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Narrating Health Literacy within Nuclear Toxic Legacies: Intermedial Ecocritical Perspective on Radiological Hazards in U.S. Nuclear Fiction

Sukhenko, Inna

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DECEMBER 1-2, 2022

EXRE: GOING OFF IN POST-MILLENNIAL
NORTH-AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



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MARIA CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA UNIVERSITY

THE JOHN PAUL II
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ExRe(y) 2022

ΕΧΠRE

Going Off in Post-Millennial North-American
Literature and Culture

1-2 December 2022

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Book of abstracts

The 2022 conference “EXπRE. Going Off in Post-Millennial North-American Literature and Culture” is organized by Department of British and American Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and Department of American Literature and Culture at The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin.

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Keynote Speakers

Aneta Dybska (University of Warsaw, Poland)

The Reparation Generation: Accountability and Truth Telling in Pursuit of Racial Justice in the U.S.

My presentation will focus on truth telling and truth projects as an aspect of black reparations activism. The reparations movement is often misconstrued as and discredited for demanding cash payments for past racial wrongs in a situation when both the perpetrators and the victims as two parties of a possible litigation are no longer alive. Yet demands for restitution and compensation for the historical wrongs of slavery are a valid approach to reparations rooted in corrective justice. While some battles for reparations have taken place in courts, I will discuss justice-seeking initiatives outside the courtroom. My primary interest lies in the reparative and restorative approach to justice, both of which foreground truth and accountability. Taking responsibility and action to repair harm can stem from international human rights law obligations (reparative justice), national legislation or voluntary initiatives within the civic society (restorative justice).

In recent years, the anger and frustration at the impunity of repeated racist police killings of black men, which catalyzed in the Black Lives Matter movement, intensified grassroots commitment to racial reconciliation and community healing through the restorative justice process. Local truth telling projects, apologies for slavery, commemorative events, financial reparations, transfer of land, and higher education scholarships stand out as the most common initiatives. At the federal level, reparations activists have used the momentum created by the #BLM movement to reintroduce in 2021 a revised reparations bill known as HR-40, calling for a nationwide commission to study and develop reparations proposals for slavery and discrimination from the colonial era to the present.

In light of international human rights norms (UHCHR Basic Principles) “public disclosure of the truth” is one of the ways in which victims of gross human rights violations can gain reparation for the harm suffered. Bearing those principles in mind, black reparations activism supports the truth-telling process to examine and acknowledge the lingering effects of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, racial violence, and terror on African Americans. Truth telling is both a moral and political project. Whether accompanied by other reparative justice measures or not, truth telling creates a space for victims to share the truth in public and allows them to cast their experiences into a story that is both therapeutic and empowering (Phelps 58). It gives the victims a moral standing to call others to account. It restores the victims’ dignity and reintegrates them into the community of shared moral standards (Walker 31). Ultimately, truth telling grants victims recognition as citizens and acknowledges their harm as equal members of a political community (de Greiff 460-461).

My discussion will address the following questions: If the restorative/reparative process is a form of communication, when is justice achieved? Under what conditions can the public discovery of truth satisfy the victims’ demand for justice? Why do white Americans have a problem with taking accountability for historical injuries?

Aneta Dybska, Ph.D., teaches American Studies at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland. Her research interests focus on 19th and 20th c. American city, race, ethnicity,

biopolitics of the nation and black social movements. Her 2016 book Regeneration, Citizenship, and Justice in the American City since the 1970s engages scholarly debates on urban revitalization and gentrification, theorizations of the “right to the city” idea, as well as grassroots struggles for the urban commons. This research builds on her earlier interest in 1960s urban ethnography on black communities, which culminated in the publication of Black Masculinities in American Social Science and Self-Narratives of the 1960s and 1970s (Peter Lang, 2010). She is co-editor, with Sandrine Baudry, of Special Double Issue: The City, Part One the European Journal of American Studies (Fall 2015).

She is currently a Visiting Law Scholar at the University of Irvine, California, where she is working on a new project on the Black reparations movement and restorative justice.

Caren Irr (Brandeis University, USA)

Walking through the Ruins

Walking west from the Copp’s Burying Ground in Boston, one of the oldest sites in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the resting place of Cotton and Increase Mather as well as other scions of colonial America, you pass through the remnants of many different failed projects, many micro-climates of culture. After descending from the hilltop village of the Puritans to the now demolished immigrant tenements of the West End, the walker can cross the locks over the Charles River and, with a careful eye, spot the location where the Muddy River once ran free as well as the remains of a network of industrial canals. The former is now contained in culverts, although activists are clamoring for its release, and the latter have been filled in and built over by the likes of Akamai, Microsoft and Google.

For more than 100 miles, sites like these are strung along a doomed railway venture that is currently in the process of being converted—ever so slowly and irregularly—into a public greenway. Perhaps the rail trail itself will remain yet another incomplete project, its bits and pieces never linked together into the green commuter throughway envisioned by its most ardent advocates. But for now it serves as a point of entry into innumerable partially buried histories. Following this stopping and starting trail has involved a bit of trespassing and bushwhacking as well as time in the archives. With a mixture of methods, I have been researching the social, literary and environmental histories of this densely overwritten landscape in order to tell the story of the infrastructural remains of late industrialism. I am interested in documenting the ways Americans live with, while simultaneously ignoring, the architecture of ruins. This talk will follow the rail trail and offer some reflections on the everyday acts of art-making that make some sense of its evolving landscape.

Caren Irr is Kevy and Hortense Kaiserman Professor of the Humanities at Brandeis University. Her work considers connections between ideology and contemporary narratives. She is the author of three monographs and the editor of five volumes--most recently *Life in Plastic: Artistic Responses to Petromodernity (Minnesota 2021)* and *Adorno's Minima Moralia in the 21st Century: Work, Fascism, and Ecology (Bloomsbury 2021)*. She is currently writing about walking and environmental renewal.

Conference Speakers

Maria Rhodora G. Ancheta (University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines)

The Post-Pandemic Ordinary: Reimagining Post-Millennial American Everyday Life in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* and Ling Ma's *Severance*

It is inconceivable now to think of a postmillennial future without the undeniable impact of the devastation and disruption and the experience of forced transformations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. While we focus on emerging into a post-pandemic reality, the expected responses to the ruptures brought about by a global disease are to come up with ways of addressing and managing anxieties.

This paper's project is to examine how two groundbreaking American novels set in imaginary pandemics confront the breakdown of what had been taken for granted as normal in American contemporary life by uncovering and analyzing the ways by which the micro-interchanges of everyday life operate in these post-pandemic, postmillennial loci. In Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), we find the Great Lakes region ravaged by "Georgia Flu", a swine flu pandemic, and in Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018), various American cities are plagued by the fictional Shen Fever, a virulent fungal infection.

Using Christos Lynteris's concept of a pandemic imaginary to re-envision a dystopian postmillennial American culture, and deploying de Certeau's concept of everyday life, the paper aims to identify the elements and aspects of the everyday in these novels as tactics of resistance and examine how these palliate societal rifts and individual agitations arising from the fears and ravages brought about by pandemic. Moreover, the paper interrogates how the current quotidian and the everyday life in fictive futures overlap and mutate, and thus remake personal and communal American identities as counterresponses to physiological and psychical disability and inertia.

Maria Rhodora Ancheta is a professor at the Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines Diliman, teaching American literature. Her areas of interest are humor studies, everyday life and domestic cultures, sociology of the body, and the carnivalesque. She was a research fellow at the Center for Popular Cultural Studies at Bowling Green State University at Bowling Green, Ohio, and was fellow of the USIS Summer Institute at the University of California at Santa Barbara. She was a past president of the American Studies Association of the Philippines.

Cajsa Baldini (Arizona State University, USA)

Platonic and Shelleyan Horror in *Stranger Things*

This presentation will examine how classical notions of horror, from Plato through renaissance and enlightenment thought, are channeled through the board game Dungeons and Dragons to project powerful images of post millennial dread in the Netflix series *Stranger Things*. Firstly, I will examine how the now iconic "Monster of the Moment", Demogorgon (featured prominently in Season 1-2 of *ST*) has developed from authors such as Plato, Boccaccio, et al under the guise of a Classical Greek

deity of the netherworld. However, when examining the character more closely it appears, curiously, that Demogorgon is a faux-mythological creature of entirely fictional origin, and probably the result of an unfortunate misinterpretation, attributed to early Latin poets, for instance Lucan's epic *The Pharsalia*.

Secondly, moving towards his *Stranger Things* persona, Demogorgon develops as a sort of bad-boy deity, a shadowy demonic creature who is so menacing that it is dangerous to even know his name. John Milton refers to him as "that dreaded name", Edmund Spenser names him the "Ruler of Hell", and Percy Shelley, who features him prominently in his poem *Prometheus Unbound*, describes him as a vast, obscure power, "a mighty darkness."

Thirdly, the character of Demogorgon enters popular culture. It is the miltonic and shelleyan version of Demogorgon which is adopted into the Dungeons and Dragons pantheon as the most dangerous of adversaries, and who comes to function as an explanatory model for the powerful predator encountered by the protagonists of *Stranger Things* as it emerges from a corrupted, decaying mirror of fictional Hawkins, IN, called The Upside Down.

The group of friends at the center of the *ST* plot are avid players of D&D, which serves both as a place of escape from the petty social complications of traditional high school life, but more importantly provides a narrative framework against which is projected the increasingly fragmenting society of Reagan-era America. The expanding, rotten world of The Upside Down increasingly encroaches on the "real" Hawkins as the barriers between the worlds begin to blur.

Cajsa Baldini's research interests are concentrated on British and European 19th century literature and culture. Authors of special interest to her are Percy B. Shelley, Lord Byron, Robert Browning, and Fredrika Bremer, with an emphasis on poetics and cultural context. Her teaching interests are somewhat broader in scope and she focuses on developing and teaching courses about the literatures of Western Europe and North America from the Renaissance to the 20th century, often with a significant technology component.

Anna Bendrat (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland)

The New Art of Dying in 21st-century American Drama

"Important mythic and ritual features characterize the new art of dying," claims Donald F. Duclow in "Dying on Broadway." He further explains that myth and ritual confer meaning and order on experiences that would otherwise be chaotic. In contemporary American drama, myth and ritual translate anomalous, boundary situations into socially shared patterns of interpretation and action. Instead of the traditional Western *ars moriendi* imbued with religious associations, a modern myth outlines the process of dying with all its social and cultural backdrop (e.g. Black Lives Matter) as a psychological journey, telling us how to deal with denial, anger, depression, and acceptance. To examine the new art of dying in 21st-century American drama, the paper will explore the selected plays of 2010s and 2020s by the playwrights such as Aleshea Harris and Randy Weiner with the aim to depict the myths and rituals which accompany death and mourning in 21st century not only as a spiritual, but also as a social healing.

Anna Bendrat is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English and American Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. As a member of a research team on Cognitive Poetics, she focuses her interests on the metaphors of the body in contemporary American literature and media. Her current research concentrates on the contemporary American drama and its rhetorical constructions of marginalized identities. She is a Board Member of the Polish Rhetoric Society and an editor of two international journals: *Res Rhetorica* and *New Horizons in English Studies*. In 2016 she published a book titled *Speech is Golden. American President and Rhetoric* (Mowa jest złotem. Amerykański prezydent i retoryka).

Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun (University of Białystok, Poland)

Indigenous Memory and Survivance in the Decaying World: Cherrie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*

The proposed paper aims to read Cherrie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) in the context of Indigenous ways of relating to memory that challenge the limitations of conventional settler modes of remembrance and are crucial for Indigenous survivance. Setting her novel in the near-future North America, Dimaline (Georgian Bay Métis Nation) portrays a dystopian, climate-changed world, where people are not only faced with the effects of global warming, but also suffer from a virus which makes them incapable of dreaming, and thus prone to madness. The only demographic group immune to the virus are Indigenous people, who are hunted for their bone marrow—a source of their immunity. Directed at YA readership, the plot follows a teenage Indigenous protagonist and his companions struggling for survival and fleeing North to escape the system of “factories” (based on the system of residential schools), where the bone marrow of Indigenous people is forcibly extracted to provide a cure for the settler population. Linking the past, present and future colonial oppression, the novel is deeply preoccupied with the issues of memory and heritage as key to Indigenous survivance. In this paper, I propose to read *The Marrow Thieves* as an example of Indigenous artistic and creative practices that offer alternative paradigms of remembering. Situating Dimaline's novel within the framework of sovereign memory, I aim to demonstrate its rootedness in distinctly indigenous conception of memory that is land-based, embodied, reciprocal and relational.

Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun received her Ph.D. in English literature from Warsaw University. She is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Philology at the University of Białystok, where she teaches courses in English literature, speculative fiction and literary theory. She is a member of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts and of the Polish Association of Canadian Studies. She co-edited two volumes on fantastic literature: *The Fantastic and Realism* (2019) and *Images of the Anthropocene in Speculative Fiction: Narrating the Future* (2021). Her research interests include fictions of the Anthropocene, cultural memory, as well as medievalism and Gothicism in popular culture, especially fantasy literature.

Karol Chojnowski (University of Gdańsk, Poland)

Death and Decay in Michael Crummey's *Under the Keel*

In my presentation, I'm going to analyse selected poems from Michael Crummey's 2013 collection *Under the Keel*. The poems I've chosen all deal with death and decay in various forms, and can be roughly grouped into three categories: elegiac poems about the speaker's deceased father; poems about the deaths of animals; and poems about decaying objects. I will analyse the poems' diction: metaphors, similes and imagery, focusing especially on how the elegiac poems reflect the process of grieving and how the poet's perception of death and decay changes depending on whether he deals with human or animal death or the "demise" of an object.

Karol Chojnowski is an assistant professor (adiunkt) at the Department of Translation Studies, Institute of English and American Studies, University of Gdańsk, where he teaches practical translation courses. He graduated from the University of Gdańsk with a master's degree in translation studies in 2010 and received a Ph.D. in literature (cum laude) in 2018, also at the University of Gdańsk, for his dissertation Space and Epistemology in the Works of Marek S. Huberath. He has published articles mainly on speculative fiction and he translates fiction, non-fiction and poetry.

Vasileios (Vassilis) N. Delioglanis (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)

"Survival or Extinction": End-of-the-World Rhetoric and the Collapse of the Western World in Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan's *Westworld*

The present paper explores the ways in which Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan's HBO series, *Westworld* (2016-), which is a remake of the so-called 1973 movie, features some of the science fiction elements that comprise what Heather J. Hicks calls "the new post-apocalyptic canon" (23). The series producers appear to sit on the fence as regards humans' survival and their replacement by machines. *Westworld* presents a postmodern technological dystopia where technology, capitalism, and corporate power constitute the new driving forces that eventually lead humanity to destruction. Thus, the near-future apocalypse portrayed in the series can be examined alongside postmodern end-of-the-world narratives and rise-of-the-machine scenarios involving the creation (the machines) being in pursuit of the creator (humans). However, while, as Hicks would argue, *Westworld's* American "society has reached its nadir of violence and corruption has been expressed repeatedly in Western civilization" (12), the series is actually based on a constant interplay between survival and extinction. Although the world in the series is on the verge of extinction due to the intervention of technology, survival serves as a recurrent motif that is also "a crucial practical and conceptual element of the twenty-first-century" postapocalyptic narratives (Hicks 3). Contrary to late-twentieth-century American postapocalyptic narratives, *Westworld* constructs an extinction-and-survival loop, with "[s]craps of the world remain[ing]" at the end of each season, and the "characters salvag[ing] ... elements of the world that has passed," to use Hicks terms (15). The analysis will place emphasis on the issue of restructuring, reshaping, and rebuilding of the (post-)apocalyptic worlds depicted in the series.

Vasileios (Vassilis) N. Delioglani is currently an adjunct lecturer of American Literature and Culture in the School of English Language and Literature, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. He is also an appointed teacher of English at Primary State School Education in Greece. He holds a Ph.D. in Locative Media and North American Literature and Culture from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), Greece. For his Ph.D. he was funded by the Board of Greek State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y.). He also holds an M.A. in American Literature and Culture, and a B.A. in English from the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. He is the webmaster and a member of the European Association for American Studies (EAAS) as well as a member of the Hellenic Association for American Studies (HELAAS) and the Multimodal Research and Reading Group of the School of English, AUTH. His research interests include contemporary American fiction, locative media and games, Cyberpunk and Cyberculture, hypertext and multimedia fiction, and the fusion of literary practice with new media technologies.

Nino Dondoladze (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Georgia)

Trope in Tracy K. Smith's Poetry

Tracy K. Smith is a Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry and a two-term poet laureate of the United States of America. Her poetry touches upon various areas of contemporary American life, historical and contemporary racism, injustice, mysteries of human existence and desire, the dual nature of the world. Collections of Tracy K. Smith's poems have won four prizes and attracted readers. Few articles (mostly reviews) have been written on the poet's works so far though.

A vivid picture of contemporary American life is created in Tracy K. Smith's poems through different verbal means including tropes. In the paper the kinds of tropes used in Tracy K. Smith's poetry are discussed in connection with the aforementioned topics touched upon by the poet. The tropes are categorized through the special criterion and the results received from the study of poems from Smith's different collections are included in the paper. It is concluded that tropes used by the poet reflect the epoch when they were created, American culture and reveal interesting individual characteristics of the poet's creative method.

Nino Dondoladze, Ph.D., is currently teaching literature at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. She works as a senior instructor at the Department of European Studies. Her scholarly interests include stylistics and literature. Nino Dondoladze studied English philology at Tbilisi State University in 1981-1986. She got her Ph.D. from Batumi State University in 2009.

Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk (University of Białystok, Poland)

Has Aunt's Tale Superseded *The Handmaid's Tale*? – Rereading Atwood's Original Novel in the Light of *The Testaments*

The aim of my presentation is to take under scrutiny the evolution of one of the key wicked characters from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, namely, Aunt Lydia. Many a reader and reviewer have found this transformation questionable or implausible, others claimed that in the sequel she got away too easily with the things she did in the original novel. My paper intends to offer

a close analysis of Aunt Lydia's plot, through the revisionist reading of *The Handmaid's Tale*, examining the excerpts that pertain to the discussed character through the lens of her undercover identity, revealed in *The Testaments*. Secondly, it will dissect the techniques and ploys the author used in the sequel to breed readers' empathy for hitherto despised Aunt Lydia. I also wish to focus on the overlap between the transformation of her character and the shift from the original novel's criticism of second wave feminism towards the sequel's embrace of the third, or per chance fourth, wave.

Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk holds a Ph.D. from the University of Białystok, Poland. She is an assistant at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Białystok, where she teaches courses in British literature. She has co-edited two volumes of collected essays *The Fantastic and Realism* (2019) and *Jews of Eastern Poland: Between Odessa and Vilnius* (2019). She is a member of the Polish Association for Canadian Studies. In 2015, she was awarded a scholarship from the Corbridge Trust in Cambridge, England. She was a Visiting Fellow at The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University in April-July 2022.

Laura de la Parra Fernández (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain)

Re-Orienting Sexual Violence: Shame and Accountability in Claire Vaye Watkins's "Rondine Al Nido"

"Rondine al Nido" is part of the Nevada-based first short story collection by Claire Vaye Watkins, *Battleborn* (2012). The narrator is a woman in her thirties who recounts her lover the experience of being sexually abused when she ran away at sixteen years old with a former friend to Las Vegas. Set in the backdrop of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the story lingers precisely in the moment when the two girls could have escaped from the hotel room of their abusers but decided not to. In this sense, the girls enact Rosalind Gill's idea of the late 1990s and early 2000s postfeminist (2008), which emphasizes individual choice and self-regulation in the configuration of gender relations, thus leading to self-hypersexualization, self-exploitation and compliance with male standards of a pornified sexual experience (Nikunen 2007).

In this paper, I will deploy Victoria Browne's concept of a "feminist polytemporality", understood as "the intersection of different temporal layers and strands that combine in distinct ways to produce particular experiences and discursive formations of historical time" (2014: 31), in order to explore how the narrator of "Rondine al Nido" readdresses past traumatic events from a multi-temporal lens, which allows her to have her previously accepted version questioned by her current lover, and therefore to re-orient and reconsider her notion of accountability and shame. I will argue that understanding the act of telling as an ethical encounter with the Other—in this case, herself and her friend in the past—opens up the possibility of reimagining an alternative ending as well as alternative futures as a way to come to terms with sexual violence.

Laura de la Parra Fernández is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Studies at Complutense University of Madrid, where she obtained her PhD funded by a Research Fellowship from the Spanish Ministry of Education. Her main research interests include Modern and Contemporary British and American literature, experimental women's writing, affect theory and the

medical humanities. She has published on these topics in scholarly journals such as Atlantis, Prose Studies, or Studies in the Literary Imagination. She has been a visiting scholar at Birkbeck, University of London, and at Harvard University. In Spring 2023 she will visit Project Narrative at Ohio State University thanks to a Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellowship. She is the academic coordinator of the Master's in American Studies at Complutense University.

Marta Fernández-Morales (University of Oviedo, Spain)

Drained and Bagged: Corporeal Waste and Bodily Doubt in 21st-century Gynecological Cancer Narratives

In *Phenomenology of Illness* (2016), Havi Carel defines *bodily doubt*, explaining that it is a process which can arise in periods of serious disease, and characterized by a sense of uncertainty and a disturbing distrust of one's body's capabilities. The perception of familiarity that accompanies health is shattered, and anxiety is born out of the body's demands. This phenomenon becomes more acute when the disorder implies loss of control over basic bodily functions.

After centuries of reticence around gynecological and gastrointestinal symptoms, contemporary writers have begun to make visible the problem of bodily doubt derived from uncontrolled corporeal waste during treatments for ovarian and uterine cancer. Literary scholar Susan Gubar, for instance, titles Chapter 5 in *Memoir of a Debulked Woman* (2012) "Drained and Bagged", and goes into detail about her stoma and "the ordeal of the ileostomy" (165). Author and performer Eve Ensler's *In the Body of the World* (2013) establishes an analogy between her leaky body after surgery and an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and equates her self with the fluids that ooze out from her.

With Gubar's and Ensler's autobiographical texts as the main corpus, and utilizing the phenomenological method, this paper examines the topicalization of corporeal waste in contemporary memoirs of gynecological cancer. It argues that these two authors ground their narratives in a desire to raise awareness about the gendered taboos that affect the detection and treatment of female conditions, and that the formal strategies they activate are consistent with this aim.

Marta Fernández-Morales, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of American literature and gender studies at the University of Oviedo, Spain. Her research explores contemporary American cultural products, in particular literature, film, and television. Her work has been published in journals such as Atlantis, Television and New Media, Feminist Theory, Auto/Biography Review, Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, and American Drama. She is the author of four books and the editor or co-editor of eight scholarly volumes. She is currently a member of the research team in a project about contemporary illness narratives developed by the 'HEAL' research group at her home institution (<https://www.unioviedo.es/heal/>).

Iwona Filipczak (University of Zielona Góra, Poland)

Masculinity in Crisis – Akhil Sharma's *A Life of Adventure and Delight* (2017)

The goal of the paper is to explore the portrayal of masculinity in Akhil Sharma's short story collection *A Life of Adventure and Delight*. It is argued that Sharma is critical of Indian and Indian-

American masculinity and views it mainly negatively. His male characters are represented either as powerless and lacking agency, or aggressive when they try to use violence in order to subordinate other people. All that shows them as unimaginative and unable to create or maintain fulfilling relationships. The question of locale does not seem to matter, both the protagonists located in India and those in the US are shown as emotionally deficient or confused about the proper way of conduct.

In order to understand the roots of “masculinity crisis” in Sharma’s stories several issues will be taken into consideration. Firstly, the historical context of Indian masculinity formation and representation will be mentioned. The time of the colony constructed the Indian male as almost the exact opposite of what the Western colonizer represented: unchecked and hypersexual. Secondly, the increased role of the woman in the social and family life should be discussed as another reason of male confusion because it signifies the collapse of the traditional system of patriarchy. Thirdly, the role of cultural displacement of Indians in the US will be addressed.

Iwona Filipczak works as an Assistant Professor in the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Zielona Góra, Poland. Her academic interests concentrate on the questions of identity and experience in South Asian American fiction, globalization, disability and illness. Her works have appeared in various edited volumes and in journals including *Atlantis*, *Journal of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies*, *Brno Studies in English*, *Respectus Philologicus*, and *Roczniki Humanistyczne*. She is a member of Polish Association for American Studies and European Association for American Studies.

Brygida Gasztold (Koszalin University of Technology, Poland)

A Narrative of Arrival and Return in Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers*

Imbolo Mbue’s novel *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) tells the story about the immigrants who strive to achieve their American Dream, the myth which over the years has become a resilient and persistent national ethos of the United States. The arrival of the Cameroonian family to the US, Jende Jonga, his wife Neni and their six-years-old son Liomi, albeit at different times and for different legal reasons, marks the beginning of their American lives. The struggles of undocumented immigrants, as they try to create a new home in Harlem, NYC, are evocative of any immigrant experience, however their American lives are suddenly upended by the global forces of economy. The bankruptcy of a global investment bank Lehman Brothers was the pivotal event in the financial crisis of 2008. The Great Recession that followed affected all segments of American society, but especially severely those unprivileged such as the Jongs.

This paper discusses the reasons for the Jonga’s arrival in the American Promised Land, their struggle to carve a new life in NYC, and the final decision to go back to Cameroon. The juxtaposition of their, often naïve, expectations and the American reality offers an interesting background to examine the problems of racial bias, legal status, access to work, housing, and education, and an impact of a global economic crisis on individual lives. Mbue’s novel offers a critique of the deceptive vision of American life that has fueled immigrant imagination for centuries, but also provides an alternative—the possibility of making a conscious and thoughtful decision to go back. Whether seen as a failure to accomplish their goal, or as a victory of a reasonable mind, the Jonga’s decision to

return to Cameroon challenges the viability of the American Dream, whose accessibility to recent immigrants, especially those undocumented ones, has been significantly limited.

Brygida Gasztold, Ph.D, D. Litt. holds an MA degree, a Doctorate degree, and D. Litt. From Gdańsk University, and a diploma of postgraduate studies in British Studies from Ruskin College, Oxford and Warsaw University. She was the recipient of a 2013-2014 Fulbright Senior Research Award. She is an Associate Professor at Koszalin University of Technology, Poland. Her academic interests include ethnic American literatures, American Jewish literature, Native American literature, Canadian Jewish literature, as well as the problems of immigration, gender, and ethnic identities. She has published *To the Limits of Experience: Jerzy Kosiński's Literary Quest for Self-Identity (2008)*, *Negotiating Home and Identity in Early 20th Century Jewish-American Narratives (2011)*, *Stereotyped, Spirited, and Embodied: Representations of Women in American Jewish Fiction (2015)*, and essays on immigrant literature and ethnicity.

Anna Gilarek (Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce, Poland)

In Defiance of Climate Doomism: Post-apocalyptic Utopia in Solarpunk Fiction

Over the past decades, post-apocalyptic literature and film have generally produced bleak visions of humanity's ultimate failure to address the mounting climate crisis. This dystopian defeatism is challenged by solarpunk – an aesthetic, a hashtag, a movement, and a nascent subgenre of science fiction. Solarpunk explores positive visions of the future, while simultaneously claiming a political agenda: to raise the readers' awareness of the actions which might extend or even cancel the seemingly imminent expiration date on the human civilization.

Solarpunk narratives, though often post-apocalyptic, do not give prominence to such common dystopian motifs as violence, post-scarcity competition, or moral degeneration. Instead, they insist on people's inherent tendency towards kindness and cooperation in the face of crisis, which serves as a stimulus for utopian growth, rather than for dystopian regression.

The paper looks at the radical utopian politics behind solarpunk stories, in particular their use of utopian strategies to resist climate doomism. The genre shows climate change as inextricably tied to ethical and political issues, so the postulated switch to clean energy is accompanied by a cultural and economic shift: a comprehensive reconfiguration of our relationship to nature and a departure from capitalism. The paper also examines the application of the utopian strategies of denunciation (of capitalism) and annunciation (of post-capitalist alternatives), utopia's didactic potential with regard to the climate threat (which surpasses the cautionary impact of dystopia), as well as the utopian emphasis on values and the human connection as the primary building blocks of a sustainable society. Finally, solarpunk futures are interpreted as concrete utopias, actively developed from present-day trends: solar technology and alterglobalist social experimentation.

Anna Gilarek is Assistant Professor at Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce, University Branch in Sandomierz, where she teaches British and American literature and history. Her research interests include utopian studies, utopian and dystopian fiction, science fiction, climate fiction, (post-) apocalyptic fiction, and feminist speculative fiction.

Eliza Gładkowska (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland)

Sinking Ship Named University. The Origin of the Crisis in American Academia as Depicted in the Series *The Chair*

The growing concern about the outdated paradigm of a traditional academic education is not a new topic and has been present in the scientific research for decades. *The Chair*, an American series released on Netflix in August 2021, is one of the latest cultural representations of this skepticism. The series portrays the English department at a fictional Pembroke University on the verge of collapse and professor Ji-Yoon Kim who has just been appointed its first female chair.

Despite the frivolous comedy tone, the series could be interpreted as a bitter reflection of the crisis in culture, humanities and academia. Though *The Chair* exposes the dissolution of some of the conservative narratives, it also brings to light the consolidation of other harmful dynamics within the scholarly world. University is depicted as an institution immersed in the cultural upheaval but its transformative potential is mostly mishandled. Political correctness is ill targeted: an out of context incident is blown out to an absurd extent while the ubiquitous racist and gender prejudices pass almost unnoticed. The hierarchy at Pembroke University still mirrors the conservative discourse. The discriminatory model of agency in academia positions women as misfits because of their more communal and less competitive idea of excellence. The failure to address and properly manage this problem is presented as a major reason behind the decline of American model of university.

Eliza Gładkowska is a research assistant at the Chair of Didactics and Early Education at the University of Warmia and Mazury. Her research interests include liminality and identity in literature, culture and educational space. She has attended numerous international conferences on contemporary literature and education and published articles on the subjects in Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ, Rozprawy Społeczne and Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana.

Beatriz M. Gonçalves (University of Coimbra, Portugal)

Illness, Intimacy and Care in Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*

Yaa Gyasi's second novel, *Transcendent Kingdom*, is an intimate portrayal of grief, care and mental illness. The story is centred on Gifty, a 28-year-old African-American neuroscience PhD student who, during one of her mother's depressive episodes, becomes her caregiver. Her mother's haunting presence in Gifty's neatly organised life brings back memories of her absent father, her brother's struggle with addiction and her mother's suicide attempt, traumatic events that forced Gifty to care for her family at a young age and which became the motivation behind her research on reward-seeking behaviours. Drawing on Joan Tronto's ethics of care and Patricia Hill Collins' Black feminist thought, in this paper I will discuss the ways in which Gifty's experiences of caring for her loved ones and their struggles with mental illness affect her relationships with family, friends and colleagues, and with herself. I argue that these experiences are central to Gifty's growth as a character, leading her to realise that, to take care of those she loves, she must let herself be taken care of.

Beatriz Marques Gonçalves holds a BA in Modern Languages, with a major in Anglo-American Studies and a minor in Portuguese, awarded by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra. She is currently a student of the Doctoral Programme Discourses: Culture, History and Society (CES/FLUC/FEUC). Her research interests lie in American studies, contemporary poetry and fiction, the politics of language, and pop culture and the civic imagination.

Paula Barba Guerrero (University of Salamanca, Spain)

Loose Ends: Against Resolution in N.K. Jemisin's "Waking Awake"

N. K. Jemisin's short story "Waking Awake" recounts the story of Sadie, a human caregiver at the Northeast Anthroproduction Facility in a dystopian future. There, she participates in the breeding of healthy humans for genetically modified parasites to possess. The main premise in the story is the conflict between this parasitical race oppressing humankind (the "Masters") and their human hosts, who are portrayed as disposable beings and murdered with impunity during the transfer ritual. As human bodies grow old, Masters begin over, selecting and forcefully occupying the body of another host. It is only after Sadie dreams of one of those hosts and speaks to him that she decides to fight back, learning of a possible way towards freedom. The story ends with Sadie attempting to carry out her plan, but the reader never knows whether she succeeds or not. In Jemisin's refusal to offer closure and narrative resolution, this paper recognizes a critique of actual discourses on political exclusion as well as a refusal of simple solutions, opening a discussion through speculation and dreams. For the author, the end is "immanent" rather than imminent (Kermode 2000, 25), disclosing truths inherent to our world. I argue, then, that the severe dehumanization of disenfranchised communities in the story is read in tandem with real life marginalization and introduced hospitality terms. As such, the act of hosting no longer stands as the virtuous process of welcoming the stranger home (Derrida 2000), but as gesture of extreme dispossession and forceful embodiment that entails violence and death. By locating the *disposable* body in a dialectic of incarceration and gradual loss, "Waking Awake" investigates the implicit hostility of inclusion while vindicating black cultural memory from the carceral sites (Mendieta 2004; Browne 2015) built to hold humans. Ultimately, this paper understands Jemisin's decision to only hint at a possible return to normalcy eluding conflict resolution as an act of Ricoeurian "narrative hospitality" through which "the story of the other" (1995, 8) is voiced avoiding the *happy ending or the quick fix*.

Paula Barba Guerrero (paulabarbaguerrero@usal.es) is Assistant Professor at the English Department of the University of Salamanca, Spain, where she teaches North American Literature. She holds a PhD in black American literature, for which she received the Extraordinary Doctorate Award. Her research interests comprise contemporary black speculative fiction, space and memory studies, affect theory, and what hospitality and homeness entail for disenfranchised populations living in the US.

Ryan Haddad (Western University, Canada)

Armageddon at Home: Capitalism and Destruction in *Ducks, Newburyport* and *Synecdoche, New York*

Ducks, Newburyport tells of an Ohio housewife who, in making her grocery list, goes on to describe her innumerable anxieties about life, North-America, and her life in North-America. Her 1,000-page stream of consciousness gradually breaks down and branches off into various timelines, connecting the traumas of her past to her present misfortunes while simultaneously outlining a grim future for the nation. Stream of consciousness narratives, rather than satisfying the mental-image of smoothly flowing, linear story-telling, often produce fractured stories which break down and fall apart. Charlie Kaufman's 2008 film *Synecdoche, New York* displays the fractured narrative of a theatre director who creates a miniaturized version of New York City infested with actors who recreate his life in an eternal loop as he tries to find where his life went wrong in the openly laid-out fractured retelling of his years. Fractured narratives have the ironic quality of dissecting and highlighting a singular phenomenon about modern human life in North-America: its inherent brokenness. Its brokenness is a multifaceted amalgamation of media influence, capitalist greed, and humanity's universal desire for acceptance and love. Paralleling the two works highlights how modern North-American life has become a struggle of finding balance between one's fractured self and the broken nature of their constantly changing environment.

Ryan Haddad is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at Western University in London, Ontario. He is originally from Lebanon, which is where he originally fostered his love for literature and film. His current research focuses on the intersection between suicide and fiction in American and Japanese literature with an emphasis on the works of Osamu Dazai and Yukio Mishima. His main interests growing up were stories of ordinary people undergoing trials of the strange and uncanny, mainly through the works of Kurt Vonnegut, Stephen King, and H.P. Lovecraft.

Tomasz Jacheć (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland)

Cancel Chappelle! Cancel Chappelle?! Good Luck with That... On the futility of Cancel Culture

Since 2014, Netflix has cancelled 71 of their original shows. The reasons for cancellations were various: lack of critical acclaim and low viewership numbers, overblown budgets and financial losses, actors' contractual obligations and career choices, creative disagreements and professional burnouts, or... "Netflix did not comment on the cancellation" (Peters), which can imply controversy surrounding cancellation. One performer and a series of his stand-up specials, which Netflix did not cancel, despite controversies and Netflix's own employees' calls for cancellation, was Dave Chappelle.

The six Chappelle's specials, which he made for Netflix, frequently sparked heavy criticism for Chappelle's alleged insensitivity to the LGBTQ. His last special, *The Closer*, released in 2021, resulted in Netflix' employees' walk out to protest Chappelle's jokes and calls to cancel the comedian were made. Chappelle does not seem to be bothered and jokes about the whole situation; his stand-up specials are still on Netflix. So are the specials by Louis C.K.

In my paper, I would like to examine and discuss the intersections of artistic freedom of expression, corporate interests, and post-Millennial sensitivities.

Tomasz Jacheć, MA, is an assistant at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. In his work, he focuses on the landscape of American popular culture with sport in the center of his studies. His special interest lie in the cultural phenomenon called Michael Jordan, and the role this phenomenon and its narratives play in the culture of the USA. He is also an avid fan of American stand-up comedy, as well as late night television comedy. He is a published author of academic articles on comedy and sport. Next week (December 7th), he is defending his doctoral thesis, here at UMCS ;-).

Katarzyna Jaworska-Biskup (University of Szczecin, Poland)

Harper Lee in Poland. Reflections of Law and Justice in Polish Renderings of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*

Harper Lee was one of the most outstanding American writers who explored the topic of law and justice in the 1930s American South. She also gained recognition in Poland. Lee's literary output was popularised among Polish readers through translations. Her most widely recognised novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been rendered into Polish by two authors to this date: Zofia Kierszys and Maciej Szymański. Maciej Szymański also translated another famous work by Lee titled *Go Set a Watchman*. The major goal of this paper is to demonstrate how Polish authors reflected on American law and the social and legal landscape of the American South. It focuses on the fragments of Lee's novels that feature law and legal language. Special attention is paid to Tom Robinson's trial, in particular, court procedure, opening and closing statements, and cross-examination. The paper discusses such legal concepts as court officers, voir dire, champertous connivance, relevant, material, corroborative and circumstantial evidence, and the beyond a reasonable doubt principle.

Katarzyna Jaworska-Biskup is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Literature and New Media at the University of Szczecin. Her academic interests include Welsh literature, history, and culture. She also conducts research in law and literature.

Tatiana Konrad (University of Vienna, Austria)

Medical Progress, Health, and the Chronic Disease of Racism in *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*

This paper focuses on Damian Duffy and John Jennings' adaptation of Octavia E. Butler novel *Kindred* (1979), *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* (2017). It explores how the graphic novel visualizes health, illness, and the state of medicine as such via visual and verbal techniques. It examines the graphic novel's multiple references to medicine and health and discusses the issue of medical progress as depicted in the graphic novel; but it also analyzes medical progress as a tool through which racism is portrayed as a disease that the United States (and the world in general) is yet to cure. The graphic novel tells the story of an African American woman, Dana, who is forced to travel in time to find out more about her ancestors. As the narrative blurs time and space borders, depicting its

main character in nineteenth-century antebellum South and twentieth-century LA, it not only explores the tragic past of the U.S. and ongoing racism as the result of slavery, but also provides a detail analysis of progress (or lack thereof) through its frequent references to medicine. Dana often helps the characters from the nineteenth century to survive relying on her general medical knowledge. This makes Dana a true magician in the eyes of the nineteenth-century characters who, indeed, with her help, survive despite having the most serious injuries. The dramatic differences in understanding health and illness, ways to treat patients, and general medical awareness that the graphic novel visualizes/verbalizes, contrasting Dana and the characters from the nineteenth century, including best doctors of that time, as this paper claims, emphasize the problem of progress/stagnation: the medical progress is used to foreground racism as a never-ending story. Racial inequality is one of the major manifestations of sociocultural and political stagnation, and progress is impossible without overcoming racism.

Tatiana Konrad is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Austria, the principal investigator of "Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World," and the editor of the "Environment, Health, and Well-being" book series at Michigan State University Press. She holds a PhD in American Studies from the University of Marburg, Germany. She was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Chicago (2022), a Visiting Researcher at the Forest History Society (2019), an Ebeling Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society (2018), and a Visiting Scholar at the University of South Alabama (2016). She is the author of Docu-Fictions of War: U.S. Interventionism in Film and Literature (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), the editor of Cold War II: Hollywood's Renewed Obsession with Russia (University Press of Mississippi, 2020) and Transportation and the Culture of Climate Change: Accelerating Ride to Global Crisis (West Virginia University Press, 2020), and a coeditor of Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma, and Memory (Rutgers University Press, 2018).

Dominika Kotuła (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland)

"The great whites, from politics to culture, they're rolling offstage." Visions of the Current American Crises *in Succession*

The plot of *Succession*, a critically acclaimed HBO drama series created by Jesse Armstrong (a co-writer of the mercilessly amusing, albeit troubling British sitcom *Peep Show*) can be seen as a story of a rather extreme case of sibling rivalry. The viewers follow the story of a family owning an enormous right-wing media conglomerate, Waystar Royco. The family's manipulative patriarch, Logan, perceives his four dysfunctional children as a source of his constant disappointment. The children, despite being emotionally wounded and bullied by their father on a regular basis, never stop wondering who will replace Logan as the CEO of the company and plotting against each other. Thus, the series might be seen as yet another story of a cruel power struggle within an extremely rich family, or one of the unforgiving satires on the elite. However, *Succession* depicts many other topics, such as the present political crisis in the U.S., the rise of the alt-right, the widely discussed death of the traditional media, as well as the end of some of the most beloved American myths, such as the myth of a respectable self-made man. The level of corruption within Waystar Royco is appalling, the profit-oriented strategies used by the company's masterminds are damaging and

Logan himself embodies aggression and ruthlessness necessary to succeed in the world of business, however neither his children, nor antagonists, such as the liberal Pierce family, can provide an alternative convincing enough to replace the old patterns. With its sharp portrayals of characters (mostly deluded and narcissistic) and references to the contemporary socio-political turmoil in the U.S., *Succession* is a plausible (yet still entertaining) vision of a reality shaped by crises.

Dominika Kotuła, Ph.D., is a research assistant at the Department of English Philology of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. Her academic interests focus on contemporary Polish poetry and her main research field concerns Andrzej Sosnowski's redefinitions of such categories as *avant-garde*, *sensitivity* and *experience*. She is also interested in literary theory and pop-culture. She has participated in both national and international conferences devoted to contemporary literature, philosophy and pop-culture. She is an author of reviews and scientific articles as well as the editor of *Narracje postkryzysowe w humanistyce* (2014).

Agnieszka Matysiak (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland)

Going Off-Off the Foreman Way: Theatre of Memories and *Old-Fashioned Prostitutes: A True Romance*

Since 1968, which is the date of founding the Ontological-Hysteric Theater, Richard Foreman has invariably shocked theater-goers with his phantasmagorical and elaborately designed "pieces." Unsurprisingly, *Old-Fashioned Prostitutes: A True Romance* (2013) – the play grounded in the inimitable Formanesque avant-garde setting – explores and re-visions, as almost all of Forman's works, the concepts of reality and representation. However, there seems to be a new turn to this latest creation as it resonates heavily with the issues of memory, remembrance and forgetting, all of which are reflected in the structural and linguistic layers of the play. What is more, Foreman's excessive use of "repetition, conflation, regression, echoing, overlap, and simultaneity" (Malkin 1) – although significantly reappraised in the play – may constitute, as Jeanette Malkin noticed in the context of postmodern drama, a direct link with the idea of the Renaissance memory-theatres initiated in Italy by Giulio Camillo's *L'Idée del Teatro* (1550). I would therefore propose to approach Foreman's 2013 theatrical piece as a post-millennial treaty on the early modern memory-theatre, and Samuel, the main character, as the figure that acts out his role not only within the space of the stage/page, but also within the spatial construct of his own decaying theatre of memories.

Agnieszka Matysiak is Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Linguistics at MSCU, Lublin, Poland, specializing in literary studies. She is the author of *The Backstage as the Diegetic Space in the (Neo)Gothic Dramas*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010. She received her PhD in 2017.

Zbigniew Mazur (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland)

Female Detectives and the Moral Crisis in America: Women in the New TV Crime Drama

The paper investigates recent American TV crime drama in which prominent roles are given to female protagonists. The shows such *Unbelievable* (2019) and *Mare of Easttown* (2021) place

women in central roles, both as investigators and victims. By going beyond the classic formula of crime drama, these shows reshape, in varied ways, the format of the genre. Consequently, they overcome the generic constraints and discursively address significant social and economic issues, often ignored by conventional crime drama narratives. The narratives of the shows investigated in this paper picture American communities as morally devastated spaces, with the crisis affecting individuals and families in all spheres of life. Contrary to the established model of crime drama, *Unbelievable* and *Mare of Easttown*, although based on stories of criminal investigation, focus on exploration of social causes of crime. They point to gender, class and race inequalities, instability of the family, corruption, inefficiency of government institutions, inadequacy of health care, and many others, as sources of disintegration of American society. The stories offer some hope and reassurance to the viewer by showing that the detectives can combat crime and bring temporary order to the affected communities, but express lack of confidence in the permanence of core American values. The paper will discuss the ways in which the reshaped TV crime drama, with women in prominent roles, offers a picture of economic crisis and moral decadence in contemporary America, while remaining attractive for a wide audience.

Zbigniew Mazur teaches British and American History and Cultural Studies in the Department of British and American Studies, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland. His academic interests center on eighteenth-century Anglo-American history, leisure studies, research into culture contact, and film and television studies. He is the author of *Settlers and Indians: Transformations of English Culture in Seventeenth-Century Virginia (1995)*, *Power of Play: Leisure, Recreation, and Cultural Hegemony in Colonial Virginia (2010)* and a co-author of *Oswajanie Innego: Obraz Polski i Polaków w prasie brytyjskiej w latach 2002-2007 (2010)*, *Taming the Other: Representations of Poles and Poland in the British Press in 2002-2007*.

Marta Miquel-Baldellou (University of Lleida, Spain)

Images of Aging Masculinities in Stephen King's Fiction: The Case of *Mr. Mercedes*

Many of Stephen King's iconic novels, such as *The Shining*, *Thinner* and *Misery*, feature middle-aged men who must face a challenging life stage in which their masculinities and their associated cultural values (like strength, self-reliance and resilience) are seriously put to the test. Having to cope with physical frailty and mental instability, male characters like Jack Torrance, Billy Halleck or Paul Sheldon have to struggle symbolically against the effects that aging exerts on both their self-perceived and socially-exposed masculinities. In recent interviews, King has made explicit statements about how aging influences his writing and, in his later works of fiction, aged characters are often granted an increasingly central role.

Mr. Mercedes (2014) has been acclaimed as King's early incursion in the tradition of hard-boiled detective fiction. The popular and iconic images of hard-boiled detectives, such as Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, but also of their criminal counterparts, have traditionally been associated with a rough sort of masculinity that typifies the solitary hero who fights against crime as well as those ostracised individuals who defy the law. However, as Andrew Pepper claims, "the hard-boiled's male toughness [...] has always been little more than a ruse or façade" (2010, 147), while Frank Krutnik argues that crime is often associated

with “the destabilisation of masculine identity” (1991, 128). The apparently tough masculinity characterising males in hard-boiled fiction has thus been described as more vulnerable than it looks at first sight. Nonetheless, in the portrayal of these exposed masculinities, aging has hardly ever been pointed out as a significant variable to unravel the equation of their latent vulnerability.

This paper aims to approach Stephen King’s *Mr. Mercedes* as a contemporary hard-boiled novel with the purpose of portraying the role that aging may play on supporting and subverting apparently tough and rough masculinities which have traditionally been considered as distinctive of hard-boiled fiction.

Marta Miquel-Baldellou (BA, MA, PhD) works as a postdoctoral researcher and a member of the research group *Dedal-Lit* at the University of Lleida (Catalonia, Spain). Her field of research revolves around popular fiction and aging studies. She was granted a postdoctoral scholarship to look into Stephen King’s fiction. She is working currently on a government-funded project to analyse aging discourses in contemporary fiction. Her research papers have been published in books and journals specialised in aging studies and popular fiction.

Paschalia Mitskidou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece)

Virtual Reality, Nostalgia and Digital Immortality: The Case of *Black Mirror*’s “San Junipero”

The present paper examines how the “San Junipero” episode of the *Black Mirror* Netflix TV series (2011–) illustrates the idea of using virtual reality as a means to overcome illness, aging and death. Characters suffering from old age or a terminal illness have the ability to be immersed in sophisticated virtual environments where past decades have been nostalgically recreated down to the finest detail. In these historical simulations, not only is the past revived but also people can re-inhabit younger versions of themselves or even live perpetually in a virtual ‘afterlife’. Thus, in the episode, virtual technologies allow the continuity of existence by ensuring the ongoing presence of an individual and enabling an extension or renewal of the self. Considering David Lowenthal’s view that “nostalgia is today’s favoured mode of looking back” (31), the desire to recover the past in these environments echoes the nostalgia for recent decades that is prevalent in American culture today. The analysis will attempt to shed light on the varying goals sought in the recreated digital realms, linking them with contemporary concerns regarding the ways in which we seek to confront our fear of aging and death as well as satiate our nostalgic yearnings through the use of virtual technologies. “San Junipero” suggests that aging and death are not irreversible conditions. Rather, the episode presents the affordances and liberating potential of virtual technologies that empower characters to re-invent themselves, yet juxtaposing them with the risks and challenges that these technologies involve.

Paschalia Mitskidou is a Ph.D. student in the Department of American Literature and Culture, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece). She holds an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Western Macedonia and a BA in History from the Ionian University. Her Ph.D. project concentrates on virtual reality in contemporary American culture and the ways in which the historical past is reconstructed through virtual reality narrative practices. She is a member of the Hellenic

Association for American Studies (HELAAS) and of the 'Multimodal Research and Reading Group' of the School of English at Aristotle University. Her research interests include contemporary American fiction and digital culture, interactive digital narratives, and virtuality in the context of new media technologies.

Małgorzata Olsza (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland)

The (un)Reality of Images in Nick Drnaso's Graphic Novel *Sabrina*

Published in 2018, approximately one year into Donald Trump's presidency and the accompanying political, social, and cultural environment, Nick Drnaso's graphic novel *Sabrina* addresses the complex and destructive concepts of "post truth," "fake news," and informational, as well as visual, literacy. The story centres on the titular Sabrina, a young woman who goes missing and eventually falls victim to a hideous crime, and her grieving friends and family members. A video recording of Sabrina's murder broadcast on the news triggers questions associated with digital misinformation, faked and real images, and our waning belief in the real. I am particularly interested in how the graphic novel, as a predominantly visual medium, represents and critically examines the (un)reality of images. Indeed, paradoxically, some of the characters in the graphic novel respond to the visual representation of a true crime with a crisis of consciousness, descending into conspiracy theories and lies and, as such, seem to corroborate the claim that "fake news, disinformation and misleading content are not social anomalies that can be eradicated, technological irregularities that can be remedied with automated surveillance and censorship" but rather social phenomena embedded in the contemporary media and visual landscape (Cover, Haw, and Thompson 2022: 139). I will examine how Drnaso constructs his narrative in a contradictory manner, making it clear that the murder did take place and yet opting for minimalistic and abstract images that obscure and challenge interpretation, and how it makes the reader/viewer renegotiate their approach to what they see and trust.

Małgorzata Olsza (she/her) is Assistant Professor at the Department of American Literature at AMU. Her Ph.D. thesis was devoted to the poetics of the contemporary American graphic novel (2017). She also holds an M.A. in Art History. She has published on different aspects of American comics in Polish Journal for American Studies, ImageText, and Image [&] Narrative. She has also contributed chapters to the edited collections *Comic Art and Feminism in the Baltic Sea Region* (Routledge, 2021), *Drawing the Past, Volume 2: Comics and the Historical Imagination in the World (UP of Mississippi, 2022)*, and *Seeing Comics through Art History: Alternative Approaches to the Form* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022).

G. Jeffrey O'Malley (Northern Illinois University, USA)

"How does the never to be differ from what never was?": A Review of Multiplicity of Meaning and its Implications in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

Cormac McCarthy's combines elements of our current world with a post-apocalyptic future in his novel *The Road*, which amplifies the emotional impact experienced throughout the novel. The

reader regularly encounters concepts or objects that seem to fit better in our world than the world of *The Road*. The American reader must consider his or her own lifestyle and culture as an artifact buried beneath an apocalypse that derives from that same lifestyle and culture. The reader has no choice but to confront his or her own mortality while peering into a hellish kaleidoscope display of gut wrenching vignettes depicting their own descendants choosing between cannibalism and starvation. The dissonance of what objects and relationships signify in the world of *The Road*, when compared to our own, regularly remind the reader of the immense emotional loss of an entire civilization. This effect, combined with the emotional difficulty of watching a child suffer, cause the reader to become particularly immersed in McCarthy's sunless vision of lonely and clawing survival. McCarthy builds a multivalent text haunted by ghostly American echoes, and he continues this trend into the final vignette where McCarthy has artfully phrased a paragraph that forces the reader to make a final emotional judgment about whether to accept or deny the potentiality of human extinction.

Jeff O'Malley currently serves as guest editor for a special issue of *Literature/Film Quarterly* (LFQ) advocating for the creation of *Abuse Studies in the humanities*, which was inspired by his LFQ essay "*Prowled rather than Passed': Abuse and Veiled Social Mobility in Nabokov's and Kubrick's Lolita.*" O'Malley's primary contention is that abuse is a form of identity, and he strives to highlight and confront problems related to a culture of silence within academia related to abuse.

Giftly Ruben Prabhas (University of Hyderabad, India)

Expiration and Loss in the Works of André Aciman

In an important scene in André Aciman's *Call Me By Your Name* the protagonists Olio and Oliver talk about Heraclitus's principle of the Unity of Opposites saying that change and loss are our constant companions. This conversation anticipates the separation of these lovers. It also proves to be a looming question in the sequel *Find Me*, exploring how these characters have changed after their separation. Will Olio and Oliver be able to step into the same river twice? Similar in its sensibility is Aciman's book of autobiographical essays *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* where the writer writes not about the separation of lovers but about being separated from a land. My paper examines these books for the way Aciman writes about various kinds of loss and the similarities that connect them. Even if we are talking about exile, a break up, the shifting attitudes between long-term lovers, or the death of a loved one we are talking about the expiration of time and how change forever accompanies the human condition. Among the post-millennial American writers, Aciman writes comprehensively about expiration and waning. A parallel to his work in the past century would be the work of Proust who hugely influenced Aciman and of whom Aciman wrote many essays.

Giftly Ruben Prabhas is currently pursuing his PhD in English at University of Hyderabad, India. He is also a student of German language and literature. His research interests include *Intertextuality, Thomas Mann, Indian Literature, Modernism, and Thematology.*

Usha SK Raghupathula (Andhra University, India)

Rama NH Alapati (Andhra University, India)

Popular Culture and Adaptations: The Versions of Roth's *The Plot Against America* and their Recurring Resonance with the Insecure American

When *The Plot Against America*, the critically acclaimed take on the Jewish sense of insecurity, as Philip Roth assures it to be, was written, it was received as not more than a well written piece of alternate historical fiction, save for the usual controversial reception of Roth's writings. The expert distillation of the American experience as seen from an immigrant population from the novel, however, remained to be one that resonates across races, times and formats of storytelling. When the novel was adapted into a HBO limited series in 2020, by the acclaimed big name creators David Simon and Ed Burns, who gave us the overtly politicized *The Wire*, the inherent subtext of this story extended its relevance and opprobrium to that of the then contemporary American political landscape (or Trump, to put it bluntly). The limited series from the get-go was poised to capture the sense of insecurity and fear of being a Jew in the forties and perhaps even amplify what Roth had so expertly done. The somewhat dire limited series tapped all the right strings with its brilliant casting, writing and acting as its surprisingly high acclaim had led to the idea behind the central theme of this paper: Resonance. This resonance sheds light on the mindset of early settlers in America, be it Jews in the quasi-fictional and the real 1940's in Roth's novel, or Muslims in post 9/11 American society, or any one of the hundreds of countries' intelligentsia that move to America for better pay and livelihood, riddled with a looming sense of fear and insecurity. This paper aims to explore this recurring resonance of the story of *The Plot Against America* in all its versions.

Usha Sai Kiran Raghupathula is a PhD Scholar in English from Andhra University, Visakhapatnam. Besides, he is working as a Guest Faculty in English at the College of Engineering, Andhra University. Kiran was awarded a Gold Medal for topping MA English (Post-Graduation) at Andhra University. Apart from his excellent track record in literature and language since school days, he also is a Creative Writer and has been actively contributing as an editor for several creative and critical writings. His creative work can be found in the following blog: <https://theushakiran.wordpress.com>.

Rama N.H. Alapati is an Associate Professor of English at Andhra University, India. He holds a PhD in Postwar American Literature from Osmania University, India. In addition, he had also pursued Postdoctoral studies as a Visiting Scholar at Bowling Green State University, and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

Patrycja Roguska (University of Warsaw, Poland)

“Black is the absence of light, but white is the absence of memory, the color of can't remember”: Illness, Suffering & Loss in Stephen King's *Duma Key* (2008)

The following paper looks at the ways in which one of the most popular and prolific writers as well as one of the most crucial voices in contemporary American literature, Stephen King, conceptualizes the notions of illness, suffering, and loss in his 2008 novel *Duma Key*. The novel, written after King's 1999 accident, chronicles a testimony regarding a nearly apocalyptic experience of personal

suffering rife with images of excruciating pain, uncontrolled rage sprees, traumatic memories, and many kinds of losses caused by a life-altering accident in the life of an individual and the people he befriends along the way. The ill and the disabled characters of Duma Key, artistically inclined and endowed with supernatural powers, struggle with the weight of traumatic memories, cope with the limitations of their bodies and minds as well as the permanent sense of loss accompanying their lives, and try to reconstruct their identity in isolation from the society, following King's philosophy of recovery, which predicates that "any act that re-makes the world is heroic". The pain and the suffering, both physical and mental, are not noble and symbolic, they are cruel, isolating, and substantial, constituting the basis for exploration of the nuances of the characters' transforming senses of identity through their growing awareness of the womb-to-tomb balancing between wellness and sickness, the normal and the peculiar. King—maintaining the distinctiveness of his writing style as well as deriving from idiosyncrasies of the horror genre and his personal experiences of suffering after the accident—breaks the chains of the genre writer label and goes far beyond it, opening the floor for questions concerning the most tangible manifestation of fear—the terror of real-life suffering.

Patrycja Roguska is a PhD candidate and an instructor at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, where she also earned her MA and BA in English Studies with a focus on American literature and culture. She is currently working on her doctoral dissertation devoted to representations of illness, disability, and addiction in Stephen King's fiction. Her academic interests encompass horror in literature and film, popular culture, representations of illness, disability, and addiction in contemporary American literature and culture as well as connections between literature and medicine. She is a member of the Polish Association for American Studies.

Aleksandra M. Różalska (University of Łódź, Poland)

The Decade of *Homeland* (2011-2020): Critical Reception of the War on Terror Narrative

Drawing from recent postcolonial and feminist scholarship and critiques of ethnocentric and orientalist narratives of the war on terror that informed popular culture within the last two decades, in my paper I look critically at the television series *Homeland* (2011-2020), whose eighth and concluding season was aired in early 2020.

I have analyzed elsewhere various aspects of the series, such as depictions of urban landscapes with regards to terrorist threat, the representation of women in the show with the special emphasis on the relationship between the leading female protagonist and Muslim women as well as the ways in which the show justifies "the state of exception" and torture in the name of (national) security. Since *Homeland* concluded two years ago and there is no plans for renewal, in this paper I want to have a look at the series not in a fragmented way and at selected seasons and episodes, but rather to approach the eight-season show as a whole and analyze the changes it has undergone with regards to depiction of the war on terror and the Muslim *Other*. I am particularly interested in how the representation of enemy changed throughout this decade-long television series and in differences in approaching the terrorist threat (both home and abroad) taking into consideration the corresponding socio-political circumstances in the United States. Furthermore, I would like to use

this opportunity to investigate how *Homeland's* main protagonist, Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes)—one of the most important fictional warriors of the war on terror in American television after 9/11—transformed herself as the character.

Aleksandra M. Różalska is Assistant Professor at the Department of Cultural Research and Head of the Women Studies Centre, Faculty of Philology, University of Łódź. She is a P.I. for GEMMA (Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies) and RESET (Horizon 2020 Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together). She published on images of minorities and women in (American and Polish) film and television as well as on cultural representations of 9/11 and its aftermath. She co-edited five volumes devoted to feminisms in various cultural contexts and contemporary perceptions of subjectivity and difference in the Europe and the US. Currently she is working on a book on the post-9/11 television discourses from postcolonial and feminist perspectives and on journal article about reproductive rights and abortion as reflected in TV series.

Agnieszka Rzepa (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland)

Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier on Gardens and Cats: Memoirs of Loss and Sustenance

Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier, both prominent Canadian poets, spent together over four decades as partners and later as a married couple. While original and unique in their respective visions and concepts they present in their poetry, both often focus on the deep links between human and non-human, people and the world of animate and inanimate nature. This focus is also prominent in their memoirs: Lane's *There is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden* (2004; published in the US as *What the Stones Remember: A Life Rediscovered*), and Crozier's *Small Beneath the Sky: A Prairie Memoir* (2009) and *Through the Garden: A Love Story (With Cats)* (2020). In my presentation I propose to focus specifically on the literal and metaphoric meanings and roles of gardens and cats in the process of coming to terms with loss (in particular death) and change as described in Lane's *There is a Season* and Crozier's *Through the Garden*. The former is Lane's meditation on the process of recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction, which is accompanied by a reflection on his past, in particular his relationship with his mother—all told in the context of his work on developing his garden. One of his poignant conclusions is that "What we are is a garden", picked up by Crozier in *Through the Garden*, which explores the last two years of Lane's life, marked by grave illness, and the story of their relationship—a life lived with cats. My analysis will be informed by life writing theory and elements of ecocriticism.

Agnieszka Rzepa is Head of the Canadian Literature Research Unit at the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She has taught and conducted research on Canadian literature focusing on contemporary Canadian novel and short story, Canadian postcolonial studies, as well as Indigenous literatures and Canadian life writing. She has published numerous articles in these areas; her book publications include the monographs *Feats and defeats of memory: Exploring spaces of Canadian magic realism* (2009) and *The self and the world. Aspects of the aesthetics and politics of contemporary North American literary memoir by women* (2018; with Dagmara Drewniak and Katarzyna Macedulska).

Tamar Siradze (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Georgia)

Fire that Destroys and Fire that Creates: Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*⁰

Fire has widely been used as a symbol in fiction or poetry. Ray Bradbury's masterpiece *Fahrenheit 451*⁰ is solely built on the dual nature of the fire symbol, possessing destructive as well as creative energy. Its wider symbolism includes purification, revelation, transformation, regeneration and spiritual ardor. On a domestic scale (hearth fire), its image is protecting and comforting. The paper deals with the characterization of fire symbol in this famous dystopian novel focusing on its resurrection symbolism personified by the phoenix and salamander.

On the other hand, on the comparative basis, the paper analyses the reflection over the above-mentioned issues in the 2018 American screen adaptation of the novel by director Ramin Bahrani. The film received controversial critical acclaim, which gives us food for thought to evaluate the visual as well as contextual merits and compare different generations' perception of the apocalyptic nature of the future vision, the key issues of the novel concerning human relations, societal indifference and struggle for survival.

Tamar Siradze – PhD in Philology, Professor, faculty of Humanities at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (Batumi, Georgia); Vice-Rector; fields of interest: European and American Literature, Literary Studies, Bible in Literature, Literary Translation; has published 17 articles and a monograph Epiphany in English Literature, James Joyce and Thomas Sterns Eliot; member of Comparative Literature Association.

Magdalena Skrzyńska (University of Szczecin, Poland)

Fries, Spray Cheese and Wawa Coffee: How Food Scenes Tell the Story in *Mare of Easttown* (2021)

According to Ronald Barthes, "foodstuff is never just foodstuff". Food is more than a mere necessity and/or a source of pleasure — it is also a coded system of communication. Therefore, in film and series, food scenes are not merely a depiction of nurturing the body and/or satiating the appetite. They are yet another cinematic device which not only signifies an individual's or group's role in diegesis, but also illustrates personal identities and mental states. What is also significant is how eating scenes are entangled with social contexts and relationships. The circumstances of ingestion give the viewer a broader context of the story. Thus, along with food, they play the role of a "supporting narrator." In my presentation, I will analyze food and eating scenes in the HBO MAX crime drama limited series *Mare of Easttown*. I argue that, as a powerful cinematic device, food and eating scenes not only navigate the audience through the story, but also can be perceived as a silent character, who triggers conflicts or solves them. In the series, junk food and local (Pennsylvania-based) specialties prevail; fries, spray cheese, hoagies, cheesesteaks or Wawa coffee not only tell a lot about the condition of the community depicted in the production, but also emphasize the motif of individual and collective trauma.

Magdalena Skrzyńska, MA, is an Assistant Lecturer in the Institute of Literature and New Media at the University of Szczecin where she teaches practical English and Literature of North America. She

is currently working on her doctoral dissertation entitled "Neither Here, Nor There: Liminoid Devices in the American Film and Serial Adaptations". Her academic interests include: film and series, liminality, feminism, American history and culture. She has published an article on liminoid filmic devices in Galicia Studies in Linguistics Literature and Culture: The Students' Voices, vol. 9. She is a member of the Polish Association for American Studies.

Ana Kocić Stanković (University of Niš, Serbia)

Marko Mitić (University of Niš, Serbia)

Classics Have No Expiration Date: Adapting Henry James's Style for the Screen

The paper deals with a recent visual adaptation of Henry James's classic, his best-known novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), into a popular and critically-acclaimed Netflix TV show *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020) created for television by Mike Flanagan. The analysis relies on Linda Hutcheon's (2006: 8) definition of the adaptation as a creative and interpretative effort to transpose, re-appropriate and intertextually engage with a well-known work of art. Several key elements of Henry James's literary style are identified and highlighted from the perspectives of literary criticism and critical theory. The objective is to compare and contrast how these literary techniques are transposed to the visual medium, i.e. to see whether any similar notions can be observed in the cinematic rendering of James's classic and how this may account for the popularity of the novella and the TV show that does not wane with time. As James himself described his famous novella as a ghost story, the effort is made to identify the elements of the horror genre that are applied across different media – the literary text and a TV show, in order to achieve the effect of suspense. The authors also intend to examine the political aspects of representation in the TV show – the adaptation of characters so as to include minority groups, that not being the case in James's original text. Finally, the authors argue that Flanagan's adaptation is one of the successful ones because it shows a profound understanding of James's narrative but also exhibits original creative efforts to engage with the primary text via a different medium.

Ana Kocić Stanković currently works as an Assistant Professor of American and African American Studies and American Literature at the English Department of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia. She received her MA degree from the School of Education, University of Nottingham, U.K. and a PhD in Anglo-American literature and culture from the University of Niš, Serbia. Besides teaching courses in American literature, history and culture, she has designed and taught a BA elective course in African American Studies, an MA elective course called *Images of Others in American Literature and Culture* and a PhD elective course *American Women Writers*. Her areas of academic interest include: African American literature and history, American literature – the classics and drama, American women and other minority writers and American colonial history.

Marko Mitić currently works as a Teaching Assistant of American Studies and American Literature at the English Department of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia. He received his BA and MA degrees from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia. He is currently a PhD candidate in American Literature at the same faculty. His areas of academic interest include: American literature – the classics, contemporary American literature and American short story.

Pavλίna Studená (Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic)

The Angry Old Woman in Anakana Schofield's *Malarky*

The paper analyses the novel *Malarky* (2012) by the Irish-Canadian author Anakana Schofield, which raises awareness of the disintegrated social identity of aging women. Once a woman crosses the line, whether as a result of retirement or the loss of a spouse, she loses a considerable deal of power and her identity is contested. By depicting the protagonist's struggle to reconcile with her husband's infidelity and her son's homosexuality, Schofield exposes the hypocrisy of a society that perpetuates the cultural stereotype of wise old age and does not tolerate aging women expressing either sexuality or "socially inappropriate" emotions like anger. Building on Kathleen Woodward's concept of anger as the antithesis of the wisdom often associated with old age, the paper further argues that anger often erupts as a reaction to emotional burnout caused by social withdrawal and exacerbated by external factors such as fear of the economic situation or a recent war. Suppressed anger can then lead to a mental breakdown, as it did for the protagonist who, ironically, tries so hard to conform to the socially approved patterns that she inevitably transgresses. Furthermore, Schofield draws attention to the new social role of aging women and gradually reveals how societal and cultural conventions prevent them from freely voicing their identity by putting pressure on desirable behavioural patterns. This forces them to strike a balance between the need to express their love, sexuality, anger, or grief and the fear of being judged by a society that remains prejudiced against anything different.

Pavλίna Studená holds a Master's degree in English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic), where she is currently pursuing her doctorate in Literatures in English. Her research focuses on how the aging process is approached in contemporary Canadian fiction through the vehicle of female characters who use irony to cope with the decline of power and to challenge socio-cultural stereotypes. Besides that, her research interests include female Bildungsroman and artist's novel, postcolonial literatures, feminism, and age studies. Outside the university, she enjoys travelling, sightseeing, and walking trips in the countryside.

Inna Sukhenko (University of Helsinki, Finland)

Narrating Health Literacy within Nuclear Toxic Legacies: Intermedial Ecocritical Perspective on Radiological Hazards in U.S. Nuclear Fiction

Narrating nuclear toxic legacies in the U.S. nuclear history can be regarded as a response of the society to interpreting the challenges of radiological hazards within the nuclear present agenda. The focus on studying the narrative tools of framing the lack of health literacy, regarded as a component of nuclear toxic legacy management within 'nuclear trauma' experienced communities, helps reveal the cultural and literary dimensions of communicating 'nuclear energy' within fictionalizing radiation related health problem and death issues in nuclear energy storytelling (Szeman, 2019).

My presentation intends to show how via narrating radiological hazards (nuclear related illnesses and deaths) fictional writings help reconsider 'end-of-the-words' narratives by transmitting scientific health knowledge and promoting 'nuclear literacy' as well as stressing the idea 'Survival is

possible!' within fictionalizing nuclear toxic legacies for framing critical thinking about nuclear energy industry, nuclear infrastructure.

Referring to 'slow violence' (Nixon 2013), 'slow hope' (Mauch 2019) and intermedial ecocriticism (Bruhn, 2020), the focus of the presentation is put on studying the literary dimensions of reconsidering radiological hazards from the perspective of implementing health literacy in U.S. nuclear fictional writings such as Andrea White's *Radiant Girl* (2008), Barbara Billig's and Michelle McKeeth's *Nuclear Road Trip: Onward to Destruction: Nuclear Fiction Novel of Survival* (2014) and James Reich's *Bombshell* (2013). Such perspective allows for the revealing of the transformations of narrating health literacy in the social and cultural context with a reference to the health risk management of nuclear toxic experienced communities, reflecting the current 'nuclear' challenges of the North American energy-driven society.

Inna Sukhenko is a visiting research fellow of Helsinki Environmental Humanities Hub, the Department of Cultures, the University of Helsinki. Her current project is focused on researching the literary dimensions of nuclear energy within energy literary narrative studies and energy humanities. She teaches courses on nuclear narrative studies and Chernobyl studies. After defending her PhD in Literary Studies (Dnipro, Ukraine), she has been a research fellow of Erasmus Mundus (Bologna, 2008; Turku, 2011-2012), Cambridge Colleges Hospitality Scheme (2013), SUSI (Ohio, 2016), Open Society Foundation/Artes Liberales Foundation (Warsaw, 2016-2017), JYU Visiting Fellowship Programme (Jyväskylä, 2021), PIASt Fellowship Programme (Warsaw, 2021). She is among the contributors of The Routledge Handbook of Ecocriticism and Environmental Communication (2019). Her general research interests lie within environmental humanities, energy humanities, petrocultures, ecocriticism, nuclear criticism, literary energy narrative studies, nuclear fiction, energy ethics. She is a member of the Association for Literary Urban Studies (Finland), HELSUS (Finland), the Finnish Society for Development Research (Finland), and Nordic Association for American Studies (NAAS).

Heather Thaxter (Doncaster College, UK)

The City as Detritus in N K Jemisin's Short Fiction

Known for her Afrofuturist speculative fiction, N. K. Jemisin addresses contemporary ecological and racial injustices often by transposing them onto alternative, fictional, Earth-like worlds, such as the setting for the *Inheritance* trilogy, or a future Earth as in the *Broken Earth* trilogy. Jemisin's fiction often portrays cities as living entities, their fate determined by the arbitrariness of natural forces or the proximity of humans with magical destructive powers. In these trilogies, cycles of destruction, death, and regrowth continue over millennia thus highlighting time as the only real arbiter of change: there are no quick fixes to the quick breaks caused by humanity's disrespect for and mistreatment of the planet, or each other. However, two stories from Jemisin's collection of short fiction *How Long til Black Future Month?* (2018) present real-life contemporary settings, New York and New Orleans, to explore the menace of the cities themselves. A critical comparison of the recurring motifs of waste and debris in 'Saints, Sinners, Dragons, and Haints, in the City Beneath the Still Waters', and 'The City Born Great' reveals the anthropomorphic symbiotic nature of cities. By applying the principles of detritus as being critical to system stability, waste and debris are integral to the cycle in constant flux between humanity and the planet. During this process, '[cities] make a

weight on the world, a tear in the fabric of reality' (20). It is from within this tear that Jemisin provides insight into that relationship.

Heather Thaxter is a PhD candidate whose research interests are Afrofuturism, postcolonialism, and speculative fiction with a special focus on Octavia Butler. Selected publications include 'Broadcasting Change: in emphatic dialogue with Duffy and Jennings' graphic novel adaptation of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*' in *Vector BSFA* (2021), and "'I want to live forever and breed people!": The Legacy of a Fantasy' in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E Butler* (2020). Heather also has a chapter under review with *Teaching 20th and 21st-century US Short Fiction*. Heather is currently Programme Leader for BA(Hons) English at University Campus, Doncaster UK.

Maria Virginia Tsikopoulou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece)

On the Verge of (Not?) Expiring: Urban Space and Narrative Negotiations in Ben Lerner's *10:04*

Ben Lerner's *10:04*, published in 2014, constitutes a novel full of personal, spatial and time rearrangements. The novel's narrator, a flâneur who roams around NYC's streets, realizing his personal detours and, at the same time, collecting the stories of others, develops a psychosomatic relationship with a city that constantly rearranges itself. Stories and facts, stemming from the past, intertwine with the characters' uneasiness about the future's predictable instability and rearrange a present that seems to be expiring. Thus, I would like to argue that this endless "rearrangement" process functions as a metaphor of expiration on two levels, first, in relation to the city's urban texture and then in terms of narrative.

Threatened by upcoming storms, torn by former trauma, and currently defined by a feeling of uncertainty that prevails, New York appears to be oscillating between expiration and rebirth only to be found in a limbo condition of perpetual change, without showing any traces of concrete resolutions. This feeling of rearrangement/expiration becomes also tangible through the narrative linearity that expires within the novel's confines. What I mean is that *10:04* creates flickering McHalean Chinese-box worlds that project multiple narratives within the central one while, simultaneously, blurring the sheer boundaries between fiction and fact.

Finally, further enhanced by a plethora of photographs and its intertextual *Back to the Future* references, the novel endorses this concept of expiration by both establishing and challenging the existence of divergent temporalities as a testimony of the city's and the narrative's fragmented - almost dissipated - natures.

Maria Virginia Tsikopoulou is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of American Literature and Culture, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and a Fulbright alumna. She holds a MA (2018) in English and American Studies (AUPh) and a BA (2015) in English Language and Literature (AUPh). In 2022, she visited NYU and the Brooklyn Art Library under the auspices of the Fulbright Foundation in Greece for PhD-related research. In 2021, she taught the course *Computer Literacy and Research Skills: Literary Cycle* (School of English, AUPh). She is currently visiting the Universidad Complutense de Madrid with an Erasmus scholarship.

Natalia Vysotska (Kyiv National Linguistic University, Ukraine)

“It’s you that’s poxed, my lad”: Syphilis as a Metaphor for Liminality in Timothy Findley’s *Elizabeth Rex*

Even though Susan Sontag made a convincing case for demystifying disease (“Disease as Metaphor”, 1978/1989), from the semiotic perspective medical discourse constitutes one of the text’s cultural codes and is, therefore, open to various interpretations. Hence, in imaginative writing the topos of disease, in addition to its literal function, is charged with an array of symbolic meanings.

Timothy Findley’s play *Elizabeth Rex* (2000) is set in London during the night of February 25, 1601 (the eve of the Earl of Essex’s execution). The tragicomic events of the fateful night are presented as Shakespeare’s premortal reminiscences structurally framed by a prologue and an epilogue.

The playwright saw in them “a possibility of a glorious, theatrical confrontation – between the woman who throughout her reign played the role of a man, and the man who in his theatrical career had played the role of a woman”. As the action unfolds, the two protagonists have to reconsider their gender identities in terms of self-awareness and self-presentation. Dramatic circumstances impelling them to do so have medical or rather pathological etiologies. In particular, the male protagonist is a victim to incurable syphilis at its tertiary (terminal) stage.

The paper focuses on the dramatist’s strategies for employing the discourse of syphilis in the ways both consistent with and transcending the perception of the “pox” in Elizabethan England, and also as a catalyst for the characters’ reformulation of their gender identities.

Natalia Vysotska is Doctor of Sciences (Philology). Current position – Full Professor, Theory and History of World Literature, Kyiv National Linguistics University. Scholarly interests: multi/transculturalism; theatre and drama in the USA. Major publications include three books and numerous essays, as well as sections in textbooks and monographs published in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Greece, Germany, Poland, Romania and the USA. Member of the European Association of American Studies (EAAS). European Collegium for African American Research (CAAR). Fulbright Program Alumna (1995), Resident Scholar at the Kennan Institute (2002). Participant in Salzburg Global Seminar in American Studies (2000, 2009). Work-in-progress – Shakespearean Re-Emergences in Contemporary American Drama.

Iryna Yakovenko (Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine)

Counter/Factuality in Alexander J. Motyl’s *Who Killed Andrei Warhol: The American Diary of a Soviet Journalist*

The paper addresses the 2007 novel *Who Killed Andrei Warhol: The American Diary of a Soviet Journalist* by Alexander J. Motyl, an American fiction writer and political scientist, and analyzes representations of the factual and the counterfactual in the literary work. The novel is set in the 1968 New York, and its fictional world is constructed around the assassination attempt by Valerie Solanas to kill the Pop Art artist Andy Warhol in his Union Square studio “Factory”. In the counterfactual comic narrative about the past, Alexander J. Motyl blurs the line between historical

and fictionalized facts, thus fictional characters and historical persons co-exist in the novel constructed as the diary of a Soviet journalist. Motyl's novel is also regarded as a critique and mockery of the USSR and its Communist ideology. The theoretical framework of the paper are the works on representations of history in fiction, namely *Coincidence and Counterfactuality* by Hilary Dannenberg, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* by Lubomír Doležel, and *Counterfactuals* by David Lewis.

Iryna Yakovenko is affiliated with the Department of Linguistics and Translation, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine. At present she is a Research Fellow of the Cluster of Excellence 2020 "Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective" (Research Area 3: "Future Perfect") at Free University Berlin. Since she received her doctorate in 2004 from Kyiv National Linguistic University, Iryna Yakovenko has been teaching courses on World Literature, History of American Literature, Analytical and Critical Readings of Contemporary Anglophone Prose. Her research interests include American and Canadian literatures, ethnic studies, Ukrainian diasporic studies, comparative literature, cultural and memory studies. Her publications explore African American women's poetry and the Black Arts Movement, ecofeminist writings, and the prose of 19th- and 20th-century American writers. Previous research fellowships included the 2014 Study of the United States Institute on Contemporary American Literature (University of Louisville, USA), research grants from John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Free University Berlin (2018, 2020).

Yao Yuan (Minsk State Linguistics University, Belarus)

The Unrealizable American Dream (On Charles Yu's Novel *Interior Chinatown*)

The concept "American Dream", which means that all individuals are entitled to the opportunity for success and upward social mobility through hard work, not only plays an important role in the development of American history and society, but is also one of the main issues in American literature, including Chinese American Writing. But for Chinese Americans, besides the contents of "individual success" and "upward social mobility through hard work", the more important aspect of the "American Dream" is self-identification, because of the conflicts between cultures that often involve racism and discrimination. The biggest problem for them is "Who am I, Chinese or American?". Many Chinese American writers deal with the topic of "The American Dream", which remains relevant for the new generations. A young Chinese American writer Charles Yu also focuses on it. In his novel "Interior Chinatown," he examines the stereotypical perception of Chinese-Americans in the eyes of white Americans and highlights the problems that Asian Americans suffer from, e.g., national identity, discrimination. The novel shows how difficult the process of achieving the American dream is for Asian Americans and how difficult it is for them to find the answer to the question "Who am I", which is closely connected with the realization of their "American Dream".

Yao Yuan is a PhD Candidate of the Department of World Literature and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Theory and Practice of the Chinese Language, Minsk State Linguistics University, Minsk city, Belarus.

Beata Zawadka (University of Szczecin, Poland)

“Body of a Man, Soul of a Geek”? American Cinema after the Digital Crisis: the Case Study of *Nightmare Alley* (Guillermo del Toro, 2021)

“Stiff, synthetic thriller”; “an act of origami-level homage [to the previous version of the film — my remark] [...] folded together in impressively fiddly ways, but the result is an angular, inert approximation, lacking in the original's breath or heat” — is how critics have conceived of del Toro's 2021 remake of Edmund Goulding's 1947 film adaptation of Gresham's groundbreaking novel, *Nightmare Alley*. Structured as a pack of tarot cards, this study of show business implies the latter as a creepy — and, judging from the fact that the story is set at a carnival — second-rate world where Machiavellian individuals pull all the strings. The traditional cinema confirms the view of entertainment industry as a sinister realm: the first i.e. 1947 adaptation of Gresham's bestseller has been realised as film *noir* suggestive of a stylistically beautiful yet morally ambiguous cultural construct; a vision of showbiz that its critics gladly accepted.

Does del Toro's 2021 digital remake of Goulding's picture offers us a new concept of the cinema industry? Digital revolution, offering us the perception of cinematic reality as an affect rather than representation, has entirely changed our reception of cinema in its entirety, from genre to philosophy of the medium, thus bringing the latter to the point of crisis. The intention of this article is to demonstrate, via an analysis of the digital *Nightmare Alley*, how the contemporary cinema tackles it and how it affects the both the good old “shadowy” image of the medium and its contemporary critical reception.

Beata Zawadka is Associate Professor in the Institute of Literature and New Media at the University of Szczecin, Poland. She is a literary scholar by education, southernist by specialisation, and an ardent cinephile. At present she teaches mainly film. Her latest (postdoctoral) book entitled *Dis/Reputed Region. Transcoding the U.S. South* was published in 2018. Her next book is a co-project on the performativity of Daphne du Maurier's prose. She is a member of the Performance International (PSi), IASA, EAAS (PAAS), and of the Southern Studies Forum of the EAAS. Prof. Zawadka has presented at conferences in the European Union and beyond, and has also published — in Poland and abroad — on topics linked to her fields of research.