

ESSE DOCTORAL SYMPOSIUM 2026

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The participants and their research projects

CULTURAL AND AREA STUDIES

Research Project
<p>Title of the presentation</p> <p>Self-Fashioning and Sewing Dissent: Re-existence in the Text(ile)s of Afro-Caribbean Female Artists</p>
<p>Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended)</p> <p>This dissertation aims to illuminate the ways in which women deploy textile practices to forge their identities, resist oppression, and transmit their stories. Although fiber arts have been instrumentalized by patriarchal and colonial forces throughout history, women have reappropriated such crafts to fit their needs. These tactics prove all the more crucial for women who confront intersecting forms of violence. By examining textile practices in the works of Afro-Caribbean female authors and artists, this study explores the following questions: how do these women wield fiber arts as tools for self-expression? Can such acts of (self-)creation be considered a form of existence as resistance, as these women (re)weave the identities that colonial and heteropatriarchal forces seek to unravel?</p>
<p>Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this dissertation mobilizes decolonial, Black feminist, and Caribbean thought in its application of the concepts of bricolage (de Certeau 1980) and self-fashioning (Greenblatt 1980) to Afro-Caribbean women's identity formation. Of particular interest is Adolfo Albán Achinte's (2013) concept of "re-existence," which affirms the importance not only of resistance against the colonizer but of imagining, re-membering and weaving alternative futures. This framework is deployed alongside a methodological approach that analyzes the works studied on both a thematic and structural level and takes seriously the ways in which texts may be considered textiles woven from words, and textiles as texts waiting to be read.</p>
<p>Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project</p> <p>This dissertation examines the works of Afro-Caribbean authors Marlene NourbeSe Philip [<i>Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence</i> (1991) and <i>Zong!</i> (2008)], Edwidge Danticat [<i>The Farming of Bones</i> (1998)], Erna Brodber [<i>Nothing's Mat</i> (2014)], and Jamaica Kincaid [<i>See Now Then</i> (2013)], as well as those of multimedia artist Ebony G. Patterson [<i>where we found them</i> (2014) and <i>...when the cry takes root...</i> (2020)]. In addition to works of fiction, poetry and visual art, the study draws on non-fiction sources such as author and artist essays, interviews and documentaries. As evoked previously, this particular constellation of works was selected not only for its thematic focus on textiles, but also for certain formal characteristics that call to mind processes of stitching or weaving.</p>
<p>Results obtained so far</p> <p>While data collection is still ongoing, preliminary results indicate that the authors and artist studied deploy fiber arts thematically and structurally as tools for self-expression and "re-existence." In the narratives analyzed, textile practices enable women to affirm their identities on the individual and community level, as well as to heal from trauma. In addition, the works demonstrate a range of formal characteristics that mirror textiles: patchwork aesthetics structure short story collections, fuse prose and poetry, and inspire mixed media practices; "code-stitching" (Ramazani 2015) weaves together multiple languages within one text; dehumanizing historical text(ile)s are unraveled, their words (and silences) rewoven into new works that render audible the voices of the marginalized.</p>

Title of the presentation Defying Marginality: Iranian Women's Resistance to Dominant Power Relations
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My Ph.D. thesis focuses on Iranian women's narratives of resistance in art, media, and literature and how they contribute to the formation of transnational solidarity ties. The project is grounded in the concept of individual and collective "resistance" to patriarchal oppression in a theocratic society such as Iran. Drawing on Iranian women's acts of resistance as articulated or illustrated in memoirs, graphic novels, interviews as well as social media posts, the study conceptualizes the ways in which resistance under patriarchy and theocracy is enacted and translational solidarity is produced.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Three distinct modes of analysis have been selected for the project. Narrative analysis is particularly useful for examining how stories of resistance are constructed and conveyed. For graphic novels and artistic works, visual analysis is essential, as it involves examining imagery and symbolism to understand how visual narratives complement textual ones. Finally, thematic analysis is employed to code and categorize the thesis's key themes, including gender-based oppression, identity, resistance, homeland, and solidarity. The primary theoretical framework draws on theories of resistance, complemented by a gendered perspective, to examine how individuals and groups oppose, challenge, or subvert dominant power structures, ideologies, and social norms.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The following books are part of my primary sources for the thesis: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>The Rose Hotel: A Memoir of Secrets, Loss, and Love from Iran to America</i> (Rahimeh Andalibian)2. <i>White Torture: Interviews with Iranian Women Prisoners</i> (Narges Mohammadi)3. <i>Woman, Life, Freedom</i> (Marjane Satrapi)4. <i>Woman, Life, Freedom: Voices and Art from the Women's Protests in Iran</i> (Malu Halasa)
Results obtained so far The thesis consists of five chapters and the primary sources are analysed thematically across the chapters: Chapter One delves into the historical/socio-political context and the theoretical framework of the project, Chapter Two focuses on resistance to gender oppression by authority figures at home; Chapter Three examines embodied and performative forms of resistance; Chapter Four explores the intersection of art and activism, and Chapter Five addresses alternative knowledges and digital activism. The conclusion centres on raising awareness, and solidarity with Iranians inside the country. Through this project, which itself is an act of resistance, I seek to examine how a sustained focus on resistance to violence and oppression can enable the forging of solidarities across borders.

Konstantin Helm (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

Research project
Title of the presentation Compromised Communities: Spatial Practice in Conservative Britain in the 1980s and 2010s
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) In my PhD thesis, I am interested in spatiotemporal formations shaped by the most recent periods of Conservative government in the UK (1979-1997 and 2010-2024). It is my hypothesis that the politics and related social developments of these periods have influenced distinct strategies of representing and organising space in cultural production. I focus on cultural products I categorise as anti-authoritarian – not just in the sense that they oppose Conservative policy, but depict identities, communities, and sentiments in conflict with larger normative agents such as Britishness, nation, and the project of neoliberalism. Specifically, I examine works related to and produced by members of the Black British and British Asian, queer, and radical Left communities.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints My thesis adopts a cultural materialist position, arguing that modes of translating between formal contexts are historically emergent and can be helpful to account for aesthetic shifts. I explore spectral currents in the works I study via Mark Fisher’s adaptation of Derrida’s “hauntology.” Fisher argues that neoliberal capitalism has succeeded in rendering itself irreplaceable, with visions of radical change frustrated by a cultural formation which muddles any certain sense of the present. My approach combines a hauntological reading of my primary material with the methods of conjunctural analysis developed by Stuart Hall and other British cultural scholars. This allows me to analyse cultural production as an articulation of distinct historical, political, economic and social circumstances.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My point of departure is Jay Bernard’s 2019 poetry collection “Surge.” This collection structurally and systematically collapses temporal distinctions between the 1980s and the 2010s. Based on this, I incorporate other cultural products interested in time and spaces as sites of resistance and control, such as Lola Olufemi’s “Experiments in Imagining Otherwise” (2021) and the Black Audio Film Collective’s films “Handsworth Songs” (1986) and “Twilight City” (1989). In accordance with my methodological framework, I analyse these works alongside contemporary legal documents, governmental reports and inquiries, as well as statements by public officials, selected news items, and objects from community archives.
Results obtained so far I have begun to show distinct and deliberate aesthetic and political links between Black British cultural production from the 1980s and 2010s, demonstrating thematic convergences not just with prominent works of art like “Handsworth Songs” but also with under-researched ones like “Twilight City.” Here, political and cultural continuities between Thatcherism and the 2010s and early 2020s become distinctly visible, as are the spectral legacies of Empire and its reverberations across communities (multiply) marginalised via race, gender, desire, or socioeconomic status. In my theoretical research, I have started developing a framework that links the emergence of the spatial turn in theory to the concurrent rise of the law-and-order society in the late 1960s, as proposed by Stuart Hall et al.

Research project
Title of the presentation Toward more-than-human cinema
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My dissertation, titled “On Animal Subjectivity in Film: Multispecies Documentaries and the Cinematic Umwelt”, examines the genealogy of ecocinema by tracing its roots in avant-garde and ethnographic filmmaking, multispecies documentary practices, and the tangible turn toward more-than-human cinema. It argues that more-than-human cinema constitutes a radical aesthetic and ethical practice that decentres anthropocentric narrative structures and cultivates ecological consciousness not through explicit environmental messaging, but through aesthetic and perceptual reorientation. By foregrounding relationality and the agency of the non-human world, more-than-human films prompt viewers to reflect on entangled ways of being.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining close film analysis with theoretical inquiry. Methodologically, it employs detailed formal and aesthetic analysis of thirteen selected non-fiction films. The analysis focuses on cinematography, sound, framing, depth of field, mise-en-scène, and narrative structure so as to examine how these films foreground an ethical and aesthetic orientation toward — and a sustained commitment to — the more-than-human world. The theoretical framework draws primarily on ecocinema studies and more-than-human theory, informed by scholarship on slow and animal cinema and phenomenological approaches to perception and reciprocity.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The primary corpus of the dissertation consists of thirteen contemporary non-fiction films produced between 2000 and 2024. The early 2000s are represented by James Benning’s triptych <i>Sogobi</i> (2002), <i>13 Lakes</i> (2004), and <i>Ten Skies</i> (2004), followed by the key works from the Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab, including <i>Sweetgrass</i> (2009) and <i>Leviathan</i> (2012). The core filmmakers in the corpus include Andrea Arnold (<i>Cow</i> (2021)); Ana Vaz (<i>Apiyemiyekî?</i> (2019) and <i>It’s Night in America</i> (2022)); Michelangelo Frammartino (<i>Le quattro volte</i> (2010) and <i>Il Buco</i> (2021)) and Viktor Kossakovsky (<i>Aquarela</i> (2018), <i>Gunda</i> (2020), <i>Architecton</i> (2024)). Together, these works represent different stages and tendencies within ecocinema, including slow cinema, avant-garde practices, and ethnographic filmmaking.
Results obtained so far The research conducted thus far indicates that the radical aesthetic and ethical orientation of more-than-human cinema aligns closely with contemporary theories of decolonisation and degrowth. I explored these connections in the chapter “Can Ecocinema Contribute to the Narrative of Degrowth?”, forthcoming in the <i>Hermes 2024</i> collective volume (published by UCL), where ecocinema is situated as a practice of slowness, attentiveness, and care — values that closely correspond to degrowth philosophy. At the conference <i>You Are Here</i> , hosted by the Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier, I examined gardens as spaces of entanglement between botanical science and colonial violence through Ana Vaz’s <i>Atomic Garden</i> (2018), Salomé Jashi’s <i>Taming the Garden</i> (2021), and Jumana Manna’s <i>Foragers</i> .

Research project
Title of the presentation Posthuman Biopolitical Literacy: YA Dystopian Fiction as Cultural Laboratory in Postnormal Times.
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This PhD project investigates contemporary Young Adult Dystopian Fiction as a crucial cultural site for navigating postnormal times – an era characterized by complexity, chaos, and contradiction where traditional scientific and political frameworks appear to fail in addressing urgent problems, while the ones necessary for understanding human agency and subjectivity become inadequate. The thesis argues that recent YA dystopian fiction moves beyond cautionary and didactic functions to foster “posthuman biopolitical literacy” – the capacity to critically engage with capital-controlled technoscience as it reshapes traditional biopolitical governance and increases the imbalance of social power, while developing alternative forms of affirmative and transformative agency and subjectivity.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Using integrated frameworks from Sardar’s postnormal times theory, Braidotti’s posthuman ethics, and Foucauldian biopolitics, this research employs textual analysis with close reading, comparative and discourse analysis to examine how YA dystopian fiction develops new forms of subjectivity and agency for navigating our times, where multiple global challenges occur, ‘old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing really makes sense’ (Sardar, 2010). Drawing on Braidotti’s transversal subjectivity and affirmative ethics, the methodology analyzes how these texts challenge binary technoscience narratives while transforming negativity and anxiety under neoliberal capitalism into generative possibilities for collective resistance and alternative more just futures.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project Dimaline, C., & Fairbrother, M. (2018). <i>The marrow thieves</i> . Unabridged. Toronto, Kobo Originals; Dimaline, C. (2021). <i>Hunting by Stars</i> (A Marrow Thieves Novel). Amulet Books; He, J. (2021). <i>The Ones We’re Meant to Find</i> . Roaring Brook Press; Rodriguez, R. (2019). <i>Alita: Battle Angel</i> . Twentieth Century Fox; Rothenberg, J. (2019). <i>The Kingdom</i> , Henry Holt and Co. (BYR); Sewitsky, A. (Director). (2019). <i>Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too</i> (season 5 episode 3) [TV series episode]. In Black Mirror, Netflix; Spielberg, S. (Director). (2018). <i>Ready Player One</i> . [movie] Warner Bros; Suvada, E. (2017). <i>This Mortal Coil</i> . Margaret K. McElderry Books; Suvada, E. (2018). <i>This Cruel Design</i> . Margaret K. McElderry Books; Suvada, E. (2020). <i>This Vicious Cure</i> . Margaret K. McElderry Books.
Results obtained so far Preliminary results include the development of an integrated theoretical framework combining Sardar’s postnormal times theory, Braidotti’s posthuman ethics, and Foucauldian biopolitics, as traditional frameworks prove inadequate for understanding our times and its challenges and the new forms of subjectivity and agency. From this framework emerges the working concept of ‘posthuman biopolitical literacy’ as both an analytical framework and a form of engagement that YA dystopian fiction potentially fosters, allowing critical engagement with technoscience advances by questioning the power relations within which bio-infotechnologies have developed. This approach enables the development of alternative forms of affirmative and transformative agency and subjectivity.

Research project
Title of the presentation Commodifying Culture: Cultural Appropriation in Fashion Entrepreneurship
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD project investigates cultural appropriation in business and fashion through a humanistic approach to entrepreneurship. It examines how cultural elements, particularly clothing, textiles, and visual symbols, are transformed into entrepreneurial products, and how this process creates tensions between innovation, cultural identity, and ethical responsibility. The project addresses three core issues: Cultural Ownership and Identity. Power Imbalance and Misrecognition. Entrepreneurship, Value Creation, and Ethics.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints My project uses a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology grounded in thematic and discourse-analytic approaches. It examines how cultural meaning, ownership and value are negotiated within global fashion and entrepreneurship. The theoretical framework draws on cultural appropriation theory, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, and humanistic entrepreneurship. My standpoint is community-centered and ethical: cultural elements should be used in ways that ensure recognition, reciprocity and respect for cultural origin.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My project draws on several types of material: a corpus of attested cultural appropriation cases in the fashion industry used for comparative analysis; brand statements and digital activism, which form the discourse examined in relation to origin acknowledgement, labelling, and ethical entrepreneurial practices. (Other resources obtained could be included such as: qualitative fieldwork data from Côte d'Ivoire, including interviews and observations on the cultural meaning of pagne; and English-language fashion communication on social media, etc.)
Results obtained so far My findings reveal major conceptual gaps: For example, cultural appropriation has no stable definition, which makes it difficult to establish criteria or a scale for assessing its gravity. This definitional fluidity is reflected in my empirical data, where public reaction is consistently triggered by the lack of origin acknowledgement, mislabeling and exclusion of cultural owners. The absence of ethical and/or legal frameworks regulating attribution or benefit-sharing further hinders the evaluation these practices.

Research project
Title of the presentation A Critical Ethnographic Exploration of Freelance Professionals in English Language Teaching
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The growing disruption in the field of English language teaching (ELT) through gig economy models has contributed to an increase in freelance English teachers who market directly to learners. These teachers operate beyond the traditional institutional frameworks, shaping the ELT industry in unique ways. However, their professional practices and their perspectives on conventional teaching principles remain unexplored. This study investigates how such teachers define their roles, construct their identities, and negotiate language ideologies through their actions, and considers the implications of these practices for contemporary ELT.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints To examine these questions, the study adopts an ethnographic research design. The investigation will begin with a survey of freelancing ELT professionals who perform a variety of complementary roles as well as teaching English. The objective of the survey is to describe the current state of the freelance landscape in ELT. Following the survey, the ethnographic exploration will focus on a small number of participants. The data will be analyzed using qualitative discourse analytic (Gee, 2010) and narrative approaches (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) within the frameworks of critical language pedagogy (Crookes, 2021) and English as a Lingua Franca theory (Cogo et al., 2021).
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project Survey questions will gather information on participants' qualifications, work experience, motivations, and perceptions. The majority of the items will be likert-scale questions, with optional open-ended responses for participants who wish to elaborate. Approximately 100-120 participants from diverse segments of ELT are expected to complete the survey. The ethnographic study will focus on six core participants who teach English independently to contribute to at least 50% of their income. Data will be collected using qualitative methods adhering to ethnographic principles, including periodic semi-structured interviews over the course of one year, teaching materials and promotional content, and reflective journals.
Results obtained so far The results of the survey are anticipated to help characterize the motivations, satisfaction levels, and practices of various freelancing stakeholders of the industry. The aim is to capture a reflection of the gig economy and its effects on the individuals that contribute to it. The ethnographic study seeks to show what values, concerns, and ideologies become salient in freelance English teachers' accounts of their professional lives. Furthermore, because freelance teachers are situated outside traditional institutional frameworks, their work often challenges conventions of the profession while still remaining at the periphery. The study aims to reveal the nature of this rich and complex function they perform within the domain of ELT, consequently reshaping it.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

Research project
Title of the presentation “LIKE + THAT-clause” structures in contemporary English: corpus design and methodological challenges
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My dissertation focuses on structures which follow the pattern “LIKE + THAT-clause”, as in “They like that he’s a business guy”. These relatively new structures remain a matter of debate among scholars. Some linguists argue that “LIKE + THAT-clause” is ungrammatical (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 963), or non-canonical (Quirk et al. 1985: 1175; Sinclair et al. 1996: 95). Others, on the contrary, maintain that these structures are acceptable (Levin 1991: 191; Dixon 1991: 259). Moreover, the Corpus of Contemporary American English alone features several thousand occurrences of this structure. One of the main goals of my dissertation is therefore to assess the specificities of this structure and confirm whether it can be considered as complementation pattern of LIKE.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints This presentation will focus on methodological considerations related to corpus design and data collection. Bearing in mind the central concern for reliability and representativeness (McEnery & Hardie 2012: 8), how can one effectively capture a structure whose core components are multifunctional? First, we propose to account for the choice of the main corpus (the COCA) and of the control corpus (enTenTen). Indeed, as a large and balanced corpus, the COCA allows for a comprehensive analysis of an emerging structure. The control corpus is used to assess the specificity of the findings and explain potential corpus effects. Then, we will present the collection strategy based on a semi-automated protocol which combines corpus queries with manual annotation and validation.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project COCA - main corpus enTenTen - control corpus
Results obtained so far The results obtained so far remain preliminary and will require a more comprehensive investigation based on both the main and control corpora. However, some initial findings presented at a conference already confirm that the subordinate clause satisfies the syntactic and semantic criteria of a prototypical complement clause. In addition, the emerging status of this structure has been confirmed in an article currently under review.

Research project
Title of the presentation The Language of Control: Corporate Power and Consumer Agency in South Park
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This paper analyses speech acts and lexis in ten South Park episodes focusing on corporate power, consumerism and predatory persuasion. It examines how corporate and institutional powers utilise language to project and abuse dominance, and how consumers and engaged citizens use speech acts to articulate powerlessness or stage resistance. The study argues that the dominant groups maintain dominance through “linguistic camouflage”, which refers to masking the link between the benefit and harm. I posit that power is exercised by weaponising language to distort reality, reframing exploitation as benevolence. Resistance is achieved through active linguistic agency – the capacity to dismantle this mask by voicing the truth versus the risk of internalising the oppressor’s narrative.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Speech acts are defined as utterances with distinct illocutionary force, ranging from single sentences to longer sequences. The dataset is categorised into three main types for powerful and powerless characters, specifically analysing combinations of Constatives, Directives and Commissives paired with Expressive speech acts. This classification utilises taxonomies by Bach and Harnish (1979) and Guiraud et al. (2011). Power is primarily defined by Van Dijk (2008) and Fairclough (1996), viewing language as the primary instrument of dominance. Additionally, the analysis examines lexis used to project power or resistance and groups these items into clusters based on their shared function.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The analysis examines speech acts and lexis selected from the following ten episodes from the TV show South Park (dir. by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, 1997–2025): Gnomes (1998), Something Wall-Mart This Way Comes (2004), Freemium Isn’t Free (2014), Cash for Gold (2012), Black Friday (2013), Sponsored Content (2015), Truth and Advertising (2015), HumancentiPad (2011), Handicar (2014) and Japanese Toilet (2023).
Results obtained so far A stark contrast between dominance and resistance can be observed. The powerful exploit speech acts mainly to camouflage their exploitation and impose a distorted reality, for example by feigning friendship or showing benevolence. They employ a lexis of false generosity (e.g. “free coins”) and frame dissent as confusion (“feeling unsure of yourself”) to manipulate the addressee. In response, the powerless utilise speech acts to expose illusions through truth-telling, while simultaneously demonstrating internalised subjugation or lack of agency. Their lexis involves both precise naming of reality (“sponsored content”) and delusion (“valuable”, “just a game”). In conclusion, the powerful use language to obscure truth, while the powerless use it to either reclaim it or signal their defeat.

Research project
Title of the presentation Lexical availability and VLS use in English L2 and Spanish L3 in the Hungarian academic context
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My main topic is vocabulary acquisition in the academic context, which involves not only frequency-based academic vocabulary lists but technical vocabulary as well. Since these two types of vocabulary co-occur in academic genres, and students have to use them both in academic texts, a usage-based definition that takes into consideration all vocabulary items acquired by students in academic contexts is necessary. The main aims of my study are to explore <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. the relationship between proficiency levelii. the organization of academia-related lexical items in the mental lexiconiii. the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) in the academic context and to compare the English L2 or Spanish L3 of learners from different study years at a Hungarian university across these variables.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Although the relationship between VLS, lexical development and proficiency has been widely studied, it is not known yet how they are related to lexical access and the structural networks of the mental lexicon. As one of the main objectives of my study is to explore how VLS use in the academic context is related to proficiency level and data about lexical access processes yielded with a lexical availability task (LAT), the lexical fluency of academia-related cue words will be measured with variables, such as number of types and tokens produced to each centre of interest and graph metrics that provide information about the structure of the mental lexicon. Not only the correlations between all these variables will be computed, but also the cause-effect relationships with regression analyses.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project In the next stage, the main phase of data collection, the instruments will be an Oxford Placement Test for English and a commonly used placement test for Spanish to determine the proficiency level of the participants, a lexical availability task (LAT) containing 3 academia-related centres of interest and another general taxonomic control category, and an adapted version of a questionnaire (Chung et al., 2025) that measures VLS use in academic contexts. The fine-tuned instruments will be administered to 180 participants (30 students from years 1, 2, and 3 for both languages), and the data will be analysed in line with the aims of the study.
Results obtained so far Pilot studies have already been conducted with the second and the third instruments with the participation of about 100 students. Differences in the quantitative lexical production and in the structural organization in L1, L2 and L3 were found, and the centres of interest to use in the main study are under consideration. The adapted questionnaire was found to be a reliable instrument with high Cronbach's alpha values in most scales. However, changes will be made to improve the internal consistency of the instrument for the main study.

Silvia Dragomir (University of Bucharest, Romania)

Research project
Title of the presentation Role Nouns and Gender Stereotypes: A Study on English and Romanian
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD project sets out to investigate the translation of role nouns from English into Romanian, aiming to shed light on the use of the masculine form when referring to women, and taking into account the role played by gender stereotypes in this process. The thesis seeks to address the following issues: 1) to what extent does English, as a lingua franca, influence a grammatical gender language such as Romanian in the use of the ‘neutral’ masculine forms for role nouns? 2) if the masculine form is used, does this happen only in the case of stereotypically masculine, prestigious professions (e.g.: president, politician), or is it also the case of stereotypically feminine, less prestigious role nouns (e.g.: nurse, secretary)?
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints In the debate concerning gender-inclusive language, feminization is an important strategy proposed by linguists to eliminate gender bias, making women more visible through language. There are many studies in Romance and Germanic languages which demonstrate that, despite intentions of neutrality, the value of the generic masculine is, most of the times, purely masculine. Experimental studies with native Romanian participants will allow us to investigate the masculine/feminine dichotomy from a synchronic perspective. In order to evaluate how/if these issues have changed over a short span of time, a corpus study will be developed, offering a diachronic perspective.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project For the synchronic perspective, we will use data obtained from several experimental studies (translation tasks) which will be designed in Google Forms. With respect to the diachronic study, we will design a corpus consisting of female authors’ descriptions on different book covers in the last 15 years, published in Romania. In this way, we will be able to examine the changes which took place in the translation of role nouns in light of the changes concerning linguistic norms and social perceptions over the last 15 years.
Results obtained so far Four preliminary experimental studies were conducted for my MA thesis. The results confirm that the feminine form is present in the language, but its use is restricted for reasons which are not related to structural concerns, such as gender stereotypes or the prestige of the profession. Additionally, a small corpus study was designed by my coordinator (prof. Ruxandra Vişan) and me. The corpus we analyzed consisted of 77 books translated from English to Romanian, published by Trei Publishing house between 2010 and 2025. The results were in line with previous findings, but due to a limited number of role nouns, the fluctuation between the masculine/feminine dichotomy needs to be further investigated.

Research project
Title of the presentation AI-Powered Automated Feedback Tools in EFL Writing: Learners' Perceptions and Linguistic Impact
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The main topic of my PhD project is the role of AI-powered automated writing tools (e.g. grammar and style checkers) in English as a foreign language (EFL) writing, with a focus on their linguistic impact on learner texts and learners' perceptions of automated feedback. The project examines how the use of MS Editor during a class intervention influences the writing process and learner engagement with corrective feedback. The project defends the hypothesis that learners perceive automated feedback more positively than teacher-provided feedback and that guided exposure to automated feedback leads to measurable improvements in writing quality.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Methodologically, the project is an intervention study with quasi-experimental features and adopts a mixed-methods approach. It combines quantitative and qualitative linguistic analyses of student texts from pretests and posttests with questionnaire data on learners' attitudes and self-reported practices, complemented by qualitative analysis of focus group interviews exploring learner perceptions of automated writing tools and feedback even further. The study is grounded in process-oriented approaches to second language writing and research on automated written corrective feedback, emphasising learner engagement, noticing, and reflective use of feedback within guided instructional contexts.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The primary dataset consists of EFL learner written texts collected in a classroom-based pretest–posttest design. Learners produce texts without the use of automated writing tools, which allows for direct comparison of linguistic features before and after instructional intervention involving the use of an AI-powered writing tool (MS Editor). These texts form a learner corpus used for quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis. Additional data include questionnaire responses on learners' attitudes and self-reported practices related to automated writing tools, as well as audio-recorded focus group interviews exploring learners' perceptions of automated feedback.
Results obtained so far Preliminary results from the pilot study indicate that learners frequently use AI-powered automated writing tools primarily for grammar correction, spelling, and stylistic support. Questionnaire data suggest generally positive learner attitudes, with many students reporting increased confidence and reduced anxiety when writing in English. Linguistic analysis of pretest and posttest texts shows modest improvements in text complexity. Focus group data further suggest that while learners value automated feedback, many engage with it at a surface level, highlighting the need for pedagogical guidance to support deeper linguistic processing.

Research project
Title of the presentation Who Benefits from Learning Through English? Gender, SES and Extramural Exposure in CLIL
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD project investigates English learning gains among young learners (YLs; aged 10–12) in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes, where a subject such as Science is taught through English. The study examines how individual and contextual factors influence learners' linguistic development. Drawing on previous research (e.g. Soto-Corominas et al., 2024; Pérez Cañado, 2020), the project focuses on three key variables: (1) gender, (2) socioeconomic status (SES), and (3) exposure to extramural English (EE). It aims to explore how these factors shape learners' English proficiency and contribute to differential learning outcomes in CLIL contexts.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The study adopts a quantitative design. Based on the amount of CLIL exposure, learners are assigned to three groups: non-, low-, and high-CLIL. Participants meet predefined inclusion criteria and complete questionnaires on language background, EE exposure, and SES. English proficiency is assessed in listening, reading, speaking, and writing using standardised and validated tests. - Gender effects in CLIL are assumed to be levelled out (e.g. Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015). - Findings on SES remain mixed, with CLIL shown to both mitigate (Lorenzo et al., 2021) and reproduce inequalities (Dallinger et al., 2016). - EE is expected to support language development depending on type and intensity of exposure (Sundqvist, 2009).
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The study draws on several data sources. These include questionnaires collecting information on learners' language background, SES, and exposure to EE. The SES questionnaire gathers data on parents' educational attainment, occupational status and type of employment, family possessions, and cultural capital. EE exposure is measured through a self-report questionnaire covering different activity types (e.g. watching, reading, listening, online surfing), with learners indicating the amount of time spent on each activity in hours per week. These data are used to contextualise learners' linguistic development and to examine the relationship between background variables and English learning outcomes in CLIL and non-CLIL settings.
Results obtained so far Gender: Findings suggest that the gender gap reported to narrow in CLIL contexts could not be fully confirmed. Girls tend to outperform boys in reading and writing in high-intensity (HI) CLIL settings. This indicates that HI compared to low-intensity (LI) CLIL may be especially beneficial for females, while boys show gains only in reading. SES: Results partially support a levelling effect. Girls with lower-SES outperform higher-SES peers when enrolled in HI strands, suggesting that intensive CLIL may mitigate SES disparities. EE: Learners in HI CLIL strands tend to achieve higher pronunciation scores than those in LI contexts. However, the amount of EE alone shows only a weak association with pronunciation, indicating that qualitative aspects of exposure may play a more decisive role.

Dalia Mennella (University of Naples “L’Orientale”, Italy)

Research project
Title of the presentation The Chinese Stereotype in US Cinema: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis from the 1910s
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The Chinese stereotype in American cinema did not emerge out of nowhere, its roots lie in historical and social motivations. Throughout the past century, the Chinese people has been repeatedly depicted as an obnoxious, non-conventional, transnational “other” through the lens of American narrations, which are filled with stereotypical images of a China that swings between being an idyllic Promised Land or a hellish place. To date, critical scholarship defines the history of the Chinese stereotype in American cinema with the image of an oscillating pendulum (Greene, 2011) within a binarism that “feeds and reflects the fundamental divide between East and West between the (American) self and the (Chinese) other (Greene: 2014, 11).
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Building on the theoretical frameworks proposed by Wong (1978) and Rey Chow (1998) which foreground that Eurocentric representations of China in cinema have failed in accurately representing the heterogeneity of each and every Asian culture, this research proposal concentrates on a corpus of US films spanning from the 1910s to the contemporary era. The analysis employs a combined methodological approach integrating Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Functionalist Stylistics and Pragmatics, to explore both new and old stereotypes. The analysis adopts both a quantitative and a qualitative approach as these will allow for a truly comprehensive analysis based on a larger body of relevant data, aimed at drawing out recurring representational patterns and their diachronic evolution in US cinema.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project This research proposal concentrates on a corpus of US films from the 1910s to the contemporary era. Each of the selected cinematic resources belongs to different genres, yet their common denominator lies in the portrayal of the Chinese nation to the Western audience. The selection of the corpus has been made through the comparison of several compendiums in which some resources have been ignored or just superficially mentioned in favour of a more thorough analysis of others. Others, what is more, will be explored at this specific occasion, as at the current time of writing, they have not been released yet.
Results obtained so far An analysis grounded in Halliday’s transitivity system and Multimodal Discourse Analysis produced preliminary findings highlighting differences in the construction of otherness between older and recent films. While the former overtly reproduce stereotyping narratives through verbal language, the latter do so in a subtler yet pervasive form. Earlier texts depict China as underdeveloped. Contemporary productions portray Chinese people as victims of the CCP, shifting stereotyping from ethnicity to political allegiance. Modern China is framed as a threat, supplying the narration of a modern yellow peril (Marchetti, 1993). Visual and sound strategies reinforce a racialised imaginary through orientalist tropes (Said, 1978), contributing to an enduring project of othering.

Research project
Title of the presentation Semiotics and its Application in Fashion Discourse Aesthetic
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The first part of my PhD thesis, that makes the subject of my presentation, investigates how semiotics and figurative language such as metaphor, personification, irony, and hyperbole, shape the aesthetic, cultural, and rhetorical dimensions of fashion discourse, particularly in online fashion criticism. Addressing a significant research gap, I propose a new tool Clothing Aesthetic Description (CAD) framework to systematically analyze how visual elements are translated into persuasive and culturally meaningful language. The thesis contends that figurative language is central to constructing identity, cultural myths, and influence consumer perception in contemporary fashion media, making fashion discourse a powerful site of meaning-making and social influence.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Methodology: Qualitative discourse analysis of 43 online fashion reviews and articles, using thematic and rhetorical analysis. Figurative language is identified and coded with an adapted Metaphor Identification Procedure. The original Clothing Aesthetic Description (CAD) framework maps visual fashion elements into language. Theoretical perspectives: Semiotics (Barthes), intersemiotic translation (Jakobson), conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson), and critical discourse analysis (Charteris-Black), with insights from aesthetic philosophy. Standpoints: Interdisciplinary, culturally focused, and attentive to the shift from traditional to digital media in fashion discourse.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project A corpus of 43 online fashion reviews: This includes both video transcripts and written articles from platforms such as YouTube (e.g., HauteLeMode /Luke Meagher, Sabina Teodora), The Guardian, and Elle Romania. Red-carpet event commentary: Analyses focus on major events like the Oscars, Fashion Weeks, and other high-profile occasions. Fashion blogs and online resources: Used to define and contextualize specific fashion aesthetics (e.g., cottagecore, regalcore, preppy chic). Audience comments and engagement metrics: To assess public reception and the persuasive effect of figurative language. Annotated excerpts: Selected for their use of metaphors, irony, and other stylistic devices, coded using the Clothing Aesthetic Description (CAD) framework.
Results obtained so far Figurative language is highly prevalent in online fashion criticism, with metaphors, personification, irony, and hyperbole commonly used to frame clothing aesthetics. The Clothing Aesthetic Description (CAD) framework effectively identifies and categorizes both the denotative (physical) and connotative (symbolic, cultural) elements of fashion discourse. Online fashion platforms exhibit diverse rhetorical and semiotic strategies, reflecting differences in cultural context, platform, and target audience. The language used by critics and influencers strongly influences consumer interpretation, desirability, and the perceived value of fashion items. The analysis confirms that digital fashion discourse operates as a powerful site of identity construction and cultural meaning-making.

Research project
Title of the presentation The Construction of Childlessness through Discourse: a Corpus-Based Approach
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The main focus of the study is to investigate the dominant issues and ideological assumptions that shape representations of childlessness in written journalistic texts, with particular attention to the ways in which gender, normativity, and social expectations are reproduced through language. The project advances the hypothesis that childlessness is frequently framed through moralising discourses, which contribute to the marginalisation of non-parenthood and the reinforcement of pronatalist social norms.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints My project follows a corpus-based design, which enables the study of both circulating societal narratives and more formalised institutional framings, allowing for comparison across genres and communicative settings. Such comparison will be based both on quantitative (Corpus Linguistics) and qualitative (Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis) methods. One of the main techniques that will be used is keyword analysis.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The data under consideration consist of texts obtained from the NOW (News on the Web) corpus, taken from 2010 until mid-2025, in which childlessness is explicitly discussed, including media coverage, online public discourse, and relevant institutional or policy-facing materials. The NOW corpus will be compared to the BNC2014 (British National Corpus) as a reference corpus to ensure more reliable results. The reference corpus is not expected to contain topic-relevant discourse; its role is contrastive normalisation.
Results obtained so far At this stage of the project, initial analyses have identified recurrent discursive tendencies, including the frequent problematisation of childlessness, gendered asymmetries in attribution and responsibility, and the persistence of pronatalist assumptions embedded in evaluative language. These preliminary findings support the broader argument that childlessness is not merely described but actively constituted as a socially meaningful category through discourse.

Research project
Title of the presentation Comparing NMT and LLMs in English-Italian machine translationese of news articles
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This project examines machine translationese (MTese) (Daems et al. 2017) in news translation from English into Italian. While MTese has been widely studied in neural machine translation (NMT), the linguistic features produced by large language models (LLMs) have only recently garnered scholarly attention (Kong & Macken, 2025), and the English-Italian pair remains largely unexplored. The project compares MTese produced by NMT and LLMs across news genres and examines how raw machine-translated output differs from comparable original Italian news, investigating potential tendencies towards standardisation. The project therefore provides empirical data on the features of MTese with implications for translator training, post-editing, computational modelling, and AI literacy.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The project is grounded in Corpus-based descriptive Translation Studies. Rather than aligning ST and TT, an often unfeasible approach in news translation (Davies 2014), each corpus is analysed independently to identify specific traits of MTese produced by an NMT and an LLM system and compare them with authentic Italian news. Building on earlier MTese studies (De Clercq et al. 2021), the analysis combines quantitative measures with a qualitative analysis of a small sample. By focusing on the final product rather than the translation process, the project highlights the linguistic features of texts as they circulate in real communicative contexts, reflecting the growing prominence of MT output that users encounter directly, often with minimal post-editing (Trope & Marchan 2017).
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The empirical analysis is based on four corpora, combining existing corpora with MT translations. These include: (i) an English ST corpus of published news texts deriving from two existing corpora, the Dutch Parallel Corpus (Macken et al. 2010) and the EMA corpus (Molino 2010), containing a balanced number of words for news reports and opinion articles ($\approx 340,000$ words); (ii) an Italian TT corpus translated with NMT; (iii) an Italian corpus translated with LLMs; and (iv) a comparable corpus of non-translated Italian news texts (PUNT-IT corpus, $\approx 220,000$ words to be expanded). This design enables systematic comparison across genres (news vs. opinion) and systems (NMT vs. LLMs), treating machine-translated texts as independent linguistic products comparable to original Italian news discourse.
Results obtained so far At present, the project is at an early stage and has focused on literature review and research design. A scoping review shows that NMT still struggles with several features of news texts, including cultural references, idiomatic and colloquial language, long and complex sentences, cohesion, and semantic nuance. It also reveals that both the English-Italian language pair and the application of GenAI to news translation remain unexplored. A preliminary experimental study on ChatGPT translations of news texts about hate speech showed comparable lexical richness and good morphological adequacy in the TL, but also longer sentences than in the ST and slight discursive shifts. These findings informed the decision to include lexical diversity and sentence length in the project's empirical analysis.

Research project
Title of the presentation Emphasis, Speech Acts and Character Identity
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD investigates how syntactic emphasis in English literary dialogue (e.g. it-clefts, emphatic do, tag questions) contributes to illocutionary force and the construction of character identity, and how these effects are altered in Romanian translation. I hypothesise that because English and Romanian encode structural emphasis differently, translations often preserve propositional meaning but modify (or even lose altogether) speech-act force, which in turn affects how characters' relations, attitudes and identities are perceived.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The study combines corpus linguistics, pragmatics and translation studies. English literary dialogue is extracted from corpora using CQL queries in Sketch Engine to identify emphatic instances (such as it-clefts, emphatic do and question tags). These are analysed pragmatically as carriers of focus and illocutionary force. Each instance is compared with its Romanian translation to examine shifts in speech-act type, politeness and facework. These shifts are then interpreted in terms of character identity and interpersonal relations.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The data consist of parallel English-Romanian literary texts containing extensive dialogue, primarily from modern and post-modern fiction, where spoken-like interaction is prominent. English texts are processed in Sketch Engine, and their Romanian translations are analysed using both close and distant reading. The focus is on dialogue, as this is where emphasis, speech acts and identity construction are most visible.
Results obtained so far I have developed taxonomies of emphatic structures in English and Romanian and implemented CQL queries in Sketch Engine that successfully retrieve it-clefts, emphatic do and tag questions (and other emphatic structures) from literary dialogue. These methods were tested and presented at the DoCo conference, showing that corpus tools can detect syntactic emphasis. I have also established a theoretical link between emphasis, focus and illocutionary force, forming the basis for analysing identity and relational meaning in translation.

LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

Research project
Title of the presentation The Representation of Trauma and Healing in Contemporary Novels by African American Female Writers
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This dissertation examines the representation of the trauma as a legacy of slavery and the slave trade. It explores the journey towards healing and recovery in Contemporary novels by American and African American female writers. It highlights the way traumatic memories can be verbalized and the way trauma victims reconcile with their past. Moreover, it sheds light on the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Another attempt of this project is to decipher the symbolic tapestry of the novels to reveal the hidden meanings of trauma and healing. This dissertation aims to explain and read the wounds on the black bodies of the victims of enslavement, i.e. considering the body as a witness to the traumatic encounters in slavery plantations and a medium of the corporeal representation of pain.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints I will rely on theories of Trauma studies in literature and decolonizing trauma studies including views of Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and Dominick LaCapra. In addition, I will use the Psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and the Post-Freudian approach to portray how the victims of trauma tend to encounter, act, react, and deal with traumatic feelings and memories that have a latent and haunting appearance, and to depict the way enslaved women are treated within the novels in the context of slavery. I will include as well literary onomastics and symbolism to explain and decipher the tokens of trauma and healing within the novels. Moreover, I will follow a close reading analysis of the selected literary works with a deep analysis of the fragmented narrative, memory, and attitude.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project I am analyzing contemporary literary works by American and African American female writers which are Yaa Gyasi's <i>Homegoing</i> (2016), Jesmyn Ward's <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i> (2017), Jesmyn Ward's <i>Let Us Descend</i> (2023) and Zora Neale Hurston's <i>Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"</i> (2018).
Results obtained so far For now, I have found out and understood through my research different examples of the traumatic attitudes and how the pain and load of past traumatic events is portrayed whether in real life contexts or literature. Moreover, the way this trauma may affect the individual's behaviour, thinking, and sense of self. Also, the way the human brain and body tend to repress and escape that traumatic experience of the past whether unconsciously or consciously. Also, the role of place i.e, slavery plantations and the body in witnessing trauma.

Claudia Alea Parrondo (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain)

Research project
Title of the presentation Cancer Metaphors in Contemporary American Literature Written by Women: A Cognitive Poetics Analysis
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) <u>General aim:</u> to evaluate the responses towards cancer and its metaphors in contemporary US autobiography written by women; study how cancer and its metaphors affect the representation of the ill person's identity; and to test the possibilities of cancer as a cultural and literary motif in the 21st century. <u>Specific objectives:</u> to analyse the relationships between cancer, its treatment and its consequences applying a gender perspective; to analyse the relationship between mind and body implicit in the conceptual construction of cancer metaphors, as well as the response of the narrators/patients to these cultural impositions; and, finally, to evaluate the effects of the metaphoric views on cancer to the bodily perception and its representation.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The methodology that will be employed will be based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), specifically from the metaphor categorization proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their work <i>Metaphors We Live By</i> (1980), and developed by Gibbs (1994, 2003, 2017 and 2023) and Crips (2003), among others. The theoretical framework used will follow theories inserted in the framework of Medical Humanities, such as the concept of autopathography proposed by Hunsaker Hawkins (1999), theories on autobiography, with authors such as Smith and Watson (1998, 2002 and 2010) or Gilmore (1994 and 2010), cultural studies on the body and its representations, such as the one proposed by Grosz (1997), or concepts on identity formation (Hall 1992).
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The following primary sources will be analysed: Eve Ensler's <i>In the Body of the World: A Memoir of Cancer and Connection</i> (2013), <i>Memoir of a Debulked Woman</i> (2012) by Susan Gubar and <i>The Undying: A Meditation on Modern Illness</i> (2019) by Anne Boyer.
Results obtained so far Preliminary results include the categorization of metaphors and its consequences into macrocategories, that include but are not limited to: CANCER IS WAR; CANCER IS A JOURNEY; CANCER IS A CURSE; and THE BODY IS A MACHINE/BUILDING. Some historically inherited ideas of cancer rely on the Cartesian self, and the cosification of the ill body inherent in the medical discourse threatens identity because the disconnection with the body. There seem to be possible differences between the portrayal of illnesses in fiction and in autobiography.

Emily Aline Anderson (University of Konstanz, Germany)

Research project
Title of the presentation Old Magic, New Realities: New Perspectives on Contemporary Magical Realism
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD thesis will assess the state of magical realism in contemporary anglophone literatures and consider how magical realism, which arose in a strongly postcolonial context, has now transcended its original context and is being productively used to depict the realities of an emerging post-postcolonial world. Since the late 1990s magical realism fell into critical obscurity because scholars declared magical realism to have developed into a sensationalist type of fantasy which relies on exotic commercialism. However, my thesis will show that since the beginning of the 21st century, magical realism has developed and moved away from its postcolonial context, now integrating and critically engaging with contemporary social, economic, and political issues of a post-postcolonial world.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The four main chapters of my thesis will each explore different current expressions of magical realism, namely its development on the literary market and expansion into other fantastic genres, feminist and queer magical realism, eomagical realism and techmagical realism, in order to establish new interpretative possibilities for contemporary magical realism beyond postcolonialism. Each chapter will therefore have its individual theoretical approach, featuring different literary theories in order to offer multiple examples of how magical realism can be combined with different analytical approaches to contemporary literature.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My thesis has a rather large corpus of primary as well as secondary literature. Each of my four chapters uses 5 to 7 novels as examples of primary literature, including older works of magical realism which are compared to contemporary magical realism in order to assess the changes of the genre. Including authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie as examples of older magical realism and texts by Mona Awad, Richard Powers, Yann Martel, Ling Ling Huang, Monique Roffey, Otessa Moshfegh, Jeanette Winterson and many more as examples of contemporary magical realism. Since research on contemporary magical realism is limited, my main sources of secondary literature are texts by Christoph Wanes, Ben Holgate, Wendy Faris, Lois Zamora and more.
Results obtained so far So far, I have completed half of the paper's first chapter on magical realism's perception and development on the literary market and its expansion into other genres and media, completed the third chapter on eomagical realism in its entirety, and am currently working on the second chapter on queer and feminist magical realism of which I have so far reached about one third of the chapters' intended length. My final chapter on techmagical realism, which is magical realism that relies on (so far) impossible technologies as a source of its magic but remains distinctly different from science-fiction, is in planning for upcoming winter and I have so far found several pieces of primary literature to use as source material.

Research project
Title of the presentation Reclaiming Anger as Empowerment: Exploring Female Rage in Four American Novels
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) By means of an interdisciplinary qualitative textual analysis of the four selected primary sources (<i>Gone Girl</i> by Gillian Flynn 2012; <i>Circe</i> , by Madeline Miller 2018; <i>Animal</i> , by Lisa Taddeo 2021; <i>Nightbitch</i> by Rachel Yoder, 2021), encompassing feminist literary theories, psychoanalytic approaches and gender studies, this study aims to contextualize the literary importance of the four novels by situating them in larger social, political and cultural contexts, to investigate the experiences of female rage of the female protagonists in order to develop the literary research surrounding female rage as a source of empowerment and to explore the subgenre of female rage literature by classifying the four novels in this subgenre.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The methodological approach of this thesis involves an interdisciplinary qualitative textual analysis of the four selected primary sources through the lens of feminist literary theories, psychoanalytic approaches and gender studies. Feminist literary criticism provides the framework for analyzing gendered power structures and the cultural narratives that shape the female characters' experiences and lead to the expression of female rage. Psychoanalytic theories allow for an exploration of unconscious desires, repressions and the formation of female identities. Gender studies expand this analysis by examining gender identity, gender roles and experiences, by exploring female identities that exceed the singular identity of a woman and influence the expression and reception of rage.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The present study focuses on four primary sources, namely four contemporary American novels exploring the theme of female rage, published in the context of fourth wave feminism: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Gone Girl</i>, by Gillian Flynn – psychological thriller with elements of mystery, domestic noir, and detective fiction, published in 2012-• <i>Circe</i>, by Madeline Miller – mythological fiction with elements of fantasy and historical fiction, published in 2018,• <i>Animal</i>, by Lisa Taddeo – literary fiction with elements of psychological thriller, dark drama, published 2021,• <i>Nightbitch</i>, by Rachel Yoder – literary fiction with elements of magical realism, horror and satire, published in 2021.
Results obtained so far So far, given the fact that I am currently in the second year of my PhD studies, I have managed to put together a more theoretical chapter, reviewing previously published literature on the matter, in order to identify a gap in the research on female rage in contemporary American fiction. Indeed, I noticed, first of all, that literature on female rage as portrayed in literary fiction is quite limited, as most studies focus on female rage explored in other fields of expertise, such as psychology or cinematography. Secondly, I noticed a gap in the literature regarding my four selected primary sources, particularly a deficiency in exploring female rage as a theme or motif.

Research project
Title of the presentation Travelling during the Peninsular War: The Campaigns of Sir John Moore (1808-1809)
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My main hypothesis pivots on the fact that the publication of these military memoirs published in 1809 by veterans of Sir John Moore's Army was triggered by Sir John Moore's death, which affected both their publication processes and, eventually, their reception by the public and critics alike. It is also my contention that these texts could also be read as travelogues, and not merely as autobiographies or military accounts, as they offer interesting remarks on the nineteenth-century British conception of natural and cultural landscapes; often describing how the Iberian Peninsula was seen as a European 'Other'.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints These texts will be examined from two different perspectives: On the one hand, a comprehensive analysis of the texts's publication processes, their reception in literary reviews and their legacy in other texts of the nineteenth century. These contexts will be crucial for examining how the political climate affected their reception. On the other hand, an approach to landscape will be applied. Regarding nature, these narratives tend to be framed by the Kantian 'sublime' and Gilpin's 'picturesque'. Regarding cultural landscapes, there are commentaries on the history and customs of the places they visited, shaped by their cultural expectations. In connection to this latter point, a transmedial approach will be applied as these texts are often accompanied by engravings.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project Charles Richard Vaughan's <i>Narrative of the Siege of Zaragoza</i> Henry Milburne's <i>A narrative of circumstances attending the retreat of the British Army under the command of the late lieutenant Sir J. Moore</i> James Carrick Moore's <i>A Narrative of the Campaign of the British Army in Spain: Commanded by His Excellency Sir John Moore</i> Adam Neale's <i>Letters from Portugal and Spain</i> Sir Robert Ker Porter's <i>Letters from Portugal and Spain</i> James Wilmot Ormsby's <i>An Account of the Operations of the British Army</i> Henry Clinton's <i>A Few Remarks Explanatory of the Motives which Guided the Operations of the British Army During the Late Short Campaign in Spain</i> Officer of the Staff's <i>Operations of the British Army in Spain</i> William Bradford's <i>Sketches of the Country, character, and Costume, in Portugal and Spain</i>
Results obtained so far For the time being, the first book of the corpus here under examination, Charles Richard Vaughan's <i>Narrative of the Siege of Zaragoza</i> has been extensively analysed in its publication history approach, showing that this book, although a second-hand testimony, actually entails the first non-journalistic account of the Peninsular War, thus proving to be an essential piece in the transmission of the military events in the Peninsula to future historians and writers of the Romantic movement, becoming a template for writers such as Southey, Walter Scott, Lord Byron and Laura Sophia Temple, among others.

Research project
Title of the presentation Life Writing in the 21st Century as a Caring Network
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This PhD project analyses 21st-century Anglophone illness narratives by women as forms of life writing that function as coping strategies, sites of identity construction, and networks of care. Focusing on contemporary academic illness memoirs, it examines how self-narration responds to chronic or terminal illness, pain, and vulnerability. The project argues that these narratives may operate as identity assemblages (Smith, 2019), in which subjectivity emerges through relations among internal and external elements. Drawing on assemblage theory, it suggests that life writing enables alternative configurations of health and agency that challenge biomedical hierarchies and reconceptualise illness as a space which might become more easily transitable through self-narration.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The project adopts a qualitative methodology based on the close reading and comparative literary analysis of four different memoirs. The analysis is grounded in assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Buchanan, 2021; Duff, 2014), life writing theory (Smith and Watson, 2010), and feminist approaches within the critical medical humanities (Whitehead and Woods, 2016). These perspectives are additionally combined with insights from trauma and disability studies to examine ideas such as embodiment, care and scriptotherapy, and the clinical gaze. Considering everything, the study will take an ‘assembled’, feminist, patient-centred standpoint, foregrounding women’s experiential knowledge and critically engaging with medicalised discourses of health and illness.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The primary corpus consists of contemporary Anglophone illness memoirs by women, including Lia Mills’s <i>In Your Face</i> (2007), Nina Riggs’s <i>The Bright Hour</i> (2017), Sonya Huber’s <i>Pain Woman Takes Your Keys</i> (2017), and Alice Hattrick’s <i>Ill Feelings</i> (2021). These texts are analysed in dialogue with foundational 20th-century illness narratives by Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde, and Susan Sontag. As these are texts which fit into the category of ‘academic’ memoirs, a justification will be provided as to why other testimonial sources have not been considered for the scope of this project. Then, the secondary corpus will engage with theoretical and critical scholarship in life writing studies concerned with the representation of illness, assemblage theory, feminist theory and the health humanities.
Results obtained so far Preliminary findings indicate that contemporary academic illness memoirs move beyond confessional models to eventually function as instances of activist and feminist interventions—following Audre Lorde’s idea that self-preservation ‘is an act of political warfare’ (1988). The academic illness narratives selected for analysis in this project are envisioned as critical with biomedical hierarchies and discourses, and therefore, capable of advocating the figure of the (female) patient as the main subject within the health/illness experience. Hence, writing may unfold as a healing mechanism which advocates for self-care—as opposed to ‘self-help’—as well as the act of self-narrating can be considered a form of active resilience against current approaches to medicalised caregiving.

Research project
Title of the presentation Intersectional Identity and Institutional Belonging in Dark Academia Novels
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This study aims to use intersectionality and literary studies to explore how identity is shaped in novels labelled as Dark Academia. While revolving around the pursuit of knowledge, Gothic influences and obsession with scholarly life, these narratives challenge the status quo of academic institutions, where issues of gender, class, race and sexuality intersect and affect how individuals construct their identity performatively. The study answers to the following questions: 1) Can DA as a literary genre be used to explore how identity is intersectionally constructed? 2) What patterns occur across DA narratives, reflecting shifts in representations of identity? 3) Can Dark Academia become part of the literary canon or is it rather a temporary cultural phenomenon?
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The Dark Academia novels selected are approached in a transdisciplinary manner, by integrating literary studies (literary analysis, narratology, discourse analysis, stylistics), literary criticism (feminist, postcolonial, queer theory, and postcolonial criticism) and intersectionality to argue that identity is a performative construction depending on institutional recognition, where factors such as gender, class, race and sexuality intersect within academic settings. While textual analysis is conducted across the entire corpus and addresses the formal dimensions of the research questions, intersectional analysis addresses their identity-based and ideological implications, its results depending on each novel's thematic representation on identity.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project Across realist and speculative genres, six novels were selected as representative works of Dark Academia literature: <i>The Secret History</i> (1992) by Donna Tartt, <i>If We Were Villains</i> (2017) by M.L. Rio, <i>Ninth House</i> (2019) by Leigh Bardugo, <i>The Atlas Six</i> (2021) by Olivie Blake, <i>Babel</i> (2022) by R.F. Kuang and <i>Blood over Bright Haven</i> (2023) by M.L. Wang. All present common features such as academic setting, dark and/or Gothic atmosphere, morally ambiguous characters, the search for knowledge and the effects of elitism and obsessive scholarly pursuits. As they encompass multiple literary genres, each of their analyses and interpretations, within the frameworks chosen, shed light on numerous aspects of identity and belonging that enable institutional critique.
Results obtained so far So far, we have established the origins of Dark Academia as an Internet aesthetic and subculture as it eventually evolves into a literary subgenre, delving deeper into the literary influences of the subgenre (Gothic fiction and the campus novel), confirmed the thesis, research questions and corpus and discussed how Dark Academia can be approached through intersectional literary studies. While working on the larger analytical chapters, we have identified that collectively, these narratives demonstrate that academic sites often perpetuate rigid hierarchies, excusing violence as a means to obtain knowledge while shaping the characters' identities in relation to intersecting factors of gender, class, race and sexuality.

Research project
Title of the presentation Memory and Resilience: A Cultural Narratology of Contemporary Anglo-North American Fiction
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) Wyle et al. argue that North American identity is shaped less by national belonging than by localized feelings of community, culture, and attachment to place (ix). Building on this insight, this dissertation examines memory as a catalyst for resilience within such identity formations. By foregrounding settler-colonial strategies of organized forgetting imposed on Indigenous and racialized groups, the project analyzes literary techniques through which narratives of memory and resilience construct counter-narratives that (re)articulate subaltern identities. From a comparative perspective, it also explores how minority resilience reshapes literary representations of national identity in the United States and Canada.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The project examines primary works of fiction alongside selected critical texts. It is grounded in cultural narratology and provides a framework to analyze how narrative forms mediate sociocultural meanings related to memory, identity, displacement, and resilience in the United States and Anglo Canada. Studies of memory, space, and diaspora are central, alongside trauma theory, feminist criticism, postcolonial theory, and critical race theory. A key aspect is the engagement with theoretical work by critics who share the cultural backgrounds of the authors studied, including LeAnne Betasamosake Simpson and Gerald Vizenor; Christina Sharpe, Robyn Maynard, Cornel West, and Toni Morrison; and YẾN Lê Espiritu, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Vinh Nguyen.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project I work with the following works of U.S. American and Canadian fiction as my primary sources: Richard Wagamese's <i>Indian Horse</i> (2012), Louise Erdrich's <i>The Night Watchman</i> (2020), Dionne Brand's <i>What We All Long For</i> (2005), Colson Whitehead's <i>The Nickel Boys</i> (2019), Souvankham Thammavongsa's <i>How to Pronounce Knife</i> (2020), and Ocean Vuong's <i>On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous</i> (2019).
Results obtained so far Research so far has developed a preliminary narratology of remembrance, in which memory and resilience are mutually constitutive narrative forces. This framework, still being refined, offers a transferable model for analyzing resilience and remembrance in other fiction. Central findings include the impact of Western gender binaries on memory and survival, temporality as a structuring force linking memory and resilience, and recurring patterns portraying the U.S. and Canada as individually constituted nation-states rather than products of historical interconnections that have shaped collective memory and national identity and continue to do so.

Research project
<p>Title of the presentation</p> <p>Shakespearean writings and rewritings in the light of medieval oral tradition of mythological Celtic voices in the tragicomedies <i>Cymbeline</i> (1611), <i>Pericles</i> (1608) and the comedies <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> (1595-1596) and <i>The Tempest</i> (1623).</p>
<p>Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended)</p> <p>I will demonstrate that Celtic influences shaped Shakespeare's texts more than is believed and I will also show that there's a Galician Celtic influence in some of Shakespeare's plots.</p>
<p>Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints</p> <p>First, I will use the threefold structure of the Celtic knot in my dissertation – which I will call the structuring ternary plan – as a method of analysis for the plays that were chosen for my research. I am indeed relying on psychoanalysis and Freud's triple identification of the Borromean knots to establish this threefold prism. I will specifically also use Lacan's work on Borromean knots to clarify Shakespeare's concept of what I will call the "Unconscious Celticism", which will prove that Shakespeare's mind was infused with Celtic beliefs unconsciously. Jung's twelve archetypes will also help demonstrate that Shakespeare's mind could not escape from antique recurring motifs that he encountered in his daily life and education as a young boy and that formed the basis of his imagination.</p>
<p>Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project</p> <p>I will deal with both Scottish and Irish mythologies, and I will use <i>Carmina Gadelica</i>, which is definitely Scottish and read abundantly about Scottish myths and superstitions, I have made the choice to focus more precisely on the Irish mythological corpus gathered by W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, (Tuatha Dé Danann, the Fianna of Ireland and Cúchulainn and the Red Branch of Ulster which form The Ulster Cycle), but also ancient and traditional books like <i>Lebor Gabála Éirenn</i> and the <i>Táin Bó Cúailnge</i>, which are renowned and founded on reliable research.</p>
<p>Results obtained so far</p> <p>The first results I have been able to get so far have shown that some legends used by Shakespeare might actually be from Galicia after reading Nicolas de Montreux's plays, and I would like to dig deeper into that direction in order to prove that Galician legends might have played a role in Shakespeare's writings and rewritings of theatrical plots. Richard Hillman – an English-born scholar who has been working at the University of Poitiers – has demonstrated a strong link between Shakespeare and French Renaissance author Nicolas de Montreux, whose plays, which contain Galician plots, influenced Shakespeare tremendously. This motivates me to include a specific part in my PhD work on the possible Galician influences in Shakespeare in order to open up doors in this field.</p>

Research project
Title of the presentation Greening Camelot: Ecocritical Insights into Medieval French and English Arthurian Literature
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This thesis proposes that the process of adapting Old French Arthurian texts into Middle English may reveal distinct yet interconnected ecological worldviews. While these texts share common thematic elements, they may also present different perspectives shaped by linguistic transformation and cultural context. Therefore, the objectives of this study are twofold: (1) to understand how medieval Arthurian narratives construct relationships between the human and the more-than-human worlds (2) to examine how linguistic choices in translation may reflect differing cultural perspectives on nature.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Employing an interdisciplinary methodology drawing from medieval literary studies, ecocriticism, animal studies, translation studies, and historical linguistics, this comparative study will examine how medieval audiences conceptualized the relationship between humans and their environment by focusing on five elements: (1) wilderness, (2) the relationship between the human and the non-human, (3) the function of water, (4) the motif of the <i>terre gaste</i> , and (5) the role of the mediator (liminal figures such as hermits or fairies). Particular focus will be placed on how the linguistic choices made by the Middle English adaptors, such as selection of vocabulary and expansion or condensation of nature descriptions, reflect and potentially reshape the ecological imagination of the source texts.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project A comparative analysis will be conducted on Chrétien de Troyes's <i>Yvain, ou le Chevalier au Lion</i> and its Middle English adaptation <i>Yvain and Gawain</i> (14th century), alongside Chrétien's <i>Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal</i> (c. 1190), and its Middle English rendition <i>Sir Perceval of Galles</i> (14th century). These paired texts, which exemplify the transmission and transformation of the French Arthurian romance into Middle English romance, present a variety of interactions between human and more-than-human elements, including forests, animals, and sacred landscapes.
Results obtained so far Findings reveal insights into both the symbolic-material tension within representations of nature, and the linguistic choices that shape ecological perspectives across languages. Analysis of the interspecies relationship between <i>Yvain</i> and the lion demonstrated how the text registers the lion as both a symbol and embodied being, revealing how the text preserves animal corporality despite traditional symbolic abstraction. Moreover, comparative lexical analyses of <i>Yvain</i> and <i>Yvain and Gawain</i> have identified divergences in nature-related vocabulary. An example is the English adaptor's choice of 'wilderness' over 'forest'. This substitution may reflect semantic motivation (distinguishing legally-defined forest from unregulated areas), as well as a deliberate preference for Anglo-Saxon terms.

Research project
Title of the presentation Performative Storyworlds: Narrative Participation and Public Institutions
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD project investigates how public administration can be rethought as a participatory environment through narrative practices drawn from contemporary transmedia storytelling. The central issue concerns the limits of institutional communication when narrative is treated as a simple tool for information delivery. The project advances the hypothesis that both digital storyworlds and institutional contexts can be understood as performative storyworlds: environments in which meaning, authority, and civic agency emerge through situated acts of participation, interpretation, and attention. By analysing narrative participation across different media, the research aims to develop a theoretical framework for user-oriented public communication.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The project adopts a qualitative and comparative methodology, combining theoretical analysis with close readings of selected narrative environments. It draws on performance studies (Austin; Schechner), media theory and new materialism (McLuhan; Parikka), posthuman theory (Hayles; Braidotti), and media-conscious narratology (Ryan & Thon). Within this framework, narrative is approached as a performative and relational environment, and agency is understood as distributed across human and non-human actors. This theoretical standpoint frames participation, authority, and meaning-making as processes emerging through interaction, repetition, and embodied engagement within structured narrative systems.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The project analyses a range of digital and transmedia narrative environments. These include Inanimate Alice as a model of narrative formation and literacy; the SCP Foundation as a collaborative fictional archive simulating institutional discourse; and interactive fiction such as Mask of the Rose, which highlights ethical constraint and relational agency. A conceptual threshold is introduced through Doctor Who, particularly the Weeping Angels, as an example of performative spectatorship. Jasper Fforde’s Thursday Next series is examined as a literary model of rule-based narrative worlds, bridging storyworlds and institutional systems.
Results obtained so far The research has so far led to the consolidation of a coherent theoretical framework for analysing narrative participation as a performative process. A first outcome consists in the definition of performative storyworlds as structured environments in which meaning and authority emerge through participation and repetition. Preliminary analyses of Inanimate Alice and the SCP Foundation have clarified how agency operates as narrative literacy and collective validation within rule-based systems. These initial results have helped refine the research questions and delimit the analytical trajectory toward institutional contexts.

Research project
Title of the presentation The Posthuman Wound and Planetary Identity in Contemporary North American Speculative Fiction
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD thesis studies the impact of the posthuman wound as it is represented in 21st century speculative fiction novels, focusing on the importance of the planet Earth and its role in creating a sense of human identity. This PhD thesis explores several speculative scenarios related to different configurations of humanity in relation to Earth in order to shed light on how contemporary speculative fiction reflects the anxieties derived from the historical context of the posthuman turn. The modern idea of the subject and the concept of humanity are critically analysed, as it is put into perspective in different Earth scenarios, exploring ideas of planetary identity, risk, climate trauma and sense of place.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The methodology consists of the close reading of three contemporary speculative fiction novels. Within the perspective of the critical theories of posthumanism, ecocriticism and trauma studies, the thesis will place a special emphasis on analysing the texts from the methodology of narratology. This focus will complement the close reading of the texts, as it centers on formal structures and patterns, and searches for a correlation between the narrative structures and the literary theories that are used in analysing such texts. This has the objective of observing whether the posthuman wound is formulated in these texts through similar narratological means, paying special attention to whether these narratives make use of the narrative strategies often present in trauma narratives.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The corpus is comprised of three contemporary speculative fiction novels: <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> (Kim Stanley Robinson, 2020), <i>Walk the Vanished Earth</i> (Erin Swan, 2022) and <i>To Be Taught, if Fortunate</i> (Becky Chambers, 2019). The books show three examples of the different iterations of the paradigm Humanity/Earth in order to test the initial hypothesis. It also makes use of a bibliography in deep and material ecocriticism (Garrard, Sessions, Iovino and Opperman) planetarity (Spivak, Buell, Chakrabarty, Heise), econarratology (Caracciolo, Lindbo, James), critical posthumanism (Braidotti, Wolfe, Ferrando), trauma studies (Craps, Alexander, Luckhurst), and speculative fiction/climate fiction studies (Pak, Canavan, Goodbody).
Results obtained so far Thus far I have established a conjoined framework of ecocriticism, posthumanism and trauma studies that the conditions of climate catastrophe and the crisis of the humanist subject create a vulnerable human subject, liable to be open to new conceptualizations of being. I have also applied this theoretical framework to the first book of the corpus, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , analyzing its depiction of climate trauma and how this precipitates social change in a global stage, creating a sense of global identity or a planetarity. I have also observed how climate trauma narratives, as well as climate fiction, innovate on the level of form, preferring a multitude of voices and narrators, both human and non-human, as a ways to showcasing ecocritical and posthuman ideas of agency and enmeshment.

Research project
Title of the presentation Carnival Ambivalence and the Poetics of Transgression: Bakhtinian and Post-structural Readings
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My thesis emphasises on the ambivalent nature of Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival and grotesque theory to explore the theme of transgression in diverse mediums, namely in Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories, William Blake’s poetry and in the political caricatures of James Gillray. By treating carnival as a cultural analytic, the above texts are investigated through the methodological viewpoints of post-structuralism and deconstruction theory to generate multiple interpretations of texts and produce ongoing political, cultural, and literary discourses.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Textual analysis, post-structural and deconstruction methodologies are applied on texts to explore the dissemination of meaning in relation to carnival’s ambivalent imagery and the theme of transgression. The concept of synecdochal logic – the substitution of a part for a whole, and vice versa – is brought into the discourse to examine the multilayered structure of texts. Carnival’s symbolic imagery is used as a cultural analytic which does not resolve upon carnival being conservative or radical. It explores carnival’s capability to shift between conservative and radical conceptions, creating different discourses. This project views the socio-political, historical and cultural spectrum as heterodox, versatile and polymorphic, therefore commits to a non-binary attitude to research.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The short stories of E. A. Poe, namely “King Pest”, “Lionizing”, “The Devil in the Belfry” are analysed for themes of inversion and transgression; the poems of William Blake, such as those included in the collection Songs of Innocence and of Experience are explored for their subversive imagery; the caricatures of James Gillray, mainly the ones focusing on the French Revolution and the political climate of Britain in the late 18th and 19th century are discussed for their ambivalent representations. Theoretical texts such as those of Peter Stallybrass and Alon White, are utilized. The post-structural critical and deconstruction theories of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Harold Bloom, Barbara Johnson are employed to set forth discourses on culture, politics and the text.
Results obtained so far Establishing my methodology is of primary importance. I have significantly researched and expanded my methodological scope, yet constantly reviewing it. I have completed a first draft chapter focusing on the stories of Poe, part of which I successfully presented in the 2025 IFTR Annual Conference. I am currently refining my chapter on Poe, while researching the caricatures of James Gillray. In February 2026 I will visit the National Portrait Gallery in London for archival research on their collection of Gillray’s caricatures for which I have received a bursary from UCC. The structure and delivery of my own 10-credit seminar to second-year undergraduate students based on my research augmented my understanding of my studies and brought my research close to my teaching.

Alexandra Liakopoulou (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)

Research project
Title of the presentation The Brexit Novel: A Critical Evaluation of an Emerging Genre
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) Although Brexit is an event of historical proportions, the Brexit novel fails to imagine and create the conditions for the creation of a culturally ‘contaminated’, ‘heterogeneous’ and ‘impure’ society. Like the ballot paper itself that provided only two options, ‘Leave’ or ‘Remain’, allowing for a monosyllabic reply and ignoring the complexity of the issue at hand, the Brexit novel finds it difficult to resist this factional logic. Instead, it persists in imperial divisions of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘Remainers’ and ‘Leavers’, ‘natives’ and ‘immigrants’, ‘metropole’ and ‘periphery’ without suggesting the possibility of an alternative reality. It seems that the novel has not managed to completely shed its imperial logic and point the way to a more pluralistic future.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints To enhance my analysis, I draw upon postcolonial theory—notably Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism, Homi Bhabha’s conceptualization of hybridity and Achille Mbembe’s work on necropolitics. Such a lens is vital for problematizing the imperial divisions and binary logic that often occlude the complexities of the post-imperial condition. Since Brexit is a social, political, economic and historical issue, I also draw material from other sciences including sociology, political theory and history. In addition to that, I often resort to news media articles which I access online.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project I am mainly considering novels that have been published after the referendum including Ali Smith’s <i>Seasonal Quartet</i> (2016-2020), Jonathan Coe’s <i>Middle England</i> (2018), Anthony Cartwright’s <i>The Cut</i> (2017), Mohsin Hamid’s <i>Exit West</i> (2017), Linda Grant’s <i>A Stranger City</i> (2019), John Lanchester’s <i>The Wall</i> (2019), Melissa Harrison’s <i>All Among the Barley</i> (2018) and Amanda Craig’s <i>The Lie of the Land</i> (2018). Since one of my arguments is that with few exceptions the Brexit novel recycles internal problems and concerns that have already been explored in pre-Brexit fiction, I am also examining novels published before the referendum such as Jonathan Coe’s <i>The Rotters’ Club</i> (2001) and <i>The Closed Circle</i> (2004) and Anthony Cartwright’s <i>Heartland</i> (2009) among others.
Results obtained so far I have submitted the first chapter of my dissertation which explores the depiction of the Leave-Remain perspectives regarding the Brexit referendum as well as the way in which certain novels negotiate their differences at a narrative level. I am currently working on the second chapter which I am about to submit in March 2026. In this chapter, I focus on the issue of immigration and argue that although all novels resist the prevailing anti-immigrant sentiment, in their majority they treat immigrants as metonymies of presence. Although all of them are pro-immigrant, they do not necessarily imagine or create the conditions for a culturally ‘contaminated’ and ‘impure’ society as divisions are still there.

Research project
<p>Title of the presentation</p> <p>Robert Graves and the Classics: Structure, Language and the Shaping of Poetic Identity</p>
<p>Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended)</p> <p>Due to its long-lasting engagement with the classical tradition, Robert Graves stands as a unique voice in twentieth-century British literature. This thesis undertakes a systematic investigation of the reception and re-elaboration of the ancient world in the Gravesian corpus. It moves beyond the assumed dichotomy between the poet and the classicist, arguing for their integration into a seamless and coherent system.</p> <p>Furthermore, this study lays the foundation for a new understanding of the Greco-Roman heritage as the basis of Graves's mythopoetic system. Specifically, by synthesising his poetry and prose, the central hypothesis posits Graves's reappropriation of classical antiquity as a deliberate strategy of self-legitimation and cultural refoundation.</p>
<p>Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints</p> <p>Due to the complexity of Graves's macrocosm this study is grounded in semiotics, intertextuality and Reception Studies and combines the intratextual analysis of Graves's works with the intertextual investigation of their classical sources. Adopting Lotman's semiosphere, the study analyses antiquity as a foundational model which actively informs and shapes new voices. Second, drawing on Kristeva, Genette, and Riffaterre, the research maps the "mosaic of citations" within Graves's hypertexts to show how the past is repurposed to serve contemporary poetic needs. Following Simon Goldhill's model, the study classifies and situates Graves's reception of the ancient world, within the broader 20th-century cultural return to the classical.</p>
<p>Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project</p> <p>The research is based on a multifaceted corpus that reflects what Northrop Frye termed the "bigness" of Graves's intellectual project. To this end, the primary analysis focuses on the interplay between Graves's poetry and prose, specifically his satirical, fictionalised autobiography, "Life of the Poet Gnaeus Robertulus Graves". These creative works are integrated with Graves's major essays and critical texts, most notably, <i>The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth</i> (1948). A central focus is the generic distinction in his treatment of the past. Crucially, his prose accurately termed as "brilliant if eccentric" adopts a scholarly tone to establish rational authority, while his poetry serves as the locus for mythic transformation and intuitive revelation.</p>
<p>Results obtained so far</p> <p>As the doctoral manuscript is complete, the research has established that Graves's classicism acts as a structural bridge between theory and practice. A primary finding is Graves's strategic dialectic between history and myth. While he approaches history through his prose with a meticulous, near adherence to classical sources to establish rational authority, he treats myth through his poetry as a realm of intuitive transformation. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that through intratextuality, he transformed the classical tradition into a vital organism, culminating in his self-consecration as a Poeta, whose work restores a sacred, matriarchal religion to the 20th-century literary landscape.</p>

Sophie Narezzy Requier (University of Limoges, France)

Research project
Title of the presentation Rewriting the hero: Pat Barker's vision of revisionist mythmaking
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) At its core, my thesis is about viewing war as some sort of transhistorical force that reshapes human identity, and, through this perspective, analysing how Pat Barker, in both her <i>Regeneration</i> and <i>Women of Troy</i> trilogies, places marginalised people in the midst of war and transforms the vision we (the reader) have of what a "hero" is. I find both of her works crucial in proposing a redefinition of the "hero", especially when we consider them as markers of their own time. <i>Regeneration</i> is a product of the 1990s while <i>Women of Troy</i> was first published in 2018, during the #MeToo movement, and they both are a reflection of the events of the time. Comparing two trilogies is a way for me to both examine an evolution in the works of the author herself as well as a societal evolution.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints My thesis analyses Barker's <i>Regeneration</i> and <i>Women of Troy</i> by combining close reading, intertextual analysis, and historical contextualisation. I predominantly draw on the theory of feminist revisionist mythmaking (Alicia Ostriker), historiographic metafiction (Linda Hutcheon), as Barker's references to other works, both historical and fictional is a key point of her writing. I also tackle the notion of "Palimpseste" (Genette), and theories of power, trauma, and testimony (Foucault, Lyotard, Anderson, Azouvi, Weil)
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My main corpus is composed of the following 6 books: Barker, Pat. <i>Regeneration</i> , 1991. <i>The Eye in the Door</i> , 1993. <i>The Ghost Road</i> , 1995. <i>The Silence of the Girls</i> , 2018. <i>The Women of Troy</i> , 2020. <i>The Voyage Home</i> , 2024. Other sources of mine include historical documents and primary sources related to the First World War, Classical and mythological sources (Homer, Euripides), and literary criticism and theoretical works.
Results obtained so far I have for now mostly focused my work on the historical aspects and context behind the <i>Regeneration</i> trilogy as well as on the classical background needed for <i>Women of Troy</i> . I do not know if I can really talk about "results", as what I have for now are mostly observations as well as a furthering of my own education regarding the context. I will abstain for now of providing definitive results but will gladly talk about my various observations during the symposium.

Chamindi Perera (University Paul Valéry, Montpellier, France)

Research project
Title of the presentation Language, Communities and Power Politics; a Comparative Reading of Sri Lankan Literature in English
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The working title of my thesis is 'Language, Communities, and Power Politics: A Comparative Reading of Sri Lankan Literature in English.' Here, I would like to work on prominent Sri Lankan diasporic Anglophone writers. The focus is on how these writers foreground reparation as a narrative practice and reconfigure post-war memory as a contested yet open space for intercommunal healing and hope that emerges beyond ethnic and ideological divisions. Sri Lanka was part of the British colonial empire, and with independence, the country faced ethnic issues with a complex and contested history. This led to a three-decade-long war, which became an unavoidable topic among Sri Lankan creative contemporaries.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints This qualitative thesis employs intertextual analysis to explore relationships among the selected texts, historical contextualisation to situate narratives within their colonial legacies, and thematic analysis to identify themes of memory, denial, trauma, and resistance. The data collected from the primary sources are analysed comparatively and further cross-examined against related articles, reviews, books, and other specified documents. Analysing these may yield a more complete understanding of the characters' unique association with agency, mobility, and empowerment. Moreover, the narrative analysis may dissect and reinterpret the complex interplay between colonial legacies and contemporary intercommunal tensions.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My tentative primary corpus consists of <i>The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida</i> (2022) by Shehan Karunatilaka, <i>A Passage North</i> (2021) by Anuk Arudpragasam, <i>Chai Times at Cinnamon Gardens</i> (2022) by Shankari Chandran, <i>A Love Marriage</i> (2008) and <i>Brotherless Night</i> (2023) by V.V. Ganeshanathan, and <i>An Island of Thousand Mirrors</i> (2012) by Nayomi Munaweera. The working secondary corpus covers diasporic, memory, and trauma-related theoretical books and articles.
Results obtained so far After engaging with a range of theoretical perspectives, I formulated working definitions of the key critical terms relevant to this study. This process prompted an exploration of Sri Lanka's historical context, encompassing both the period of colonial hegemony and the postcolonial era. Consequently, the primary corpus was refined to focus on diasporic writers whose works offer insights into notions of harmony in Sri Lanka.

Katarina Rendošová (Pavol Jozef Šafarik University in Košice, Slovakia and University of the Balearic Islands, Palma de Mallorca, Spain)

Research project
Title of the presentation Patterns of Bildungsroman in Post-postmodern Anglophone Literature
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The PhD project examines how the Bildungsroman is reshaped in post-postmodern Anglophone literature by Black women writers. It argues that contemporary narratives of formation move beyond linear development and social integration toward relational, collective, and historically situated models of becoming. Drawing on post-postmodern, post-soul, and post-Black theory, the project conceptualizes the post-Black Bildungsroman as a flexible narrative form shaped by race, gender, and transnational experience. Through a comparative reading of Yaa Gyasi's <i>Homegoing</i> (2016), Bernardine Evaristo's <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i> (2019), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's <i>Dream Count</i> (2025), the dissertation shows how these texts redefine the genre through affect, community, and historical consciousness.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The project uses qualitative literary methodology based on close reading and comparative analysis. It examines narrative form, characterization, temporality, and thematic patterns in selected novels to trace contemporary models of formation. The theoretical framework draws on post-postmodern theory (Nicoline Timmer), post-soul aesthetics (Bertram D. Ashe), and post-Black theory (Thelma Golden; Marlon Lieber), supported by feminist and Black diasporic literary criticism and genre theory of the Bildungsroman. The study adopts a non-essentialist and intersectional standpoint, approaching identity as relational and historically situated, and understanding the Bildungsroman as a flexible narrative form shaped by race, gender, and transnational experience.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The primary materials for the PhD project consist of three contemporary Anglophone novels by Black women writers: <i>Homegoing</i> (2016) by Yaa Gyasi, <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i> (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo, and <i>Dream Count</i> (2025) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. These texts form the core literary corpus for comparative close reading and analysis. The project also draws on relevant secondary materials, including literary theory on the Bildungsroman, post-postmodernism, post-soul aesthetics, post-Black theory, feminist criticism, intersectional theory and Black diasporic studies, which provide the theoretical and critical context for interpreting the primary texts.
Results obtained so far Preliminary research has established a solid theoretical framework for the project, integrating post-postmodern theory, post-soul aesthetics, and post-Black approaches to the Bildungsroman. An initial close reading of the primary texts indicates that <i>Homegoing</i> , <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i> , and <i>Dream Count</i> articulate distinct but interconnected models of formation—genealogical, communal, and relational—that diverge from the classical, linear Bildungsroman. These early findings support the central hypothesis that contemporary Black women's Anglophone fiction reconfigures the genre as a relational and historically situated practice of becoming rather than a narrative of individual assimilation.

Research project
Title of the presentation Representations of Men in Twenty-First-Century Nigerian Diasporic Fiction
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) <p>This research examines a corpus of twenty-first-century transatlantic novels by Nigerian authors to address the largely overlooked intersections of masculinity and diasporic experiences in Anglophone African literature. With a focus on the mobility of men within the Atlantic region, my PhD dissertation analyses various forms of interpersonal relationships depicted in these texts and the contexts in which they emerge. Constructions of masculinity are examined in relation to interpersonal relationships, considering the different ontological positions men occupy as fathers, husbands, queer subjects, and single men. The study also explores how gender discourses—such as roles, attitudes, expectations, values, and beliefs—are represented within the corpus. Ultimately, the project seeks to identify alternative proposals for masculine existence(s) articulated through these literary works.</p>
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints <p>The methodology of this research is grounded primarily in an intersectional analysis of the primary literary corpus, approached through the lenses of literary and cultural studies. To this end, the project draws on postcolonial literary theory, critical men’s studies, feminist and queer studies, as well as theories of relationality and globalisation, applying these perspectives within a comparative framework across the selected texts. This interdisciplinary approach will guide the pursuit of the previously outlined objectives and will provide the basis for the development of the study’s final conclusions.</p>
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project <p>The dissertation is organised into four chapters, each examining a different dimension of Nigerian masculinities through a selection of contemporary Anglophone novels. The first chapter, “Neo-patriarchy in Nigerian Families: Men as Fathers,” analyses Sefi Atta’s <i>The Bad Immigrant</i> (2021) and Michael Afenfia’s <i>Leave My Bones in Saskatoon</i> (2023). The second chapter, “Constructing Husbandhood: Nigerian Men in Marital Contexts,” focuses on Ebun Akpoveta’s <i>Trapped: Prison Without Walls</i> (2013) and Yejide Kilanko’s <i>A Good Name</i> (2021). The third chapter, “Queering Masculinities in the Nigerian Diaspora,” examines Olumide Popoola’s <i>When We Speak of Nothing</i> (2017), and Okechukwu Nzelu’s <i>Here Again Now</i> (2022). Finally, the fourth chapter, “Alone Abroad: Single Migrant Men and the Burden of Vulnerability,” explores Teju Cole’s <i>Open City</i> (2011), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s <i>Americanah</i> (2013), and Okey Ndibe’s <i>Foreign Gods, Inc.</i> (2014).</p>
Results obtained so far <p>The analyses conducted so far indicate that the different ontological positions occupied by the male characters across these narratives generate distinct sets of challenges, shaped by the social, cultural, and migratory contexts in which they unfold. Although many characters attempt to adapt to shifting circumstances and negotiate the pressures to reconstruct their gender identities in accordance with dominant norms, not all of them do so successfully. In several cases, these pressures lead to forms of stagnation, failure, or even moral deterioration, as characters respond to normative expectations through withdrawal, resentment, or harmful behaviours. Taken together, these findings reveal both the heterogeneity of masculine experience and the persistent regulatory force of gender norms, which can foster resilience and transformation for some while precipitating crisis or destructive outcomes for others.</p>

Nino Liam Töndury (University of Fribourg, Switzerland)

Research project
Title of the presentation London Below and Beyond: Mapping Alternative London Cityscapes in Contemporary British Literature
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) I examine how contemporary British Urban Fantasy reimagines London as an alternative cityscape - a layered, hidden, or otherwise transformed metropolis in which architecture and infrastructure are not merely settings but central meaning-making devices. The main focus is how these texts make alternative London legible and affective, how descriptive writing turns streets, buildings, tunnels, and so on into narrative forces that organise perception, power, and belonging. Architectural ekphrasis, the verbal representation of built form, functions as a key narrative and ideological mechanism in these novels. I hypothesise that such ekphrastic strategies produce recurring patterns that can be analysed as four spatial modes in which the alternative city becomes a form of spatial critique.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The project combines close reading with a spatially oriented poetics of description. I analyse architectural ekphrasis as a formal device to show how it produces thresholds, maps, and agency for the built environment. The theoretical frame draws on the spatial turn (Lefebvre's production of space, Foucault's heterotopia, geocriticism, and psychogeography) and scholarship on urban fantasy and related modes of fantastic writing. My standpoint is literary-critical: rather than treating space as theme only, I focus on how textual techniques make London's alternative geographies thinkable, affective, and politically charged (space-as-form and potentially form-as-politics).
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My primary corpus consists of British urban fantasy and new weird novels that reimagine London as an alternative cityscape from the last 30 years (late 1990s to present). My core texts include Neil Gaiman's <i>Neverwhere</i> , China Miéville's <i>King Rat</i> , <i>Kraken</i> , and <i>Un Lun Dun</i> , V.E. Schwab's <i>A Darker Shade of Magic</i> , Ben Aaronovitch's <i>Rivers of London</i> , Tony Ballantyne's <i>Dream London</i> , and Alan Moore's <i>The Great When</i> . I expand this core in a first chapter with additional London centred texts (e.g. Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf) to trace the tradition of literary London and its influence on contemporary fantastic texts.
Results obtained so far I have established the preliminary thesis, defined my key analytic concept of architectural ekphrasis, and developed a working chapter architecture structured around four spatial modes mentioned before: Subterranean underlayers; fractured, parallel, and multiversal Londons; animated and sentient architectures; historical, magical, and haunted infrastructures. Additionally, I have assembled a preliminary core corpus and an initial bibliography, and I have begun testing the framework through close readings (I am about to submit an article for a collected volume). These early analyses suggest that architectural description consistently functions not only as atmosphere but as a narrative mechanism that shapes ontology, affect, and political critique in contemporary alternative-London fiction.

Alba Zels (University of Vigo, Spain)

Research project
Title of the presentation Rewriting Memory from the Margins: Women's Construction of the Singapore Story
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD examines women's representations of the early nation building period of Singapore through English-language historical fiction written by women of Chinese descent. The project addresses the tension between hegemonic, state-sanctioned historiography and alternative literary narratives that foreground women's experiences. It argues that these texts function as feminist interventions in historical memory, revealing how gender, race, and ethnicity shape the narration of violence, resistance, and nation-building in postcolonial Southeast Asia.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The project follows a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology grounded in close textual analysis. It draws on postcolonial and decolonial theory, feminist and intersectional approaches, and memory studies. Literature is treated as an alternative archive that actively constructs historical meaning rather than reflecting it. My standpoint is explicitly feminist and critical, focusing on narrative strategies, spatial representations, and embodied memory to analyse how women writers challenge hegemonic versions of history.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The primary corpus consists of English-language historical fiction by Chinese women writers from Singapore published in the 21st century, including works such as <i>The River's Song</i> , and <i>Gardens at Phoenix Park</i> . These texts are analysed alongside official historical narratives for comparative purposes, as well as relevant feminist and postcolonial scholarship. The project also plans to include qualitative interviews with the authors.
Results obtained so far So far, the project has produced preliminary results through a close analysis of Wong Souk Yee's <i>Gardens at Phoenix Park</i> . This case study shows how spaces of confinement and surveillance function as gendered and racialised mechanisms of state control. The novel reframes women as political subjects whose bodies and memories articulate resistance and collective trauma, challenging official narratives of order and security. These findings support the thesis's central hypothesis regarding fiction as an alternative mode of historical memory.