

# HERMES Summer School: What Matters in the Humanities



**16→20.06.25**

organisée par Charlotte Chassefière, Jean-Michel Ganteau, Molly Gilbertson, Théo Maligeay, Katia Marcellin, Constance Pompié et Christine Reynier.

à Site Saint-Charles 2, Auditorium  
Tram 1 arrêt Albert 1<sup>er</sup>  
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# Book of Bios and Abstracts

## Hermes Summer School 2025





# Miguel Alcalde Silveira

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«Cancer won't get me if I get there first»: Vindictive Conversations on Euthanasia, Social Care and the (Queer) Aging Process in Pedro Almodóvar's *The Room Next Door* (2024)

## Abstract

Elderly people and the aging process remain, to our days, some of the least visible themes in the arts and humanities. Thus, the particularities of growing old queer are even less present in contemporary media, particularly in certain audiovisual traditions such as the Spanish one. However, it has become one of the main subjects in Pedro Almodóvar's films, especially over the last 15 years as he moved from his early sixties into his mid-seventies. As a director, Almodóvar has always been associated with a subversive gaze concerned with the representation of oppressed and marginalized communities (including his own), so this fact should not really come as a surprise... except it was not that easy to begin with.

Although he seemed quite reluctant to accept his own old age at first —as some interpretations of *The Skin I Live In* (2011) and *I'm So Excited!* (2013) may suggest—, his most recent pieces show a complete turn in the way he perceives the aging subject (Sancho Cardiel, 2024). One could argue that Almodóvar has explicitly decided to draw attention to what matters in life once a certain age is reached, with a particular interest in care-giving systems and relationships. This theme had been present since 2016's *Julieta* in many ways, but never as dominant as in his latest feature, *The Room Next Door* (2024). Thus, this paper will examine how the film's conversational narrative provides a vindictive approach to the matters of social care, welfare institutions and euthanasia. Along with the evolution of Ingrid (Juliane Moore) and Martha's (Tilda Swinton) interpretation of death, our research will be sustained by critical theories of the ethics of care (Tronto, 1993), euthanasia (Fleming, 2021), and the representation of the aging process in media (Zecchi et al., 2021). However, in realising Almodóvar's intention to denaturalise the cisheteronormativity of the care-giving process, and to fight against chrononormative (Freeman, 2010) impositions of life and death, we will also take into consideration concepts and perspectives from authors closer to queer studies that may not appeal directly to these themes but can be useful to our analysis, such as Judith Butler (2004, 2009), Michel Foucault (Marsh, 2010), Lauren Berlant (2011), and Sara Ahmed (2010).

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## Biography

Miguel Alcalde Silveira graduated in Classics with a Minor in Literary Studies from the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (USC) in 2022, where he obtained his master's degree in Literature and Culture Studies in 2023. In his PhD thesis he elaborates a queer methodology of film analysis that aims to queer Pedro Almodóvar's filmography. Moreover, he is currently doing an internship at the Centro Ramón Piñeiro para a Investigación en Humanidades (Xunta de Galicia), and he is a part of the working team of the research project PERFORMA3 «Theatre without theatre: Theory and practice of the non-actor in the contemporary Spanish stage» (PID2023-14349NB-I00) (2024-2028).

# Francesca Balestro

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*Narrating the Ruins in 21st-century Fiction: Everyday Life, Form, and the Anthropocene*

## Abstract

The present paper examines forms and representations of environmental ruins in two 21st century novels, *Emergency* (2022) by Daisy Hildyard and *Lost Children Archive* (2019) by Valeria Luiselli. Building on Tsing's work on late-capitalistic ruins, I suggest that in these novels, environmental ruins function as a heuristic framework that waves together histories of disparity and capitalist exploitation, while also prefiguring the planet's future. Through their formal experimentalism, these works advocates for an 'art of noticing' (Tsing) that captures the diverse dimensions of both distress and livelihood. By engaging with representations of slow violence (Nixon) and the entanglements with progressive larger ecological phenomena (Morton, Caracciolo), these novels help us rethink the visibility and the impact of the Anthropocene on the everyday plane, drawing attention to its unequal impact on both human and non-human constituencies.

While in *Lost Children Archive*, the representation of the environmental ruins is primarily deployed to explore the history of marginalised and displaced communities, occasionally reproducing an anthropocentric perspective, *Emergency's* depiction of environment more thoroughly explores the interconnectedness of human and non-human life. Nonetheless, both novels challenge the prevailing notion that the Anthropocene cannot be experienced at a phenomenological level. By making the Anthropocene's impact visible, these novels also address the affective work required to sustain life and produce meaning in the face of the environmental crisis. Moving beyond the overstudied corpus of genre fiction, this paper contributes to literary scholarship on the Anthropocene by broadening the scope of inquiry to lesser-discussed texts. Rejecting the grandiose tropes of post-apocalyptic and dystopian genres, I emphasise how these novels employ formal experimentalism (including slow narrative pace, overlapping points of view, and narrative fragmentation) and genre hybridisation (such as essayism) to offer innovative approaches of narrating both a dying planet and the persistence of life.

## Biography

Francesca Balestro is a first-year PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at University College London (UCL). She holds an MA in Modern and Contemporary Italian Literature from the University of Milan and an MA in Comparative Literature from UCL. Her AHRC LAHP funded research focuses on representations of the Anthropocene in everyday life in contemporary fiction across Italian, English, and French literatures. Her broader academic interests include ecocriticism, narrative theory, and affect theory.

# Isabela Bertho

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*What remains: migration narratives and grieve in objects in the border*

## **Abstract**

In recent years, the issue of migration in the US, especially on the Mexico-US border, has occupied the public debate, and has intensified with the so-called migration crisis and the construction of the wall under the Trump administration. The anti-immigrant discourse is again on the rise with Trump's re-election, consolidating itself as an object of political and identity disputes. Migrants have become an indistinct mass; they occupy the media headlines while at the same time remaining invisible. If, on one hand, the media and certain political discourses create a homogenizing narrative about migrants, there is a lack of information about the many different stories of migrants.

Monica Lozano, a Mexican American photographer, develops her work on the Mexico-USA border, precisely in the area around the wall between Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and El Paso, USA. In her works *El Cementerio*, *Concertina* and *What Remains*, the photographs portray the border area and capture personal objects brought by migrants and/or objects abandoned during the process of crossing the border (or attempting to). Without faces, bodies or people, the photographs document migration, bringing the materiality of place and objects (Assmann, 2011) into discussion. The migrant subjects are absent from the photographs but materialized in them through the presence of the objects, which are themselves embedded with history, memories and losses (Erll 2011; Hirsh 1997; Gibson 2008). My research aims to analyze if the photographs in these works can be perceived as an archive of memories about migration and if this archive enables a narrative of migrants, bringing the dimension of grieving into these stories. I propose a combined reading of the three works, trying to identify the narrative effect created by the relationship between them, asking myself, like Butler, *When Is Life Grievable?* (2009)

## **Biography**

Isabela Vieira Bertho is a PhD candidate and scholarship holder in Comparative Studies at the Centre for Comparative Studies of the Faculty of Letters of ULisboa. She has a master's degree in Sociology from Unige and a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from USP. She researches the materialities of memory and its dimensions of affection, and in particular the intersectionalities between memory, migration and gender.

# Kirsten Brohm

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*White ladies, coloured mistresses and black mammies  
(Re)constructions of womanhood in Phyllis Shand Allfrey's feminist plantation romance*

## Abstract

Taking white-Dominican Phyllis Shand Allfrey's romance novel *The Orchid House* (1953) and its reception as its point of departure, this paper reconsiders the mid-20th century Caribbean romance novel as a feminist alteration of 19th century Southern American plantation fiction. Focusing more specifically on the novel's reconfiguration of stereotypical tropes of black and white womanhood rooted in plantation society, the paper argues that by appropriating the voice of a devoted black woman servant as first-person narrator, the novel displaces the racialized and gendered power structures of the conventional (proslavery) plantation narrative. In doing so, *The Orchid House* exposes the perseverance of the patriarchal and paternalistic construction of both the ideology of true white womanhood (Carby; Welter) and the faithful 'black mammy' figure (McElya) in late colonial/post-slavery society. With a combined focus on the immediate reception of *The Orchid House*, the paper further demonstrates how similar stereotypical tropes of womanhood envelop the novel beyond the text itself. Contemporary British reviews of *The Orchid House* indeed reduced the novel to an "exotic" romance story, essentially appealing due to its feminine qualities (Rossall; Scott). While the novel employs the plantation romance as a framework for negotiating racialized tropes of womanhood on the verge of decolonization, similar stereotypes of (white) femininity, ironically, framed Allfrey's marginal position within anglophone Caribbean literary history. Indeed, the emergence of postcolonial and Caribbean literary studies in the 1960s and 1970s caused the exclusion of seemingly imitative colonial writings, especially by women and white-creole writers, from Caribbean literary history (Donnell; O'Callaghan). Thus, read in light of its reception, *The Orchid House* further reveals the perseverance of stereotypical and racialized tropes of Caribbean womanhood within literary criticism and historiographical paradigms across colonial and anti-colonial divides.

## Biography

Kirsten Brohm is a PhD student of Comparative Literature at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University. Her main area of research is the intersection of feminism and literary culture in the anglophone Caribbean region in the early and mid-20th century with a special focus on the gendered politics of sentimental literary genres. She is affiliated with the Centre for the Study of the Literatures and Cultures of Slavery at Aarhus University.

# Alyssa Bryl

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*(In)visible Victims?: Vienna's World War II Remembrance Culture*

## **Abstract**

Vienna's urban memorial landscape reveals two distinct approaches to its Erinnerungskultur, or memory culture: the systematic commemoration of interwar socialist culture and the dispersed memorialization of Austria's involvement in the Holocaust. This divergence speaks to the frames of perception and intelligibility shaping what is remembered, how, and by whom. Engaging with the conference theme of "What matters," this presentation examines the ethical and political implications of Vienna's differing memorial strategies.

The municipal celebration of interwar "Red" Vienna is marked by cohesive, city-led efforts that manifest in commemorative publications, events, and prominent sites. These initiatives underscore an organized, institutionalized narrative of modernity and progress, embedding Red Vienna as well as figures of the Austrian resistance as a cornerstone of Viennese identity. In contrast, Holocaust memorials are characterized by decentralization, often arising from private commissions or grassroots initiatives. Scattered and diverse, they reflect the ethical challenge of perceiving and addressing the fragmented, painful legacy of Austria's complicity in genocide.

This presentation argues that these divergent approaches reveal perceptual blind spots, wherein the systematic promotion of Red Vienna renders its narrative dominant and unchallenged, while the scattered nature of Holocaust memorials risks diminishing their visibility and ethical resonance. This presentation highlights the need to "care" for memory by interrogating these asymmetries, addressing the vulnerability of marginalized histories, and fostering equitable commemorative practices. Through this analysis, I demonstrate how Vienna's memorial strategies shape public consciousness and historical accountability, calling for a critical re-evaluation of whose stories "matter" and how they are brought into collective awareness. By asking what is hidden, scattered, or systematically amplified, this work contributes to an understanding of memory as a site of both cultural production and ethical responsibility.

## **Biography**

Alyssa Bryl is a PhD candidate in the German Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She received a bachelor's degree from UW-Madison in German and International Studies and her master's degree in German as a Second and Foreign Language from the University of Vienna. Her primary interests are related to Viennese history, culture, and language. In her doctoral research, Alyssa focuses on interwar Vienna, the legacy of Red Vienna, and the Wiener Gemeindebauten. She is also motivated to explore how aspects of memory and history are transmitted or obscured via public spaces in Vienna.

# Sophie Chauhan

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*Conjuring the phantom liminal: Chinese Exclusion (1882) and racial futurity in the United States congressional record*

## Abstract

The capacity of a phantom limb to generate feeling without substance makes it an object of uncanny fixation. How can sense be made without matter—indeed, from the absence of matter—and subsequently be made to matter? In this paper, I explore what happens when raw nerve endings in the racial imaginary re/con/figure new appendages.

I begin with a moment in the US congressional record of 1882, where a Mississippi representative's amputated arm 'speaks' in a debate about Chinese immigration. When Andrew Curtin (Pennsylvania) comes to rebut Charles E. Hooker's critiques of the proposed Chinese Exclusion Act, he remarks that "there was more appeal... in the mute eloquence of the wave of his armless sleeve than in all the beauty and power and fascination of his language." As a sign of the ravages of the Civil War and victory of emancipation over slavery, Hooker's phantom limb articulates "that true liberty founded on unity, concord, and fraternity was now present, and to grow and increase forever and forever." Curtin goes on to argue that Chinese immigration (associated with labour exploitation) threatens to undermine this liberal triumph and derail the onward march of racial progress.

Through my analysis of Curtin's conjuring, I unpack how logics of comparative racialisation make 'Asiatic' aliens both mean and matter to nineteenth-century imaginings of racial futurity in the United States. In doing so, I argue that flexible, ambiguous figurations of 'Asiatic' racial difference play an instrumental role in two entangled projects of white racial power: the growth of anti-Black racial capitalism and the expansion of the genocidal settler colony. If Curtin/Hooker's phantom limb is made to signify post-Civil War repair, the 'Asiatic' figure, or 'phantom liminal', is the 'narrative prosthesis' that rescues American liberalism from the haunt of the very racial violence on which it is predicated.

## Biography

Sophie Chauhan is a third-year PhD candidate in Race, Ethnicity and Postcolonial Studies at University College London. Her research investigates diasporic 'Asianness', the shifting parameters of whiteness and anti-racist coalition movements in Australia and the United States. Outside of academia, she organises in queer, anti-racist and anti-capitalist solidarity spaces, and is author of *Curious Affinities*, a collection of essays and poems on the politics of intimacy.



# Maria-Clara Ciopată

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*Once Upon a Neurotransmitter: Affective and Neurological Engagement with Fictional Genres*

## Abstract

This project examines the neurological and emotional responses elicited by reading various fictional genres, arguing that genre-specific features in literature stimulate distinct neurological pathways—such as dopamine in fantasy’s curiosity-driven plots, oxytocin in romance’s nurturing dynamics and acetylcholine in horror’s stressful contexts—linking physiological responses with genre-based storytelling. Drawing from neuroscience and cognitive literary studies, I investigate how fantasy, romance, and horror each engage readers’ neurological and emotional systems, offering distinct cognitive and affective experiences that reveal literature’s hidden impacts.

In line with the HERMES Summer School’s theme of “What Matters in the Humanities,” I argue that what remains to some extent “invisible” in literary studies—namely, the neurobiological underpinnings of reading—is critical for understanding why readers are drawn to particular genres and how literature profoundly affects mental and emotional states, even beyond the reading experience. This investigation highlights literature’s role in promoting empathetic engagement and influencing social perceptions by identifying with a multitude of various characters while being immersed in the simulative experience that is the reading act.

By framing reading as both a personal and socially shared experience, my research illustrates literature’s capacity to foster cognitive and emotional growth, linking narrative with readers’ neurological responses and shedding light on the ethical dimensions of literary engagement. Understanding these impacts reveals how literature matters in deep and often unseen ways, contributing to both individual development and broader social understanding.

Ultimately, I propose that such an integrated view of literature within the humanities, where cognitive science intersects with literary studies, can deepen our understanding of “What Matters.” Literature thus becomes a potent medium not only for entertainment but also for shaping empathy, addressing biases, and inspiring critical thought—aligning closely with the ethical and social priorities central to the humanities.

## Biography

Maria-Clara Ciopată is a European Languages and Cultures BA graduate with a focus on Culture and Literature from the University of Groningen. Currently, she is a ReMa student in the program Arts, Media and Literary Studies. Her main interests meet at the interaction of literature (particularly genres), emotional stimulations and neurochemistry. Clara has contributed to upcoming academic publications on themes of sustainability, memory, and adaptation studies. Additionally, she has participated to international forums and holds extensive training in neuroscience and mental health. Her interests include ballet and contemporary fiction writing.

# Joshua Clark

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*How we define and represent depression matters: moving beyond the biomedical model*

## **Abstract**

As conversations about mental health proliferate, depression appears to be the central figure: perhaps the most well-known and talked about category of mental illness. We are regularly reminded about the global impact of depression in statistics published by the WHO and are made aware of increasing diagnosis rates. There appears, however, to be a universal depression which is talked about, rigidly defined via the symptoms presented in the DSM5 and/or ICD11 for Major Depressive Disorder. Many continue to call into question the usefulness and accuracy of these diagnostic manuals which collapse the distinction between personally and culturally disparate experiences to a monolithic notion of depression. Conversely, across a range of disciplines, it is variously painted as; an imbalance of chemicals in the brain (neurology), cognitive and perceptive distortion (psychology), a response to changing societal values (sociology), and as profoundly altered subjective experience (phenomenology). With this, it seems we can only talk about depressions in the plural.

What, then, can contemporary film and literature offer in terms of engaging with concepts of depression that go beyond official lists of symptoms offered in diagnostic manuals? With this question in mind, I focus on comparing English, French, and German narratives that represent depression. Using aspects of linguistic analysis, I explore the bringing-together of depression concepts from different fields despite theoretical contradictions. In this sense, I suggest that close analysis of these narratives encourages us to move beyond the narrow framework of conventional psychiatric diagnostics. Highlighting these different cultural and linguistic viewpoints is fundamentally important to continuing efforts to destigmatize mental ill-health and to nuancing our understanding of different and marginal experiences of depression which do not neatly fit into the available diagnostic criteria. It matters greatly how we talk about depression if we are to acknowledge the diversity of voices which can talk about depression.

## **Biography**

Joshua Clark is a first-year Comparative Literature PhD student at UCL, working in the School of European Languages, Culture and Society – Centre for Multidisciplinary and Intercultural Inquiry. His research focuses on the representation of depression in contemporary English, French, and German film and literature. He holds a BA in French and German from UCL, as well as an MA in French and Francophone Studies from UCL. He is particularly interested in how art in a broad sense can contribute to interdisciplinary discussions of mental (ill)health.

# Silas Edwards

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## *Invisible Entomologists*

### **Abstract**

In a column published in 1919 advising readers how to turn a profit by importing tropical insects to Europe, the editor of the Germany's largest broadsheet for the sale of insect specimens lamented the difficulties of employing and training indigenous people who were 'unpunctual, careless, lazy, indifferent, and thoroughly unreliable'. The author, Adalbert Seitz, nonetheless went on to claim that 'anyone who succeeds in overcoming these flaws will find the natives to be skilful, persistent, and undemanding; it is only necessary to treat them in such a way that one benefits from their strengths without suffering from their weaknesses'.<sup>1</sup> Penned in a shockingly racist and patronising tone, Seitz's description of the collaboration between European natural history collectors and indigenous people in colonised territories nevertheless provides a rare written acknowledgement of the extent to which the study of insects in Europe depended on the knowledge, skills and labour of indigenous people in other parts of the globe. In popular collecting regions such as Central America, Sri Lanka and West Africa, local inhabitants were employed under coercive conditions to amass great quantities of insects for export to Europe via colonial shipping networks. However, the increasingly popular science of 'exotic' insects produced in Europe — consisting of new taxonomic categories, names and printed images for purposes of identification — paid no credit to the labour and knowledge of the people who provided its raw material. Within the framework of my PhD project, which explores the cultural and scientific meanings of printed images of insects from the 19th and 20th centuries, I would like to use the context of the Hermes Summer School to workshop possible approaches to reconstructing the lives and contributions of these 'invisible entomologists'. Guided by the focus of the summer school on 'what matters' and its provocation to discuss marginalised agents within histories of knowledge production, my paper would provide an opportunity to develop a decolonial perspective on the history of entomology.

### **Biography**

Silas Edwards is a doctoral candidate in art history and a member of the Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at the Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen. Under the supervision of Professors Claudia Hattendorff and Mechthild Fend, his PhD thesis sets out to analyse the relationship between printed media and the growing popularity of insect collecting as both a science and leisure activity in the 19th and 20th centuries. Though barely explored by scholarship to date, he proposes that popular insect identification manuals are important artefacts for understanding the history of human ideas about insect life, while serving as a productive junction to consider the entanglements between environmental history, visual culture studies and the history of science. Further research interests include the visual cultures of consumer capitalism, land ownership and environmental activism, as well as collective memory construction surrounding the sixth mass extinction.

# Safa El Alami

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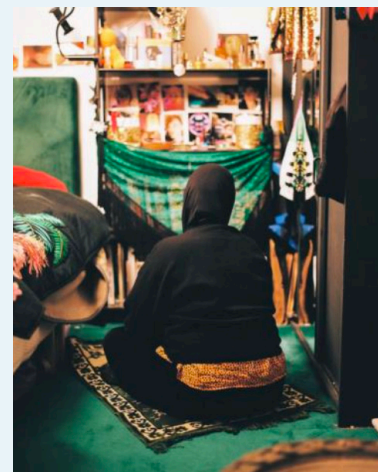
*Bodies in liminality: Between roar and silence, there's a portrait*

*Queer Futurity and Multilayered Identities: Exploring Aesthetics of Resistance and Utopian Aspirations in Camille Farrah Lenain's "Made of Smokeless Fire"*

## Abstract

This paper examines *Made of Smokeless Fire* (2022), a photographic series by the US-based French Algerian photographer Camille Farrah Lenain, which explores the intersection of queer, North African (diaspora), and Muslim identities in France. The project, which began as an homage to her uncle Farid, who died of HIV in 2013 without ever publicly addressing his homosexuality, offers a poignant tribute to marginalized queer and racialized individuals. Through intimate portraits, Lenain seeks to amplify the visibility of those who, like her uncle, embody multilayered identities that are both minority and non-normative in European contexts. This paper explores how the series serves as a bridge from private memory to collective memory, conveying an artistic perspective that both challenges and redefines historical narratives. The project confronts silences caused by colonial histories, immigration, and heteronormativity, reclaiming a counternarrative of visibility and memory.

Through contemplative aesthetics, the series evokes silence and grief, bridging the absence of an individual with collective invisibility, turning absence into presence. Drawing on seminal works such as José Esteban's *Cruising Utopia* and Barthes' *Camera Lucida* this paper explores how Lenain's work embodies utopian aspirations through queer aesthetics, ephemeral moments, and performativity, challenging present-day oppressive realities. By constructing new images that articulate a previously silent past, Lenain's work encapsulates the ideals of queer utopia and futurism, allowing for an imaginative critique of present social realities. The artist engages with the concept of liminality, which makes this series a transformative tool in contemporary photography that challenges fixed narratives around identity and memory. The series serves as both a resistance to oppression and an invitation to envision a world where diasporic and queer utopias are not only imagined but realized in the present.



## Biography

Safa El Alami is a PhD student in Cultural Studies at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. Her research interests lie in visual arts, postcolonial studies, diaspora studies and queer theory. She holds a master's degree from KUL in Cultural Studies. In her master's thesis, she studied the orientalist depiction of gay male characters in North African queer cinema co-produced by western media. She analyses the representation of homosexuality, the correlation with power dynamics, and film production and distribution. Currently, she is working on her doctoral thesis, titled "Thinking past pride, creating beside shame: Hshouma in contemporary visual artist's works from the Moroccan diaspora in Belgium and France", which delves into the themes of shame, identity, and cultural expression within the context of Moroccan diasporic art.



# Sandra Engels

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*Whose (Hi)Story Matters?*

*Dissonances and Nuances in Narrating Histories of Democracy at Heritage Sites*

## **Abstract**

Does it matter which narratives are represented and visible in heritage discourses? Does it matter that positions towards heritage sites are nuanced, diverse, and possibly dissonant? And whose (hi)story matters at heritage sites after all? The answers to this may seem disturbingly simple and obvious: yes, representations matter—yes, (different) positions matter—everyone's stories (should) matter. Indeed, the heritage sector has long advanced an understanding that heritage is inherently dissonant, that perspectives on the past are diverse and multidirectional, and that heritage discourses and practices should be participatory and inclusive. However, the politics of heritage continue advancing a highly selective and authorized discourse that overshadows, neglects, or avoids values and memories that deviate from its norm. In Germany, recent years have seen a significant surge in initiatives to label and promote democratic heritage, using the recourse to the past to socially and politically consolidate democratic ideals. The way that dominant heritage politics thereby foster a one-sided, linear history of democracy and its symbolic function in national historiography, however, impedes a more nuanced and ultimately democratic understanding of heritage processes. What leaves ruptures and latencies of heritagescapes untold, in fact, too, excludes perspectives that challenge or reject the dominant narrative—while giving room for (opposing) actors to position theirs. Through the case of St Paul's Church in Frankfurt, this paper analyzes how various actors in the heritage discourse try appropriating the site's democratic heritage and mold it for their own purposes. Questioning whose (hi)story is visible in the heritage discourse—and whose is un/intentionally not—this paper sustains a more dynamic understanding of heritage spaces. It acknowledges that counter-narratives are substantial part of the heritage process, and that dissonances, agonistic pluralism or even conflict must be dealt with for mediating and doing heritage in a diverse and complex world.

## **Biography**

Sandra Engels is a doctoral researcher and research assistant at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen. In her research project she works on cultural mediation and the dynamics of heritage making at sites/spaces of memory. Through integrating the innovative methodology of 'emotion networking' in her own tour-guiding practices she aims to investigate the emotional/affective side of heritage making processes and the diverse and individual perspectives on heritage spaces.

# Voula Evangelidou

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*Teaching and acquisition of morphologically complex French words by Greek-speaking students: What Matters?*

## **Abstract**

Research in humanities pays particular attention to the recognition of the uniqueness of individuals and to the specific contexts in which they operate, ex. in terms of language settings. The object of this presentation concerns the acquisition of the French lexicon, and more particularly of French morphologically complex words (ex. désavantage) by Greek-speaking students aged 13 to 16. Up to now, the visible point in the methodological approach is to be centered on a monolingual way of teaching the French prefixes and suffixes, operating under the assumption that the students' first language (L1) and any other languages do not influence their learning. The teacher evaluates at the end if the words produced by the student are correct, either in written or spoken language. However, there is an invisible point that eludes us and that the researcher has to uncover (Diamond 1995; Putnam 1996): the presence of other languages, namely the mother tongue, which is Greek, and specifically English, which these Greek-speaking students have likely acquired prior to learning French. Ignoring this can lead educators to inadvertently penalize students for errors that stem from legitimate language transfer rather than a lack of understanding. The present study aims to uncover a series of errors produced in this context by studying a written corpus from the same group of students over several months. By parsing out the patterns and examining the dynamics of these errors, we can address the fundamental question: What truly matters in the teaching and acquisition of French lexicon and specifically French morphologically complex words? The discussion concerns the ethical dimension of errors in L2 and L3 acquisition and how our findings can reshape error classifications and teaching methodologies. The aim is to enhance our understanding of the bilingual and plurilingual mental lexicon as a necessary step for a change in the way we view 2nd language perception and production, by considering various transfer phenomena (e.g. from L2 to L3), that can impact effectiveness of foreign language teaching, especially in settings where the L1 is less commonly studied. Ultimately, what matters is recognizing the complexities of language transfer and its implications for successfully teaching morphologically complex words in French.

## **Biography**

Voula Evangelidou is a graduate of French Language and Literature (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki). She holds two postgraduate degrees : Master 2 Linguistique Théorique et Descriptive (Université Paris VIII / École Normale Supérieure Paris) and Master 2 Didactique des Langues, du FLE et du FLS (Université Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle / Paris V). She is a PhD candidate in ED58 Langues, Littératures, Cultures, Civilisations at the Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry. She works as a French language teacher at the "Evangelidou Language Centre" and is a certified examiner and proof-reader of the French Institute of Greece DELF (A1-A2-B1-B2) / DALF (C1-C2).

# Roque Fernández Alcañiz

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*How to talk about love in digital poetry? Mechanisms of language for the reception success of an “insignificant” topic*

## Abstract

This paper aims to explore love, a subject which, although considered irrelevant by the first Wittgenstein --who would later rectify it--, is constantly dealt with in digital poetry, an enormously prolific genre, although marginal in the academy, whose most popular manifestations are marked by multimedia and competition for the scarce attention of the network's reader/viewers. Thus, the main focus will be to discover the language features used by digital poetic compositions on social networks that, by addressing such a recurring theme, manage to attract and interact with their online audience.

To this end, a mixed method approach will be used, based on Ordinary Language Philosophy and the ideas of Andrew Epstein (2016) and his conceptualisation of poetry as a medium for attention and knowledge. Using this set of tools, a comparative and literary language analysis will be carried out of the five recent digital love poems --written in English and published as of 2020, a date taken as a reference for the present due to the acceleration in digitalisation caused by the global pandemic-- with the highest engagement on each of the four social networks with the largest number of users in the world: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.

On the basis of this work, homologies will be established that will make it possible not only to know the keys to the reception's success of love in poetry in social networks, but also the common links that allow us to contribute to the clarification, through this poetic and analytical method, of one of the most recurrent topics of humanity.

## Biography

Roque Fernández Alcañiz (roque.fernandez.alcaniz@rai.usc.es) is a PhD candidate in Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Santiago de Compostela and a member of the Research Group Teoría da Literatura e Literatura Comparada (GI-1371) based in the Faculty of Philology. In the 2023-2024 academic year, he completed a Master's degree in Literary and Cultural Studies at the same institution and was awarded a research initiation contract funded by Banco Santander. This grant supported projects such as his Master's dissertation, titled “Multimedia poetry of online dissemination: Theoretical and through contemporary corpus approach (2019-2024)”.

Recently, he has developed an interest in public science communication, as reflected in the workshop “Oficina de Poesía Digital” that he directed at Casa da Esquina (a cultural association based in Coimbra, Portugal), and in the online German-culture-themed NichtNurMagazin, a publication which he co-founded.

His research results have been presented in several international events, such as the “Twenty-Second International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities” (Sapienza University of Rome), the First International Symposium “O que virá” (University of Santiago de Compostela), and the Fourth International Symposium on Initiation into Research in Literature and Cultural Studies / IV XIII ELC (University of Santiago de Compostela), where he was also part of the organizing team.

Currently, he brings together his main research interests in a thesis that explores Iberian digital poetry with a focus on its sociological, aesthetic and communicative analysis: “Iberian digital poetry online. Anthologisation and analysis of contemporary corpus (2020-2025)”.

# Imane Ghebache

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## *What Matters in the Gutter: Exploring Identity from Prose to Panels in US Comics*

### **Abstract**

The transition from prose to comics is not merely a shift in format but an act of listening to what might otherwise remain inaudible or invisible in traditional narrative forms. In this regard, this study discusses Chuck Palahniuk's shift from prose to panels when he switches to a graphic novel format for his *Fight Club* (1996) sequel, *Fight Club 2* (2015). By focusing on *Fight Club 2*, this research highlights the importance of studying the original story under a new medium, therefore shedding light on how Palahniuk reimagines and portrays the novel's themes of fractured, shapeshifting identities, and moral disarray through the unique aesthetic and narrative devices belonging to the comics' medium. Indeed, by moving beyond the constraints of prose, Palahniuk reimagines his narrative, utilizing the visual and spatial storytelling devices of comics to uncover hidden dimensions of the protagonist's internal conflict and dual identity. Drawing from Scott McCloud's framework of panel transitions and his concept of the "gutter" that he defines as "the space between the panels" (Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 66) where "human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" (66), this research demonstrates how the "gutter" is where the reader's imagination bridges fragmented images, thus revealing the untold and the unseen. Consequently, this allows us to see how the sequential art of *Fight Club 2* brings to light themes of narrative fragmentation that emphasize the shapeshifting identity of the protagonist. These visual and textual elements amplify the psychological and thematic complexities of the story, rendering visible the protagonist's struggles with identity, societal alienation, and existential crisis. This layered storytelling approach invites readers to engage actively with the invisible and inaudible forces shaping the narrative. The study further argues that comics, as a hybrid and participatory medium, serve as a counter-archive space where marginalized or obscured voices can find expression. By blending prose and visual art, *Fight Club 2* challenges traditional literary forms, offering an immersive and ethically charged narrative experience that demands the reader's full attention. In doing so, it engages with questions of what matters in storytelling: whose stories are told, how they are represented, and how they resonate with audiences. Ultimately, this research positions comics as a transformative medium that bridges literary studies and visual culture, uncovering what might elude other forms of storytelling. By attending to the inaudible and the unseen within *Fight Club 2*, this research demonstrates that moving from prose to comics is not merely a change in format, but a rethinking of how stories can be constructed, experienced, and interpreted to offer fresh perspectives that underscore the role of comics in revealing what truly matters in literature and art.

### **Biography**

Imane Ghebache is a first year PhD student specializing in US Comics Studies at the university of Université de Montpellier Paul Valéry. She is writing a thesis titled "Shapeshifting Superheroes: The Dual Identity of Anti-heroes in the Dark Age of Comics" under the supervision of Pr. Fiona McMahon (Université de Montpellier Paul Valéry) and Pr. Nancy Pedri (Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador). Her Master's thesis was on "Archetypes in Comics: The Dionysian Superhero in Alan Moore's *Watchmen*". She recently published an article titled "Transtextuality in Fiction: Alan Moore's *Watchmen* as a Meditation Upon Power" in the journal *Aleph: Langues, Médias et Sociétés*.



# Marina Iaroslavtseva

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*Reclaiming Agency: The 'Corporeality of Violence' in Contemporary Russian Feminist Literature*

## **Abstract**

In recent years, millennials in Russia have begun to describe their ways of understanding the concept of violence and reflecting on the hard Russian past of the 1990s and early 2000s, when they were growing up. The link between social and political dimensions intersects in the so-called "private sphere" – the family/home, which is never a safe place for anyone (Young 2005). In this sense, domestic violence serves as a mirror of social and political violence, and we can see traces of this in contemporary culture, especially in literature and cinema. The state uses its identity power (Fricker 2007) to silence the oppressed marginalized voices in the country because they contradict its political agenda and the mere concept of so-called 'traditional values'. To counter the state's position, young writers seek to reclaim their agency in creating counter discourses and narratives. By examining the prose of two prominent Russian feminist writers – Evgeniya Nekrasova and Vera Bogdanova – I tend to show how they try to take control of their identities and reconfigure the dominant language (Cixous 2009; Skiveren 2020; Chapter 6). They depict the terror, pain and suffering of a female body embedded in a socio-political context that allows us to reflect on the abuses of the authoritarian state on a material and personal level. These created affective bodies transform our perception of the 'corporeality of violence' and help us focus on the performative potential of the text (Oulanne 2020; Chapter 7).

## **Biography**

Marina Iaroslavtseva is a PhD-student at Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen. Her dissertation topic is « The Conceptualisation of Violence in Contemporary Russian Cinema and Its Interconnection to The Authoritarian State ». Her main disciplinary field is Cultural Sociology.

# Nuri Batuhan Luleci

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*Repressed Violence and Invisible Presence in Michael Haneke's Caché (2005)*

## **Abstract**

Based on my forthcoming article 'Postcolonial frames in Michael Haneke's Caché' in French Cultural Studies, originally linking the film to the genesis and ongoing legacy of anti-colonial dissent and resistance in the history of Francophone cinema, this paper focuses on how the film elicits ethical responsibility from the anaesthetised spectator regarding the issues of visibility and invisibility, violence and healing. In Caché (2005), politics, aesthetics, and life collapse into one another by setting a dystopic simulacrum from which the spectator becomes emancipated. The film critiques colonial-racist discourses alongside the society of the spectacle, subverting binary categorisations such as form/content, ethics/aesthetics and diegetic/extradiegetic through staged hyperrealism, neorealist aesthetics, and manipulations. By transgressing into the fictional discourse, the director manipulates the protagonist Georges Laurent (Daniel Auteuil) and the spectator through uncanny videotapes and childish drawings to make them encounter the Other, observe their underlying racist prejudices, and confront the repressed violence that returns with the suicide of Majid (Maurice Bénichou)—whose parents were killed by the French police during the Paris massacre in 1961—as an act of existential self-assertion. This paper demonstrates how Haneke's filmic aesthetics open the frame to relational presences and demand interpretative vigilance from the spectator as an ethically responsible subject, moving from filiation to affiliation, imaginary solipsism to symbolic syncretism and family interests to ethical humanism essential for peaceful co-existence. Contrary to the critical invisibility of French colonialism and Algerian resistance in French reviews and cinema, this paper emphasises the film's counter-hegemonic force that activates cultural memory for social transformation.

## **Biography**

Nuri Batuhan Luleci is a PhD student in the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at Charles University in Prague. He is researching and writing at the conceptual intersections between and among life-writing, postcolonial studies, and critical theory. He is currently working on his dissertation entitled 'Transgressive Life Writing and Exilic Criticism, focusing on the nexus between theory and lived experience in the life narratives of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Stuart Hall

# Valérie Morisson

*From the Residual to the Ruderal: Matters of Persistence and Resistance*

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The use of found-materials in 20th-century art has been related to the Duchampian ready-made, the trash aesthetics of Arte Povera or to the new recycling processes in sustainable practices. Infra-materials have been approached as rubbish, waste or trash subverting the cleanliness of the white cube, sometimes even celebrating decomposition more than composition. The abject presences of these repressed materialities (Kristeva), formlessness (Bataille), the threatening invasion of leaking bodies, smelling substances, rotting materials emerged through new forms (performance, installation, video art). Worn out, weathered, used materials, whether industrial or organic, also put to the fore notions of usages while celebrating the beauty of the ordinary and the mundane (Lehmann, Didi-Huberman). A forager and an archeologist of sorts, the artist scavenging objects or substances often shares authorship with the collected materials and wilfully adopts bricolage praxis. More recently, the field of discard studies (Liboiron) has invited us to consider the circulation of waste from a post-human, post-colonial, then decolonial perspective. Starting from these aesthetic, anthropological, post-colonial critical understandings of the infra-object in art, and drawing from New Materialism (Bennett) and the sensory turn (Ingold), I would like to probe the paradigmatic potentiality of the term 'residue' and articulate the residual and the ruderal to chart out a possible critical drift from persistence to resistance.

The word residue designates the fragment of an object which survived transformation, destruction or evaporation. Often interpreted as merely trace or evidence of a process, its autonomy is negated and its presence made synecdochical. Materiality has all too often been ranked below spirituality, the slough being devoid of any promise, any regenerative capacity, dismissed as a residue. Because the residue is what is left-behind, what has failed to be transformed, improved or subsumed, it is easily dismissed as a marginal, powerless element, a renegade almost. Yet considering its resilience and its capacity to endure and survive may lead us on alternative critical tracks. The residual can be conversely approached as what has persisted, resisted. Through the study of artworks made out of scavenged materials I intend to suggest that the assemblage of residues allows for the emergence of a contingent assembly (Hardt and Negri) of infra-matters. The agentive amorphousness and tentacularity of such an assemblage-assembly may reclaim rights to live and spread. Out of the material rubble, ruderal forms of occupation and proliferation signal a redistribution of agentivity, organicity and liveliness.

# Valérie Morisson

I would like to unpack the stakes of these twin notions of the residual and the ruderal by scrutinizing three kinds of works and by articulating them with critical terms borrowed from G. Agamben, N. Tuana and D. Haraway. In some works featuring dust, scum or discarded materials, the assemblage of bare substances, matter or bodies, form a chorus of formerly invisible, spectral forces which emerge from our forgotten, untold material histories of repression. Some artists have worked with recycled plastic materials and bestowed an unsettling agency upon plastic residues which translate into visual, perceptual terms of viscous porosities. Plastic ruderality sprouts new trans-species, trans-matter hybridities. New hybridities also emerge out of the organic residues of the vegetal realm. Donna Haraway's invitation to become compost is explored in several art works. Her call for the advent of « humusnities » implies acknowledging that what we divest as mere waste is in fact a residue and a fertile ground for renewal and decolonization.

## Biography

Valérie Morisson ([valerie.morisson@univ-montp3.fr](mailto:valerie.morisson@univ-montp3.fr)) is Professor of British and Irish cultural history at Université de Montpellier Paul Valéry 3. She is a member of EMMA (Études Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone) and co-director of the Sensitive Ecologies axis of the GIS EIRE. She has written extensively on Irish and British visual culture with a specific emphasis on artistic praxis and field work. Many of her publications have explored the complex relation between art and national identity. Her latest book, *Locating the Self / Welcoming the Other in British and Irish Art 1990-2020* (Peter Lang, Oxford, 2022) investigates the way contemporary artists respond to the issue of belongingness ; it addresses space and artistic praxis as relational and dialogical. Her recent research focuses on environmental art and the artists' intimate relation with the landscape or habitat. Her latest publications and conferences investigate the way artists have moved away from landscape and approached the vegetal realm through new ontologies and praxis.



# Đỗ Thảo Nhi

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*(In)visible Masculinities: Emasculated Stereotypes and Remasculinization in Ocean Vuong's Works*

## Abstract

This paper examines the experiences of Asian American masculinities within the context of U.S. history, focusing on the systemic emasculation and invisibilization of Asian American men resulting from exclusionary policies and legislation. These historical forces have resulted in the emasculated stereotypes and misrepresentations of Asian American masculinities in U.S. cultural products. The paper traces the emergence of remasculinization movements led by Asian American male authors in the 1960s and investigates how contemporary literary approaches have evolved to embrace intersectionality and challenge conventional masculine ideals. The study focuses on two recently published works by Ocean Vuong: *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019) and *Time Is a Mother* (2022). In terms of methodologies, the study makes alternate use of close readings, narrative and poetry inquiry, content analysis, and discourse analysis, drawing on theoretical frameworks from R. W. Connell and David L. Eng. Eng's concept of the "feminized" Asian American male—wherein Asian American men are symbolically castrated and rendered invisible in the larger U.S. cultural imaginary—serves as a foundation for understanding how these men have been historically marginalized. Vuong's works offer a fresh perspective on how these emasculated stereotypes evolve, transforming into a new source of power that confronts and exposes the representational burdens placed on the Asian American male. By exploring the visibility and invisibility of Asian American masculinities in Vuong's works, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on gender and minority studies. It also raises critical questions about cultural identities, microaggressions, and racist-thinking in the humanities, offering new insights into how literature can challenge and reshape cultural norms.

## Biography

Đỗ Thảo Nhi (she/they) is a doctoral researcher at the Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) and International PhD Program (IPP) – Justus Liebig Universität Gießen. Currently, she is working on a dissertation titled "Submission is a Power": Remasculinization in Contemporary Asian American Literature. Before coming to Gießen, Nhi studied and worked in Paderborn (Germany), Vietnam, and Thailand. In Vietnam, she works as a lecturer in British and American Studies and writes prose and poetry. Her creative works in English have appeared in some journals in Thailand, Singapore, and the US. Sometimes, Nhi also holds art exhibitions in Vietnam.

# Fahdah Ofaissan

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*Cultural Heritage as a Bridge to Sustainable Development (SDGs). "Why Does it Matter?"*

## Abstract

In a world that is changing fast, the protection of human heritage is a major challenge that comes from the environment we create ourselves. Threats range between neglect, destruction, or bio exploitation; it is also accompanied by a kind of shame and lack of recognition. However, "What matters to us today?" The heritage it is the part from which the "Humanities"; languages, traditions, literature, and the arts - have emerged. Cultural heritage is not a record of the past; it is an alternative source for helping all people to build a future. The human heritage why is so important? Because it enhances the Identity and sense of belonging of societies as its abilities to prosper and adapt to the changing times. Protecting heritage means ensuring communities' rights to document their cultural narratives to preserve their past and to pave the way for greater cultural diversity. Therefore, human heritage is a connection for cross-cultural dialogues and fosters respect through which sustainable societies can be developed.

This study is based on the analytical and inductive approach to understand the role of heritage in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the UN in 2015, aim to transform Cultural heritage into a powerful tool of policy-formulation and urban planning and quality-of-life enhancement. In this way cultural heritage ensures sustainable tourism while benefiting for the local economy. It involves extensive involvement of communities in conservation activity that instils a sense of ownership and responsibility in them and attracts them to actively participate in projects related to sustainable development.

Finally, "Why Does it Matter?" Is to attain cultural diversity and historical justice. Heritage is a powerful tool for enhancing communities' resilience to possible and impossible futures.

Heritage makes an impact in sustainable development always special, such as reflecting respect for human history and presenting the regional cultural and religious diversity, tangible examples of that are, for instance, "Al-Ahsa Oasis" and "Jeddah Al-Balad" in Saudi. This type of development leads to sustainable cities and communities based on rich cultural identities, driving sustainable tourism and urban displacement.

## Biography

Fahdah Ofaissan is a PhD student at Montpellier University for the 2024-2025 academic year, registered in the Doctoral School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures, and Civilizations. She is working on her dissertation under the supervision of Prof; Abdenbi Lachkar within the research lab RESO. Her research is situated at the intersection of multiple disciplines within the field of humanities and cultural studies, with a particular focus on cultural anthropology, archaeology, heritage studies, and digital technologies. The objective of this study is to examine the intricate relationship between heritage and identity in both local and regional contexts from a contemporary, critical perspective.

Her dissertation is entitled: "Tangible and Intangible Heritage, Cultural Ecology, and Identity(ies) in the Digital Age: Exploring Space (Al-Diffi Site in Saudi Arabia), Revitalization and Heritage Making." The project delves into the cultural and symbolic significance of the "Al-Diffi site", a major ancient coastal location in Eastern Saudi Arabia, which played an important role in trade and culture between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. Fahdah's research focuses on analyzing the site's architectural structures, understanding its role in regional maritime exchanges across the Arabian Gulf, and exploring ways to revitalize and integrate this heritage within Saudi Arabia's contemporary cultural policies, especially using digital documentation tools and interactive platforms to foster public engagement and national identity. A distinctive element of this research is its participatory approach, wherein Fahdah endeavors to engage local communities and a range of stakeholders in the heritage preservation process. This aspect of her work is noteworthy in that it transcends the realm of theory, embracing a practical dimension. The objective is to develop new models for cultural sustainability and identity-building that are both relevant and applicable to today's rapidly changing world.

In addition to her academic pursuits, Fahdah is employed by PDA, a French heritage company, in her role as the Head of Scientific Initiatives and Knowledge Dissemination. She is also a certified expert for UNESCO, with a specialist in heritage protection agreements. Fahdah holds a master's degree in Archaeology and Museums and has participated in various international training programmes focused on heritage documentation, combating illicit trafficking of cultural property, protecting heritage during conflicts, and preserving underwater cultural heritage.

# Claire Omhovère

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*"The Temporality of What Matters, or the Art of Making Things Last: A Reading of Michael Christie's Greenwood (2019)"*

## Abstract

To the question "what matters?", Canadian writer Michael Christie answers that trees matter. In Canada, the boreal forest has been essential to the development of a strong logging industry, after fish and fur declined to be replaced by paper mills and unconventional oil. Today, the country's boreal forest has come to represent more than an economic asset for Canadians only; it is also key to carbon storage, renewed oxygen and a breathable atmosphere on a worldwide scale. In the human sciences, researchers have come up with terms associated with ideas of irregularity and indeterminacy to grapple with the chain reactions of the Great Acceleration, the rise of carbon dioxide emissions, causing a greenhouse effect with largely unpredictable impacts. Think, for instance of Amitav Ghosh's "great derangement" (2016), Tim Morton's "global weirding" (2016), or Anna Tsing's "patchy Anthropocene" (2019). In the field of art, fiction writers have also rallied forces to imagine the plausible worlds that may inspire changes in the present, as evinced by the vogue of cli-fi and post-apocalyptic fiction. Canadians have been prolific in this domain, from Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy (2013), Emily St John Mandel, Station 11 (2014), Cherie Dimaline, The Marrow Thieves (2017), Larissa Lai, The Tiger Flu (2018), Christine Lai, Landscapes (2023). Although Christie's Greenwood (2019) clearly fits the trend, its author does not renounce the idea of an intelligible model to reflect on the chaotic impact of anthropogenic activities on natural environments. His novel rests on an analogy that folds narrative progress into five periods, each temporal layer nestling into the next one, like the growth rings on a tree's cross section. Against the aporias of time and the imponderable transience that causes irreversible material damage – the second law of thermodynamics – Greenwood tries out the proposition that time does not so much elapse as it accumulates. Relying on Actor-Network Theory in addition to more recent developments in the field of maintenance studies, this talk will ponder the kind of comfort – perhaps even the consolation – Christie's writing procures its readers when it touches upon the plain matter of things, in the absence of any foreseeable progress, or man-made solution to the environmental crisis.

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## Biography

Claire Omhovère is a Professor of English and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Montpellier Paul-Valéry (France). Her research is broadly concerned with perceptions and representations of space in postcolonial literatures with a specific interest in the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of landscape writing in settler-invader colonies such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. All of the essays and book chapters she has recently published can be consulted on the open archive HAL. Additional publications include Sensing Space: The Poetics of Geography in Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction (Peter Lang, 2007) and the edited collection L'Art du paysage (Michel Houdiard, 2014).

# Myrto Petsota

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*Who Decides What Matters? The novel against history in Malcolm Bradbury's The History Man*

## Abstract

Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* offers a satirical view of modern academia and intellectual radicalism, exploring the existential collapse of authenticity against the backdrop of progressive narratives of liberation. The novel's epigraph, taken from Günter Grass – "Who is Hegel?" – "Someone who condemned humanity to history". "Did he know a lot? Did he know everything?" – serves as a thematic prelude to the characters' embodiment of the conflicting forces that contribute to a dynamic that results in the crushing of the Literary by History. The novel asks: what determines cultural significance, and who wields this power? This inquiry resonates with broader philosophical concerns central to the humanities: the mechanisms of canonisation, the ethical invisibility of otherness, and the fragility of relational ethics in performative modernity obsessed with eventfulness. Drawing on Milan Kundera's concept of "terminal paradoxes" – where historical progress fosters its own contradictions – this paper argues that Bradbury interrogates the impossibility of agency when freedom and individuality are subsumed into performance. Through Howard Kirk, a sociologist whose performative radicalism disguises exploitation and manipulation, the novel explores the ethical vacuum created with the collapse of private and public spheres. This paper will analyse how Howard's dismissal of otherness and singularity underscores the fragility of the intellectual and moral stances of self-styled upholders of justice.

Despite its emblematic status as a campus novel, *The History Man* elicited a mixed critical response upon publication. While some critics dismissed the wryness of its style as trivial, others recognised its uneasy position between a liberal humanist agenda and the expectations of both the radical Left and the conservative Right. Beyond its political reception, the novel deserves greater critical attention because it is aptly concerned with the conditions that render certain intellectual stances, histories, and individuals visible or invisible.

## Biography

Myrtó Petsotá has taught languages, literature, and translation in secondary and higher education for over a decade. She completed a Ph.D. on Italo Calvino at the University of Edinburgh in 2012. In 2022 she obtained a doctoral contract for a second Ph.D. at Paul-Valéry University Montpellier 3. The core hypothesis of her current research is that built on the ruined landscape of progress, the novelistic knowledge of contemporary British fiction probes the anthropological deadlock of humankind in the age of neoliberalism and outlines a new project, which goes against the theoretical claims of posthumanism.



# Meeri Pihlström

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*"What matters in Disney's retellings of the non-human world in classic children's literature: mechanisms of adaptation and the shifting depictions of human-non-human relationships"*

## Abstract

In the era of climate crisis and environmental disasters, intergenerationally significant cultural products like Disney films wield immense power in shaping our collective understanding of "what matters" regarding our attitudes toward the non-human world. Disney's adaptations of classic children's literature, such as the 1977 animation *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, result in notable shifts in the portrayal of the non-human animals and the environment in comparison to the adapted text *Winnie-the-Pooh* (Milne 1926/1928). For instance, the Disney film introduces new animal characters and omits others while altering the structure and narration of the story. Through an ecocritical analysis of the thematic shifts in the process of "Disneyfication", often understood as the simplification and infantilization of traditional children's stories, this presentation will explore how children's classic literary works, such as Milne's *Pooh*, are adapted. I will examine which "non-human" elements of the source texts are adapted or omitted and how these changes ultimately influence the messages that are communicated to young audiences about our relationship with the non-human world.

Using the theoretical framework of ecocritical adaptation studies, I will discuss the mechanisms of selection and discrimination in how Disney's adaptations retell the complex relationships between humans, animals and nature extensively present in the canon of children's texts. With *Winnie the Pooh* as a case study, I will argue that contrary to popular perception, Disney's adaptations do not necessarily merely simplify or streamline the adapted texts. Rather, the process of Disneyfication can simultaneously result in the streamlining and promotion of harmony between human and non-human worlds. Despite concerns about infantilization and infidelity to the adapted text, Disneyfication may also add layers to the portrayal of the non-human world. The proposed presentation thus contributes to a more complex understanding of the depicted attitudes toward the non-human world in popular children's culture.

## Biography

Meeri Pihlström is a doctoral researcher in the doctoral programme in Philosophy, Arts and Society at the University of Helsinki. She holds a Master's degree in comparative literature, with a focus on ecocriticism and children's literature and cultural studies. Her PhD dissertation (2024–) explores the "Disneyfication" of non-human animal characters and the natural environment in Disney's film adaptations of classic children's literature. Her research interests include children's environmental literature and film, the societal impact of popular children's culture, and the evolving representation of human attitudes towards the non-human in various cultural texts.

# Stephen Ross

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*How do the Humanities Matter?*

## Abstract

My paper tries to answer the question, “What Matters in the Humanities?” by asking as well, “How do the Humanities Matter?” What is at the core of Humanistic inquiry, and how can we live up to that core in our present predicament? How can what we do matter when faced with the polycrisis: too many crises on too many fronts—everything everywhere all at once? The problem is not new, but it may never have been more urgent.

I will begin by sketching out a longer history of the tension between politically engaged intellectual work and the urge to retreat into the ivory tower: from Lenin through Benda to Adorno and Benjamin, Barthes and Foucault, to Derrida and contemporary thinkers of how the Humanities matter: Caroline Levine, Eric Hayot, Stephanie Lemenager. I hope to show that narrative—rhetoric in the broadest sense—holds the key to making the Humanities Matter today. To this end, I’ll tell a couple of stories.

The first is perhaps the most unjust story of our time: the tale told to young people today and for decades now. Describing a “vast panorama of anarchy and futility,” teachers, parents, politicians, and media have told young people a story of their own inevitable failure—and in that failure, of human extinction. It’s a story with a foregone conclusion the young are told cannot be changed, and yet which they are charged with changing anyway. It can’t be done. Do it. And if you don’t, yours will be the last generation. Good luck!

The other story is my own personal story. It includes all the elements of great narrative: ambition, success (modest), frustration, despair, an urgently felt need to find a new path, and a third act that’s still in development. I won’t pretend to have the answers, but I will turn to Levine, Hayot, Lemenager, and others to begin to describe a way forward. In doing so, I will draw on the ethos of post-critique and notions of the activist scholar. I will conclude by outlining some of the steps I’ve taken as I remake my career in accordance with two very outmoded terms: hope and wisdom. In the end, I argue, these are what we can bring to a world that desperately suffers from a lack of both. They are the twin axes of a Humanities that matters.

## Biography

Prof. Stephen Ross has been teaching at the University of Victoria since 2001. He is a specialist of modernism, critical theory, and the cultural dimensions of climate change, and a Past President of the Modernist Studies Association. He recently published *Spectrality in Modernist Fiction* (2023, Oxford University Press). He co-edited with Kirby Brown and Alana Sayers *The Routledge Handbook to North American Indigenous Modernisms* (2022) and edited *Modernism, Theory, and Responsible Reading: A Critical Conversation* (2021, Routledge).

<https://www.uvic.ca/humanities/english/people/regularfaculty/ross-stephen.php>

# Ansa Salonen

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## *Representations of Suffering in Marie NDiaye's Novels*

### **Abstract**

The work of contemporary French author Marie NDiaye is marked by a profound engagement with identity conflicts, fraught family dynamics, and various mechanisms of rejection and alienation. Her characters navigate harsh, destabilizing social worlds, the effects of which are mirrored in their private worlds of suffering.

This presentation explores portrayals of suffering and their ethical and political implications in Marie NDiaye's novels. I analyze the narrative techniques employed in depicting distress and desolation, paying particular attention to the modes of representation of consciousness in third-person narration, as well as to the kaleidoscopic image composed of the interwoven trajectories of the characters. As I shall argue, NDiaye's writing conveys both the experience of suffering and its opacity, thereby probing the possibility and the limits of empathic understanding. The presentation thus undertakes a reflection on the broader literary ethos embodied in NDiaye's work: while contemporary French literature is frequently associated with a therapeutic function, NDiaye's novels, plays, and short stories create zones of discomfort and insecurity, prompting a nuanced discussion on the ethical and political questions they raise. By complementing my analysis of representations of suffering with perspectives from social sciences, I aim to illuminate the form of social criticism embedded in her writing.

### **Biography**

Ansa Salonen (MA, MSSc) is a doctoral researcher working in the fields of French Language and Culture and Comparative Literature at the University of Helsinki. In her doctoral dissertation, she examines the work of the contemporary French author Marie NDiaye, with a focus on techniques of representation of mind and psychosocial themes. Contact: ansa.salonen@helsinki.fi.

# Émilie Sanchis

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*Telling their Stories, Giving a Voice to Invisible Black American Women: Women's Slave Narratives Through the Long 19th Century.*

## Abstract

In the current American political context with the return of Donald Trump as president, and what we can call a whitelash in the American institutions and society as a whole, it seems necessary to make sure that the voices of the people who have been silenced for such a long time because of their gender, skin color or social status will still be heard and to enhance the fact that Black history matters and Black women's empowerment matters. Censorship is more than ever a threat and many issues such as critical race theory, diversity, etc. are now considered as subject matters that university professors are forbidden to teach or work on. Moreover, for decades, historians have only studied slavery through the perspective of men and their narratives and it is only recently that women's voices have been considered and studied. Many slave narratives were written in the 19th century, but few depict the lives of enslaved women. For centuries, Black American women's voices were silenced; indeed, they were marginalized not only on account of their gender but also of their skin color and social status. Throughout the 19th century, black women were made invisible despite being present in slaveholders' households and in the American society as a whole. They nevertheless managed to express their voices in narratives, leaving a mark which is still visible today. This presentation will study the emancipation of Black women's voices in slave narratives, considering each story as a political act aiming at making the invisible visible as well as claiming and building Black women's political identity. We will focus on the evolution of women's slave narratives by scrutinizing the voice conveyed in the texts: the presence of a white author, mainly in the narratives published in the antebellum period, can also be seen as ambiguous in terms of blurring whose voice is being heard. Moreover, in order to authenticate the narrative, letters -- usually written by a renowned white person -- were added to the narratives. The gendered specificity of these narratives will also be analyzed, since these Black women managed to develop a specific form of language described as « mother tongue » which enabled them to express the invisible and make it concrete, thus developing a feminist ideology. Finally, I will argue that these narratives not only give access to individual stories but to the construction of the history of Black American women and their role in History, in their own voices, an issue that crucially matters.

## Biography

Émilie Sanchis is a doctoral student at Université Montpellier Paul Valéry. She is currently a permanent secondary school teacher and has a temporary position at the University of Nîmes. She specializes in nineteenth century American civilization and she is presently writing a dissertation on Black women's slave narratives and women's political activism in the long nineteenth century the title of which is: *Raising their Voices, Writing their Story, Taking a Stand: Black Women's Slave Narratives and Political Activism in the United States in the Long 19th Century.*

# Caro Suringar

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## *Rethinking Burnout: Individual Struggle or Structural Issue?*

### **Abstract**

In this presentation I introduce my PhD research on burnout among first-generation students. The central question will be: what's beneath the surface of the concept 'burnout'? Drawing from intimate interviews with first-generation students—those who are the first in their families to attend university—I explore whether their burnout experiences reflect individual struggles or expose deeper structural issues within academia and other institutions. Engaging with Mimi Khúc's *Dear Elia* (2024), I critique the dominant conceptualization of burnout as an individualized, work-related phenomenon, as defined by the World Health Organization. The WHO's definition, widely adopted in research, depoliticizes burnout by severing it from its broader social and structural contexts. Maybe we are all unwell - in different ways, at different times, shaped by intersecting structures of power and privilege. If we zoom out, the question could be asked: what does 'being well' mean? Following a neoliberal logic, 'wellbeing' is often translated to being productive, functional and able to contribute to society (Khúc, 2024). Cultural studies researchers such as Sarah Bracke (2016) and Sarah de Mul (2022) refer to this conflation as capitalism's care crisis. We tend to value profit over life-making and life-sustaining activities. What happens if we expand the meaning of wellbeing beyond the demands of capitalism, thinking about care, rest and resistance?

### **Selected Works**

Bracke, S. (2016). Bouncing back. Vulnerability and resistance in times of resilience. In *Vulnerability in resistance. Towards a feminist theory of resistance and agency*. Duke University Press.

De Mul, S. (2022). Beyond burnout culture? Artistic imaginations of care (crisis). In Barbara Raes' *Zon dag kind* and Els Dietvorst's *Field Guide*. *DiGeSt-Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 9 (1).

Khúc, M. (2024). *Dear Elia: Letters from the Asian American Abyss*. Duke University Press.

### **Biography**

Caro Suringar is a PhD candidate in Humanities at the Open University in Heerlen. Her research focuses on burnout among first-generation students. By analyzing autobiographies and conducting in-depth interviews with first-generation students who have experienced burnout, she aims to understand the complex interplay of factors contributing to their stress and exhaustion. Her specific interests include resilience, intersectionality, and meaning-making, with a focus on how these elements shape the lived experiences of students whose experiences deviate from the conventional academic path.



# Nicole Valeri

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*Significance and marginality in the representation of objects in the late nineteenth-century novel*

## **Abstract**

The centrality of the world of objects in the nineteenth-century novel is undisputed: the industrial development and the strengthening of modern capitalism are not excluded from the novel's tendency to be all-encompassing and to represent the whole world. Italian literature is an exception, in a sense: the descriptive dimension is reduced compared to the example proposed by French literature; yet, from the middle of the century and increasingly with the end of the century, it seems to get an expansion and the objects enter into the narration with various implications, meanings and roles. It is interesting to dwell again on the silent presence of things in order to investigate their relations with the human and to reflect on their marginal presence in the novel (at least, marginal compared to the human presence, ). It is perhaps a fictitious marginality, but it hides and reveals a particular mode of the human, connected with materiality and the world of goods. I would like to analyze this relationship in some Italian novels of the fin de siècle in a comparative perspective that takes into account the connection between the Italian novel and the French novel, in a European context. The aim of the research is to focus on the relation of the subject to things and the doubtful relationship between marginality and centrality which is established between human and non-human in the reified world of goods, at a time crucial for European literature such as the end of the 19th century, at the crossroads between naturalism and the beginning of a modernist sensibility.

## **Biography**

Nicole Valeri is a Phd Student in "Philology and critics" at the University of Siena and at KU Leuven. Her research interests focus on the Nineteenth-century literature (mainly on the history of novel in Italian literature and on the intertextual relationship between Italian and French literature).

# Alexis F. Viegas

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*The Player as Co-Creator of Meaning: Interpretation and Sensemaking in Disco Elysium*

## Abstract

This paper explores how *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (Kurvitz [2019] 2021), a neo-noir video game, harnesses the transformative power of (interactive) narrative to engage and challenge players' beliefs, fostering meaningful reflection on its themes of systemic collapse, community suffering, and ideological fragmentation in a post-war society. The game compels players to question "what matters?" through their active role in shaping the detective-protagonist's identity through interpretative choice-making while engaging with the setting. Detective fiction is one of the most well-defined genres in literary theory. In this regard, the issue of interpretation has been well researched, from the hermeneutics of detection (Rapaort 1986) to the hermeneutical uncertainty of the genre's postmodern expressions (Gyimesi 2019). However, hard-boiled fiction in particular invites interpretation of a world of social and systemic corruption (Petty 2014)—a trend continued by the neo-noir (Merivale and Sweeney 1999). *Disco Elysium* emerges as an interactive successor to this tradition, with the involvement of players being foundational for its social critique. Drawing on Marco Caracciolo's (2011) enactivist approach to narrative and interpretation, the paper argues that the player's co-creation of the detective character is an expression of what Caracciolo argues to be a process of "joint sensemaking": the mutually transformative interaction between the reader's background and the story. In this sense, the game exemplifies the power of narrative, in its form and contents, to engage with and reshape the interpretative frameworks of its audience. The "Thought Cabinet" illustrates this well—a gameplay mechanic wherein players develop the detective-protagonist's identity, wrestling with the setting's often contradicting and even destructive perspectives on individuals, their suffering, and the world. By integrating player subjectivity into its narrative structure, these choices involve players in a continuous meta-questioning of "what matters?" and "who matters?" in a post-war society, challenging players' values, preconceptions, and sociopolitical beliefs.

## Biography

Alexis F. Viegas is a PhD student in Comparative Studies (U. Lisboa) with a project on crime fiction in videogames, for which he has been awarded an FCT scholarship (2024.04205.BD). He is also a researcher in training of the Centre for Comparative Studies (CEComp-FLUL). He holds an MA in Comparative Studies from U. Lisboa with a thesis in the field of game studies, and earned his BA in Languages, Literatures, and Cultures from the same institution. He co-organized the conference "Nosferatu: 100 Anos de Terror" (2022) and has co-edited the resulting, homonymous anthology (Edições Húmus, 2023). Currently, he is (co)editor-in-chief for the scientific journal *estrema*. His areas of interest include videogame and intermedia studies, comparative literature, and speculative fiction.

# Jingyun Xiao

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*Exploring the Localization and Circulation of Cthulhu Literature in China: A Case Study of Zhuzi (Oobmab)'s Translation and Recreation*

## **Abstract**

As one of the most influential thematic genres in contemporary Western literature, Cthulhu literature has undergone a transformation in China, expanding from traditional publishing to online platforms and shaping a dynamic landscape of fantasy within contemporary Chinese literature. In this process, China's reception of Cthulhu literature has not been a passive absorption but rather a complex path of translation, recreation, and localization, followed by a cultural reflow back to the West. This study takes the case of the Chinese translator and writer Zhuzi (Oobmab) to examine the trajectory of Cthulhu literature's reception in China, analyzing how Zhuzi's translation strategies and Sinicization practices have shaped the distinctive features of Chinese Cthulhu literature, contributed to global cultural circulation, and offered insight into evolving definitions of world literature in our age.

This study consists of three main sections. First, it explores how Zhuzi's translation practices have influenced the aesthetic construction of Cthulhu horror within the Chinese context, particularly how textual style and the atmosphere of horror have been reproduced or reconstructed during the translation process. Online forums (such as the TROW forum) played a crucial role in the early reception of Cthulhu literature among Chinese readers, and Zhuzi, as one of the earliest translators of Lovecraft's works on TROW, significantly shaped the way Chinese audiences perceive cosmic horror through her translation strategies—whether through faithful reproduction or moderate adaptation.

Second, the study examines Zhuzi's creative writing process. As an innovator in the localization of Cthulhu literature, Zhuzi has been producing original Cthulhu tales since 2011, including *The Flock of Ba-Hui*, *The Black Taisui*, *The Ancient Tower*, and more. These works skillfully integrate Chinese mythology, folklore, and Zhiguai narrative, influencing subsequent internet adaptations and derivative creations of Cthulhu literature in China. This section analyzes how Zhuzi employs cross-cultural narrative strategies to retain the core themes of Lovecraftian horror while incorporating native horror narratives, making Cthulhu literature more adaptable to the Chinese context.

Third, since 2020, Zhuzi's Cthulhu fiction has been translated into English and entered the Western market, forming a unique phenomenon of cultural reflow. This study traces the trajectory of transformation in Cthulhu's imagery within cross-cultural transmission—from the deep-sea tentacled deity to a giant serpent rooted in Chinese mythology. Through the imagination and reinvention of Cthulhu literature, it reflects the creative tensions Chinese writers experience in negotiating with a Western horror tradition that has evolved beyond its Western origins.

# Jingyun Xiao

## Biography

Jingyun Xiao is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature and World Literature at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and currently a visiting PhD researcher at KU Leuven, Belgium, funded by the China Scholarship Council. She holds a master's degree in Chinese literature from National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. Her research interests include comparative literature, world literature, translation studies, and contemporary Chinese literature. Her recent projects focus on the localization and cross-cultural circulation of fantasy literature in China, examining both translation practices and creative rewriting. She has published on topics such as fantasy literature, and the contemporary transformation of Chinese mythology. Jingyun also has a background in creative writing, including playwriting and screenwriting.

# Andrea Zvoníčková

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*Mundane Matters: Shops, Symbols, and the Space Between in Virginia Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and Elizabeth Bowen's "Ann Lee's" Biography*

This paper explores the symbolic resonance of seemingly mundane objects within the charged space of the shop in Elizabeth Bowen's "Ann Lee's" and Virginia Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street". Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's concept of topoanalysis which examines the psychological impact of spaces, and Tim Ingold's theories about objects as gatherings of lines that reflect individual and collective experience, this paper argues that the shop becomes a stage for negotiating female identity, desire, and societal expectations in the early 20th century.

Bowen's "Ann Lee's" constructs an atmosphere of exclusivity and ritual, elevating the hats to objects of transformation and desire. The limited access and hushed reverence create a sense of anticipation and suggest the hats' potential to allow self-reinvention within a seemingly safe, feminine domain. However, this illusion of safety is shattered by the intrusion of the male gaze, represented by Mr. Richardson's disruptive presence. In contrast, Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" positions Clarissa amidst the bustling Bond Street, a site associated with luxury and social performance. The objects, such as the exquisite jewels and pearl-buttoned French gloves, function as catalyst for reflection and introspection, prompting memories and anxieties about social standing, the passage of time, and the impact of war on her world. Unlike the transformative potential of the hats in "Ann Lee's", the objects in "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" primarily serve to illuminate Clarissa's complex emotional landscape and her navigation of a rapidly changing social order.

By examining the contrasting portrayals of space and objects, this paper reveals how seemingly insignificant feminine articles become imbued with potent symbolism, reflecting broader anxieties and desires surrounding femininity, consumption, and the shifting landscape of the early modernity.



# Andrea Zvoníčková

## Selected works

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- Woolf, Virginia. *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Susan Dick. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989.
- Yoon, Irene. "Behind a Pane of Glass." *Twentieth Century Literature* 63, no. 1 (March 2017): 49–74. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26806771>

## Biography

Andrea Zvoníčková is a PhD student at the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at Charles University in Prague. Her doctoral research focuses on British and Irish literature, particularly examining the role of space and consciousness in the works of Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen. She holds a master's degree in Czech and English Studies from the University of South Bohemia, where she focused her thesis on the topic of time, space, and journey in Virginia Woolf's writing.