, only to ‘rise again’ in “the bardo” – a liminal realm, between Earth and ‘the next place’, which is filled with ghosts. Using Nancy Armstrong’s assertion that twenty-first century fiction is experiencing “a disconcerting sea change in the traditional subject of fiction” and has turned toward the “extremophile subject”, alongside Elspeth Probyn’s argument that “Writing is interested [and] is deeply embedded in contexts, politics, and bodies” (89) this paper aims to interrogate what is at stake in this evocative depiction of a child in spatial, emotional and existential limbo. I will examine the representation of the affective dynamics of the father-son relationship, and consider how the familial bond fantastically jumps the gap between life and death, whilst drawing attention to the way that the text simultaneously raises questions about non-filial responsibilities towards children. I synthesise this study with the ongoing literary discourse generated by critics such as Ellen Pifer, James Kincaid and Lee Edelman concerning the role the figurative child—as a potent symbolic figure of the future—plays in social discourse.

Emily Direen is a PhD Candidate at the University of Melbourne. Her research interests include contemporary literature, adaptation studies, neo-Victorianism, and representations of childhood and adolescence. She is currently working on a dissertation provisionally titled: “Agentic Children: Affective Events and Childhood Upheaval in Contemporary Anglo-American Fiction.”

### **Kate Atkinson’s *Life After Life*: Vulnerability and Resilience**

Beatriz Domínguez-García (U of Huelva)

In *Life After Life* (2013), British writer Kate Atkinson returns to the rewriting of History. Ursula Todd’s lifespan overlaps with the major historical events of the twentieth century. Most of all, *Life After Life* highlights the deep vulnerability of women to systemic gender violence, but it seems to emphasise women’s resilience, which can be defined as “a form of suppleness and elasticity that enables adaptation to and recovery from shocks, surprises, and even slowly evolving changes and afflictions” (Hirsch 2014: 338). Thus, in the novel Ursula is the victim of repeated acts of gender violence, yet her extraordinary capacity for rebirth allows her to start anew, and eventually to escape the specific aggressions of each previous life in the next. The purpose of this paper is to examine Atkinson’s peculiar rendering of resilience, which interestingly she locates in the body, rather than in the mind (the more traditional adscription). I contend that in *Life After Life* resilience results from the combination of embodied memory and emotional forgetting. Since rebirth is a creative licence and patently impossible in real-life terms, Atkinson seems to establish the impossibility of victims to put an end to their own victimization and, likewise, the ability to “recover” from that bodily violence. In this respect, one may wonder if Atkinson is just questioning the ability of female victims to be resilient, whether resilience can be a viable discourse for recovering from gender violence and, finally, whether cultural texts can successfully present female resilience at all.

Dr. B. Domínguez García works as a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Huelva, where she is currently teaching women’s writing and critical theory. Her research interests include generic

fiction, women's writing and popular culture. She is currently participating in a funded research project entitled "Bodies in Transit 2" (ref. FFI2017-84555-C2-1-P).

### **'Heureux dans sa peau': The Imaginative Possibilities of Skin in Northern Irish Short Fiction**

Caroline Magennis (University of Salford)

This paper will offer an overview of the depiction of Northern Irish skin in recent short story collections, including David Park's *Gods and Angels* (2016), Rosemary Jenkinson's *Aphrodite's Kiss* (2016), Bernie McGill's *Sleepwalkers* (2013) and Roisin O'Donnell's *Wild Quiet* (2016). Drawing on work by Laura Marks, Abbie Garrington, Virginia Woolf, Sara Ahmed and others, this paper seeks to examine how we might engage with this new representation of the body and the potential of the haptic to be a mode of both self-knowledge and transmission. In these short stories, moments of connection through touch are lingered on and memories of touch past are pivotal. White Northern Irish skin is not valorised or celebrated, but often cast as something fragile and permeable that absorbs the toxic quality of the atmosphere. Scars are everywhere, and language is a fleshy mechanism involving lips, tongues and teeth. This paper will argue that recent short stories continue to move the Northern Irish body away from its representational dead end as over-deterministic symbol of the conflict. Rather than just the body in pain, skin is revealed to be a complex medium that yields no easy symbolic answers.

Caroline Magennis is a Lecturer in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature at the University of Salford and the Chair of the British Association for Irish Studies. She has published widely on theoretical approaches to Contemporary Northern Irish Literature and Culture.

### **Abusive Historicity**

Chris Vardy (University of Manchester)

This paper argues that the figure of the abused child often functions culturally as a metaphor for contemporary historicity, in which traumatic pasts determine the present in pervasive but epistemologically ungraspable ways, and subjectivities are defined by precarious, impossible or radically delimited futures. I will explore this claim through a comparative close reading. Denise Mina's *The Field of Blood* (2005) transposes the James Bulger murder from Liverpool in the 1990s to Glasgow in the early 1980s. When child sex abuse is revealed as a key factor in the case/narrative, it effaces social and historical context, presenting a crime with complex social and political provenances as the sole result of inescapable cycles of individual deviance transmitted from one generation to the next. Rupert Thomson's *Death of a Murderer* (2007) explores the legacies of the Moors Murders, suggesting that violent crimes are logical examples of an underlying logic or social system in which children – and what the figure of the child represents – are insecure and unsafe. Nostalgia for childhood in the recent past is presented as illusory and damaging: pre-lapsarian narratives that serve reactionary contemporary impulses and do little justice to the complexities of the past or the real experiences of children. Yet a hagiography of childhood is not replaced with an equally neat 'horror story'. Instead, childhood is presented as a difficult and anxious but also exciting and pleasurable period that determines adult life in complex ways, and which is refigured as we remember it: a seductive origin myth always in the process of being rewritten. In both texts, the figure of the abused child destabilizes concepts of progressive possibility and futurity, complicates liberal ideas of agency and articulates a disturbingly deterministic sense of the contemporary subject's situatedness within historical processes.

Christopher Vardy recently submitted his PhD, 'Historicizing neoliberal Britain', analyses twenty-first-century British figurations of Thatcherism and the End of History. He co-edited the collection *Rupert Thomson: Critical Essays* (Glyphi, 2016), and has published articles on the relationship between nostalgia, materialism and adolescence in British historical fiction; the figure of the abused child as a metaphor for historical change; the political significance of dystopian figurations of the 1980s.

## Contemporary Canonicity (or, what not to read): Workshop

Rachel Sykes (University of Birmingham), Arin Keeble (Edinburgh Napier), and Diletta De Cristofaro (University of Birmingham)

This workshop and discussion group will debate the idea of canonicity in the research and teaching of contemporary literary studies. Participants will be asked to discuss the literary texts, authors, and/or theorists that they believe to be “essential” to students and scholars of the contemporary and, through a reading of Amy Hungerford’s now infamous ‘On Not Reading’ (2016), we will debate the necessity of establishing a sense of canonicity in the field of contemporary literary studies as well as the right to refuse certain dominant cultural figures.

This session will develop and swap strategies for syllabus design, research development, and publication strategy. It will be guided by the experience of the organisers who, as co-founders of the Contemporary Studies Network, have spent the last two years running reading groups throughout the UK with the aim of discussing a broad range of cultural theory that, during the hectic academic year, we might not otherwise “find time” to read. As Hungerford claims, time and the economising of energy and resources is often what is at stake in the neoliberal university and this session hopes to reflect, however provocatively, on which contemporary texts remain essential, and how we might better identify when “[o]ur time is better spent elsewhere”.

Diletta De Cristofaro is a Teaching Fellow in English Literature at the University of Birmingham. She teaches and researches contemporary British and North American Literature, with a particular focus on the nexus between narrative and time. She is the author of a forthcoming monograph on the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel (Bloomsbury) and of articles and book chapters on Jim Crace and David Mitchell.

Arin Keeble is Lecturer in Contemporary Literature and Culture at Edinburgh Napier. I am currently finishing my second monograph, *Narratives of Katrina: Literature, Film and Television*, which is under contract with Palgrave and will be published in 2018. New essays are forthcoming in *The Routledge Companion to 21st Century Literary Fiction* (2018) and *The City in American Literature* (CUP, 2020).

Rachel Sykes is Lecturer in Contemporary American Literature at the University of Birmingham, where she co-directs the Centre for Contemporary Literature and Culture. Her book, *The Quiet Contemporary American Novel* (2017), was published with Manchester University Press in December and she has recent articles in *Signs: Journal of Women in Society and Culture* and *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*.

## Contemporary Life Writing and its Gender Dynamics

### I – you – he: Male, Self and Other in Serial Autofictions

Ricarda Menn (Goethe University Frankfurt)

If we think about the success of Karl Ove Knausgaard’s epic autobiographical project *My Struggle*, two observations can be made. Firstly, Knausgaard quite excessively elaborates on his life. Resulting in six instalments with over 3,000 pages, this success secondly appears as enigmatic for an underlying gender dynamic in the field of literary autobiographies and autofictions. Whereas other prolific writers, such as Paul Auster, John Burnside and J.M. Coetzee, too have published several autobiographical or rather autofictional books about their lives and writings, a female pendant to grand-scale autobiographical narratives in contemporary literature seems lacking. Far from suggesting that serial forms of life-writing

only cater to male authors and egos, an underlying politics of gender and representation cannot be overlooked. In setting contemporary serial autobiographies and autofictions apart from more popular genres such as self-help memoirs, I examine narrative strategies and motifs that constitute this genre.

These include father-son-conflicts and self-reflexive plays. On a narratological scale, however, serial autofictions do not yield unity and instead delineate the self as a more fragile, elusive entity: whereas Coetzee only uses the third-person narrative perspective to pursue his autobiographies, Auster writes about himself employing first, second and third-person narrative. Underlying this differentiation in voice are concerns about self-distancing and a non-stabile perception of the self. Thus, while on the onset promoting maleness, the texts discussed also employ motifs which run counter to concepts of 'toxic masculinity', so that the gender dynamics involved are far from linear and instead require a differentiated analysis.

Ricarda Menn is a PhD candidate at Goethe University Frankfurt/Main, where she studied two M.A.'s in "American Studies" and "Anglophone Literatures, Cultures and Media." She works as a research assistant at Goethe University and holds a scholarship from the German National Academic Foundation (Studienstiftung). Her current PhD project investigates the concept of serial autofiction and ties in with her research interests in contemporary literature and aesthetics.

### **Private Writing/Public Reading – The Case of Karl Ove Knausgaard and Elena Ferrante**

Melissa Schuh (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Karl Ove Knausgaard and Elena Ferrante are both popular writers whose reception in media and criticism has been structured according to their perceived contributions to autobiographical writing. *My Struggle* and the *Neapolitan Quartet* are frequently mentioned in tandem and while they are often interpreted in opposition to one another, these works are always related to an autobiographical dimension, regarding also the writerly personas and literary celebrity status of the authors. This coupling is particularly interesting insofar as Knausgaard's standing as a public figure stands in stark contrast to Ferrante's anonymity. While the phenomena of "Knausgaardmania" and "FerranteFever" attest to their shared popular appeal, Knausgaard's seemingly radical self-exposure and Ferrante's insistence on anonymity have garnered distinctly gendered responses. The gender dynamics that become prevalent in their reception can therefore serve as a case study for a discussion of current life writing as mirroring contemporary gender dynamics. This seems fruitful with regards to autobiographical writing by women gathering increasing critical attention. While showcasing a development in autobiographical life writing towards narrative complexity and a multifacetedness of the autobiographical self, I also aim to analyse how the reception of such literary autobiographical works is inevitably underpinned by gender politics.

Melissa Schuh completed her MSt in Modern Languages (University of Oxford) in 2013. She is currently a doctoral candidate in English at Queen Mary University of London and a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute of English and American Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. Her research interests include English and German contemporary autobiography and life writing, specifically the works of Philip Roth, J.M. Coetzee and Günter Grass.

### **'Cave Research': The Need for a Matricentric Narrative**

Mariana Thomas (University of Southampton)

Women's contemporary stories of mothering: what began as a few women shouting into silence is rapidly becoming saturated with voices. A reviewer of Rivka Galchen's recent memoir declared that the 'publishing industry has been in thrall to motherhood memoirs for years now,' suggesting that women writers have established a new tradition of matricentric narrative. This paper will interrogate the rise and evolution of these 'post-feminist' confessional texts, as produced within a cultural landscape of individualism and personal responsibility. It will discuss this literary movement as a reaction to the

cultural conditions of modern motherhood as well as the innate experiences of mothering itself. In narratives that illustrate a desire by these writers to redress the paucity of representations of mothering, in an approach that may once have been accused of essentialism, but which is now being reconsidered as a site of the empowerment and reconstruction of the maternal subject. It will seek to answer why there is such an urgent need for matricentric narratives, and why women writers feel compelled to produce them. The paper will work under the proposition, proposed by Andrea O'Reilly, that mothers need a feminism and literature of their own; that historically feminists have often dismissed the importance of motherwork, equating it with Adrienne Rich's patriarchal 'institution of motherhood'. It will examine how these writers are developing a matricentric narrative of their own, with common characteristics of form illuminating the experiential, visceral encounter with mothering, which has long existed in the shadow of the institution.

Mariana Thomas is a PhD candidate and lecturer in contemporary women's writing at University of Southampton, UK. Her work explores the mothering narratives of contemporary women writers, with a particular interest in maternal subjectivity, temporality, and the mother-daughter relationship.

## Ecology and Writing Beyond Human

### **A Crisis of Representation: Addressing Environmental Change in the Dystopian Novel**

Hollie Johnson (University of Nottingham)

Throughout history, disasters and periods of upheaval have often proved to be inspirational catalysts for the literary imagination. The emergent crisis around climate change has been no exception. Growing environmental anxiety, encouraged as new warnings about CO2 emissions and pollution emerge, has prompted a great deal of new and creative work attempting to grapple with the causes and implications of these environmental changes. While some critics have argued that the discursive and dialogic nature of the novel provides a creative space for exploration and understanding, others have questioned the capacity of the novel to construct a meaningful engagement with global environmental crisis. In this paper, I explore the challenges posed by this environmental turn for the dystopian novel in particular. Although dystopian fiction has experienced a surge in popularity in recent years, its traditional focus on human politics and social relationships puts it in conflict with demands to move beyond the anthropocentric. Locating the dystopian novel within the wider literary debate outlined above, this paper introduces an emerging trend of ecodystopian fiction: novels which use and adapt the conventions of the genre to address the crisis of representation posed by global environmental change. I analyse the literary techniques and formal innovations introduced by these novels, exploring how these future dystopian visions and narratives of resistance attempt to challenge contemporary attitudes towards environmental politics. Ultimately, this paper argues that the genre of dystopia offers a potentially productive forum for creating an ecocritical dialogue around the issues of environmental exploitation and responsibility.

I am a Midlands3Cities/AHRC-funded, final-year PhD student from the School of English at the University of Nottingham. My research aims to carry out an ecocritical re-evaluation of literary dystopias that tracks the role of environmental concerns within the development of the genre, exploring the dialogic relationships between humanity and non-human nature as presented within contexts of extinction, climate change, and environmental exploitation.

### **The Hyperobjectivity of Weird Things: Ecocritical Concerns in China Miéville's "Polynia" and "Covehithe"**

Allan Rae (University of Stirling)

This paper will analyse two of China Miéville's short stories (published in his most recent collection, *Three Moments of an Explosion*) in order to sketch one possible avenue down which an ecocritical reading of his work might proceed. Criticism of Miéville's fiction has tended to focus upon political concerns but, I suggest, there is ample scope among the generic malleability and hybridity of his work for the investigation of ecological issues. This paper will employ Timothy Morton's concept of the "hyperobject" in order to suggest that a defining feature of Miéville's fiction is the manner in which it attempts to animate deep ecological processes — processes which occur across timescales and on magnitudes which are impossible for humans to grasp — in order to produce the uncanny, weird, cognitively estranging features of these events. Morton describes hyperobjectivity as the key characteristic of global warming, its phenomena demonstrating the contours of the ungraspable thing itself. Miéville's fiction, I propose, illustrates the gap between "nonlocal" hyperobjectivity and its phenomenal manifestation, and does so in order to interrogate and engage with the moment of the anthropocene. The characters in "Polynia" and "Covehithe" experience a radical challenge to their own ontological certainty in the face of the indifferent, pitiless forces which work upon them in bizarre and unfathomable ways. Miéville, I suggest, offers the reader a troubling challenge — is it possible to accept the hyperobjectivity of (weird) things beyond our direct experience?

Allan Rae is a teaching assistant at the University of Stirling, where he teaches on various undergraduate modules in the Division of Literature and Languages. He received his PhD from the University of Stirling in November 2016. His research investigates constructions of subjectivity and environment in contemporary twenty-first-century literature, focusing on British and North American literature, ecocriticism, and psychoanalysis.

### **The Drill to Power: Oil and Contemporary Literature**

Sam Solnick (University of Liverpool)

'We need to contemplate literature's relation to the raucous, invisible, energy-producing atoms that generate world economies and motor our reading' write Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden in a 2012 editorial on 'Oil Culture'. Oil is the iconic substance of the Anthropocene, uniquely pervasive and fungible, leeching into the issues surrounding the products we buy, the emissions that shape the climate, the politicians we (sometimes) elect, and the landscapes we turn into 'sacrifice zones' – inhabited by those marginalised communities who have to suffer the environmental injustices of fossil capital. And yet, as Imre Szeman points out, most 'literature in the era of oil has little to do with oil'. But increasingly oil does seep to the surface as subject matter. Drawing on the evolving critical discourses around petrofiction and ecopoetics, this paper will identify some of the key works by poets, playwrights and novelists that deal directly with oil, focusing in particular on Ella Hickman's transhistorical play *Oil* (2016), Juliana's Spahr's poetry collection *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015) and Jennifer Haigh's intergenerational novel *Heat and Light* (2016). It will argue that these three texts are particularly compelling examples of how different types of literature can respond to the representational challenges posed by the ecology, economy and geology of oil, demonstrating that, in Graeme Macdonald's words, 'like oil itself, oil literature has significant global transportation routes, value changes, and multiple and uniform forms'.

Dr Sam Solnick is a Lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool where he is co-director of the Literature and Science Hub. He writes primarily on contemporary literature and the environmental humanities. His book *Poetry and the Anthropocene* was published by Routledge in 2017.

### **Experimental Writing**

**"Swanky aubergines": narrative voice, subjectivity and reification in Claire-Louise Bennett's *Pond* (2015)**

Daniel Barrow (Birkbeck, University of London)

Claire-Louise Bennett's 2015 collection of linked short stories, *Pond*, presents a study in tensions in narrative focalisation. The text alternates first-person monologues narrated by an isolated woman narrator with passages of intense free indirect discourse in which she seems to appear, seen from the outside: 'Removes hat and whispers something.' This oscillation of point of view shows an elective affinity with the claims of Roland Barthes and Lucien Goldmann claim that the techniques of focalisation in Alain Robbe-Grillet's fiction, focused on space and the externality of objects, was appropriate to a world dominated by the apparently autonomous objects of commodity culture. Indeed, Bennett's work arguably generates its narrative tensions in conversation with the late modernist fictions that Peter Boxall has argued inform the genealogy of 21st century fiction, in a moment governed by a form of simultaneous, digital time: Samuel Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Ann Quin and so on. This paper argues, through a close reading of Bennett's stories and drawing on work by Fredric Jameson, Jonathan Crary, Julia Jordan and Daniel Hartley, that these tensions organise the text's narrative structure and style, which counterposes a mobile and probing impersonality to an excessive and often paratactic subjective voice focused on disturbingly vivid objects ('swanky aubergines', 'high-gloss palazzo pants in tropic shades of green') but that struggles to articulate any movement of memory or narrative time. The paper will conclude with a few suggestions about what Bennett's work suggests for wider problems of subjectivity and narrative time in 21st century fiction.

Daniel Barrow is a PhD candidate at Birkbeck, University of London. He has also written for *The Wire*, *Sight and Sound*, *Los Angeles Review of Books* and others.

### **Oswald's 'tear in the veil': epiphany in *Woods etc.***

Joanne Dixon (Nottingham Trent University)

Epiphany in contemporary British poetry has received limited recent critical attention and is perceived reductively by some poets and critics as a uniform, coercive and teleological literary mode. Perloff (2012), for instance, expresses concern that rigidly linear epiphanies have become a mainstay of contemporary poetry. She is troubled by what she calls 'a tepid tolerance' for the fixed and contained sequence of experience: 'observation—triggering memory—insight'. This paper intervenes in these debates by suggesting that epiphany can still be a useful term in explorations of contemporary poetry. Drawing on the etymology of epiphany (Gk: epiphanaeia/phainein) as 'an appearing' or 'manifestation', this paper explores a selection of poems from Oswald's collection *Woods etc.* (2005) to suggest new ways of thinking about epiphany. In an interview with Rees-Jones (2013), Oswald recalls how 'The Greeks [...] thought of language as a veil which protects us from the brightness of things', adding that 'poetry is a tear in that veil'. When Oswald suggests that poetry has the capacity to reveal 'brightness', to make 'things' appear, to make them visible, her language is reminiscent of Schelling's definition of unheimlich as the 'name for everything that ought to have remained [...] secret and hidden but has come to light' (Freud, 'The Uncanny', 1919). What might an exploration of Oswald's 'tear in the veil' and the uncanny reveal about epiphany, and how might this help us to reassess epiphany in the contemporary context?

Dr Joanne Dixon is a poet, critic and Research Assistant from Nottingham Trent University, where she focuses on creative and critical theory and practice, and the poetry of Alice Oswald. Her poems have appeared in a variety of publications and her debut pamphlet, *A Woman in the Queue*, was published in 2016 (Melos Press).

### **Winning Experiments: Literary prize culture and the rise of women's experimental fiction**

Carly Robinson (Birkbeck, UoL)

This paper explores the recent increase in popularity of experimental women's fiction as an emerging

form of 'becoming-narratives' and the correlation of this popularity with the value bestowed by literary prize culture. I will be looking specifically at the prize-winning novels of Ali Smith, Nicola Barker and Eimear McBride as a development of modernism which engage the contemporary in a reflexive in-process perpetual becoming and provoke a new kind of visceral reading experience and philosophical response. Using the Deleuzo-Guattarian theory of becoming as my theoretical framework, I suggest the direction of women's contemporary experimental fiction is attuned to a more affective form, combining self-reflexive lines of questioning, socio-political commentary and accessible philosophical ideas bound up in readily available and easily readable fiction. My approach is to combine a reading of the Deleuzian theory of becoming through these experimental narratives with a view to assessing their impact on contemporary readers and how these readers respond to this challenging form of fiction. Looking specifically at how the language and social commentary of these novels have been received by the general reading public and the impact of literary prizes upon reader choices, I seek to understand how seemingly challenging narratives like these are read and understood by general readers outside of academic study and how these experimental techniques imbue the works with self-reflexive lines of questioning which capture the contemporary moment in a tangible reflection of the Now.

I completed my BA in European Philosophy and Literature with Women's Studies and my MA in Women's Studies at Anglia Ruskin University. I am currently a part time PhD at Birkbeck. My thesis explores the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of becoming with a view to deploying it as a model in the service of a progressive feminist politics within contemporary fiction.

### **The "Post" Aesthetics and Identity in Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* (2005).**

Jaroslav Kušník, (University of Prešov, Slovakia)

In his study of recent American fiction, "Speculative Realism and the Postrace Aesthetic in Contemporary American Fiction", Ramón Saldívar identifies a tendency in recent American literature which is, in his view, both developing and responding to several aspects of postmodern fiction. He uses the terms "post-postmodern" and "postrace" to refer to fiction which includes, in his view, Salvador Plascencia's novel *The People of Paper* as well. The novel is seemingly reminiscent of the love story which turns out to be a formal experiment both using and undermining postmodern and magic realist narrative techniques. In addition to this, however, in this novel Plascencia depicts various aspects of Mexican/Hispanic (American) culture which is treated in a different way than in traditional immigrant novels. This paper will analyze Plascencia's use and aesthetic response to postmodernism and postmodern vision of the world and the way cultural identity is reconsidered in the context of contemporary sensibility and the theories of the end of postmodernism such as digimodernism (Kirby) and postrace Aesthetic (Saldívar).

Jaroslav Kušník is Professor of American, British and Australian literature at the University of Prešov, Slovakia.. He is the author of *Poetika americkej postmodernej prózy (Richard Brautigan and Donald Barthelme)*[Poetics of American Postmodern Fiction: Richard Brautigan and Donald Barthelme]. Prešov, Slovakia: Impreso, 2001; *American Fiction: Modernism-Postmodernism, Popular Culture, and Metafiction*. Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem, 2005; *Australian Literature in Contexts*. Banská Bystrica, Slovakia: Trian, 2003; and *Postmodernism and After: New Sensibility, Media, Pop Culture, and Communication Technologies in Anglophone Literatures*. Nitra:ASPA, 2015.

## **Feminist Documents**

### **Mental Illness, Trauma, and Testimony in Elissa Washuta's *My Body is a Book of Rules***

Katrina Longhurst (University of Leeds)

Elissa Washuta's memoir *My Body is a Book of Rules* (2014) explores the entangled nature of her

experiences of rape, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, and her heritage as a member of the Cowlitz tribe. Formally experimental and disruptive, Washuta draws upon numerous intertextual and multimodal elements, including diary entries, interviews, diagnostic manuals, transcripts of text messages, and a hypothetical script for *Law & Order*, in order to piece together a testimony of her sexual assaults, and their inseparability from her mental illnesses and her ethnic identity. Throughout the memoir Washuta juxtaposes her life narrative with a 'Cascade Autobiography' that focuses on the historical traumas of her tribe and her contemporary experiences as a Native American. Drawing upon Leigh Gilmore's recent *Tainted Witness* (2017), which argues that autobiography provides a more flexible means of asserting self and challenging gendered violence than legal testimony, I will examine how Washuta reflects on her credibility as a witness writer and uses life writing as a restorative tool by which to work through herself to her experiences. This paper will analyse the creative strategies by which Washuta turns towards anti-coherence and is fuelled by, to borrow from Sara Ahmed, wilfulness and being a "feminist killjoy." I will argue that Washuta's dual tendencies towards provocation and reflection are intrinsically linked to issues of authority, truth, and reliability; all of which are implicitly gendered.

Katrina Longhurst is a 3rd year PhD candidate in the School of English at The University of Leeds. Based in the medical humanities, her thesis explores contemporary life writing about mental illness across various media. It analyses the critical strategies by which writers with experiences of mental illness construct and assert difference in their self-narratives.

### **"Slightly more mortal": The Body and Nomadic Subjectivity in Rachel Cusk**

Marli Roode (University of Liverpool)

In Rachel Cusk's recent experimental novels, *Outline* and *Transit*, the first volumes of a trilogy, characters present their oral histories to an elusive narrator, stories of divorce, the breakdown in family life, the concomitant rupture in reality that the narrator herself has recently experienced. This paper draws on Rosi Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjectivity to argue that these recent novels by Cusk enact the destruction of unitary visions of the subject as an autonomous entity through the invocation of a post-personal writing (and reading) mode. "She began to see herself as a shape, an outline, with all the detail filled in around it while the shape itself remained blank. Yet this shape, even while its content remained unknown, gave her (...) a sense of who she now was." The paper also considers the novels' silence on social and political issues with reference to the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of becoming-minoritarian, as well as embodiment in the novels, and goes on to reflect the author's artistic practise by considering the implications of nomadic theory for creative writing practitioners.

Marli Roode is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool. Her current research examines the structure of subjectivity in the (auto)fiction of Rachel Cusk and Chris Kraus. She is the author of a novel, *Call It Dog*, which was shortlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize.

### **What Happens When We Make Demands: Twenty-first-century Feminist Manifestos**

Jennifer Cooke (Loughborough University)

If some of the most influential, even notorious, manifestos of the latter half of the twentieth century were written by feminists, including Valerie Solanas' S.C.U.M. Manifesto and Donna Haraway's 'The Cyborg Manifesto', the twenty-first century has seen the manifesto continue to be employed by feminist thinkers and collectives. Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) closes with a Killjoy Manifesto and Jessa Crispin has recently published *Why I Am Not A Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (2017). There are also collective examples: the online 'Xenofeminism Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation' is an anti-naturalist call for feminists to think through the technoscientific innovations they need, rather than those provided by the marketplace, and the long 'No Manifesto' poem, co-written by an anonymous collective of women poets protesting about sexual harassment in poetry spaces and the gendered nature of poetry publishing,

experiments with the manifesto form through negation. Using these and other examples to offer a broad analysis of how twenty-first-century feminist manifestos differ from their predecessors, this paper is also interested in how—more troublingly—they repeat the same or in some cases even less radical demands. Manifestos offer a chance to take the temperature of the contemporary they address through the future they imagine. With the Harvey Weinstein revelations and #MeToo hashtag, feminist politics have gained great prominence of late, yet they also testify to how permeated our present is with misogyny, sexism, and inequality. What, I shall be asking, can twenty-first-century feminist manifestos tell us about how stuck feminism might be? This paper draws on work for a chapter for *New Feminist Studies: Twenty-first-century Critical Interventions*, ed. Jennifer Cooke (CUP, forthcoming).

Jennifer Cooke is Senior Lecturer in English at Loughborough University and chair of the Gendered Lives Research Group. She's editor of the book of essays *Scenes of Intimacy: Reading, Writing and Theorizing Contemporary Literature* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), and a special issue of *Textual Practice* on challenging intimacies and psychoanalysis (September 2013). She has just completed her second monograph, *The New Audacity: Contemporary Feminist Life-Writing*, and is editing *New Feminist Studies: Twenty-first-century Critical Interventions* (CUP, forthcoming). She is the Treasurer for BACLS.

### **Forms of Solidarity: Feminist Experiment and Political Resistance**

Georgina Colby (University of Westminster)

This paper will take up the first topic and will be on Caroline Bergvall's recent work *Ob My, Ob My* (2017) and Laynie Browne's *Solidarity Texts*, texts written for and after the Women's March on 21st January 2017. The paper is part of a larger project on experimental women's writing and forms of solidarity. The paper explores the relation between theories of feminist solidarity found in the works of feminist thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Sara Ahmed, Denise Riley, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Jodi Dean, alongside experiment with form in women's texts of resistance, and new activisms.

Georgina Colby is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Westminster, and author of *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible* (EUP, 2016). She is editor of *Reading Experimental Writing* (EUP, 2019), and is working on a monograph addressing the relationship between literary experiment, political activisms, and feminist forms of solidarity from 1970 to the present. She is a Director of S A L O N – LONDON.

## Formations of the Human

### **Geologies of the human: Lithic Temporalities in Contemporary Science Fiction and Experimental Music**

Rafael Lubner (King's College London)

The category of the human - its histories and construction - has become increasingly central to a raft of theoretical strands in recent years, appearing in discussions surrounding Critical Race Theory, Media Theory and Marxism. Theorists within this field often tie themselves to particular temporal forms when approaching the production of the human, privileging histories of conquest, enslavement and capital. While this work is clearly valuable, it often struggles to overcome what Sylvia Wynter terms “the coloniality of being”, due to its reliance on the methodologies and epistemologies of the West. This paper attempts to think beyond these approaches and the temporalities that adhere to them, by exploring understandings of humanness that are founded on the temporalities of the geological and the mineral. It uses the music and thinking of the contemporary experimental musician Elysia Crampton, N.K. Jemisin’s “The Broken Earth” series of novels, as well as recent theoretical work by Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Fred Moten and Christina Sharpe to interrogate how such histories of humanness can destabilise those of colonialism and capitalism. As Crampton explains, “to go further and consider ourselves on a geological

level ruptures hierarchies and taxonomical divides as we find ourselves already deeply enmeshed in the strangeness and vast timescales of the lithic.” By looking at how the geological and the mineral are figured in the works of these practitioners and theorists, I argue for an approach that privileges forms of history and humanness that are made illegible by the temporalities of capitalism and colonialism.

Rafael Lubner is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at King’s College London. His research focusses on articulations of humanness in contemporary literature. He teaches Literary Theory at King’s and writes music criticism for Tiny Mix Tapes.

### **Housing the Crisis: Precarious Homes in Contemporary Culture**

Emily Hogg (University of Southern Denmark)

What is a home for? As Susan Fraiman (*Extreme Domesticity*, 2017), amongst others, has recently argued, literary and cultural critics have often emphasized the oppressive ideological significance of home over its more diverse and unexpected material meanings. In this paper, I will argue that, if contemporary cultural texts can be crucial resources for exploring the diverse, creative possibilities of home, then they have an important political function in the contemporary moment. Housing has emerged as a central political struggle of our time. With the horror of the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, Britain’s ongoing housing crises and the housing policies which enabled them, became front-page news for a short period. But from the underlying issues are systemic and deep-rooted. In this paper, I will argue that housing provision in Britain is a crucial dimension of what Isabell Lorey (*State of Insecurity*, 2015) has described as precaritization as governmentality. I will then explore key moments from three contemporary texts: Laura Oldfield Ford’s zine collection *Savage Messiah* (2011), Mohsin Hamid’s novel *Exit West* (2017) and Andrea Luka Zimmerman’s film *Estate, A Reverie* (2015). I will argue that in these texts, housing is depicted as precarious, vulnerable, and a source of anxiety. They explore, variously, refugees’ housing in a near-future London, demolition of a housing estate, and gentrification. But, in the midst of housing crises, they also employ textual and visual strategies to reimagine home’s meanings, and defend its value in a precarious world.

I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Southern Denmark, where I work on contemporary literature, alcohol and precarity as part of Rita Felski’s Niels Bohr Professorship group, the Uses of Literature project, which is funded by the Danish National Research Foundation. I completed my PhD in English Literature at Queen Mary University of London in 2015.

### **Recycling, Racialized Labour, and Contemporary Migrant Fiction**

Christine Okoth (King’s College London)

This paper considers the representation of recycling in contemporary literary culture to suggest that critical responses to fiction about waste must take into account the status of labour performed *in* waste. This enables a better understanding of the relationship between recycling and migrant labour in liberal democracies. With reference to NoViolet Bulawayo’s novel *We Need New Names* this paper draws attention to liberal modes of erasure by thematising how humans become waste and how disposable persons, unlike recyclable waste, cannot be permanently reintegrated into cycles of production and circulation. In *We Need New Names*, liberalism’s inattention to the shape of potentially extractable material manifests in persons turning into the material they labour with and within so that they may be further mined and integrated. Drawing on this analysis, I consider the novel’s critical reception as an indicator of the reading public’s discomfort at being confronted with the effects of enacting extractive processes on populations and individual persons. Recycling performs the primary gestures of liberal democracy; the hope that everything, including waste, can be made purposeful with the use of the correct extractive tools. Building on Samantha MacBride’s critique of single-stream recycling as an example of ‘busy-ness’ where recycling’s value lies in the activity itself rather than any meaningful impact on the status quo and Mary

Douglas' notion of waste as 'matter out of place,' I propose that sustainability practices make actually existing racialized labour and the people that perform it invisible. In performing tasks that are supposedly superfluous – the sorting of waste, which consumer recycling seeks to erase – recycling workers make visible the limits of liberal integration.

Christine Okoth is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at King's College London. Her thesis entitled 'Writing Material: Extractive Reading and African Migrant Literature' investigates how contemporary fictions of migration are read as reproductive of U.S. national projects. She teaches Literary Theory and American Literature at King's.

## Haunting as Resistance in Contemporary Writing

### **'We must all learn to live together, the living and the dead': Achronological hauntings and post-postmodern narrative**

Katharine Harris (University of Sussex)

This paper analyses twenty-first-century historical fictions about ghosts, with reference to Jacques Derrida's and Peter Buse and Andrew Stott's works. The logic of Derridean haunted spectrality is ontologically uncertain and combines temporalities, as the anachronistic presence of ghosts performs active incursions from the past into the present (or textual present in the case of historical fictions). In this paper, I argue that this chronologically resistant structure of haunting is a useful metaphor and critical tool for understanding the way in which some contemporary historical fictions resist and struggle with the normative linearity of standard chronology. This is the product of a shifting relationship to narrative in the twenty-first-century, which I will argue is visible in certain historical fictions. So, for example, in films *The Others* and *The Awakening*, and the novel *Dark Matter*, this temporal logic of hauntings actually enables the coexistence of postmodern and what I call 'pre-postmodern' relationships to narrative and history. These texts' direct representations of achronological ghosts and haunting manifest a 'post-postmodern' response to postmodern deconstructions of historical narrative. Through analyses of the films and novel, I will propose that a post-postmodern relationship to history in narrative is implicitly and inevitably self-contradictory, insisting on certainty even as it relies on the uncertain ontological spaces of haunting. I will conclude with a brief gesture outward towards the wider political potential of this achronological haunted structure, with a consideration of how it connects to the works of Valerie Rohy and Elizabeth Freeman on non-linear queer time.

Katharine Harris was recently awarded her doctorate from the University of Sussex. Her thesis was entitled 'The neo-historical aesthetic: Mediations of historical narrative in post-postmodern fiction'. Her most recent publication is "'Part of the project of that book was not to be authentic": Neo-historical authenticity and its anachronisms in contemporary historical fiction', *Rethinking History* 21.2 (2017).

### **Occupying Ghosts**

David Hering (University of Liverpool)

Focusing primarily on Eugene Lim's novel *Dear Cyborgs* (2017), this paper seeks to investigate how the ghost or spectre might be theorised as a figure of anti-capital protest. By positioning Lim's novel alongside literature of the Occupy movement as well as theoretical works of 'spectrality', the paper also considers how this ghostly protestor might constitute a response to postmodern literary form.

David Hering is Lecturer and co-director of Centre for New and International Writing at the University of Liverpool. He is the author of *David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form* (2016). His writing has appeared in publications including *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Orbit* and *Critical Engagements*.

## **'A ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back': Virgilian Hauntings in the Later Poetry of Seamus Heaney**

Ian Hickey (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland)

This paper aims to shed light on the haunting presence of Virgil in the later poetry of Seamus Heaney. Virgil's absent presence has helped to shape and influence many works in the Heaney canon but this paper will solely focus on the Roman poet's presence in 'Bann Valley Eclogue', 'Virgil: Eclogue IX' and 'The Riverbank Field'. By using Jacques Derrida's notion of hauntology to view these works from a different angle, a series of spectral hauntings can be traced through the works. The etymology of the word itself, hauntology, can be traced to ontology as in French phonology the words "ontology" and "hauntology" sound strikingly similar. For Derrida, the spectre is not a physical being but has a non-present presence. The spectre cannot be seen but exists within, and haunts, the unconscious of the individual with Derrida noting that 'to be...means, for the same reason, to inherit' (Derrida 2006: 67). In this sense, Heaney has inherited certain aspects of Virgil's works in his later writings and both are fused together through the workings of the spectre. In doing so, Heaney locates himself within a wider European realm of hauntings similar to what he accomplished in North and the bog poems. The repetition of history and the universality of Irish identity will be explored through the Virgilian hauntings that exist within Heaney's poetry. What happens now, in the present, is a result of the haunting nature of the spectre within the works.

Ian Hickey is a Ph.D research student under the supervision of Dr. Eugene O'Brien in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. His current field placement is in Mary Immaculate College as a departmental assistant in the Department of English Language and Literature. He is interested in Modern Irish Poetry and Fiction, Irish Theatre, Hauntology and Literary Theory.

## Human and Nonhuman Nature

### **Shared and hefted lives in the twenty-first century shepherd's calendar**

Catherine Parry (University of Lincoln)

For humans, other animals, whether real or textual, are a complex composite of empirical and imagined features and functions, and human material and ethical engagements with animals are responses to this composition rather than to any 'pure' original creature. This paper takes up such a condition of human-animal relationships in explorations of twenty-first century 'shepherd's calendar' life-writing. Shepherds such as James Rebanks (*The Shepherd's Life*) and the doughty Amanda Owen (*A Year in the Life of the Yorkshire Shepherdess*) adopt and adapt a traditional form to create narratives of lives that are both structured by the demands and constraints of modern agriculture, and enmeshed in what they represent as the timeless annual cycle of farming their 'hefted' upland flocks. Like their sheep, Rebanks and Owen see themselves as 'hefted', attached, to their landscapes. Their sense of their own hefting proposes a shared human-ovine experience of upland life and its physical demands which, at the same time as it bespeaks an imaginative and romantic human relationship with a shepherd's way of life, also romanticises and shapes the lives and bodies of their sheep. For sheep, then, the imaginative world of a shepherd has material consequences. This paper explores the performance and representation of the relationship between autobiographical shepherd and domesticated livestock in the shepherd's calendar form, and the cultural location of such writings. It also considers the imbrication of land, sheep and shepherds, and the many other conditions that participate in shaping the lives and deaths of Britain's 33 million sheep.

Catherine Parry completed her Ph.D at the University of Lincoln in 2016. She is an Associate Lecturer at the same institution. She has recently published a monograph entitled *Other Animals in Twenty-First Century Fiction*, and is now researching life-writing by livestock farmers.

**‘Everything is slowly being killed’: Vulnerability, Animal Life, and Photography in Sara Baume’s *A Line Made by Walking***

Tim Baker (University of Aberdeen)

Sara Baume’s *A Line Made by Walking* was released to critical acclaim on 16 February, 2017. Although many of the novel’s reviewers note the complexity of the text, including the use of embedded photographs, none were alert to the significant differences between the British (Heinemann) and Irish (Tramp) editions, despite their simultaneous publication, while the American edition (Houghton Mifflin), released two months later, is even more radically altered. These differences, which radically affect the reader’s experience of the text, call into question the idea of an authoritative edition, even in the contemporary period. Yet while the publishing and editorial decisions leading to this unusual scenario are interesting in themselves, they also, if only coincidentally, illuminate the themes of the novel, which is largely concerned with the authority of the absent or remembered image or text. The novel revolves around its protagonist’s attempt to cope with her anxiety and depression by taking photographs of dead animals while simultaneously reflecting on other, more famous works of art (listed in the appendix, but not reproduced). As such, the tension between embedded photographs and absent artworks – and between word and image – is used to parallel similar tensions between human and animal life, rural and urban environments, and interior and exterior space. Exploring the novel’s appeal to absent referents, as well as its surprisingly convoluted publication history, illuminates its complicated approach to the development of empathy through artistic practice.

Timothy C. Baker is Senior Lecturer in Scottish and Contemporary Literature at the University of Aberdeen. He is the author most recently of *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition*, and is completing a monograph on the relation between language, suffering, and animality in contemporary fiction.

**Penetrating the “Pink Wasteland”: Gender and Environmentalism in Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang***

Coco d’Hont

More than forty years after its first publication, Edward Abbey’s 1975 novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* remains a major environmentalist text. The story, in which four ecoterrorist activists use sabotage techniques to protect their beloved Western landscape from industrial and commercial interference, has inspired real life movements such as Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front. However, the environmentalist project the novel describes is not as radical as it may appear at first sight. This paper argues that MWG’s message of ecoterrorism depends on the (re)construction of a rigid gender boundary which turns the American West into a feminine entity that can only be saved through masculine interference. The paper is an extension of my recent guest blog for U.S. Studies Online and explores in much more depth how the novel’s gendered descriptions of the Western landscape represent and interrogate how masculinity functions as a token of power in American culture. The novel is both anti-feminist backlash and feminist counter-argument, contrasts hegemonic masculinity with the multidimensional nature of real-life gender identities, and problematizes the reliance of environmentalist activism on stereotypical gender roles. The paper demonstrates how this work of fiction functions as a multifaceted reflection of its socio-cultural background and, through its reflection of extra-textual contradictions and complexities, allows for that their critical dissection.

Coco d'Hont is currently working on her monograph *Extreme States: The Evolution of American Transgressive Fiction 1960-2000*, to be published by Routledge in 2018. Her article on Marilyn Manson's music recently appeared in the *European Journal of American Studies*. Projects in progress include book chapters on transgressive horror, border masculinities, and Mary Harron's adaptation of American Psycho.

## Intersectional Ethics

### **Grammatical empathy: the conjugation of racial difference in the early work of David Foster Wallace**

Lola Boorman (University of York)

Many admirers of David Foster Wallace have had to uncomfortably confront his attitudes to race. Despite the maximalist range of his fiction, there are less than a handful of non-white characters, many of whom are treated in highly racialized ways, from the troubling collection of racial epithets uttered by Wallace's characters in *Infinite Jest*, its baffling 'Wardine' section written in insensitive dialect, and the racialization and sexualization of Ms. Chahla Neti-Neti in Wallace's unfinished novel *The Pale King*. Despite the criticism levelled against him little ink has been spilled in attempting to parse Wallace's complicated relationship to race beyond mere condemnation. This paper will argue that Wallace's attitudes towards race, while undoubtedly problematic, were central to the development of his aesthetic principles of communication, empathy, and sincerity. By examining *Signifying Rappers* (1989) and the 'Wardine' section (first written in 1986) as bridge texts between his earlier fiction and his magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*, I argue that Wallace's early experimentations with race were essential in the development of his critique of postmodernism and his move towards an aesthetic of empathy and sincerity, and, moreover, that this aesthetic exploration is derived from a complex philosophy of grammatical experimentation and a theory of language acquisition as a means of achieving linguistic identification as a way of getting outside one's own self-conscious world-view. In doing so, I link Wallace's work to a broader trend in the late-80s in which the grammatical was increasingly used as way of working through problems of American identity and intellectualism.

Lola is Wolfson scholar and PhD candidate at the University of York. She has recently completed a Fulbright scholarship at Stanford University, where she continued her work on the relationship between grammar and modern and contemporary American literature, focusing on the work of Gertrude Stein, Lydia Davis, and David Foster Wallace.

### **Race, class, and social abjection in the work of Sunjeev Sahota**

Phil O'Brien (University of Manchester)

This paper examines two novels by Sunjeev Sahota: *Ours are the Streets* (2011) and *The Year of the Runaways* (2015). Sahota's debut novel, *Ours are the Streets*, recounts the radicalisation of its first-person narrator: a young, working-class Muslim from Sheffield. It explores a search for identity and belonging while engaging with colonial history and the impact of deindustrialisation and precarious employment on a multicultural working-class community. Sahota's second book, *The Year of the Runaways*, depicts the experiences of 'illegal' immigrants working in Britain, examining, in turn, the global precariat and the formulation of 'abject' labour as a manifestation of the neoliberal economy. The crafting of the social abject to justify the inequality of contemporary capitalism, eliding the contradictions in its construction, will be one focus of my paper. Compellingly, what the figurations of work in Sahota's novels point towards are the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism; for example, there is a demand and need for migrant labour at the same time as there is a crafting and mobilising of a myth concerning the parasitic

immigrant. This is part of what Imogen Tyler has identified as a 'liberal paradox': the construction of the figure of the 'undesirable' migrant at the same time as the embrace of international capital. And, crucially, this is accompanied by a reliance on and exploitation of migrant labour. Therefore, my paper will explore how Sahota's texts illuminate an understanding of the intersections between race and class in twenty-first century Britain.

Phil O'Brien completed his PhD on class, neoliberalism, and twenty-first-century British fiction in 2016. He has written on Gordon Burn for *Textual Practice* and on 1930s fiction for *Literature and History*. He has forthcoming chapters in *Accelerated Times: British Literature in Transition* (CUP) and *Working-Class Writing: Theory & Practice* (Palgrave) and is editing an issue of *Key Words* on 'Race and Class'.

### **The Morally Dim Witted: Intersectional Politics in Zadie Smith's *NW***

Sara Upstone (Kingston University)

In his 2017 book *The Making of Black Lives Matter* (2017), Christopher Lebron speaks of what he calls the 'morally dim witted'. Cast in strategically anti-intellectual language, Lebron's critique is aimed not at the obvious white racist perpetrators of racism against African-Americans, but rather at white liberal intellectual elites that he identifies as unaware of their own place in the structural hierarchies which perpetuate contemporary inequalities. In this paper, I aim to apply Lebron's thinking to Zadie Smith's *NW*, a novel which serves to deconstruct single-issue politics and to advance instead the necessity for an intersectional movement which can only be successful if it encompasses gender, race, class, and interspecies perspectives, and which must be ethically thought as well as politically motivated. It is this complexity, I suggest, that drives what David James recognises in his essay 'Worlded Localisms: Cosmopolitics Writ Small' (2015) as the narrative ambivalence of *NW* compared to earlier work such as *White Teeth*: a position in which to identify in terms of a singular alliance or standpoint fails to account for the ethical need to recognise intersectional difference. In the wake of recent events such as Black Lives Matter, the Brexit vote, and the Grenfire Fire, I argue, the lesson offered by Smith's novel has become even more urgent. In conclusion, I will consider how such a philosophy offers guidance not only for our thinking about society in general, but also for our own academic enquiry.

Sara Upstone is Associate Professor of English Literature and Head of the Department of Humanities at Kingston University, London. She is the author of three monographs including *Rethinking Race and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction* (Routledge, 2016), three co-edited collections, and many other critical and creative writings. Her most recent publication is *Literary Theory: A Complete Introduction* (Hodder, 2017).

## [Marxist Literary Criticism in the Contemporary](#)

### **Kim Stanley Robinson: Revolutions in, against, and beyond capital**

Andrew Rowcroft (University of Lincoln)

This paper argues the centrality of dialectical thought procedures through an examination of the American science-fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson. Robinson is regarded as one of the best living science-fiction writer working today, winning numerous science-fiction awards and honours, among them the Hugo, Nebula, Locus, and John W. Campbell Memorial Award. In the first two decades of the new century he has already produced nine novels including *The Science in the Capital* Trilogy (2002-2007), *Galileo's Dream* (2009), *2312* (2012), *Shaman* (2013), *Aurora* (2015), and *New York: 2140* (2017). It is my argument here that both Robinson and Marx feature a specific kind of speculative problem solving distinct from other traditions of philosophical enquiry and science-fiction writing. They approach a problem in a markedly similar way: enumerating its elements, its ironies, contradictions, and its

complexities; confronting other theories and exploring their antinomies, before turning the problem into a solution which becomes a starting point for new research. Offering a reading of the *Mars Trilogy* (1993-1996) and *New York: 2140*, the paper explores the relationship between problem-solving, dialectics, literature, and science.

Andrew is a PhD student in English and Associate Lecturer at the University of Lincoln. He has just submitted his doctoral project which locates contemporary British and American fiction in relation to new forms of Marxist literary criticism. He has published on Thomas Pynchon, Jonathan Lethem, and edited a special issue journal on Marxism, literature, and culture in the 21st century, with the *OLH*.

### **Dissident Gardens, Contemporary Genre and Communist Historiography**

Elinor Taylor (University of Westminster)

This paper discusses Jonathan Lethem's 2013 novel *Dissident Gardens*, which traces the changing formations of radical American politics from Popular Front-era Communism to the Occupy movement of the last decade. The novel adopts a disjointed family saga structure that appears to allude to the mid-century progressive realism characteristic of the transnational movement Michael Denning calls the 'Novelists' International'; the allusion, however, is an intensely critical, even hostile one. The disastrous effects, personal and political, of the Hitler-Stalin pact and the cataclysm of 1956 on the Communist characters, while traced, are curiously overshadowed by a preoccupation with what is insistently presented as the cultural disaster of the Popular Front, when 'every formerly sharp-eyed urbanist went chasing after some oil-rigging cowboy with charcoal and a sketch-pad, or shoved a reel recorder under the nose of some illiterate sharecropper clutching a one-string guitar'. While the novel presents the Popular Front as originating a repressive cultural pastoralism, always out of step with history, persistently re-emerging in images of 'dungarees and dustbowl heroes', it nonetheless holds to a certain pastoralism of its own, as suggested by its title. This paper considers the question of genre, and specifically of the pastoral, as a way of thinking through not only the historiographical paradoxes of 20th century communism itself, but also the possibility of a renewed Marxist criticism of the historical novel.

Elinor Taylor is a lecturer at the University of Westminster. She's the author of *The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934-1940* published by Brill, as well as of various articles on communist writers, and a member of the executive committee of the Raymond Williams Society.

### **Impersonality as Resistance in Contemporary South African Fiction**

Daniel Hartley (University of Leeds)

This paper argues that literary impersonality, traditionally associated with a Eurocentric conception of high modernism, is best framed as a mediated response to the 'impersonal domination' of capital. It aims to challenge dominant conceptions of literary impersonality by suggesting its mimetic affinities with the impersonality of capital itself as well as bringing to light its critical potential as a rejection of the modes of personhood that have historically proved conducive to capital accumulation. In doing so, I question the supposed 'structural indifference of capitalism to extra-economic identities' propounded by scholars such as Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995: 267) by indicating the combined and uneven imbrication of 'impersonal domination' with wider, complex socio-cultural processes of personification (from 'pre-capitalist' tribal roles to colonial juridical classifications; from the caste system to human rights and solidarity). These latter, I argue, have both enabled and challenged the universalisation of capital, depending upon the specific historical and political conjuncture. Focussing on contemporary post-apartheid South African fiction, I indicate the ways in which writers such as J. M. Coetzee and S. J. Naudé have adopted impersonality as an ethico-political and literary principle to challenge the rule of neoliberal capital whilst symbolically mediating the traumatic legacies of apartheid.

Daniel Hartley is a Leverhulme Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Leeds. As of September he will be Assistant Professor in World Literatures in English at Durham University. He is the author of *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (2017) and has published widely on Marxist theory and contemporary literature.

## Media Infrastructure and Literary Aesthetics

### **Viral Gateways and Social Media Portals: Technology, Migration, and Genre in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West***

Emily Horton (Brunel University)

Anxieties regarding global capital's spectral mutability, flux, and transformation are at the heart of two postmillennial novels: Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* (2004) and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017). Both explore contemporary migration in relation to transnational electronic communications, making evident the migrant's vulnerability within emergent technology. In so doing, the novels offer, on the one hand, a critical parody of corporate ethical bankruptcy, and on the other, a dystopian vision of migratory suffering and loss. Nevertheless, in each case the texts also explore transgressive possibilities opened up by global technology, negotiating generic frameworks to navigate alternative viewpoints electronically facilitated. In working with sci fi, Gothic, and fantasy devices, these novels call to attention global technology's deviant potentials, stepping outside social realism's restrictive boundaries to envision alternate worlds. In this paper, I seek to explore this understanding, considering in particular genre and technology's joint importance, as a way of both of identifying invisible subaltern presences concealed beneath global capitalist spectacle and of enabling vernacular cosmopolitanisms more reflective of modern diasporic experience.

Emily Horton is a visiting lecturer in English Literature at Brunel University. Her research interests include contemporary British and American fiction, specializing in trauma fiction; genre and popular fiction; and fictional explorations of globalization and cosmopolitanism. Her first monograph, *Contemporary Crisis Fictions*, was published with Palgrave Macmillan in 2014. She has also co-edited two volumes: *The 1980s: A Decade in Contemporary British Fiction* (Continuum, 2014); and *Ali Smith* (Continuum, 2013).

### **'International Day of Telephones': Barghouti, Derrida and Calling Jerusalem**

Sarah Jackson (Nottingham Trent University)

Arriving at the banks of the Jordan River and waiting for permission to cross the bridge into Palestine, Mourid Barghouti writes in *I Saw Ramallah* (2000): 'There is very little water under the bridge. Water without water'. Recalling Derrida's use of the Blanchotian syntagma of 'X sans X', Barghouti's memoir of exile is structured by an impossible logic: for the Palestinian, this is place without place, home without home, calling without calling. For although Barghouti tells his friend in the memoir, "'Today is the international day of telephones'", the lines of communication within and between communities are crossed, complicated, very often cut entirely, and the oppressive religious, political and geographical boundaries are not only mirrored but also significantly extended through the telecommunication infrastructure in the occupied territories. Drawing on research into mobile phone networks in the region by Helga Tawil-Souri (2013, 2015), this paper explores the literary, cultural and political implications of telephony in Israel-Palestine. Picking up the telephone in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* (2000), *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* (2011) and *Midnight and Other Poems* (2008), alongside Jacques Derrida's 'Avowing – The Impossible' (1998), this paper explores the ways in which Israeli control of airspace, infrastructure, and cellular networks contribute to Eyal Weizman's model of the vertical architecture of the state – how, in effect, using the telephone in Palestine so often equates to calling without calling.

Sarah Jackson's publications include *Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary Writing* (2015) and *Pelt* (2012), which won the Seamus Heaney Prize and was longlisted for the Guardian First Book Award. She is a BBC/AHRC New Generation Thinker and has been awarded an AHRC Leadership Fellows award for her current project, *Crossed Wires: Literature and Telephony*.

### **Glitch Myths: Narrativizing Error in the Video Game Novel**

Doug Stark (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

Contemporary approaches towards the glitch in new media and game studies have largely focused on art that “aestheticizes the glitch” (Krapp) and/or the glitch’s role in post-digital aesthetics (Apperly). For the post-digital movement, glitches and their imitations hold value as traces of subversion. Certainly, to reflect on the glitch is to reflect on the power of interruptive, liminal moments in systems. Often overlooked, however, is the commodification and systematisation of glitch development. The glitch’s very essence of error is at stake. But can we tell the difference between error and image? As Rosa Menkman delineates in her “Glitch Studies Manifesto,” it is ultimately the subject that decides how glitches are understood and remembered. So how to influence the subject’s interpretive faculties? I propose that scholars, creatives, and players can generate new mythologies around glitch moments by telling stories about making and discovery. Narrativized glitch moments are thus historicised in ways that maintain their transgressive power. Through a digital presentation incorporating my own visual and sonic distortions, I provide an introduction to the glitch in post-digital aesthetics and video games. This first part of the paper is a simultaneous praxis of and preface to glitch narrativization. The following discussion of Austin Grossman’s *You*, a fiction based on experiences in the video game development industry, allows a consideration of the video game novel as a contributor to the glitch mythos. The narrative follows a developer’s attempts to finish a franchise-defining game terrorised by a destructive glitch that ironically makes the game successful.

Doug Stark is a Ph.D. student in the English program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He did his prior degrees at Loughborough University and is happy to be back consuming Imago food again. He is currently interested in theorizing affective relationships with digital technologies and often finds a home in the field broadly conceived as game studies.

### **‘Transcendent Ethereality and Complex Materiality’: J.R. Carpenter’s *The Gathering Cloud***

Jess Oliver (University of Sussex)

J.R. Carpenter’s project *The Gathering Cloud* takes its form from its nebulous subject – ‘the cloud’: presenting research on climate change, meteorological history and criticism through poetic fragments, essay, photography and digital collage, described by Jussi Parikka as ‘a condensation of media history and a comment of the current environmental weight of clouds.’ Carpenter’s project gestures towards the possibilities of the hybrid text now in investigating obsolescence, waste and the persistence of the material in technology’s aspirations towards disembodiment. This paper explores current research on data storage and its aesthetic impact using the work of Seb Franklin and Alison Carruth, drawing out what Franklin calls the ‘transcendent ethereality and complex materiality’ of the drive towards cloud storage, highlighted in Carpenter’s work.

Jess Oliver is a doctoral researcher and associate tutor at the University of Sussex. Jess is completing her thesis: ‘The Raft, the Ladder, the Transitional Space, the Moratorium...’: Digital Interventions in Twenty-First-Century Private and Public Lives’, which explores novelistic responses to connectivity and dataism in the early 21st century. She is a co-coordinator of the Artificial Lives project, a joint venture between the University of Sussex and the University of California, Riverside.

## National Encounters

### **Internal Instabilities: Nationalism and India's 'Northeast'**

Anjali Daimari (Department of English, Gauhati University)

This paper would look into Nationalism in the context of Northeast India which offers an alternative idiom in so far as any discussion on the idea of nation is concerned. Nationalism in the Indian context begins with the Tagore-Gandhi take on Nationalism, a homogenous idea which was the need of the time to unite the people against the throes of British colonialism. It was B.R. Ambedkar who first posed the issues of internal instability within that idea of Nationalism. As such, the idea of nation is inherent with its internal instabilities. The idea of nation undergoes periodic interventions contingent upon the political climate. After Independence, this established idea of nation has been questioned from multiple sites. Many groups within Northeast India found itself absent in the narrative of nation. Nagaland for instance, wanted secessionism. There was tentativeness on the part of the Indian nation to identify her own people as her citizens. The Naga case opened up possibilities of reconstructing the idea of nation with an alternative idiom. The Nagas did not conform to any one idea of Indian nation. As such they offered crises for the emerging nation and a new narrative of nation emerged, which is multivalent and decentred. This paper is thus an attempt to explore the internal instabilities within the idea of nation and nationalism through a reading of Easterine Kire's *Mari* (2010) and Bitter Wormwood (2011). For the theoretical framework of the proposed reading I would refer to Sanjoy Hazarika's *Strangers of the Mist* (1994) and Udayon Misra's *The Periphery Strikes Back* (2000).

Anjali Daimari is a Professor in the Department of English, Gauhati University. She teaches African Fiction in English, Life Writing, 18th Century Prose, 19th Century Fiction, Contemporary South Asian Fiction. Her other areas of interest include Northeast Literature, Women's Studies and Witchcraft Studies. Her latest publication is "Towards a Postcolonial Ecocriticism: A Reading of Mamang Dai's Legends of Pensam" (2017).

### **Liberal Hawks: Homeland and the War on Terror.**

Toby Manning (Independent Researcher)

Over its seven seasons, US television drama *Homeland* has accurately tracked the course and discourse of the War on Terror. This paper argues that while the show is not uncritical of the US state – especially in its first and sixth seasons – both its criticism and its overarching ideology can be characterised as 'liberal hawk'. Such an ideology suffuses the American political system: wishing to be regarded as humanist in its treatment of the enemy 'other' and able to admit culpability, while simultaneously ruthless in the defence of American 'freedom' and concomitant foreign intervention. Within this, if CIA operative, Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) is a parody of American foreign policy – paranoid, psychotic, trigger-happy, ever ready to leap into bed with unsavoury types – then her calm, paternal boss, Saul Berenson (Mandy Patinkin), reassures the viewer that, in US foreign policy, behind every Mathison, there is a Berenson, a sane, decent, civilised consciousness. Yet the narrative thrust of every season has been that Mathison's paranoid theories are actually true and her psychotic methods yield results, meaning Saul's scepticism ultimately always shifts to endorsement. In this way, liberal doubts and misgivings about US policy in the War on Terror are rehearsed, given oxygen, before a hawk agenda is reasserted, doubt stifled without being addressed.

In addition, this liberal impulse of *Homeland* positions itself within a liberal humanist tradition in two senses. First, drawing directly on John le Carré, *Homeland* legitimates itself via a semi-canonical literary 'brand'; second, both le Carré and his character, George Smiley (on whom Berenson is based) are perceived as paradigmatic of liberal approaches to global conflict.

Toby Manning worked for many years as an arts journalist and has subsequently taught at Birmingham, Brunel and Queen Mary universities. He also works in further education. His monograph, 'John le Carré and the Cold War', is out now via Bloomsbury Academic. He is currently working on a chapter for a book on The Velvet Underground and on a second monograph on Cold War Culture.

**'Don't fool yourselves. This is the story of the complete lack of nationalism!': Processional Contemporaneity of Jan Fabre's Carnival Parades moving towards the re-invention of Belgian Nationality in Belgian Rules/Belgium Rules (2017)**

Sylvia Solakidi (University of Surrey)

The rise of nationalism is dramatically experienced in Flanders, Jan Fabre's homeland. *Belgian Rules/Belgium Rules* transforms Belgian carnival parades into intersecting processions of paintings, dances, theatrical/political monologues and three sets of rules ('it is forbidden', 'it is obliged', 'it is possible'), directed towards the re-invention of Belgium. Belgium is identified with theatre, since the Revolution of 1830 broke out in theatre. This study aims at demonstrating theatre's political potential through the fluid concept of procession, expressing contemporaneity not as concomitance but as a hybrid temporal notion (Kierkegaard, Agamben) beginning from the historical rise of nationalism and directed towards Belgium's theatrical re-invention beyond nationalism. Based on introvert Belgian hedgehogs and naughty, migrant pigeons corresponding to parades' order and carnival's anarchy, the concepts of 'autoethnology' as self-reflection and 'alloethnology' as encounter with alterity (Augé), explore contemporaneity as 'foefelen' (disobedience in Flemish), connected to carnival's quest for resistance and identity (Tancons). Based on the monologue 'Theatre of the image' and processions as 'kinesis versus poesis' (Conquergood), Fabre's processions are approached as images-in-the-making. Their contemporaneity of 'foefelen' is thematized through Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory of meaning: 'sedimentation' of existing meaning, (nationalism/imposed rules), 'coherent deformation', as its transformation towards rules of potentiality ('it is possible'), and 'advent', as a promise of a future as 'inauguration' (Augé) of Belgium beyond nationalism. Since Belgium and theatre are identical, performers and audience become nationals of theatre/Belgium as they join and transform processions through the contemporaneity of 'foefelen' towards a nation both local and global, created and inhabited in the theatre.

My name is Sylvia Solakidi, I have a background in visual and performing arts and I am at the second year of a TECHNE-funded PhD at the University of Surrey, focusing on durational theatre as a site of exploration of contemporaneity. Jan Fabre's work is at the centre of my research.

**British Cosmopolitanism in Alan Hollinghurst's Fiction**

José Yebra (University of Zaragoza)

The author of six novels so far, Alan Hollinghurst has become one of the main representatives of British gay fiction and a leading voice in Britain's literary scene. Hollinghurst's intertextual play with the British canon accounts for the undeniable Britishness of his novels, from his debut *The Swimming-pool Library* (1988) to the more recent *The Sparsholt's Affair* (2017). It is my contention in this paper that the revisionist impulse behind Hollinghurst's works results in a kind of fiction that bridges the hiatus between the local and cosmopolitan. In other words, his fiction is illustrative of the glocal, the combination of the local and the global that characterizes current transculturalism. His narratives are built upon intertextual encounters with the canon, but also with the Other and, as part of this double move towards the familiar and the strange, what makes his protagonists (Charles Nantwich, Will Beckwith or Edward Manners, among others) distinctively British can also be said to result from an ethical encounter with Otherness — particularly other races, cultures and social classes. The implications of these encounters with the Other, the stranger, the different, will be explored from the perspective of Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of alterity, as a key part of a wider approach to the novels based on Kwame Anthony Appiah's account of cosmopolitanism as a process of sharing (2006).

José M. Yebra is a lecturer in English at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). He has widely published and delivered papers on contemporary British literature, particularly on Alan Hollinghurst, Colm Tóibín and Will Self. He is the member of a research team and project on contemporary literature in English funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Competitiveness.

## Negative Mobilities, or Precarity and Unprecarity

### **Regarding Homelessness: Berger's *King: A Street Story* and McGregor's *Even The Dogs***

Joseph Anderton (Birmingham City University)

According to the housing and homelessness charity Shelter's late 2017 figures, one in 200 people are homeless, sleeping rough or living in inadequate housing. The organisation Homeless Link calculates that these conditions have risen by over 50% since 2010, around the time journalist Ben Myers wrote a books blog in *The Guardian* questioning whether an 'authentic literature of the homeless' exists. With food and shelter an exigent concern, homeless people are arguably without the energy and space (or 'room', to echo Virginia Woolf) to tell their own stories. Indeed, in a recent literature review including Richard Jenkin's *Social Identity* (1996), one commentator queries whether 'self-identity fixation is something everyone equally takes part in; that those who have more pressing issues to worry about simply do not have time to reflect on who they are'. Jon McGregor's 2010 novel *Even The Dogs* coincides with these narrative vacancies and identity blanks by revealing the necessity of noticing vulnerability; having the awareness to recognise unspoken narratives, as the urban ghosts (and perhaps dogs) do in this tale. John Berger's earlier 1998 novel, *King: A Street Story*, is a pertinent antecedent that implies and complicates these deficiencies, by having a nonhuman animal witness and narrate the lives of homeless people. This paper will develop a theory of 'regard' for occluded marginal narratives in Berger and McGregor's novels, noting the acts of attention required to divulge and value the vulnerable life subsisting all around.

Joseph Anderton is a Lecturer in English Literature and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. His AHRC-funded doctoral studies at the University of Nottingham resulted in the monograph, *Beckett's Creatures: Art of Failure after the Holocaust* (Bloomsbury, 2016), which considers conceptions of the 'creature' and 'creaturely life' as they appear in Samuel Beckett's literature and drama.

### **Working Class Literature: From haunting through refusal to (re)invention**

Martin Goodhead (Keele University)

The paper will first briefly outline 'crises' of working-class' future and recent revivals of class-inflected political imaginaries under both Corbynism and reactionary-populism, as well as discussing recent automatism-identified criticism by Del Valle Alcala (2016) and the sociological work on automatism by Skeggs et al (2013). It will then proceed to set out homelessness in its myriad forms as emblematic of 'working-class'; a lived condition stemming from social precarity, a direct or indirect effect of refusal, and a hauntology-inflected figuration of 'unhomeliness' or partial-estrangement from historical-places for subjects. The paper will go on to identify such intertwined levels of homelessness within two contemporary novels, Lisa Blower's *Sitting Ducks* (2016) and Ross Raisin's *Waterline* (2011) - contextualised with passing reference to recent novels by Anthony Cartwright and Jon McGregor. It will see withdrawal there not just as a zero-level subjectivity enacted through refusal but as re-invoking a historically creative working-class consciousness, in line with the automatist mission of desire released without institutional mediation. Haunting objects within *Sitting Ducks* will be read as historically formed by craft-labour and the work of the imagination alike, with their affective import (re)born through creative memory-work which traverses melancholia or refusal; in *Waterline*, after forsaking the oppressive proximity of memory-saturated objects/places, a sense of the lost working-class community is partially

regained on the streets. Desire will thus be seen as that in need of invention but as also summoned, through material-cultural accrual (with history thus acting as haunting and 'possession' alike), towards remaking social life.

A 1st year Phd candidate at Keele, supervised by Nicholas Bentley and Ceri Morgan, Martin is researching 'Versions of Working-Class Subjectivity within Contemporary English Literature'. He completed an English MA at Keele (2017), with a thesis on 'Residual and Emergent Practices in Sitting Ducks, Lionel Asbo and Iron Towns', after studying Film Journalism (Glasgow MLitt) and reading English (MA Oxon).

### **Doomed to the Road: Negative Mobility and Transnationalism in Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach***

Grazia Micheli (University of Nottingham)

Ours is a century of increased mobility and interconnection: borders are crossed and re-crossed and transnational links between different and distant areas of the world have intensified. "Globalization' is on everybody's lips" (Bauman 1) and travelling is within everyone's reach, a clichéd idea which, in a Western context, evokes images of freedom and self-realisation. From *Heart of Darkness* to *On the Road*, Western narratives of mobility have variously celebrated this concept. Yet immigrants' tales can uncover the dark, alienating side of mobility. Through an analysis of *Mulberry and Peach* (1998 [1976]) by Asian American writer Hualing Nieh, I emphasise the negative outcomes of forced mobility and transnationalism. The protagonist, Mulberry, is a Chinese refugee who relocates across China, Taiwan, and the United States to escape war as well as male and institutional violence. If by "transnationalism" we mean "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Glick Schiller et al. 48), in *Mulberry and Peach* the author depicts a negative transnationalism. Placed in a transnational web against her will, Mulberry refuses to establish links with any nation as both China and the United States are fraught with violence. She is therefore doomed to wander perpetually and, at the same time, she is trapped in a frightening in-between space that causes "a vertiginous unbalancing of life and self" (Roberson 11). She indeed develops a multiple personality disorder which will haunt her for the rest of her life.

Grazia Micheli is a PhD student in American Studies at the University of Nottingham. She studied Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Padova, the University of Southampton, and Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3. Her PhD project explores concepts of mobility, border crossing, and transnationalism in contemporary Asian American literature. Her research interests include immigrant, women's, and post-colonial literature.

### Neoliberal Subjects

#### **Out of Time: Ageing Women and the Contemporary in Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone***

Siân Adiseshiah (Loughborough University)

The contemporary as category or concept is frequently discussed in metaphorical terms that align it with early phases of the life course. Scholarship on contemporary writing often emphasises how contemporary texts are finding new ways of expressing (new) things, this newness inflected with a set of associations often aligned with youthfulness than old age. To be contemporary – as a text or as a subject – is somehow to mediate the ways in which our current moments are urging us into new futures. This conception of the contemporary has something in common with the mobile, self-scripting, and future-oriented neoliberal subject, a classed and gendered construction that is also framed in ageist terms. Caryl Churchill's play *Escaped Alone*, which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in early 2016, features a character list of four women, who, the stage directions state, are 'all at least seventy'. These women are in

some ways the familiar untimely figures of old age. They are the (anachronistic) background, who (fittingly) sit in ‘Sally’s backyard’. In part, they serve as framing for the proper subject of the play: the absurd catastrophe of the contemporary geopolitical moment represented in strikingly, formally experimental dramaturgical terms. Yet, these older women simultaneously press at the edges of their inscription as background in a number of ways. This paper will focus specifically on how the figure of the untimely ageing woman – often invisible, occluded or normatively reproduced in ageist ways – is reframed in *Escaped Alone* to disrupt normative notions of older age, ageing women, and concepts of the contemporary.

Siân Adiseshiah is Senior Lecturer in English and Drama at Loughborough University. She is author of *Churchill’s Socialism: Political Resistance in the Plays of Caryl Churchill* (CSP, 2009), co-editor of *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now* (Palgrave 2013) and co-editor of *Twenty-First Century Drama: What Happens Now* (Palgrave, 2016). She is currently writing a monograph with the title *Utopian Drama: In Search of a Genre* (Methuen Bloomsbury, 2020) and co-editing *debbie tucker green: Critical Perspectives* (Palgrave, 2019).

### **Domestic Space and Postfeminist Daughters in Anne Enright’s *The Green Road***

Dearbhaile Houston (Trinity College Dublin)

Through an analysis of Irish writer Anne Enright’s 2015 novel, *The Green Road*, this paper explores contemporary Irish women’s experience of domestic space and postfeminist conceptions of domesticity. Following the timeframe of the novel, this paper maps out the changing conception of home and domesticity in Ireland from the 1980s to the early 2000s’ Celtic Tiger period by incorporating postfeminist cultural theory with Gaston Bachelard’s theory of ‘felicitous space’ as outlined in his seminal work *The Poetics of Space* (1958). Beginning with a brief overview of cultural and historical discourses surrounding the Irish home and domesticity during this time period, the paper follows on with an examination of various domestic spaces from the point of view of the novel’s ‘postfeminist’ daughters, Constance and Hannah Madigan. Marrying a close reading of Enright’s novel with a critique of postfeminist culture and a Bachelardian analysis, this paper illustrates that while Irish women’s experience of domestic space may appear to have moved on from a mandate of patriarchal State-Church control to being regarded as a space of agency in the Celtic Tiger era, factors such as the neoliberal commodification of housing and homes, postfeminist culture’s visions of a ‘new’ domesticity, and a still-gendered public/private dichotomy complicate the idea of the contemporary Irish home as a felicitous space. This paper ultimately seeks to address the future of Irish women’s relationship to domestic space after the failure of postfeminist domesticity during the Celtic Tiger and in light of the current housing crisis in Ireland.

Dearbhaile Houston is a current PhD researcher at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. Her research is concerned with representations of domestic spaces in contemporary women’s fiction since 1980, including the work of Lorrie Moore, Alice Munro, and Anne Enright.

### **Sex work, globalization and fiction**

Liam Connell (University of Brighton)

The representation of sex workers has usually seen the sex worker as a kind of boundary. Most notably, as a form of female labour that transforms the work of social reproduction into economic exchange, sex work repeatedly forms a kind of limit along the borders between the public and the private, between labour power and unpaid work, between legitimate and illegitimate forms of desire. In the era of globalization the idea of the trafficked sex worker has introduced a further border into this framing. Although the phenomenon of trafficking remains contested within feminist studies, the concept has had implications for fictional representations of sex work. In contemporary fiction, sex work has increasingly come to be equated with foreignness and the sexual economy to be represented as an illicit mirror of the

global economy. In this paper, I want to explore recent fictional representations of sex work to examine the significance of this development. This will give especial attention to the relationship between the foreign sex worker and the political border as a way of exploring how borders are constituted in the bodies of those who cross. I argue that by representing sex work as a synecdoche for larger patterns of global exchange, this depiction continues a pattern of representation in which the sex worker functions as a cypher for other processes and through which the particularities and agency of sex work is lost.

Liam Connell teaches English Literature at the University of Brighton. His publications include *Precarious Labour and the Contemporary Novel* (2017) and the editor of *Literature and Globalization: a Reader* (2010).

## Poetry as Resistant Form

### **‘I work to earth my heart’: purpose, labour and (re)production in the poetry of Denise Riley and Andrea Brady**

Helen Charman (University of Cambridge)

‘More limp puns abound. You conceived the child, but you can’t conceive of its death’. Here, in *Time Lived, Without Its Flow* and its accompanying elegy ‘A Part Song’ (2012), Denise Riley tries to articulate the difficulty of expressing maternal grief. This paper reads Riley’s elegies alongside Andrea Brady’s *Mutability: Scripts for Infancy* (2013)— an account of the birth of her daughter— and the explicitly political ‘A Pinch of Salt’ (2017): four texts that function as sites of convergence for the work of the parent, the work of the poet and the literary product itself. In doing so, it will extend Jahan Ramazani’s ‘economic substructure’ of elegy to the transactional, transgressive character inherent to all reproductive writing. These texts move away from the Marxist basis of both writers’ early theoretical and lyric work, but their consideration of reproductive and artistic labour is intertwined with an increasingly pressing revolutionary imperative. ‘A Part Song’ was republished in Riley’s 2016 collection *Say Something Back*: the final section of the paper will read republication as a form of reproduction. If Riley’s reflexive elegy relies upon consuming its own vocabulary, what changes when the poem is placed in new surroundings? How does this relate to Brady’s move from personal questions of birth and productivity in *Mutability* to her mention of the fight for reproductive rights in ‘A Pinch of Salt’?

Helen Charman is a PhD student at Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge. Her doctoral research focuses on the transactions of maternal sacrifice that underpin the narrative structures of George Eliot and George Moore’s fiction. Alongside her research, she teaches undergraduates Practical Criticism and supervises dissertations on contemporary poetry.

### **‘What time is it O’Clock?’ Mastering time and temporality in the Poetry of Susan Howe**

Rebecca Cullen (Nottingham Trent University)

In *Lyric Time* (1979), Sharon Cameron argues that poetry can ‘push its way into the dimensions of the moment, pry apart its walls and reveal the discovered space there to be as complex as the long corridors of historical or narrative time.’ Drawing on literary and critical theory, this paper explores the relationship between contemporary poetry and time. Mark Currie (2010) highlights the convergence of A-series theories of time and B-series notions of temporality, observing a resonance with the objectivity of text and the subjectivity of reading literary fiction. In *On Poetry* (2012), Glyn Maxwell states ‘you master form you master time’, connecting the mastery of poetic form and the mastery of time. Summarising these approaches, I propose that theoretical insights do not fully express time and temporality in a poem, which appear to resist mastery. Following Evans in *The Structure of Time* (2003), the paper presents a model for literary time based on movement and substance in language. Asking Hélène Cixous’s question: ‘What time

is it O’Clock?’ in the work of contemporary poet Susan Howe, I examine how time moves in her poems, and what that time might be made of. Referring to Cixous’s idea of ‘before time’, the paper considers whether it is possible – or desirable – to master time, suggesting that in the contemporary poem, time is unmastered.

Rebecca Cullen is in the final stages of her thesis ‘Mastering Time: Time and Temporality in Contemporary Poetry’. Her creative and critical PhD at Nottingham Trent University is funded by the AHRC-Midlands3Cities Doctoral Training Partnership. Her poetry appears in Carcanet’s *New Poetries VII* (2018). In 2016, she was the second poet-in-residence at Newstead Abbey, ancestral home of George Gordon, Lord Byron.

### **The Saddest of Formalisms: Acadamese in Contemporary Anglophone Poetry**

Hugh Foley (University of Liverpool)

In this paper I intend to discuss the use of a kind of poetic diction which I am calling acadamese. That is to say, I will examine poets’ use of a register which seems to belong to the world of academic literary criticism, particularly of the kind influenced by what is often called Theory. I will situate the usage of an ‘academic’ style of writing, and of academic ‘jargon’ in contemporary poetry within two mutually constitutive debates. One of these is a debate about the role the academy plays in constructing the ‘subject’ of lyric poetry. The other is about the kind of knowledge produced by literary studies, and literature itself. I will take several examples from across different schools of contemporary poetry and ask the question what is language of this kind doing here, and why have poets been, arguably, increasingly likely to use language recognisable as the argot of the academic humanities in their poems? I want to suggest that the obvious answer: that this language reflects poetry’s total absorption by English and Creative Writing departments is only partially true, and obscures a more interesting truth about what many contemporary poets are attempting when they use this language in their work. They are, rather than writing poems symptomatic of their positions within academic institutions, often successfully addressing themselves to the question of how a poem might exceed its context, represent more than the time of its writing, and how, by analogy, an individual might be more than simply the product of the institutional forces that shape them.

Hugh Foley is a lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool

### **Political Efficacy and the Novel**

#### **Cultural Trauma & Political Solidarity: The Representation & Reconfiguration of the 1984/5 Miners’ Strike in the Twenty-First Century.**

Jon Begley (Bishop Grosseteste University Lincoln)

This paper addresses a range of twenty-first century representations of the 1984/5 Miners’ Strike and explores the reasons behind the conflict’s continuing, and intensifying, cultural and political resonance. It will explore the idea that recent representations are underpinned by the processes of cultural trauma; that the strike has come to be seen as a moment of communal rupture that demands the persistent re-visitation and revision of its collective memory. It identifies two strands of creative response to the ‘open wound’ of the strike: the first focusses upon novels that use aspects of noir and detective fiction to instigate metaphorical patterns of re-emergence and reinvestigation, most notably in the occult style of David Peace’s *GB84*, but also in Val McDermid’s *A Darker Domain* (2008) and John Harvey’s *Darkness, Darkness* (2014). A second, more multifaceted strand relates to images of community and solidarity that seek to reconfigure narratives of traumatic defeat by symbolically re-contesting the values and legacies of Thatcherism. These range from images of family in *Shafted* (2016) and *Queen Coal* (2014); women’s

activism in *Tinned Goods* (2016), *Queens of the Coal Age* (2013) and *Chicken Soup* (2018); intersectional activism in *Pride* (2014); and colliery culture in *Wonderland* (2014) and *Land of Our Fathers* (2013). The paper will explore how both strands self-consciously position the Miners' Strike as an abstracted, countervailing principle to the individualism and instability of contemporary economic and social relations.

Dr Jon Begley is a Senior Lecturer in English at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln. His research interests and publications concentrate upon contemporary British Literature, with a specific emphasis upon the literature and culture of the 1980s, the Falklands/Malvinas War and recent representations of national and post-consensus identity.

### **Continuity, Collectivity, and Repeatability: Nostalgia in Jonathan Coe's *Number 11* (2015)**

Richard Bromhall (Nottingham Trent University)

Nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or perhaps never existed (Boym, 2001). One recent manifestation of nostalgia materialised during and after the EU referendum vote in 2016. This vote ostensibly revealed a double longing for the past: on the one hand, the vote registered a longing for an immigration-less 'little England' of post offices, village halls, and manners, and on the other, a liberal desire for the boom years, characterised by tolerance, diversity, and progressive values. Though seemingly two divergent positions, I suggest that both arguments find comfort – home, even – in the millennial moment. For Boym, this millennial moment showed, 'a global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world' (Boym, 2001). Boym's analysis appears incomplete from the vantage point of post-vote life in Britain, yet her words speak to a contemporary nostalgic politics: as the global developed world fractures, a desire for something apparently lost persists. *Number 11* is a political novel haunted by 2003, the year of the second Iraq War, the death of Dr David Kelly, and a fictional one hit wonder. The novel's formal qualities, this paper argues, of continuity, of scrabbling to assemble a collective experience, of repeatability, reveal *Number 11*'s failure to articulate fully a critique of the contemporary moment. Ending with *Number 11*'s predecessor, this paper suggests, we might be better off looking back to *What A Carve Up!* to understand the politics of now.

Richard is a PhD Candidate in English at Nottingham Trent University. Richard's thesis is concerned with class and the British novel since the 2008 financial crisis. Richard is funded by the M3C DTP and AHRC.

### **"Now come, you filth!": Why It's All Kicking Off in Fantasyland, UK**

Nick Hubble (Brunel University London)

This paper will investigate the utility of contemporary Science Fiction and Fantasy (SFF) not just to represent but also to explain aspects of the social upheaval of twenty-first century Britain. Analysis of the different ways in which Gwyneth Jones's *Bold as Love* sequence (2001-7) and Steph Swainston's *Castle* series (2004-) blend modern idiom with traditional fantasy tropes will demonstrate how such works challenge what Niall Harrison describes as 'the conventionally historicised nature of fantasy settings'. Arguably, the most conventionally historicised fantasy setting of them all is the 'enchanted' (Tom Nairn) United Kingdom in which 65 million of us live and work. The mode of twentieth-century fiction which has most persistently exposed this reality and tried to make it new, is the modern SFF of, among others, Wells, Mirrlees, Mitchison, Lessing and, even, Tolkien. Such work opposed what, following John Clute, might be described as the passive 'wrongness' of the twentieth century by trying to encourage readers to remember different stories of agency. However, as the fantasy of the UK 'thins' (Clute) into 'Fantasyland' – variously defined by Diana Wynne Jones or Kurt Anderson – the clock starts running down on the timeless feudal order leaving a choice between actually making a modern(ist) break into a different future or relapsing into barbarism. Both Jones and Swainston confront this choice by forcing us to ask ourselves

what is really modern. Only by doing so will we escape the tightening coils of the past and find out what happens now.

Nick Hubble is Reader in English at Brunel University, author of *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question* (2017), and co-editor of volumes on the contemporary British fiction of the 1970s, 1990s and 2000s. Currently writing *The Science Fiction Futures of Modernism: From Virginia Woolf to Feminist Speculative Fiction in the 21st Century*.

### **On resistance in *The Carhullan Army***

Rebecca Pohl (University of Manchester)

Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) is a novel that centres on resistance – the forms resistance takes, as well as the conditions that make it possible and that it requires to sustain it. It does this specifically through an investigation of the connection between sexual and political dissidence. In an alienating, authoritarian patriarchal social system where women's bodies are disciplined through enforced contraception, a legendary women's commune in the Cumbrian wilderness – Carhullan – beckons as the rebellious narrator's imagined utopia. Town gossips describe the women as 'dykes', 'cunt-lickers' and 'communists', as though equating homosexuality with revolutionary politics. Whilst proffering this equation, the novel also troubles the link. Women's bodies are disciplined at Carhullan, too, and indeed this disciplining is crucial to their political project, especially as it develops into one of military insurgence. The novel culminates in failure with the dystopic regime prevailing after the resistance itself turns into a dystopia. As such, the novel offers no comfortable identification with either a radical or a reactionary position. It troubles easy celebrations of indiscipline, as well as complicating ideas of social reproduction and modes of resisting it.

Rebecca Pohl teaches at the University of Cambridge and is Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Manchester. She has co-edited a volume on Rupert Thomson (2016), as well as publishing on Sarah Waters, Christine Brooke-Rose, and Ali Smith. Her current research examines the impact of gender on mid-century experimental writing by women in Britain.

## Post-Secular Writing

### **Towards a Plural Post-Secular**

Rose Harris-Birtill (University of St Andrews)

The concept of secularity has become increasingly problematised in contemporary culture: by the growth of religious fundamentalism and 'alternative' spiritualities, the ruthless secular 'faith' of late capitalism, the politically-sanctioned persecution of minorities according to assumed religious threat, and the increasingly pressing need to find an ethical survival strategy amidst ecological and humanitarian crises. This paper examines the impact of Christianity on the theorisation of the post-secular, discussing an ongoing bias in Anglophone literary theory by which the concept of religion and its assumed opposite, secularism, both remain defined by dominant Christian paradigms. Discussing critical theory examples from the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, including the popular *Religion for Atheists* (2012) by Alain de Botton, I examine a fallacy in which belief system diversity is often inadvertently minimised, using 'religion' to refer almost exclusively to Christianity and 'secular' to indicate non-Christianity. Illustrating this with studies whose self-proclaimed pan-religious focus retains a Christian-normative bias, this paper highlights the need to break away from this binarism as an insidious form of religious imperialism, as suggested by Manav Ratti. I argue that to treat 'the' post-secular as a singular, stable category risks minimising its growing plurality, as is evident in the variety of engagement with the post-secular in contemporary literature, as in the works of David Mitchell, Margaret Atwood, and Yann Martel. A greater

range of theoretical approaches are needed to understand the diversity of non-Christian post-secular influences surfacing in contemporary literature. Far from being a fixed category, then, the post-secular is plural.

Dr Rose Harris-Birtill is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of St Andrews, where she also teaches. Her research interests include post-secular and speculative fiction, time, global Buddhisms, experimental and visual storytelling, and globalisation. Her forthcoming monograph, *David Mitchell's Post-Secular World: Buddhism, Belief and the Urgency of Compassion*, is due out with Bloomsbury Academic in 2019.

### **Intersecting Extremisms in Michel Houellebecq's *Submission***

Daniel O'Gorman (Oxford Brookes University)

Michel Houellebecq's willfully controversial *Soumission* (Submission) was, upon its release, supposed to be a national news event. The novel imagines an Islamic political party sweeping to power in France's 2022 general election, and quickly beginning to introduce aspects of Sharia law into the nation's civil society. However, it was published on 7 January 2015, the same day that two gunmen, affiliated with the group al-Qaeda in Yemen, forced their way into the Paris headquarters of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, killing 12 people and injuring 11 others. Written before the recent wave of high-profile terror attacks in Europe and the United States, some have described the novel as prescient, but the crisis that Submission predicts is not exactly an Islamist uprising. Rather, it depicts a death pang in what Houellebecq sees as secular democracy's terminal decline. This paper will analyse the ways in which discourses of counterterrorism intersect with those of far-right populism in Houellebecq's novel, with a particular focus on its representations of Muslims and Islam. At times crude, contradictory and undoubtedly Islamophobic, Submission demands scrutiny because of the ways in which deep-seated connections between secularism, neoliberalism, and recently ascendant contemporary extremisms are made visible within its pages.

Daniel O'Gorman is Lecturer in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature at Oxford Brookes University. His book, *Fictions of the War on Terror: Difference and the Transnational 9/11 Novel*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2015, and he is currently co-editing, with Robert Eaglestone, the *Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*.

### **Straight Outta Hendon: Gender and Religious Identities in the work of Naomi Alderman**

Mike Witcombe (Bath Spa University)

The runaway success of her 2016 novel *The Power* has put Naomi Alderman firmly in the front rank of British writers. Whilst reviewers have focused extensively on themes of gender in this novel, there has been significantly less interest in one of the book's subsidiary themes, which imagines the titular 'power' becoming the basis for a new religious movement. This paper will question the nature of Alderman's writings about Jewish religious identity, arguing that the shadow of this theme extends further than has been considered thus far. It will focus initially on her London-based debut novel *Disobedience*, but will progress to examine how her long-standing fascination with reformulating religious identity through the lens of gender is manifest in later works which may not tackle these themes as explicitly. The dynamic of conflict and ambivalence that is set up in *Disobedience* become recast in *The Liar's Gospel* as the conflict between Jesus and Mary, and finally in *The Power* as an alternative spirituality. The transcultural conflict in *Disobedience* grapples with established religious narratives in pursuit of modes of analysis that privilege creative indeterminacy. This paper will argue that this unique strategy enables the staid streets of Hendon depicted in *Disobedience* to eventually provide the thematic impetus behind the apocalyptic religious community depicted in *The Power*. It will also provide one of the first scholarly appraisals of one of Britain's foremost young Jewish writers during a period of time in which she is achieving critical and popular acclaim.

Mike Witcombe is Lecturer in English Literature at Bath Spa University, where he is researching representations of gender in contemporary Jewish-American fiction. Since completing his PhD thesis on Philip Roth at the University of Southampton in 2015, he has published widely on British and American Jewish literature.

## Queer Being

### Queer Kinship in Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers*

Peter Ely (Kingston University)

This paper explores the relationship between ‘race’ and sexuality in literary representations of adoption, specifically in Jackie Kay’s underexamined poetry collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991). Literary critics have thus far offered a highly limited account of the political significance of this text, framing their readings solely in relation to the transformative potential of ‘transracial’ adoption as a model for a more tolerant and liberal society. In this way, John McLeod celebrates transracial adoption against expectations of ‘same-race adoption’, which he argues functions as an ‘exercise in virtual eugenics’ based on ‘mystical filiative bonds’ (McLeod, 2015). This paper argues that such readings of adoption elide the importance of the political subjectivity of blackness, which rather than serving simply as a ‘mystical bond,’ must also encompass concrete political mobilizations against racism and white-supremacy. Furthermore, such analyses largely ignore how kinship is implicated not only in racialized narratives of the state, but in the generation of the heterosexual family as the foundational site of the social reproduction of capitalism. (Butler, 2000 and Bhattacharya, 2017). By examining the intersection of blackness and queer life, this paper offers an alternative reading of Kay’s *The Adoption Papers*, focusing on its tacitly queer potential to demand ways of ordering kinship beyond the restrictive heteronormative confines of the nuclear family. Working at the intersection of race and sexuality, this framework will expose how Kay’s text is disruptive of state-sanctioned modes of affinity, gesturing toward radical ways of reconceiving kinship and community.

I have recently submitted my PhD entitled “The Politics of Community in Contemporary British Fiction” at Kingston University, where I currently teach a module on Black British Writing. My research works at the intersection of philosophy, critical theory and literature to examine the political potential of ‘community’ in contemporary British society.

### The Utopian Body in Contemporary Literatures of Crisis

Raphael Kabo (Birkbeck, University of London)

This paper will examine the forms, orientations, and affects of bodies in two recent novels, *A Closed and Common Orbit* by Becky Chambers (2016) and *Walkaway* by Cory Doctorow (2017). These speculative fiction novels have gained critical attention for their complex and intersectional representations of queer, trans, and non-binary characters, but less attention has been focused on the ways in which Chambers and Doctorow represent and estrange human bodies as the sites of multiple and diverse ongoing crises. Though both of these novels are oriented towards speculative futures, they are strongly located within, and reflect upon, a contemporary period defined by ongoing political, social, environmental, existential, and humanitarian crises for widespread global populations. When crisis, in the words of Lauren Berlant, becomes “ordinary” — not an exceptional event but a continual process which demands strategies of coping, minor survival, and navigation through anxiety — the location of crisis becomes intimate, personal, and localised. At the same time, as normative narratives of the good life and traditional bodily ontologies fall away, the contemporary moment and its cultural outputs become the source of radical processes and methodologies of hope, futurity, and utopianism. The bodies found in these two novels are fundamentally of this contemporary moment: porous and transitional, they evade the boundaries of identity, interface in both material and virtual worlds, and orient themselves towards not-yet-imagined

utopian horizons. At the same time, they are the site of a multitude of fundamentally normal and minor crisis affects: they find themselves anxious, awkward, vulnerable, dissociative, nervous, depressed, and precarious. Utilising the methodologies of scholars including Berlant, José Esteban Muñoz, and Sara Ahmed, this paper will investigate what becomes of crisis when it is situated within a utopian body, and how contemporary utopian literature teaches bodies in crisis to orient themselves towards better futures.

Raphael Kabo is a research student at Birkbeck, University of London, and is currently writing a PhD on utopia and precariousness in contemporary Anglophone literature.

### **Colour and the body: Derek Jarman's *Chroma* and Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* and *The Argonauts*** Alexandra Parsons (UCL)

Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* (2008) and *The Argonauts* (2015) are interdisciplinary autobiographically-informed texts that explore the limits of articulacy and create queer and feminist genealogies of meaning in the contemporary. This paper teases out how these experimental projects communicate experiences including loss, pregnancy and the transitioning of a partner. I bring Nelson's work into productive dialogue with work from the queer filmmaker, artist, activist and writer Derek Jarman, whose book of colour, *Chroma* (1994), acts as a precedent to Nelson's writing. Both have written searchingly about colour in relation to their own lives, using Ludwig Wittgenstein's work to consider the conceptual challenges that colour provokes. Thinking with colour, they explore the nature of perception and, looking outwards from themselves, both strive to articulate and thereby expand the limits of what language can do. By denaturalising and complicating our understanding of colour, they demonstrate the culturally constituted nature of colour perception and, by juxtaposition with the autobiographical, both seek to advance more nuanced and truthful accounts of their embodied lives. This paper analyses the hybrid critical modes that Jarman and Nelson use to create a sense of self in relation to the world. By relating Nelson's work to Jarman's, who belongs to the previous generation of queer artists and writers, I draw out the ways in which she revisits some of the aesthetic modes of the response to the HIV/AIDS crisis to inform her contemporary, politically urgent subjects.

Alexandra Parsons researches cultural responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis. She is currently writing a book on queer filmmaker, artist and activist Derek Jarman's life-writing. She teaches at Queen Mary and UCL, and her work has been published in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* and *Shakespeare Bulletin*.

## Reading Affect

### **'Let it Branch out Horizontally': The Direction of Attention in Ben Lerner's *10:04***

Alice Bennett (Liverpool Hope University)

In the early pages of Ben Lerner's 2014 novel *10:04*, the author-protagonist finds himself putting together a shoebox diorama about brontosaurus. His collaborator is an eight-year-old boy, Roberto, who is "intelligent and sociable, but even more susceptible to distraction than the average child" and whose after-school project work with the narrator is meant to "trick him into, or at least model for him, modes of concentration" (11). This paper takes Ben Lerner's *10:04* as a starting point for considering why contemporary culture might be so committed to the idea that the "published author" and his books should be the ones to trick us into, or model for us, "modes of concentration". An avalanche of thinkpieces have been dedicated to a supposed crisis of attention that could be remedied by returning to reading books rather than looking at digital devices but Lerner's protagonist in *10:04* is notably distracted and distractible, and remarkable for his oblique, veering attention – not a model of focused attention. Across Lerner's work (including his poetry, essays and first novel, *Leaving the Atocha Station*) there is some defence of "looking sidelong" as a mode of attention (*Leaving the Atocha Station* 10). Readers of *10:04* have

remarked on the novel's tense relationship with futurity, and this paper argues ultimately that sidelong, horizontal, or oblique attention is recuperated from the negative connotations of distraction to become an alternative way of dealing with the present and its demands.

Alice Bennett is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Liverpool Hope University. She is the author of *Narrative and Afterlife in Contemporary Fiction* (Palgrave, 2012), and has published on contemporary fiction in, among other places, *Critique*, *Textual Practice* and *The Oxford Literary Review*. Her next book, *Contemporary Fictions of Attention*, will be published by Bloomsbury in 2018.

### **Fictions of Molecular Desire in Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* and Laurie Weeks' *Zipper Mouth***

Sophie Jones (Birkbeck, University of London)

In an article published in 2003, the social theorist Nikolas Rose identified a profound shift in our ways of understanding emotion and behaviour—a 'recoding of everyday affects and conducts in terms of their neurochemistry' (46). This shift, Rose argued, has produced a subject uniquely attuned to neoliberal discourses of flexibility and manipulability: the neurochemical self. This talk will place Rose's Foucauldian analysis of the neurochemical self in conversation with two recent works of queer literature: Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie*, a 'somato-political fiction' (11) which narrates and theorizes the author's relationship with testosterone, and Laurie Weeks' *Zipper Mouth*, a first-person prose narrative which renders the experiences of addiction, office work and unrequited love in terms of their imagined neurochemical composition. While Rose focuses on neoliberal deployments of the neurochemical self, Weeks and Preciado—in distinct but consonant ways—imagine the queer occupation of pharmacological subjectivity as a response to its capitalist underpinnings, experimenting with genre in order to test the limits of capitalist regimes of self-fashioning. Closely reading both texts, I argue that the medical humanities needs queer feminist writing in order to develop a critical account of twenty-first century biopolitics.

Sophie Jones is a Wellcome ISSF Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English and Humanities, researching the politics of the body in post-1945 American literature and film. Her first book, *The Reproductive Politics of American Literature and Film, 1959-1973*, is due out next year with Edinburgh University Press, and her current research project examines neurobehavioural diagnosis and contemporary literature.

### **Absorption and Contemporary Literary Practice**

Ruth Charnock (University of Lincoln) and Karen Schaller (University of East Anglia)

Contemporary literary scholarship is increasingly preoccupied with feeling, both as an object of interest, and a question of how and why we write the ways we do. To ask 'what happens now' in contemporary literary studies is also to ask 'and how will we write it? how might it feel?'. In this paper we argue for the importance of a dialogue about absorption in any question of literary scholarship now. What all of our contemporary stories about literary practice engage with (sometimes anxiously, sometimes not) are feelings, ideas, and practices of absorption. Sedgwick, Doyle and Halberstam have shown how the notion of an absorbed reader has stood counter to dominant critical strategies which disavow their own absorptions in particular affects. This disavowal, we will argue, has also shaped the academy's sense of what permissible, legible and rewarded literary scholarship looks like: debates about what, and how, we research, or what and how we teach, are also debates about the proximities and orientations that absorption threatens. Absorption is not just a question of reading, then, but also the conditions in which that happens. Indeed diminished opportunities to absorb rather than be absorbed by our institutions threaten the very possibility of reading and teaching literature. In this collaborative paper we show how arguments about absorption are at work in debates about the work of the literature researcher and

teacher, and we examine figures of absorption (absorbed readers and the self-absorbed) to show how a politics of absorption conditions our methods, our objects, and our lived experiences as literature scholars.

Dr Ruth Charnock is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Lincoln. Her research interests lie mostly in the fields of contemporary culture, affect studies, feminist theory and queer theory. She is the editor of *Joni Mitchell: New Critical Readings* (Bloomsbury NY, 2019) and the author of *Anaïs Nin: bad sex, shame and contemporary culture* (EUP, 2019).

Karen Schaller Karen Schaller is a critical, creative, and creative-critical writer specialising in theory and politics of emotion, affect and feeling. Her research tracks the affective economies of literary scholarship, whether in terms of neglected writers, subjects and forms, or the academic conditions, practices and pedagogies of literary study.

## Reading Matters

### **Valuing the Human within the Context of Catastrophic Crisis**

Zoe Bulaitis (University of Exeter)

My paper interrogates the relationship between value, catastrophic global disaster and the humanities. I discuss the scope and limits of contemporary critical theory that explores crisis and the significance of imaginative action. The paper explores what happens when the humanities is required to think beyond the scale of the human. Drawing upon significant public debates such as the obesity crisis and visualizing climate change, I will examine the ways in which contemporary literary theory testifies to and engages with the phenomenon of global crisis. Specifically, I assert that, despite their present dismissal in higher education policy, the humanities are not passive observers of the social and economic lifeworld. Analysis of contemporary critical theory in the context of global catastrophic disaster enables an exploration the potential of imagination and the values of the humanities. I discuss Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, Slavoj Žižek's *In Defence of Lost Causes* with reference and engagement to more internally facing critical reflections from Sharon Marcus and Steven Best ("Surface Reading") and Bruno Latour ("Has Critique Run Out of Steam?"). In this, the relevance of the values of English as a discipline emerges from the general conversation of the humanities. Critical reading of evidential claims, imaginative speculation and the idea of embracing futurity as a means to 'carrying on' prove to be provocative but useful ideas.)

Zoe Bulaitis is finishing her PhD in English Literature at the University of Exeter. She is interested in theory concerning value, neoliberalism and ethics of reading. Her research explores the marketization and the valuation of culture, through contemporary literary studies that focus on the relationship between higher education, the humanities, and contemporary policymaking culture.

### **'The conflict of interpretation' in Kazuo Ishiguro 'Nocturnes' (2009)**

Olga Dzhumaylo (Southern Federal University, Russia)

In the short story, 'Nocturne', which is placed centrally in the short story collection *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* (2009), Kazuo Ishiguro breaks with his own habit of giving slow-paced uneventful plots, but stays true to his meticulous art of 'concealment'. He offers a sort of textual undecidability to craft a short story in which the reader has to undermine and re-shape what is represented by the narrator as a mere report about undergone plastic surgery into a vulnerability of existential plotting. The paper proposes various hermeneutic strategies of reading, which address the story from different theoretical premises leading to coherent yet seemingly 'conflicting interpretations' (Paul Ricoeur). In the frameset of an expressive approach, phenomenological, psychoanalytical, and archetypal readings can be well supported by symbolic imagery, sets of characters and surrealist space, and place configurations. A

mimetic approach manifests itself in Marxist criticism, gender, celebrity, and ethnic studies and helps to reconstruct various social and cultural contexts in their relation to the story's imagery. Critical tools of an objective approach – Russian formalism, narratology, intermediality studies – reveal leitmotif clusters, structural patterns, and musical nocturne remediation in the textual poetics. It also encourages demonstrating intra-textual relations with the other four stories within the collection. Apart from that, the short story abandons the typical Ishiguro imagery easily found in his earlier novels, and can be viewed as a confessional 'self-recollection' narrative project (Alfred Hornung). In other words, it might suggest showing the 'true Ishiguro's face' under the surgical bandages.

Olga Dzhumaylo, Prof. Dr., Associate Professor of English literature at Southern Federal University (Russia). My monograph, *The English Confessional Novel 1980-2000* (2011), explores interrelated questions of the confessional turn and the poetics of self-reflexivity in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan, Graham Swift, Julian Barnes and Martin Amis.

### **Close Reading with Computers**

Martin Eve (Birkbeck, University of London)

Reading literature with the aid of computational techniques is controversial. For some, digital approaches apparently fetishize the curation of textual archives, lack interpretative rigour (or just, interpretation), and are thoroughly 'neoliberal' in their pursuit of Silicon Valley-esque software-tool production (Allington et al. 2016). For others, the potential benefits of amplifying reading-labour-power through non-consumptive use of book corpora fulfils the dreams of early twentieth-century Russian formalism and yields new, distant ways in which we can consider textual pattern-making (Jockers 2013). In this paper, I bring a range of computational stylometric approaches to bear on David Mitchell's genre-bursting novel *Cloud Atlas* (2004). In particular, I note that the first section of David Mitchell's genre-bending novel, *Cloud Atlas* (2004), purports to be set in 1850. However, using computational methods I here show that of the 13,246 words in Part I of *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing*, there are at least three terms that have an etymological first-usage date from after 1910. Instead, I show that racist and colonial terms occur with much greater frequency in *Cloud Atlas* than in a broader contemporary textual corpus, indicating that the construction of imagined historical style likely rests more on infrequent word use and thematic terms from outmoded racist discourses than on etymological mimesis. This specific case study example is framed by the histories of close and distant reading methodologies, exploring the connections between proximity and profundity, surface and depth, and the history of quantitative methods in the humanities.

Martin Paul Eve is Professor of Literature, Technology and Publishing at Birkbeck, University of London. He is the author of four books. His next book, on which this paper is based, is titled *Close Reading with Computers: Textual Scholarship, Computational Formalism, and David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas* and is forthcoming with Stanford University Press in 2019.

### **Crafting the Novel at a Time of Crisis: Precarious Authorship, Endings and the Literary Marketplace**

Caroline Wintersgill (University of Winchester)

Literary fiction, according to a recent *Arts Council England* report is in crisis (Michael Bhaskar et al., 2017). Plummeting sales and stagnant prices are undermining authors, publishers and by extension readers, with marginal voices and experimental fictions repressed and all but bestselling authors part of the precariat. There remains a powerful appetite for narrative but novels struggle against competition from gaming and Netflix. Critics further suggest the label 'literary fiction' may be inherently problematic, implying a difficult, unsatisfying reading experience. This paper delves into the dialogue, largely invisible to literary studies, between authors and the literary industry, in the creation, production and positioning of novels in the literary marketplace. Contesting the contemporary validity of Bourdieu's distinction between

heteronomous and autonomous principles in literary production, the paper conceives the published novel as a ‘craftwork’ – and ‘literary fiction’ as a creative collaboration between novelists, their editors and agents, as well as the institutions that produce, promote and value literary work. The paper draws on a series of qualitative interviews conducted in 2017-18, with authors, editors, agents and literary prize judges, with particular reference to endings, a narrative feature hotly contested by readers, critics and prize juries alike. It focuses attention on the interventions that publishers make, how authors respond, and how their work is judged. Novels discussed include Claire Fuller’s *Our Endless Numbered Days* (2015 Desmond Elliott prizewinner) and Naomi Alderman’s *The Power* (2017 Baileys prizewinner). The paper demonstrates the complexity of the contemporary ‘crisis’ and the agents engaged in addressing it.

Caroline Wintersgill is a third year PhD student at University of Winchester, funded by a 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary studentship, following a 25 year career in publishing. She researches endings in contemporary fiction, combining close readings of novels, reading-group research, and qualitative interviews with authors, editors, agents and prize judges.

## Realisms

### **‘Natura Morta’; or, *Falling Man* and the Antinomies of Homeland Realism**

Thomas Travers (Birkbeck, University of London)

Don DeLillo’s post-Underworld fiction responds to the question ‘what happens now’ for the American novel in a historical period conceptualised as at a ‘frenetic standstill’. From *The Body Artist* to *Zero K*, DeLillo’s twenty-first century novels develop a realism of contemporaneity that encodes the economic, social, political, and environmental crises that afflict the United States. Clocking the emergence of the Anthropocene, a planetary agent that disrupts the novelistic interpretation of history as an anthropomorphic mission, these novels also pose the question ‘what happens now’ for the theory of the novel. In this paper, I would like to address just one of these ‘splinters’, DeLillo’s ‘9/11’ novel, *Falling Man*, whose plot focuses on the domestic household and the possibility of reconstituting the psychically wounded liberal subject. The paper takes its motivation from a surprising resonance between DeLillo’s deployment of ‘natura morta’ or still life and Lukács’s critique of description as a prose style that ‘contemporarizes everything’ and turns social processes into static tableaux or ‘still lives’. Without endorsing Lukács’s conclusions, the paper would nonetheless like to pursue this association of description, which might now be theorised as affect, and the experience of contemporaneity whose temporal form is the still life. The paper will consider to what extent *Falling Man*’s use of still life works as an apparatus to ontologically secure a ‘permanent state of emergency’, or whether its sensuously vivid registration of everyday life discloses an insurgent temporality that destabilises Empire. *Falling Man* perhaps dramatizes the antinomies of ‘Homeland’ realism.

Thomas Travers is a doctoral candidate at Birkbeck, University of London. His thesis, provisionally titled ‘Tendencies of History’, explores the representation of capital in the fiction of Don DeLillo. Additional research interests include the Novel, Critical Theory, Marxism, and Utopia. Tom has edited several issues of Birkbeck’s postgraduate journal Dandelion.

### **Realism in Contemporary British Women Writing**

Emilie Walezak (Université Lumière Lyon 2, France)

This paper aims to pit the vitality of a realistic approach to depicting gendered experiences in contemporary fiction against a persisting suspicion of conservatism inherited from the poststructuralist critique of classic realism. Following in the footsteps of Rita Felski’s criticism of the hermeneutics of suspicion in *The Limits of Critique*, the paper proposes to examine the variety and variability of reception

and responses to such writers as Pat Barker, A. S. Byatt, Sarah Hall, Rose Tremain, or Zadie Smith to question ideological readings of realism. Barker's early works have been neglected in favour of her renowned male-driven trilogy. Byatt is regularly labelled as a conservative. Tremain has been overlooked by the academia on account of her mainstream plots. Sarah Hall, though a popular award-winning author, has not yet attracted much criticism. Despite her fame, Smith's novels elicit contradictory responses, as evidenced by her latest novel *Swing Time*. In addition, the paper plans to correlate fictional experiences from the novels with the authors' own engagement with realist aesthetics in their non-fictional writing to underscore the revival of the form through gendering the everyday. By calling on a multiplicity of experiences – the academic reader's, the popular reader's, the authors', the characters' – this paper seeks to demonstrate the relevance of realism in contemporary discussions on gender struggles.

Emilie Walezak is a lecturer (MCF) at Université Lumière Lyon 2, France. A specialist of contemporary British literature, she has devoted several articles to the processes of rewriting in the works of Angela Carter, A. S. Byatt, Rose Tremain and Jeanette Winterson. She is the author of *Rose Tremain. A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

### **The Contemporary Sixties Novel: Post-postmodernism and Historical Fiction**

Mark West (Glasgow University)

Bringing together three strands of contemporary scholarship – on historical fiction, on the 'post-theory' novel, and on theories of post-postmodernism – this paper examines recent American novels about the 1960s to ask: to what degree does their construction of historical narratives move away from Linda Hutcheon's model of "historiographic metafiction"? Jennifer Egan's *The Invisible Circus*, Dana Spiotta's *Eat the Document*, Christopher Sorrentino's *Trance*, and David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King* might all be seen as examples of what Judith Ryan calls "the novel after theory" insofar as they incorporate in various ways forms and concepts derived from theory, reflecting too on their implications for the novel. This is particularly clear in the way they acknowledge what Hutcheon called "the problematizing of history by postmodernism" – the textuality of history, questions of continuity and closure, and of perspectival multiplicity; these novels acknowledge the naivety of a faith in what Hutcheon called "transcendent timeless meaning." Yet one thing missing from these works, with perhaps the exception of Wallace's novel, is any significant metafictional aspect. If, as Stephen J. Burn has suggested, post-postmodern writers identify metafiction as the most problematic inheritance from literary postmodernism, then does their minimisation of it (and it's arguable that Wallace also does this between *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King*) mean that these novels represent a different kind of historical fiction? Does Hutcheon's work still have explanatory power, or should we be considering this fiction in light of contemporary re-workings of her ideas, like Amy Elias' "metahistorical romance" or Elodie Rousselot's "neo-historical fiction"?

Mark West teaches at Glasgow University. He has published book chapters and articles on Joseph O'Neill, David Foster Wallace, and Emily St John Mandel. He is a Scottish Review of Books Emerging Critic 2018 and his criticism has appeared in *The Millions*, *3:AM Magazine*, *Review31*, and others.

### **Retelling and Rewriting**

#### **Subverting the Monomyth**

Amy Crawford

One of the currents in contemporary women's writing involves narrative retellings of canonical texts. These Richian revisions challenge notion of authorship and authority, representation and meaning construction. This literary slipstream continues into the twenty-first century with texts such as Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lavinia* (2008). In this paper, I will explore Le

Guin's *Lavinia* as a feminist revision of Virgil's *Aeneid*. After investigating the historical and literary contexts of both the source text and revisioned text as well as unpacking the patterns of revision within Le Guin's Earthsea series, I identify the critical focus of the revision and analyse the textual effect produced by the revision. Namely, I argue that *Lavinia* subverts key elements of *Aeneid*, including the notion of the monomyth (the narrative of the hero and heroic quest) and anthropomorphised gods. Le Guin's narrative, instead, evokes a rural scene of a numinal religion and the concept of duty (*fas*). By employing these critical revisions, Le Guin effectively subverts the monomyth and asserts an alternative epistemology based not on male privilege but built around the numinal.

Amy Crawford is an early career researcher interested in contemporary women's writing. Originally from the US, she holds a Master of Liberal Arts in English from the University of Northern Colorado; a Master of Christian Studies from Regent College in Vancouver, BC; and a Master of Letters in Women, Writing and Gender at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. She completed a PhD on Feminist Revision of Narratives with particular interest in Margaret Atwood, Michèle Roberts, Ursula Le Guin, and Angela Carter. She lives in Cambridge, England.

### **A Blazing World: Danielle Dutton's *Dorothy*, a publishing project**

Abram Foley (University of Exeter)

In the early pages of Danielle Dutton's novel *Margaret the First* (2016), which tells the story of the seventeenth-century British writer Margaret Cavendish, an eight-year-old Margaret discovers 'an invisible world' (10) on a stream near her home. 'There, on the surface of the water', recalls Margaret, 'river-foam bubbles encased a jubilant cosmos. Whole civilizations lasted for only a moment! Yet from the creation of one of these Bubble-worlds to the moment that world popped into oblivion, the Bubble-people within it fell in love, bore children, and died, their bodies decomposing into a fine foamy substance that was then reintegrated into the foamy infrastructure of the world' (10). Margaret's recollected childhood reverie—which, in the logic of Dutton's novel, leads to Cavendish writing *The Blazing World* (1666)—is at once highly imaginative and intricately structured. As quickly as one world bubbles up, it gives shape to new forms of life, new temporal scales, and then as quickly pops into foam, the residual form of fleeting modes of existence. This paper takes Margaret's observation of bubble-worlds as a starting point for considering Danielle Dutton's own engagements with literary world-making, both in her own writing and through her work as Editor and Publisher of *Dorothy*, a publishing project (2009–). By assessing Dutton's fictional writing alongside her editorial work, I show how Dutton records the "infrastructures of the world" of literature as a means of engaging the question: what happens now for contemporary writing?

Abram Foley is Lecturer in Literature and the Creative Industries at the University of Exeter. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Affirmations: Of the Modern*, *ASAP/Journal*, *Criticism*, *Textual Practice*, and elsewhere. He is currently Editor of *ASAP/J*, the open-access platform for *ASAP/Journal*.

### **Fairy Stories meet the Shoah: The power of words in Holocaust anti-tales**

María Martínez-Alfaro (University of Zaragoza, Spain)

In the last decades, and in parallel with the rise of Trauma Theory and Memory Studies, literature has increasingly turned to the Holocaust and its always problematic representation. "The power of words" is the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2018 and, in line with certain aspects of this theme, I want to focus here on one of the ways in which literature has attended to "the broken voice" (Kertész, Eaglestone) of the Holocaust past in our post-Holocaust era: the retelling of traditional fairy tales, used as background structures through which the Holocaust can be written and discussed. In the light of debates on the limits of Holocaust representation, some reflection seems to be required as to whether imposing the fairy-tale genre on the Holocaust is to be censured—for betraying its incommensurability, facilitating escapism...— or whether retellings like these can make more real what, with the passing of time, may

seem to be less so. By resorting to representative works, I will show how Holocaust anti-tales bear witness to the power of words to keep the memory of the past alive, while they partake of the indirectness and dialogical nature typical of accounts of traumatic events. Attention will be paid, too, to the reflection they prompt on issues like the legacy of survival and victimhood, perpetration and evil, and the relational nature of remembering that links different generations of people and also different stories of violence.

María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Zaragoza (Spain), where she teaches English literature courses and works with a research team on ethics, trauma, memory, and transmodernity. Her research deals with the above-mentioned fields, with a special interest in Holocaust literature. Among her latest publications is the co-edited volume *Memory Frictions in Contemporary Literature* (Palgrave 2017).

## Shareveillance

This panel will examine the intersection of public and private selves in the context of data, surveillance and information sharing. Our panel broadly responds to Claire Birchall's work on 'shareveillant' subjectivity, defined as 'a state in which we are always already sharing; indeed, in which any relationship with data is only made possible through a conditional idea of sharing' (Birchall 2016: 1).

### **'Our excessive selves': confession and precarity in the neoliberal university**

Rachel Sykes (University of Birmingham)

This paper discusses the relationship between teaching, precarity and self-disclosure in online environments, analysing how recent autobiographical writing by women can reveal the often-precarious conditions of academic, creative and online spaces. Contemporary strands of 'confessional' writing frequently include anecdotes about the author's short-term contracts and habitual 'oversharing' online, and this paper is concerned with the gendered relationship between precarity and risk that is manifest in this form. Recent texts by Chris Kraus, Kate Zambreno, Jackie Wang, and Roxane Gay will be used to discuss how women cultivate intimacy through autobiographical self-presentation, drawing a link to parallel literary attempts that continue and extend the concerns of a traditionally male-identified 'confessional' mode in the contemporary autofictional novel, memoir, and the online personal essay.

Rachel Sykes is Lecturer in Contemporary American Literature at the University of Birmingham, where she co-directs the Centre for Contemporary Literature and Culture. Her book, *The Quiet Contemporary American Novel* (2017), was published with Manchester University Press in December and she has recent articles in *Signs: Journal of Women in Society and Culture* and *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*.

### **Reading Online: *Super Sad True Love Story* and the Future of Public Reading**

Chelsea Oei Kern (University of California, Los Angeles)

Although fears about the decline of literature and reading continue to proliferate in many circles, the rise of the Internet and other digital technologies and practices means that people consume more text each day than ever before. At the same time, these readers are also themselves becoming read: readable through the data they produce and, increasingly, are. Corporations and state entities not only have access to, but also control the display and flow of this data. As imagined in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), the result is a social landscape in which all private expression is both readable and writeable by public forces, which include state and corporate actors. In this paper, I ask what political potentials can arise from reading—interacting with texts—under such conditions. In conversation with theories of publics and publicness, I argue that *Super Sad True Love Story* models a new orientation toward reading that

claims the act of reading as a site for potential political feeling that operates clandestinely beneath the eye of surveilling bodies. This political feeling is the basis for resistance to both the acceptable public feeling dictated by state/corporate entities and to those entities themselves.

Chelsea Oei Kern is a PhD candidate in English literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research areas include contemporary literature and culture, speculative fictions, reading and reading practices, and digital culture.

### **Surveillance and the Database**

Robert Lederer (Arcadia University)

In her new book, Clare Birchall examines the culture of “data sharing”, whereby citizens are required to surrender their information or are asked to appraise information volunteered by the state, in ways that, she suggests, shape the possibilities for political action. Birchall argues that strategic acts of obfuscation and opacity might enable forms of resistance to this logic of, what she terms, “shareveillance”. This paper uses Birchall’s arguments as a framework for investigating Jennifer Egan’s novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. I analyse Egan’s novel for what it has to say about the database as a means of defining, logging, and tracking people, and look specifically at its understanding of data as a reductive language that makes claims to transparency and objectivity. I locate a complementary critique of the database in the form of Egan’s novel, which approximates the unordered structure of the database and, in so doing, undermines the illusion of its characters’ freewill. Writing against database surveillance, *Goon Squad* finds a form of subjective opacity in material collections, where personal meaning is rendered in the inscrutable language of objects that disintegrate over time.

Robert Lederer lectures at Arcadia University in London.

### **Tracking Transience, Tracking Selves**

Dorothy Butchard (University of Birmingham)

This paper explores representations of self-surveillance and monitoring in Nicola Barker’s novel *H(a)ppy* (2017) and the *Black Mirror* episode ‘Nosedive’ (2016), placing these fictional visions of surveillance societies in conversation with Hasan Elahi’s ongoing ‘artveillance’ project on his Tracking Transience website. Both *H(a)ppy* and ‘Nosedive’ reinterpret twenty-first century experiences of self-tracking to consider the personal ramifications of operating within systems of surveillance, revealing complex, multifarious and canny responses to the pervasive reach of modern monitoring technologies. Exploring the ramifications of what Claire Birchall terms ‘shareveillance’ alongside Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon’s discussion of a ‘boundary of privacy’ in *Liquid Surveillance*, I argue that *H(a)ppy*, ‘Nosedive’ and Tracking Transience expose both the temptations and tensions of self-surveillance, suggesting that apparent complicity with data assemblages may also introduce new models of self-disclosure and resistance.

Dorothy teaches and researches contemporary and twentieth century literature at the University of Birmingham, with particular interest in digital cultures and creative representations of technological change.

## **Teaching Contemporary Literature Beyond the Book**

### **From Fan Fiction to YouTube: Navigating The Digital Literary Sphere**

Clare Hutton (Loughborough University)

Inspired by the article on ‘Charting the Digital Literary Sphere’ by Simone Murray, I am going to teach a module entitled ‘From Fan Fiction to YouTube: Navigating The Digital Literary Sphere’ to 2nd year undergraduates this Autumn. My paper will describe the challenges, thinking and choices behind the module which aims to:

1. survey the underpinning structures of contemporary literary culture (such as authorial activity, publication and reading) and show how they have been transformed by the digital revolution;
2. survey and interpret a range of contemporary texts and authors in relation to digital and transformational changes in literary culture;
3. encourage students to engage analytically and creatively in the digital literary sphere through the creations of blogs, vlogs, online reviews, fan fictions; and
4. develop skills in critical thinking, writing and oral communication.

Much of the thinking here derives from my training as a book historian in the 1990s, but I am keen to work out how to make that work (which has a justified reputation for being dry as dust) relevant to today’s digital natives. What is the best way of teaching them to think analytically about how digital culture works for literature? What, moreover, is distinctive about digital literary culture? In order to answer this, it will be necessary to introduce students to some of the defining features of the pre-digital (thus issues such as authorial isolation, the mechanics of textual transmission, the net book agreement, the power of imprints/reviewers, and the difficulty of finding out about sales) and to compare them to the world we live in now (with a blogosphere, Amazon, self publication, goodreads and Nielsen BookScan). How can this kind of content be tied to literary analysis and what kinds of literary content will help to make sense of the issues raised by the fact of the digital literary sphere? What kinds of assessment might be suitable? My paper will also discuss how this module builds on other ‘digital’ offerings currently being taught at Loughborough.

Clare Hutton is Senior Lecturer and Programme Director for English at Loughborough. Her monograph on the textual and contextual significance of Joyce’s *Ulysses* as a serial is now in press with OUP (*Serial Encounters: Ulysses and the Little Review*). She developed a significant interest in digital in the course of her research on *Ulysses*, and has developed a new BA programme at Loughborough (*English with Digital Humanities*) as a result. This begins in 2019.

### **Entering the literary scene: learning about contemporary literature through local events and virtual spaces**

Kerry Myler (Newman University)

This session introduces a model for engaging students with contemporary literature by encouraging participation in ‘real world’ literary spaces outside of the academy and through developing virtual literary spaces. In 2016-2017, I ran a module titled ‘The Literary Scene’; the module included a taught element (lectures and tasks offering a framework for understanding the field of contemporary literature) but also a significant off-campus element, including attendance at local literary events and book festivals (Birmingham and Cheltenham) and the establishing and running of students’ own book clubs. These activities informed the ‘authentic assessment’ tasks: an individual event review and a group website project in which students were required to design, populate and project manage a literary e-zine. With an emphasis on peer collaborative learning and by linking student engagement to assessment, this model enabled students to explore contemporary literature on their own terms, to become genuinely invested in the assessment task, and to take ownership of their own learning. Evidence for this can be found in the quality and quantity of content for the group assessment (which far exceeded my expectations) and the fact that several students have continued to run their book groups and produce content for their literary e-zines and social media platforms long after the module has ended. This session begins by addressing some of the obstacles to student engagement with both contemporary literature and using digital literacy

skills for learning and teaching and then offers a model for overcoming these using 'The Literary Scene' module as a case study.

Dr Kerry Myler is a Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Literature at Newman University, Birmingham. She has published on Doris Lessing, reading groups, and sex and censorship in post-war women's writing. She is an executive committee member of the Contemporary Women's Writing Association.

## The Problem with 'Now'

This panel focuses on the different ways in which the forms of contemporary fiction register the problems of representing a singular temporal moment. Each paper explores a different context in which the present becomes a problem: conceptions of history; digital sociability; exchange in a credit economy. Together, these papers suggest we read contemporary fiction not only to find out 'what happens now', but to reflect on what is stake in privileging the idea of the 'now' as a means of understanding contemporary culture.

### **The Extended Present and the Present Tense Novel**

Kevin Brazil (University of Southampton)

In recent years, a striking number of critics have theorised the contemporary as being defined by the experience of an extended present that vitiates our sense of history: However, the claim that modernity has been replaced by an ahistorical present has been made by European and American critics since the end of the Second World War. At the same time, a new literary form emerged trying to give form to the experience of an endless present: the present tense novel. This paper explores the turn towards the extended present in fiction and theory by turning to the origins of the present tense novel work of Joyce Cary, John Updike, and Christine Brooke-Rose. The early authors of this awkward form associated the extended present with moments of aesthetic absorption, sympathetic identification, and fantasies of racial primitivism. This paper argues that these aspect of present tense in fiction can shed light on some of the unexamined assumptions involved in theorizing the contemporary as 'an extended present'.

Kevin Brazil is a Lecturer in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Literature at the University of Southampton.

### **"As if any human experience couldn't be bridged": The Deferment of Affinity in Dana Spiotta and Chris Kraus**

Lian Patston (University of Southampton)

In 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', Donna Haraway proposed affinity as a form of relation that would avoid the totalizations of identity and alterity. For Sherry Turkle and Jodi Dean, digitalization has redefined connections in the twenty-first century. This paper explores the nature of affinity in an age of technological connection. It traces how the moment of affinity is always deferred in the work of social theorists, before turning to look at how *Innocents and Others* by Dana Spiotta and *Summer of Hate* by Chris Kraus are structured as novels around the deferment of affinity within heterosexual relationships. It argues that these novels explore how technologically mediated affinity is ultimately frustrated by desire, and that this deferral can be a productive mode for unpicking gender inequalities.

Lian Patston is a PhD student in the English department at the University of Southampton. Her research focusses on the stranger, modes of relation and digitalisation in 21st century literature.

### **Finding Dorothy: Credit in American Fiction**

Nicky Marsh (University of Southampton)

The characters in Thomas Pynchon's novels, from *Gravity's Rainbow* to *Against the Day*, are constantly trying to catch *The Wizard of Oz's* Dorothy. They never do and when they come close they often realise that it is because they are chasing the wrong Dorothy. The lingering confusion over who Dorothy really is allows Pynchon to point us to the need for a new kind of history for money in early twentieth-century America. Pynchon's history for money points us away from the recurring anxieties about the relative significance of fiat and specie currency, that extend from the bimetal debates that formed the background to the *Wizard of Oz* to the ending of the Bretton Woods agreement that shaped Pynchon's own context in the early 1970s. In their place he points us to the emergence of consumer credit money in America, and its complex relationship to notions of both gender and sacrifice. This paper follows Pynchon as he follows Dorothy and tries to suggest a language for money that can acknowledge this submerged and belated history of money in America.

Nicky Marsh is a Professor of Twentieth Century Literary Studies at the University of Southampton.

## Theorising the Novel Now

### Kazuo Ishiguro's Non-Actors

Maria Christou (Oxford Brookes University)

This paper stems from a larger project which identifies, and traces the intellectual career of, what I call 'the turn to the potential' from the Cold War to the present day – a turn which, I argue, reshaped conceptualisations of action, agency, subjectivity, and freedom. The paper constitutes part of this task. It focuses on the question of action, which it sets out to explore via Kazuo Ishiguro's work. While Aristotle sees action as being at the very core of any good literary text, Ishiguro's work presents us scenarios at the centre of which is precisely the absence of action. Action in Ishiguro's work is often not even contemplated; and when it is contemplated, it is not proportional to the situations at hand. Examining such scenarios, the paper will identify a devaluation of action in Ishiguro's work, which it will situate in the intellectual legacy of the Cold War by employing as an interpretative tool game theoretical work on The Prisoner's Dilemma.

Maria Christou completed a PhD at Lancaster University in 2016 and is now the Vice Chancellor's Research Fellow in English Literature at Oxford Brookes University. Her first monograph is entitled *Eating Otherwise: The Philosophy of Food in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). She is now working on her second monograph, which is entitled *The Turn to the Potential*.

### From Writing to Matter in the Contemporary Novel

David Wylot (Queen Mary University of London)

What happens to the novel in a critical moment that resituates indeterminacy from the domain of writing to that of matter? This paper argues that a materialist turn in critical theory, which I will evidence through Catherine Malabou's recent work, invites a materialist approach to the contemporary novel that downplays textual indeterminacy to instead prioritise its closed time structure. The paper argues this through an analysis of prolepsis in James Smythe's 2014 book *No Harm Can Come to a Good Man*, which tells the story of the protagonist's failure to escape predictions of his future made by a data analysis company. I will suggest that its prophetic plot spotlights the text's material form, thematising its medium as an object of temporal closure, with textual or interpretative indeterminacy offering scant resistance. This is one consequence, I argue, of critical theory's materialist theorisation of indeterminacy, an approach to the concept that reads disruption, play, and contingency to be imminent in the domain of the material and the molecular. If writing's capacity to best metaphorise these qualities is, as Malabou

suggests, decreasing in significance, then the paper draws two possible conclusions from this turn's effects on an approach to the novel. First, it situates discussion of the novel in a broader media history; second, it necessitates an understanding of the novel's time structure as ontologically doubled.

David Wylot is an early career researcher and Teaching Associate at Queen Mary University of London.

He is currently writing his PhD into a monograph, entitled *When a thing happens: reading the accident in contemporary fiction*.

### **The Darkness-within-the-Light of Contemporary Fiction: Agamben's Missing Reader and Ben Lerner's *10:04***

Ben Davies (University of Portsmouth)

Giorgio Agamben's essay 'What is the Contemporary?' (2008) and Ben Lerner's novel *10:04* (2014): two texts, both with an emphasis on reading and readers, optics, seeing and light. But whereas Lerner's novel repeatedly invokes and refers to the reader and reading, Agamben ultimately ignores these aspects, despite establishing reading and readers as central to his essay's success. Bringing these two texts together, I shall focus my own vision on Agamben's essay, particularly his crucial oversight and omission, as well as *10:04*'s contemporariness to argue for contemporary reading, contemporary readers and contemporary literature to be seen not in the light of historical specificity or periodicity, but as a type of relationality. Agamben's essay, I argue, offers a way into re-conceptualising contemporary reading and readers, despite their occlusion in his essay. Correlatively, Lerner's novel can be seen as a 'contemporary' contemporary text (or 'meta-contemporary' text) that reflects (upon) its own contemporary relationality and brings to light some of the darkness that surrounds the study of contemporary literature – problematics that involve readers, reading, the un-read and the un-written.

Ben Davies is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Portsmouth. He is the author of *Sex, Time, and Space: Exceptional Intercourse* (2016) and the co-editor of *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture* (2011).

### **The New Sincerity of Inauthentic Poetry**

Anna Travis (University of Brighton)

Why is contemporary culture repeatedly offering escapism founded on depictions of mediocre and inauthentic selves? This paper draws on portrayals of mediocre and 'failed' writer protagonists from 21st century fiction, in particular *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011) by Ben Lerner, to re-evaluate the legacy and reconfiguration of David Foster Wallace's conception of sincerity. Lerner's novel is contextualised within 'reconstructive literature' where authenticity is re-enacted metareferentially. Sincerity moves from a Wordsworthian 'over flow' of feeling, to Byronic attitudes where sincerity is code for convention. The Bildungsroman's maturing artistry moves towards tragi-comic depictions of failed authenticity. An Anti-Künstlerroman (anti-artist's novel) emerges where protagonists lament attaining original, expressive status. This paper questions why contemporary culture is drawn to this narrative arc, collapsing into reflexive poets who can't find their 'true' voice. This model of writer as uncomfortable 'fake': "there was nothing particularly original about my poems" complicates Wallace's ideal of literary writing as negative critique and positive affirmation in the face of a "tyranny of ironic watching," an increasingly dominant element of a social formation mediated by technological interaction.

Freelance writer, Art History Lecturer and PhD candidate at the University of Brighton, exploring models of authentic inner voice in the novel. Current research centres on contemporary Anglo-American fiction and Marxist and absurdist aesthetics. Fiction Reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement. Have previously run adult education courses on Literary Theory, Twentieth-Century Poetry and Fiction.

## New Media Literary Studies

What does it mean to research ‘the digital’ and ‘the literary’ together? How and where are the intersections between these disciplines producing new approaches in research?

Six ten-minute papers introduce work that is bringing together the fields of new media, media studies and literary studies. This roundtable, which spans videogames, CGI artworks, contemporary novels and their digital presences, highlights the theoretical diversity of emerging research. It aims to spark questions and conversation, with plenty of time for discussion after the papers.

### **The Author and the Cyberbard: Creative Entities in Videogame Production**

Rebekah Cunningham (University of Birmingham)

In what ways can we meaningfully study videogames alongside literary theory? The past five years have seen increasingly varied styles in which videogames are being developed, and the increasingly intertwined relationships between videogame users and creators. In response to these changes, my paper examines creative roles in videogame discourses, drawing from both literary and digital theory to capture some of the varied and dynamic creative entities in game production. I examine two examples of creative entities in videogames: the videogame ‘author’ – drawn from literary theory – and the videogame ‘cyberbard’ – drawn from Janet H. Murray’s use of the term in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997). These creative roles are by no means exhaustive of all of the creative entities present in videogame production, but this paper begins to present a case for the myriad ways in which we can interpret videogame creativity. Furthermore, this paper demonstrates the usefulness and the pitfalls of applying both literary theory and new media theory to our understanding of videogames and the creative forces around them.

### **Cyborg Reading for the 21st Century Literary Novel**

Sam Cutting (University of Brighton)

My research argues that the developing relationship between the literary and the digital can be considered in ethical terms. This is because locating new technologies in relation to already established ways of writing, communicating and reading involves making a judgement about what forms of subjectivity are possible, and what relations should be allowed or maintained. Thinking about technological is disentangleable from thinking about subjectivity, and relations between selves and others. Literary novels form some of the stories told about technologies, which are also stories about social relations. Following Donna Haraway, stories of ‘the origin of the family, of language, of technology, of co-operation and sharing’ require reading which is situated, resistant and politically aware. My readings of literary novels use Donna Haraway’s thinking on the cyborg and situated knowledges, to engage in cyborg reading. Cyborg reading emphasizes the contestation of stories about technology, in social life that ‘swarms with technological mediation’ as Laboria Cuboniks Xenofeminist manifesto articulates. It views digital textuality and digitally-mediated relations in the novel as sites for ethical inquiry, encounters from which to consider what ways of being are made possible, always inscribed with a feminist politics. It asks, too, whether the literary novel elides its own technological status in the course of representing forms of digital mediation, resulting in a possibly antagonistic relationship with digital textuality.

### **Corpo(un)reality: Mediation and Mutation in the Digital Contemporary**

Vicki Williams (University of Birmingham)

This paper considers the ways in which recent CGI artworks are able to represent alternative renderings of human subjectivity/ies from the perspective of the unhuman machine. In the digital contemporary, the identities and embodied forms of (human) computer users are subject to

the interpretation of nonhuman actors such as expansive computer networks, intelligent machines, data banks and algorithms. Not only does the digital contemporary mould our lived relations (Parikka, 2010), but it brings the ontological fixity of the human life-world into question. In 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', Giles Deleuze claimed that such societies no longer rely on the mass/individual pair but rather 'dividuals and masses, samples, data markets or banks' (1992). To try and capture the production of the human subject under the ever-changing intensities and "freefloating impersonal flows" (Hardt and Negri, 2000) of data capital relies inherently on various kinds of unhuman perspectives. Using Steven Shavero's postcinematic model of affect (2010), the paper argues that CGI artworks are able to capture and visually narrate the affects and intensities of the digital contemporary which sees human subjects as 'mutation bodies' (N Katherine Hayles, 2008). Using Playdead's 2016 videogame *Inside* as a central narrative framework, this paper explores the rupturing of both the normative human subject and the discursive logic of the human world via mediated corpo(un)realities.

### **'No one there was part of anyone else's world': Digital Participation as Collective Reading Enterprise in Doug Dorst and JJ Abrams' *S*. (2013)**

Emily Jayne Fisher (University of Surrey)

JJ Abrams and Doug Dorst's collaborative enterprise *S*. (2013) offers an opportunity to renegotiate current understandings of the role of the reader in twenty-first century American fiction. This paper's primary focus is on the way the novel encourages the reader to interact with digital platforms. Considering aspects of the narrative contained within the pages of *S*. and the digital canon externally accessible through social media platforms and forums, the novel champions the print form whilst 'the internet [...] is cunningly woven into the very fabric of the narrative[e]'. (Fjellestad, 2016, p81). The digital, then, is not presented as the nemesis of the physical book, but an integral collaborative tool. At stake in this paper is the novel's engagement with the digital which enables the evolution of the reader's role from individual experience to collaborative endeavour, allowing the reader to actively participate within, and thus modify, the storyworld of *S*. The expansive digital canon associated with *S*. and the inability to identify sources as stemming from the creators or the fans foregrounds the potential for collaborative reading enterprises through multimodal fiction including *S*. (2013), *House of Leaves* (2000), and *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007). Nevertheless, as this paper highlights, the digital canon is supplementary and therefore the reader is offered a choice in terms of their interaction beyond the physical book.

### **Systemic Vagueness: Realism after Technocapitalism**

Rich Bingham (University of Birmingham)

While the 'Cloud'—as in 'cloud computing'—has recently become a metaphorical figure that obscures the material infrastructures of computational systems, its original function was metonymic. In early network diagrams, engineers drew vague, cloud-like shapes to gesture to complex infrastructures that were relevant to the network but not to the particular subject of the diagram. In this 'quick-fire' paper, I argue realistic literature—which has long been described as metonymic—today pursues cloudy aesthetics in relation to a technocapitalist system. Technocapitalism, as defined by Luis Suarez-Villa, is an emergent mode of capitalist production centred on the research and development of new technologies. Literary realism positions itself within and against technocapitalist system by embodying a kind of 'systemic vagueness' (a term I borrow from Tom McCarthy's novel *Satin Island*). This vagueness is systemic in several senses: firstly, because cloudy metonymic gestures are an inherent feature of realistic literature; secondly, because today's realistic literature often constructs this vagueness by evoking twentieth-century systems theory; and thirdly, because this vagueness functions as realistic literature's cultural capital within a wider technocapitalist system. I will briefly demonstrate these points in relation to Jonathan Franzen's 2015 novel *Purity*, arguing that the novel employs vagueness in an attempt to inoculate the traditional realist novel against the discursive networks of social media, obscure its own systemic function, and preserve the 'purity' of the literary.

## Media archaeology and novels

Kate Wilkinson (Queen Mary University of London)

When media archaeological and literary studies meet – which is not often – it is usually through their shared interest in the material technologies of writing and their role in thinking and writing practices. In this paper I outline other grounds for a meeting between the two: media archaeology is a valuable framework for considering how novels are responding to the complex coexistence of digital and analogue media in contemporary culture. Printed novels are not dead yet; within them, handwritten letters continue to thrive alongside smartphones. Jussi Parikka observes that media archaeological investigations – both of media cultures and of digital devices' internal workings – are increasingly conducted through artistic practice rather than in the form of historical narrative accounts. This paper draws on Parikka's work and on recent novels including Rupert Thomson's *Katherine Carlyle* (2015), to make two proposals. The first is that (some) contemporary novels are themselves media archaeological artworks. The second is that media archaeology offers a productively layered approach for exploring how contemporary novels register and repurpose media technologies: it unsettles ideas of the new and it also allows to come into view the diversity of readers' thinking in and with media.

Richard Bingham is a PhD student at the University of Birmingham researching the reconstitution of the aesthetic category of the realistic in our twenty-first century media environment.

Rebekah Cunningham is a first-year PhD student in the Department of English Literature at University of Birmingham and co-creator of the PLAY/PAUSE videogame and VR seminar series.

Sam Cutting is a PhD student at University of Brighton. His research addresses the relationship between digital technology, subjectivity and ethics as it appears in twenty-first century fiction.

Emily Fisher is an AHRC (TECHNE DTP) funded PhD candidate at the University of Surrey in the School of Literature and Languages.

Vicki Williams is a doctoral researcher in the English Department at the University of Birmingham, where she co-convenes the PLAY/PAUSE videogame and virtual reality seminar series.

Kate Wilkinson is a PhD student at Queen Mary University of London researching the persistence of letters in twenty-first century novels.

## Utopian Readings

This panel seeks to explore the processual and multi-scalar temporalities that a utopian reading can uncover in works of contemporary fiction. Each paper weaves together a utopian hermeneutic approach with narratives that foreground non-linear and non-chronometric temporal experiences: from the slowing down of narrative time in memories of recollected trauma, and the ontological opening-up of mimetic realism to produce alternative times of anticipation and subjunctive possibility; to the plurality of post-deluge timescales that flood fictions can uncover outside of, or beyond, capitalism's *longue durée*; and the temporalisation of genre history which sees the utopian *Novum* privileged in science fiction studies – as a realm of youthfulness, historical opportunity, and child-like attentiveness to phenomenological experience via the child's supposedly unalienated perspective. What brings these papers together into a coherent and, we hope, interesting panel proposal is the examination of the contemporary moment's shifting sense of timescale – whether processual, durational, multivalent, or ecological – and the proposition that utopian

reading strategies have something unique to offer in parsing the implications of such narrative and philosophical temporalities.

In “The Multivalent Times of Miraculous Realism,” Caroline Edwards draws on the utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch’s oeuvre to examine how utopian thinking necessitates a cosmological, or glacial, standpoint that is decidedly inhuman. This representational gesture pits utopian possibility somehow within, as well as outside of, the ordinary duration of lived human time. Two twenty-first-century novels by British writers – Grace McCleen’s *The Land of Decoration* (2012) and Jon McGregor’s *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002) – are considered to examine how experiments in contemporary literary fiction are cleaving apart chronometric, linear narrative and historical time. Through messianic apertures, subjunctive alternative times, and a multi-scalar perspective of cosmological times Edwards argues that these two writers are extending what has been called “miraculous realism”: a formal and generic experimentation that embeds oddly numinous temporalities within the mundane daily reality of lived time. Sean Grattan’s “Intertidal Temporalities: *New York: 2140* (2017) and the Slow Time of Revolution” similarly brings formal analysis into contact with a utopian examination of temporality. Drawing on Fredric Jameson and Ernst Bloch, Grattan examines Robinson’s use of multiple narrative voices in *New York: 2140* to consider the temporal experience of the enduring, ongoing disaster. Rather than an apocalyptic rupture to the time of capitalist modernity, Robinson offers his readers a slowed-down *longue durée* in which it is oppositional struggle, and traditional politics, that will bring about capitalism’s end. Grattan suggests that Robinson’s political optimism reveals Blochian traces of the utopian “not-yet”: building a new world out of the rubble of cataclysmic flooding in Manhattan thus reorients the post-apocalyptic genre in a distinctly utopian direction, and draws on the language of the Occupy movement and recent political protests.

Finally, in “The Speed of Childhood in Utopianism and Science Fiction,” Katie Stone expands the Blochian readings of the first two papers in the panel, to consider the broader sweep of genre history and its implications for a reconsideration of temporal deceleration. Darko Suvin’s foundational work in establishing the formalist parameters of science fiction studies in the 1970s is premised, Stone suggests, on an evolutionary perspective that identifies genres progressing through linear time – from youthful generic beginnings through to full formal maturity. This reminds us of Suvin’s conceptual indebtedness to Ernst Bloch, whose own utopian philosophy privileges the figure of the child as uniquely receptive to utopian possibility: yet to be subsumed into fully alienated life, and encountering the world for the first time. Stone offers a close reading of Octavia Butler’s 2005 novel *Fledgling* to consider how uncovering the utopian figure of childhood in this text might open up new lines of enquiry in Butler’s last novel. *Fledgling*, Stone argues, uses a child protagonist to explore a range of temporalities; from the durational timescale of a species of vampires who live across centuries of human time, to the amnesiac temporality of a child whose estranged perspective requires a process of (re-)learning the ordinary co-ordinates of temporal experience.

Dr Caroline Edwards is Senior Lecturer in Modern & Contemporary Literature at Birkbeck, University of London. She is author of *Fictions of the Not Yet: Utopian Times in the 21st Century British Novel* (forthcoming) and co-editor of *China Miéville: Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2015) and *Maggie Gee: Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2015).

Sean Grattan is Lecturer of American Literature at the University of Kent. He is the author of *Hope Isn't Stupid: Utopian Affects in Contemporary American Literature* (Iowa UP, 2017).

Katie Stone is a doctoral candidate working in the English department at Birkbeck, University of London. She is an active participant in the London Science Fiction Research Community and Birkbeck’s ‘Feminist and Queer Theory’ reading group. She is the recipient of the Birkbeck School of Arts Postgraduate Scholarship and a lead organiser of upcoming conference: ‘Utopian Acts’.

## Videogames as (Comparatively) Contemporary Literature: Parallels, Precedents and Paradigm Shifts

Early videogame scholarship was often keen to stress the newness of this new medium and the need for similarly novel critical approaches. Certain critics even took it upon themselves to ‘defend the still emergent discipline of game studies from colonization by more established disciplines, in particular sociology, film studies, and literary studies’ (Schweighauser 2009), insisting that paying too much attention to what games shared with novels and films would obscure what was new and important about gaming as a cultural phenomenon. Others predicted that game developers would soon cease to rely so heavily on the precedents set by other media, foretelling new forms of interactive storytelling which would transcend the ‘syntagmatic’ linearity of traditional narratives and embrace the ‘paradigmatic’ open-endedness of the digital database (Manovich 2002, 230). Meanwhile, however, designers keen to flesh out their games’ diegetic universes and contextualize players’ actions have persisted in borrowing plots, techniques and scenarios from literature, film, theatre and other fictional forms - often to the extent of placing books, screening films or staging plays within their gameworlds. Rather than abandoning old strategies, forms and motifs altogether, then, videogames retain and rework them. It is this mix of the familiar and the unprecedented that makes them symptomatic of the contemporary, reflecting a broader struggle to adjust to the far-reaching implications of digital technologies and the new forms of quantification, capture and informatic control they enable.

With this in mind, our panel offers four papers which outline approaches to the comparative analysis of games and other fictional forms, calling for attention to how genres, aesthetics and conceits travel across moments and media. Gaming’s love affair with the Gothic - a mode rooted in the literature of the late 18th century but eerily resonant in the 21st – provides a useful case study here. Attesting to the continued (if not increased) relevance of texts like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) in a posthuman age of ‘intercorporeal’ interfaces, videogames also help us to recognize the Gothic novel as a kind of multimedia form *avant la lettre*, its incorporation of diaries and letters, maps and diagrams, lockets and cameo portraits betraying a precocious interest in the material bases of memory, mediation and identification. These parallels are also brought to the fore in ‘archival adventures’ - a contemporary fictional form that encompasses digital games, processional theatre and site specific performance, using spatial storytelling techniques to engage a player/spectator charged with discovering and collating evidence as they seek to reconstruct the past.

Another angle on the relationship between games and prior fictional forms is provided by contemporary novels about game design. Harking back to the modernist heyday of the *künstlerroman* even as they underline how radically understandings of work, creativity, gendered subjectivity and social mobility have altered since, these texts position the novel and the videogame as similarly amorphous, similarly omnivorous forms which offer very different means of handling the passage of time. These dis/continuities challenge us to develop interdisciplinary modes of comparative chronotypological analysis. Performativity theory is of assistance in this regard, enabling us to see that ‘the game’ is a matter not just of code and assets created by developers, but also of the live configurative activity of players – and opening, in so doing, the prospect of fresh perspectives on art and literature.

Papers:

### **Musical and Pornographic Approaches to Game Fiction**

Rory Summerley (Falmouth University)

### **Archival Adventuring**

Melissa Kagen (Bangor University)

## **From Bildung to Coding: Novelizing the Development of Videogame Development**

Rob Gallagher (King's College London)

## **Chronotypology: A Comparative Method for Analysing Nonlinear Narrative**

Darshana Jayemanne (Abertay University)

Rob Gallagher is a postdoctoral researcher with King's College London's Ego-Media project. His work addresses the role of digital technologies in fostering new forms of self-presentation and conceptions of identity. He is the author of *Videogames, Identity and Digital Subjectivity* (Routledge 2017).

Melissa Kagen is a Lecturer in Digital Media & Gaming at Bangor University. She holds a PhD from Stanford University (2016). Her current research focuses on walking simulators, wandering, queer game studies, and intersections between participatory theatre and video games.

Darshana Jayemanne is Lecturer in Art, Media and Computer Games at Abertay University and the author of *Performativity in Art, Literature and Videogames* (Palgrave MacMillan 2017). He is Co-Investigator on the AHRC "Reality Remix" project.

Rory Summerley is an early career researcher and lectures in game design and theory at Falmouth University. Rory's research considers issues surrounding game fiction, esports, spectatorship and unconventional approaches to game studies.

## **Working with Authors, Archives and Questions of Authority**

### **David Foster Wallace's Archival Poetics: An Introduction**

John Roache (University of Manchester)

Based on a period of funded research at Wallace's papers in Austin, this paper offers a consideration of not only the burgeoning field of 'Wallace Studies', but also the economic and ideological assumptions underlying the increasing contemporary investment in the labour of archival research. Conventionally, archival materials have been read by literary scholars as a way of further elucidating the significance of the final, published work. For instance, an author's marginalia and variant drafts might allow us to reconstruct the compositional processes or cultural influences of a particular text. However, this paper starts from the contention that Wallace's writing forcefully resists this 'supplementary' logic. By reading some of Wallace's published works in relation to a range of source materials and drafts, the paper illuminates his 'archival poetics' for the first time: the extraordinarily diverse and far-reaching ways in which Wallace's oeuvre is intensified, critiqued, and even undone by its own archival origins. In this sense, the 'poetics' under discussion here are informed not by the intentions that Wallace explicitly expressed for his own work, but rather by the singular levels of disruption, overflow, and fragmentation that emerge from a reading of the author's archival materials. Finally, then, the paper aims to present a useful yet politicised consideration of contemporary archival research, at a time when the papers of a number of other major authors such as Christine Brooke-Rose, J. M. Coetzee, and Kazuo Ishiguro are becoming available to scholars in new and exciting ways.

John Roache is Lecturer in Twentieth-century Literature at the University of Manchester. His current research focuses on the intersections of archival research and critical theory, and he has previously published on Wallace's personal library, historical materialism in Russell Hoban's *Ridley Walker*, and the marginalia of J. K. Rowling.

### **Reading with Toni Morrison**

Charlotte Terrell (University of Sussex)

What kind of cultural authority do contemporary novelists have, and how does it influence the way we read their fiction? As “world literary stage” authors go, Toni Morrison has more claim to the phrase than most. Decorated with prizes from literary and non-literary institutions, possessing over a decade of experience in literary publishing as an editor and many more as a professor, an author of fiction and literary criticism, a generous giver of interviews, talks and speeches, it is clear that she commands a prominent place as a cultural figure. But the nature of the authority that attends that prominence – and its effect on criticism of Morrison’s work – is less clear. In this paper I examine how Morrison’s substantial extra-fictional presence has induced a critical tendency to reproduce Morrison’s own words in place of producing an independent critical reading. As Ann duCille and C. Namwali Serpell have argued, the historicization of black women writers as metaphorical conjure women and the vexed sociological lens with which that writing was read through the second half of the twentieth century has seen these writers (and their critical outputs) coded as ‘authentic’ mediums of experience rather than as authoritative writers. This paper will read the paradox of Morrison’s authority and pose a counter-narrative that, theorizing the anticipatory relationship between readers and writers, is attuned to the ways that Morrison invites and deflects attention from her hand in her fictions.

Charlotte is in the final stages of her PhD at the University of Sussex, completing a thesis on forms of enchantment in contemporary fiction. Planning a new project about novel editors and editing since 1960, she has a chapter forthcoming with Edinburgh UP on the shared critical temporalities of literary criticism and art criticism, and has published in *Textual Practice*.

### **Between the Two: the textuality of correspondence between Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark**

Nonia Williams (UEA)

This paper will discuss 1990s correspondence between Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark, with two interconnecting purposes: to ask what kind of narrative these texts construct, and how. First, I will consider how the letters and faxes express these writers’ friendship and solidarity, in terms of a lively and forthright defence of their identities as women and as writers. This aspect of discussion will seek to probe at Lessing and Spark’s complex relationship to feminism and questions of female identity, by engaging with how, across the correspondence, they both support and encourage each other’s right to write, and share frustrations of motherhood and womanhood. Secondly, I will consider how the tone, textual forms, patterns and intimacy of address of the correspondence work to articulate and complicate Lessing and Spark’s personas within these texts. Here, I am particularly interested in both the affective and historical qualities of the letters and faxes, in terms of what kinds of authorial or narrative voices are created through the dialogic forms of this correspondence, and how in turn we might read such composite and fragmented texts. Such texts necessarily consist of gaps and misreadings, and I will draw on Deleuze and Guatarri’s concept of ‘rhizome’ in order to consider how the multiple nature of the material might itself be able to generate a depth of thinking about women and writing which precisely happens because it happens in writing and reading between the two.

Nonia Williams is a Lecturer in Literature at UEA. She is co-editor, with Kaye Mitchell, of the forthcoming *British Avant-Garde Fiction of the 1960s*, and has written on the British writer Ann Quin for *Textual Practice* and elsewhere. She is currently researching correspondence between Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark, and representations of gender and the institution(alisation) of madness.

Writing Brexit

**‘It was the worst of times, of it was the worst of times’: Brexit and Literary Mood in Ali Smith’s *Autumn***

Sibyl Adam (University of Edinburgh)

Declared the ‘first great Brexit novel’ by *The New York Times*, Ali Smith’s 2017 novel *Autumn* continues the author’s penchant for stylistic innovation while simultaneously responding to the contemporary politics of Britain. This paper will focus on how the novel creates a literary mood that responds to the lead up to and initial reaction to the EU membership referendum in June 2016. Drawing upon recent scholarship in affect studies, I will discuss the ways in which the novel creates mood through specific emotions linked to Brexit, amongst them anxiety, fear and anger. *Autumn* serves as a point of catharsis through its structural engagements with time, for instance with the seasonal theme and central character relationship between an elderly man and young woman. In considering *Autumn* to be a literary response to Brexit, I suggest that it reconfigures the political novel for the contemporary age by concentrating on everyday emotions rather than overtly political context. Overall, the emphasis on mood shows the novel’s engagement with the immediacy of the contemporary, which in turn reasserts the relevance of the novel form in the digital age.

Sibyl Adam recently submitted her PhD in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, funded by the Wolfson Foundation. Her thesis theorises migration as an everyday experience using affect theory in a genealogy of texts about Muslim women migrating to the UK from 1906 to 2012. She currently tutors in English and Scottish literature at Edinburgh.

**‘It aye like London, you know’: Brexit Fiction and the Post-Industrial ‘North’**

Chloe Ashbridge (University of Nottingham)

This paper examines the role of post-industrial space within the emergent genre of Brexit fiction, centred on Anthony Cartwright’s *The Cut* (2017). I provide an analysis of representations of regional deindustrialised spaces within ongoing debates surrounding what Tom Nairn has termed ‘the break-up of Britain’, a conversation which has been reignited following the UK’s vote to Leave the EU in 2016. *The Cut*’s critique of the bind between a unified British nation-state and the metropolitan literary economy forms the overarching contextual focus of this paper. I examine the spatial biases of British literary production and its respective scholarship, arguing that these prejudices perpetuate structural inequality throughout the UK. Drawing on the novel’s task of ‘build[ing] a fictional bridge between the Britains that opposed each other on Referendum day’, I consider how the post-industrial landscape is heavily politicised and positioned in a way which challenges a unitary nation state, posing pressing questions regarding London-centred Britishness at a time when the nation is divided across political, cultural, and geographical fault lines. To this end, I address three overlapping and reoccurring thematic concerns: the continuing literary legacy of de-industrialisation in Northern England, the absence of adequate forms of political representation beyond the South-East of England, and the marginalisation of the urban working classes. Finally, I conclude that the turn towards the post-industrial in Cartwright’s text ultimately undermines the reconciliatory potential of the Brexit novel in the twenty-first century.

Chloe Ashbridge is an AHRC-funded PhD Researcher in the School of English at the University of Nottingham. Her thesis focuses on contemporary Northern English fiction and examines the relationship between representations of space in Northern England, twenty-first century British politics and regionalised devolution. Chloe also co-ordinates the Landscape, Space and Place Research Group at Nottingham.

**Cruel nostalgia and the memory of the Second World War**

Robert Eaglestone (Royal Holloway, University of London)

In this paper I mention the War. I argue that while statistical, social science accounts of Brexit are useful, we can make that narrative deeper by exploring the specific affects around Brexit. As ‘Structures of feeling’ are always ‘feelings about’ something: in this case, it is the collective memory of the Second World War. This turn to the past means that Brexit is not quite an example of what the leading affect theorist Laurent Berlant calls ‘cruel optimism’: instead Brexit is a ‘cruel nostalgia’. I explain what this means and give some notable examples from both fiction and non-fiction, ‘Leave’ and ‘Remain’, and then look at the some of the limitations and the damaging consequences of cruel nostalgia.

Robert Eaglestone is Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought at Royal Holloway, University of London. He works on contemporary literature and literary theory, contemporary philosophy and on Holocaust and Genocide studies. He was involved in the founding of BACLS.

### **BrexLit: Fate of the Nation**

Kristian Shaw (University of Lincoln)

Britain’s recent exit from the European Union on 23rd June 2016 signalled an unprecedented historic moment for the nation and has resulted in a form of political isolationism unthinkable at the turn of the millennium. The years leading up to the EU referendum witnessed a sudden and violent shift towards right-wing populism, hostility towards supranational forms of cosmopolitan democracy and global interdependence, extensive opposition to open border policies, discontent with the cultural implications of globalization, and a xenophobic resistance to both immigrants and transnational mobility more widely. This paper will consider the response of contemporary literature in an increasingly fragile and uncertain political climate, arguing that the referendum debate entailed a broader struggle between the forces of cosmopolitanism and nationalism (represented by the contradictory narratives woven by the Remain and Leave camps, respectively). Beginning with a brief analysis of Brexit and its immediate consequences, the paper will then provide a timely close reading of post-Brexit fictions (forming a genre which I have coined ‘BrexLit’), including *Autumn* (2016) and *Winter* (2017) by Ali Smith, *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, and *The Cut* (2017) by Anthony Cartwright. This first wave of post-Brexit fiction will be shown to detail the specific frailties and parochial trivialities of a diminished small island. However, these works also gesture towards more inclusive and diverse forms of public culture and espouse an outward-looking cosmopolitan resistance to an increasingly inward-looking cultural landscape. In this way, they demonstrate literature’s potential to engage with emergent political realities and imagine life ‘after’ Europe.

Kristian Shaw is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Literature at the University of Lincoln. His first monograph is *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-First Century Fiction* (Palgrave, 2016) and was funded by the AHRC.

His second monograph is *BrexLit* (Bloomsbury). He has chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to British Postmodern Fiction* and *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*.

### **Writing Women: Subjectivity and Selfhood in Contemporary American Fiction**

This panel will bring together papers on three contemporary American women authors to look at questions of gender, subjectivity, and the construction of the self in literary fiction.

### **Domestic Apocalypse: Gender and Neoliberal Identity in the New Naturalist Novel** **Sarah McCreedy (University College Cork)**

In this paper, I argue that the manifestation of naturalism, a type of literature in which characters are governed by forces beyond their control, is archetypal in Lionel Shriver’s 2016 novel, *The Mandibles*. Through a consideration of female subjectivity and the gendered construction of formulaic naturalist spaces in the novel, it will emerge that Shriver troublingly reinforces several of the problematic racial and

gender stereotypes of traditional naturalism, advocated by classic white male naturalists such as Frank Norris. The paper thus explores how Shriver's novel is regressive for a text of 'new' naturalism, the 21st-century resurgence that my thesis, with a focus on the impact of neoliberalism, explores.

Sarah McCreedy is a second-year PhD student in the School of English at University College Cork. She is the recipient of a PhD Excellence Scholarship from the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences. Her thesis explores the resurgence of American literary naturalism in 21st century American fiction.

### **Thinking Through Theory: Double Vision in Jennifer Egan's *Look at Me***

Tricia Malone (Queen's University Belfast)

This paper will look at Jennifer Egan's 2001 novel, *Look at Me*. Although Egan is best known for the Pulitzer-prize winning *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (2010), *Look at Me* is a more ambitious and expansive novel – one the author herself considers her best work. As Adam Kelly has written, the novel “begin[s] with postmodernism,” and the question of the relationship between life and literary theory looms large in the text. I will offer a reading of the way in which Egan explores theories of gender within the text, framing this in the larger context of Egan's own position. Egan has expressed anxiety around her “tendency to model [herself] consciously after male writers,” and uncertainty about “what tradition [she is] part of.” This uncertainty is reflected, too, in the marketing and critical reception of Egan's work, and in this paper I will explore some of the difficulties inherent in the construction of the ‘Great (White Male) American’ author.

Tricia has recently completed her PhD at Queen's University Belfast, where she currently teaches American literature and Cultural and Critical Theory. She recently won the USSO keynote competition and presented her winning paper at the 2017 BAAS Postgraduate conference in November.

### **“My body is accomplishing impossible things”: The female body, agency and slavery in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God***

Angela Sparks (University of Hertfordshire)

Louise Erdrich's 2017 novel, *Future Home of the Living God*, raises the prospect of a dystopian near-future where evolution runs backwards and pregnant women are being captured and interred in hospitals by the self-appointed government who want to study them. Cedar, a Native American woman raised and somewhat fetishised by her adoptive white parents, undertakes an increasingly perilous journey to discover her biological history and protect her unborn child from an evermore unstable world. This paper will examine the novel's engagement with citizenship and women's rights against the current political backdrop in the U.S. which Erdrich acknowledges as a catalyst for the completion of the novel. The emergence of invasive technology, an underground network and the breakdown of law and order contribute to the threat posed to the female body at its most vulnerable – and powerful.

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Hertfordshire where I am writing my thesis on the Birchbark House series of children's books by Native American author Louise Erdrich. My research and teaching interests include indigenous fiction, children's literature, American history and contemporary U.S. culture.

### **Zadie Smith, *The Panel***

### **Zadie Smith and Laughter: ‘talking about things we didn't want to talk about’**

Huw Marsh

This paper discusses the role of laughter in Zadie Smith's fiction. In the essay 'Dead Man Laughing', Smith recalls how television sitcoms provided a method of dialogue with her father, giving them 'a way of talking about things we didn't want to talk about': laughter as unifying, shared experience. But there is a contrary view that associates laughter with superiority, ridicule and social control. According to Michael Billig (2005), this is laughter's primary function. Both forms of laughter feature in Smith's novels, and this paper traces their manifestations from the ironic caricatures of *White Teeth* (2000) to the more muted textures of her recent fiction. Drawing on work in affect studies and sociology as well as literary studies, this paper argues that laughter and humour in Smith's recent fiction present a challenge to the idea that joke-work necessitates a victim or target. It argues that, as James English (1994) suggests of postcolonial joke-work, Smith's writing advances 'a new laughter of community which would not celebrate a common identity, and a new politics of community which would not strive either to realize a common essence or to perform a common work'. This humour recognizes difference and laughs through it rather than at it.

Huw Marsh is Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of *Beryl Bainbridge* (2014) and is currently writing a second monograph, entitled *The Comic Turn in Contemporary British Fiction: Who's Laughing Now* (Bloomsbury).

### **Zadie Smith's Liberal Imagination**

Daniel South (University of York)

The 2018 publication of Zadie Smith's second collection of essays, *Feel Free*, affords us the opportunity to reconsider the author's work after nearly two decades as one of the most recognisable British authors in the literary public sphere. In her foreword, Smith posits that her essays, "about one person's affective experience," are defined by their "freedom." This extends, she hopes, to the experience of reading them – her "hope is for a reader who, like the author, often wonders how free she really is, and who takes it for granted that reading involves all the same liberties and exigencies as writing." Smith's formal expression of freedom in these essays mirrors her thematic interest in the idea, which has always been present in her work. But if Smith's latest novel *Swing Time* (2017) was in part about, as she put it, "the failure of liberal thought," have her recent essays taken aim at its central tenet of freedom? Smith is known for changing her mind, but as Adam Kirsch points out, "liberal assumptions [...] have always been the homes to which Smith has returned." In this paper I will trace the development of the theme of freedom across Smith's fiction and non-fiction, outlining its intricate connections with how she writes about selfhood, power, and politics. In doing so, I will ask questions about the relationship between liberalism and literature in the twenty-first century that build on important debates about the role of neoliberalism in art and culture.

Daniel South is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate and associate member of the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York. His research focuses on notions of the public sphere in the Internet Age as explored in contemporary Anglo-American fiction, and he has presented on the topic at IBAAS 2016, BAAS 2017, and ACLA 2017.

### **Zadie Smith: Female Sexuality and Romantic Love in *White Teeth* (2000)**

Fiona Martinez (Sheffield Hallam University)

"...theirs was a marriage of true love, total spiritual bonding and dedicated political union. (...) Joley's and Crispin's marriage served as a kind of cosmogony, an originating myth that explained succinctly what people could and should be" (Smith, 2001, p. 477-8). Using Simone de Beauvoir's theory of authentic love, as outlined in *The Second Sex* (1949), this paper examines representations of romantic love in contemporary writer Zadie Smith's debut novel *White Teeth* (2000). Exploring some of the many examples of romantic love within the text, I focus on the attempts of Smith's characters to 'create shared meaning' within their relationships: an element central to de Beauvoir's theory of authentic love. In doing so I

argue that Smith's work foregrounds the power and influence of romantic love, and critiques limiting and unequal examples of romantic relationships. As de Beauvoir argues: 'authentic love must be founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms (...) together they would both reveal values and ends in the world. For each of them, love would be the revelation of self through the gift of self and the enrichment of the universe. (2010, p. 799). With this in mind, I will present Smith's novel as a contemporary example of de Beauvoir's feminist and somewhat utopian ideals and consider the extent to which these ideas can be seen within her wider fiction.

Fiona Martinez is a fully-funded PhD candidate and Associate Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University. Her research uses Simone de Beauvoir's theory of authentic love, as outlined in *The Second Sex* (1949), to explore contemporary women writers' representations of romantic love as a feminist endeavour. She is the founder of the Post-Graduate Women in Academia group at Sheffield Hallam University and a member of the Post-Graduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network steering group.