

# 9 WEST ROAD



## INTRODUCTION

**NOBODY CAN SEE THE WHOLE OF WHAT HAPPENS IN A PLACE LIKE THE FACULTY OF ENGLISH, BUT IT DOES SEEM TO BE TRUE THAT THE CHAIR OF THE FACULTY BOARD HAS A BETTER CHANCE THAN MOST.**

Pete de Bolla, my predecessor as Chair, proposed that in June he and I ran joint staff review and development meetings. As someone who had spent most of her career in one of the Cambridge colleges (we still have a long way to go in integrating the colleges with the University), this gave me a major head start. Since then I have been on a steep learning curve: I have chaired a great number of committees of which I have never even been a member, and I have been asked for advice on procedures that I never went through. I have tried to be honest in all these contexts, but I have more than once taken comfort in the fact that there is no such thing as a standard academic career, life in writing or, for that matter, mode of study. That is still one of the great things about the academic world. What I can say is that I am amazed at the variety, inventiveness and broad horizons of much that is now happening under the umbrella of English in the Faculty and colleges, among both staff and students.

Much of this is in evidence in this newsletter. The Faculty seems more than ever to be a home for writers, poets and for those working with theatre. There is everything to celebrate about the founding in 2019 of the Faculty's Centre of Poetics, several of whose organising members appear here: as a medievalist, I was delighted to see that the thirteenth-century Land of Cockayne (flying monks, nuns and food) still had something to say to the poet in the aeroplane. What the newsletter shows above all is the extent and variety of the Faculty's current engagement with issues of ecological and political concern - climate change, migrancy, global cultures, decolonisation and gender. It also illustrates in abundance the many different forms in which these engagements take place: traditional research publications, yes, but also poetry, illustrated books, street protest, public performance projects, practice-led research, work with the BBC, AI projects and scientific museum collaborations, even an 'anti-conference' involving the art and testimonies of the migrant.

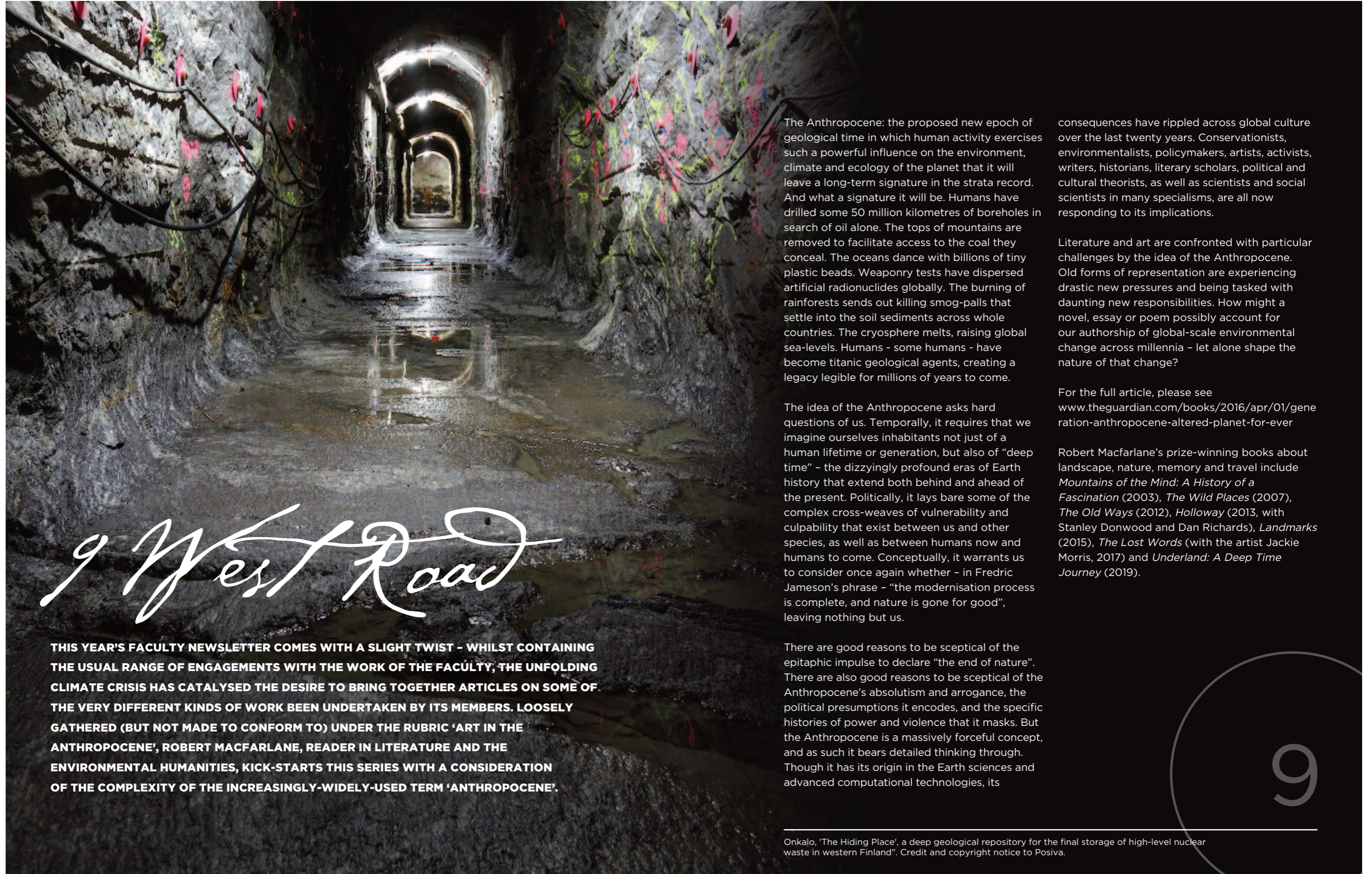
Also striking is an impressive degree of continuity and integration between these activities and the Faculty's wider remit in teaching, outreach, and gender and race equality, where so many are at work to make the Faculty a more culturally open-minded and responsive community. Of course, for everyone, whether staff or students, there remains a huge amount to do on all these fronts. We are as yet simply not diverse enough. And the world is in a bad way. Nevertheless, I think that there are reasons to be moderately optimistic about the work and role of the Faculty; as this newsletter demonstrates, there is a great deal happening here and a great deal to play for. There may also still be a place for the crazy stuff of Cockayne.

**Nicolette Zeeman**

Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English

Chair of the Faculty of English

Fellow of King's College



# 9 West Road

**THIS YEAR'S FACULTY NEWSLETTER COMES WITH A SLIGHT TWIST - WHILST CONTAINING THE USUAL RANGE OF ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE WORK OF THE FACULTY, THE UNFOLDING CLIMATE CRISIS HAS CATALYSED THE DESIRE TO BRING TOGETHER ARTICLES ON SOME OF THE VERY DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORK BEEN UNDERTAKEN BY ITS MEMBERS. LOOSELY GATHERED (BUT NOT MADE TO CONFORM TO) UNDER THE RUBRIC 'ART IN THE ANTHROPOCENE', ROBERT MACFARLANE, READER IN LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES, KICK-STARTS THIS SERIES WITH A CONSIDERATION OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE INCREASINGLY-WIDELY-USED TERM 'ANTHROPOCENE'.**

The Anthropocene: the proposed new epoch of geological time in which human activity exercises such a powerful influence on the environment, climate and ecology of the planet that it will leave a long-term signature in the strata record. And what a signature it will be. Humans have drilled some 50 million kilometres of boreholes in search of oil alone. The tops of mountains are removed to facilitate access to the coal they conceal. The oceans dance with billions of tiny plastic beads. Weaponry tests have dispersed artificial radionuclides globally. The burning of rainforests sends out killing smog-palls that settle into the soil sediments across whole countries. The cryosphere melts, raising global sea-levels. Humans - some humans - have become titanic geological agents, creating a legacy legible for millions of years to come.

The idea of the Anthropocene asks hard questions of us. Temporally, it requires that we imagine ourselves inhabitants not just of a human lifetime or generation, but also of "deep time" - the dizzyingly profound eras of Earth history that extend both behind and ahead of the present. Politically, it lays bare some of the complex cross-weaves of vulnerability and culpability that exist between us and other species, as well as between humans now and humans to come. Conceptually, it warrants us to consider once again whether - in Fredric Jameson's phrase - "the modernisation process is complete, and nature is gone for good", leaving nothing but us.

There are good reasons to be sceptical of the epitaphic impulse to declare "the end of nature". There are also good reasons to be sceptical of the Anthropocene's absolutism and arrogance, the political presumptions it encodes, and the specific histories of power and violence that it masks. But the Anthropocene is a massively forceful concept, and as such it bears detailed thinking through. Though it has its origin in the Earth sciences and advanced computational technologies, its

consequences have rippled across global culture over the last twenty years. Conservationists, environmentalists, policymakers, artists, activists, writers, historians, literary scholars, political and cultural theorists, as well as scientists and social scientists in many specialisms, are all now responding to its implications.

Literature and art are confronted with particular challenges by the idea of the Anthropocene. Old forms of representation are experiencing drastic new pressures and being tasked with daunting new responsibilities. How might a novel, essay or poem possibly account for our authorship of global-scale environmental change across millennia - let alone shape the nature of that change?

For the full article, please see [www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-for-ever](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-for-ever)

Robert Macfarlane's prize-winning books about landscape, nature, memory and travel include *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* (2003), *The Wild Places* (2007), *The Old Ways* (2012), *Holloway* (2013, with Stanley Donwood and Dan Richards), *Landmarks* (2015), *The Lost Words* (with the artist Jackie Morris, 2017) and *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (2019).

Onkalo, 'The Hiding Place', a deep geological repository for the final storage of high-level nuclear waste in western Finland". Credit and copyright notice to Posiva.

# IN LIGHT OF TIME

Extracted from Dr Rod Mengham's curatorial catalogue essay for the exhibition of artist Darren Almond's recent works at Jesus College, Summer 2019.

Across all media—film, photography, painting, sculpture, audio-installation—the work of Darren Almond hovers over the puzzle of time and how it is understood, measured, sensed and represented. Time is the dimension in which we confront our own limitations as individuals, families, societies, species; but it is also the medium in which we grow and learn to collaborate in coming to terms with those limitations and what they can teach us.

The works in the recent exhibition include a photographic representation of the stars visible from the Southern Hemisphere; a set of paintings using conductive metal pigments that seem to hesitate between revealing and concealing the workings of a numerical system; and a set of sculptural plaques bearing verbal messages that are as emphatic as they are mysterious.

Almond is perhaps most well-known for his uncanny photographic compositions that offer meditations on the natural world and its indifference to the place we give it in our system of meanings. These often monumental compositions have an unworldly precision that is disturbing precisely because their accuracy is

achieved by methods that both recall and surpass the means by which we usually interpret the world using the evidence of our own eyes. *Light of Time* is a representation of the stars that fill the sky in the Southern Hemisphere. It is an image-capture achieved through a thirty second long exposure on the night of the new moon—the night when there is least moonlight to interfere with our perception of the most distant sources of starlight. The camera has received a degree and quality of visual information that is never available to the human eye. This mechanical supplement to what we see is subtly but radically disturbing to the anthropocentric cast of mind and its habitual claims on the world. The camera has been aligned with the axis of the earth, and pointed towards deep space across a distance of billions of light years, underlying the absurdly small band-width of the atmosphere—up to roughly ten miles from earth's surface—enabling human life.

The plaque-work that bears the closely similar title 'In Light of Time' and the trio of plaques that spell out the familiar phrase 'Time Will Tell' ask us to reconsider the bearing of each of these idiomatic formulae. The overall design of the plaques and the font used for the lettering are derived from the house style of British engine plates in use on the railways over the last century. They compel us to re-assess the wording in the context of the revolution in time-keeping that the railways both epitomised and instigated during the Industrial Revolution. For the first time in history everywhere on the national network was drawn into the same time zone, so that a reliable time-table could be installed and

maintained. The relations between space and time were rationalised, systematised, and controlled. The harnessing of natural resources to mechanise transport and industry and the regulation of trade routes and cycles meant that the obstacles to human mastery over the environment seemed to be overcome.

The juxtaposing of the photograph 'Light of Time' with the similarly titled plaque-work 'In Light of Time' is a gesture aimed at undermining the confidence with which humanity has taken for granted its pivotal role in the history of the earth. The fact of the matter is, all our measurements of time and space are projections and inventions that have been given authority by agreement and instituted by convention. The number of hours in the day, of days in the week, weeks in the month, and months in the year, is maintained by habit. Light itself takes time to reach us, so that what we see is always the past, not the present. And the photograph is a record of a passage in time that leaves its mark as a pattern in space.

Darren Almond's three paintings 'Pendulum', 'Escapement' and 'Remontoire' all refer in their titles to key components of the clockwork mechanisms that Harrison invented in his development of a viable marine chronometer. Each work is composed of several small canvases, brought together in a gridded arrangement, intended to be reminiscent of the grid system developed in Ancient Egypt for the purpose of dividing land into taxable units. The paintings are abstract representations of a long history of human imposition on the landscape: to turn it to various kinds of exploitation and profit; to render it an efficient resource for the development of humanity's own narrow goals; and to pursue the same logic of development even when this no longer makes sense—even when the clock is ticking on those autobiographical stories that humanity likes so much to repeat.

## Dr Rod Mengham

Reader in Modern English Literature  
Fellow of Jesus College



In Light of Time



Micro



Macro



Time Will Tell



Pendulum



Escapement



Remontoire

# RE-/UN-WORKING TRAGEDY:

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

### A 'Re,' Interdisciplinary Network International Conference

One of the co-convenors, **Ekin Bodur**, outlines the rationale and urgency of this conference being held at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

On 6-7 December 2019, CRASSH hosted a two-day conference that proposed both to rethink and to unlearn assumptions on tragedy. The conference built on the ongoing research within the Re- Interdisciplinary Network at CRASSH; therefore, the idea of repetition had a central role in our discussion. We aimed to explore canonical traditions of tragedy from the perspective of the Global South and in the process, raise questions about the problems of these categories as they are changing.

In addressing the Global South, we do not refer to the concept as a geographical designation, but rather as a critical concept in reference to the peoples and zones experiencing most acutely the negative impact of global capitalism in the long term. This, of course, brings with it a sense of deterritorialization as there are Global Souths in the North and vice versa, particularly when considering, to give two different examples, the ongoing refugee crises of our day or thinking about Irish adaptations of ancient Greek tragedies from a postcolonial perspective.

Thus, some of the major questions that the conference asked were:

- How do people in various zones of crisis embrace, interpret and adapt canonical traditions of tragedy to make sense of their suffering and express their resistance?
- How do authors, playwrights, performers, philosophers, and critics respond to the questions raised by the reworking of tragedies?
- How does the reworking of tragedies in the Global South transform the idea of the canon and/or decolonise the literary curricula?

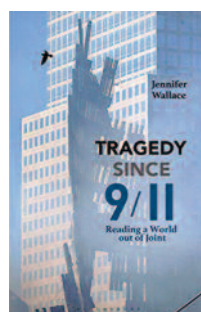
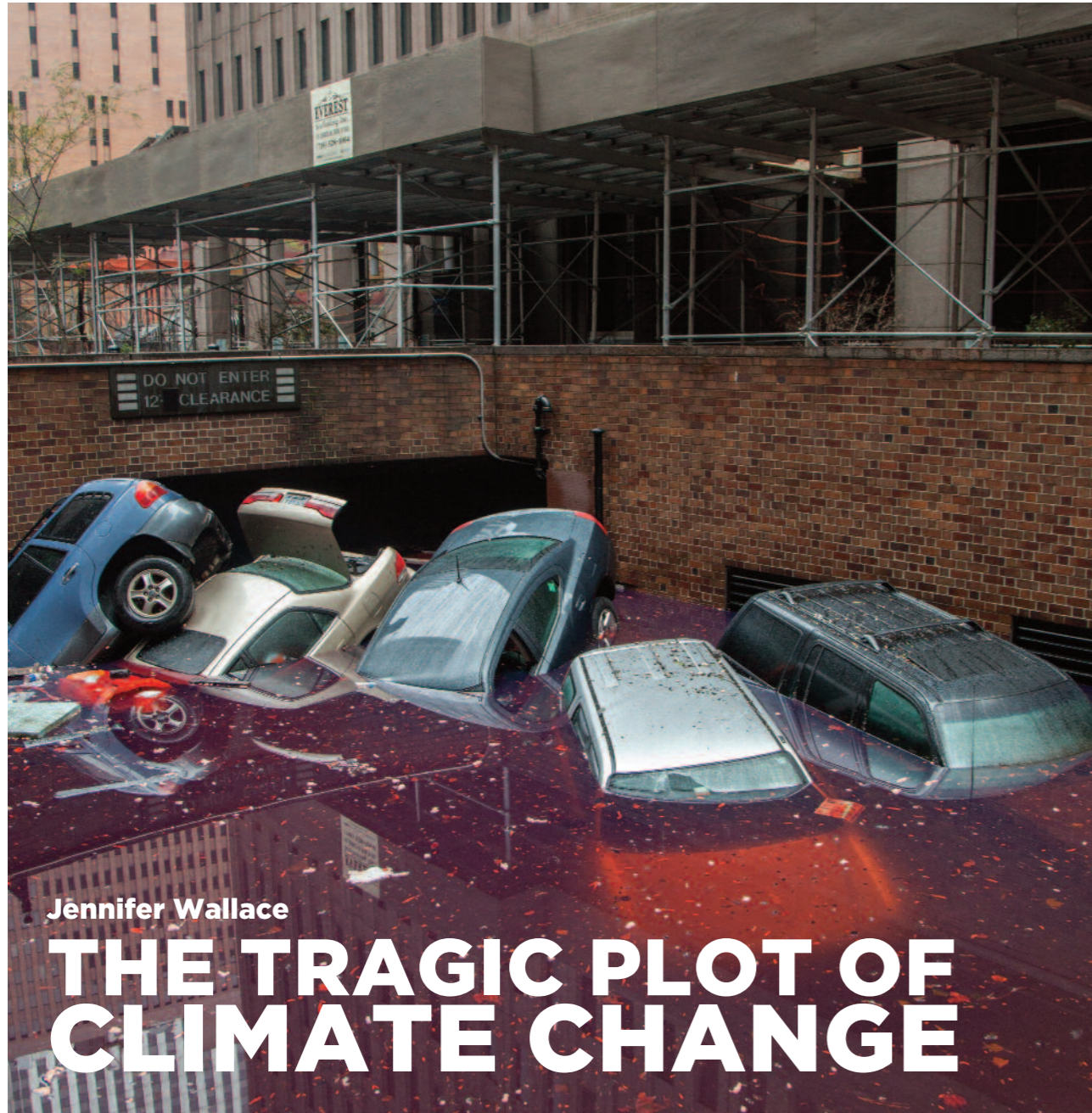
We often employ the prefix 're-', as in 're-working', 're-writing', 're-thinking', 're-imagining', 're-appropriating', 're-presenting' as if to situate the modern work in a historical line, or dialectical movement, of repetitions. The creation of the new cannot but come with reference to the prior. But how does recognisable repetition operate as a unique kind of site for invention, and for speech? Besides, how might we rethink the tragic canon as a destabilizing gesture - an un-working, rather than re-working, when exploring perspectives from the Global South? In reference to 'unworking', or *désœuvrement* as a concept that interrupts, suspends, and counteracts the work in the moment of its unfolding, the conference will look for ways to put the authoritative position of the 'original work' at stake. Unworking this notion of 'the original' reveals the work of tragedy to be that which opens itself to reinvention and becomes self-consciously meaningful in the moment of its re-presentation.

There were roundtable discussions and four panels based on the key issues addressed by the conference, as well as alternative forms of presenting, such as performance workshops. The conference aimed to generate discussion between theatre practitioners, artists and authors who adapt classical tragedies, and academics from various backgrounds and disciplines. When introducing the perspective of the Global South, we are aware that this combination of different disciplines and contexts often results in what people feel are uncomfortable conversations, but we believe that this is exactly what a conference such as this is for: staking the vulnerability of established positions in terms of adapting tragedies and getting out of comfort zones. In this respect, we find it crucial to talk about subjects relevant to our faculty, as well, such as decolonizing the tragedy curriculum.

Professor Freddie Rokem from Tel Aviv University gave a keynote about the thematic and performative dimensions of death and dying in drama and performance, focusing on Sophocles's Theban plays and *Hamlet* entitled "Take up the Bodies", alluding to the words of Fortinbras at the end of *Hamlet*.

The conference was funded by the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) and The Judith E Wilson Fund, Faculty of English.

**Ekin Bodur**  
PhD Candidate in English (Criticism and Culture)  
Faculty of English



Tragedies on the stage take place over a limited period of time. The protagonist is presented with a dilemma. He makes a choice. Terrible consequences rapidly ensue. As soon as Macbeth kills the king, he is damned, his drunken porter turns his castle into hell, and unnatural signs of turmoil, such as horses eating each other, follow that very same night. So swift is the action in the Scottish play that Macbeth and his wife almost want to speed up time, doing the deed “quickly”, feeling the “future in the instant” or willing to “jump the life to

come”. The play hurtles towards its necessary conclusion as the impossible prophecies of the three witches come true with banal neatness.

But the tragedy of environmental disaster, in which we find ourselves, is unfolding along a different timescale. The bleaching of the coral reefs, the shrinking of the Arctic polar ice, the extreme droughts and floods we are experiencing worldwide with increasing frequency are symptoms and portents of decisions already taken whose full consequences have not yet been felt. To put it simply, there is a time lag between carbon emission and temperature rise. The 1-degree rise above global average we have now

reached is due to the carbon emissions released about forty years ago while the amount of carbon in the atmosphere now is enough to force 2 degrees of warming by the mid-century. If we continue at the current rate of emitting 2 parts-per-million (ppm) more of carbon each year, we will have reached 471ppm by 2050, which translates as about 3 degrees of temperature rise some decades later. This relentless linear plot is complicated by the terrifying twists known as the climate change feedback loops. Once we have warmed beyond two degrees, the capacity of plants to absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis will be affected and they will start to puff the gas out instead (the carbon feedback loop), forcing the temperature up further. And between three and four degrees, the Arctic tundra will thaw and start to emit methane (the Siberian methane feedback), amplifying temperature rise again. This is what is known as “runaway climate change”, when the consequences of global warming become the causes of further warming, the planet becomes its own dirty polluter, and the linear progression of cause and effect is inverted, speeded up and stretched beyond the capacity of exact prediction.

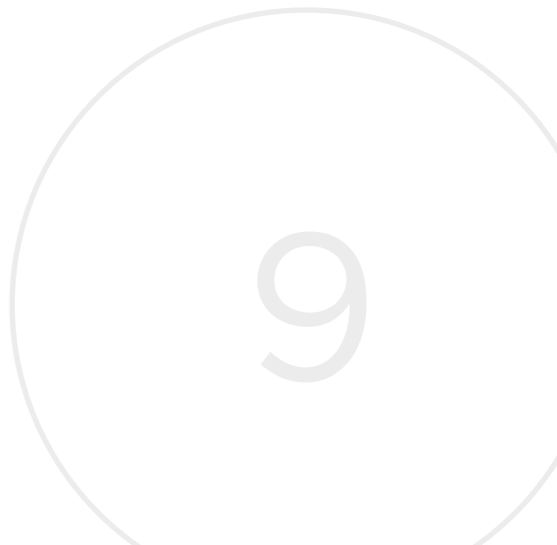
The tragic plot of climate change is much more elongated than tragic plots in the theatre, stretching the connection of cause and consequence to forty years between transgression and punishment. But its determination by fate is just as inexorable, and the logic just as implacable. It’s like Prometheus, nailed to his rock in the Caucasus in Aeschylus’s famous play, knowing that centuries in the future his defiance will ensure the toppling of Zeus. At first, the play appears to be about an unchanging situation, the implacable opposition between Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods to give to man, and Zeus, chief of the immortals, who has chained his opponent to a rock in retaliation. Yet the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus is not static, nor is it fated to last forever; Prometheus can foresee change decades, centuries, and millennia ahead. He knows the secret cause of Zeus’s overthrow in the future, from prophetic signs he can detect now, but is reluctant to divulge it. So, the implacable fate of Zeus and Prometheus turns out to be based upon Prometheus’s will, and upon the brinkmanship between the two.

The philosopher Stephen Gardiner wrote in 2011 that our lack of action to tackle climate change is dependent upon a “perfect storm” of ethical blindspots. We can’t see the direct connection between the past, the present and the future or between individual behaviour and global consequence. It’s not our problem, we tell ourselves. It’s for hypothetical generations in the future to worry about

or else it’s so huge that whatever we do will make little difference. But in Aeschylus’s extenuated tragic plot in *Prometheus Bound*, there exists an alternative model to think with. Aeschylus admits that the power of human agency weakens under the pressure of the vast inhuman forces of time, place and destiny. But still he stresses that fate depends on individual choices, decisions, deeds and consequences and that each of us must continue to act and accept culpability. He leaves room, in his dramatic vision of the world, for contingency, for resistance and responsibility. Progress is dependent upon each character’s knowledge, and acknowledgement, upon the particular vagaries of self-deception or engagement.

If we view climate change not only as a scientific or even a philosophical challenge, but also as a tragic narrative that can be read and interpreted like an Aeschylean or Shakespearean play, then we might start to think about time, fate and individual responsibility differently. These tragic narratives forge the connections between the individual and the world, between the small choices we each make and the huge, inevitable consequences they unleash.

**Jennifer Wallace’s book, *Tragedy Since 9/11: Reading a World Out of Joint*, was published by Bloomsbury on 5th September 2019. A version of this article is due to appear in the *New Statesman*.**



# Islands and COASTLINES

**Cambridge is far from any ocean, a sad but unavoidable fact, and anyone trying to gain an ersatz-maritime -horizon by staring at the river Cam is somewhat delusional.**

However, over the past two years a number of scholars from Britain, Germany and beyond have used Cambridge as a key locale for thinking about the sea – and especially how the border between land and sea is profoundly complex in culture. Some of these discussions have occurred in symposia I have organised, funded partly by the English Faculty and partly by the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst / German Academic Exchange Service). For since 2016 the DAAD have financed a Research Hub for German Studies in Cambridge with a fine intellectual breadth, and they have thus generously enabled these debates and conversations.

In July 2018 my first symposium, 'Islands and the archipelagic imagination', tried to think comparatively about islands in both British and German culture, and especially how their meanings could be highly localised – or linked to longer archetypes or iconographies. Professor David Trotter (Cambridge) talked of 'Island Media', which brought together etymology, theories of connectivity, August Strindberg's *By the Open Sea* (1890), and some of his (virtually unknown) paintings. Then participants brought W.H. Auden's lifelong love of islands into focus – from his time on Rügen in the Baltic in the 1930s to the queer cruising ground of Fire Island near New York. Others traced the still-potent concept of 'islandness' in British poetry – and in political discourse. The day concluded with Professor Bernhard Siegert (Weimar) on 'Anti-Islands: The Riddle of the Sediments,' This used the sandbanks and channels of the Friesian coast, featured in Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), to introduce the modernist island (or the islands of modernism), specifically questions of legibility or contour.

In July 2019 (in the midst of the heatwave), some of the participants returned to Cambridge for a day of thinking about 'Coastlines, Flotsam and Jetsam'. Many of the ideas debated in the 'Islands' symposium were elaborated on, especially as we continued with a deliberate focus on the North Sea and the Baltic, counterpointing the usual tendency in Britain to look

mainly to the Atlantic periphery. In both British and German twentieth-century culture, the act of writing (or painting or filmmaking) on and about the coast has preoccupied many key figures; and in doing so it has allowed explorations of nationality, territoriality, and the nature of a boundary / limit / border. But the animating terms for most papers were 'flotsam and jetsam', with the coastline becoming the equivalent of the page or stage-set for floating objects (meaningful, traumatised, partial, telling, and/or toxic) to appear. Current fears of plastic pollution and ever-circling gyres of debris were placed in a historical continuum, and ideas of time, beachcombing, and the sheer unknowability of the sea were returned to – as if by tides.

David Trotter again gave a keynote paper, and this year it was 'Flotsam & Jetsam or Wrack & Ruin?'. Other speakers during the day included Dr Mark Rawlinson (Leicester) on Fennimore Cooper; and Dr Deborah Bowman (Cambridge) on war-debris and the shoreline of the Hebridian island of Vallay. The artist Gertrude Hermes – Bowman's key figure – engraved the astounding woodcut *The Warrior's Tomb*; and we were very grateful to Harriet Löffler, the curator of the Murray Edwards College art collection, for making it possible for this very picture to be displayed throughout the day. Dr Benjamin Kohlmann (Hamburg) spoke on Julien Green and Hans Blumenberg; and Dr Ian Patterson (Cambridge), gave an overview of 'Salvage and the soteriology of shipwreck'. Other subjects included: Naum Gabo and patterns of decay; flotsam in Mina Loy; novels with radar arrays on the Suffolk coast; and reasons why Dylan Thomas fits within a European modernist tradition of 'Lists, beginnings, kitsch, prose-rhymes, ghosts, drafts, mincemeat, and dead things'. The closing keynote was by Dr Joseph Rosenberg (Notre Dame) and took the idea of the floating coffin in Melville's *Moby Dick* as a test-case for making vehicles from jetsam.

In 2020 the arc of the symposia will conclude with 'Ports and Harbours', intense spaces where the sea and human agency are again drawn together – and made meaningful in artworks.

**Dr Leo Mellor**  
Murray Edwards College



# Migrant Knowledge: Early Modern and Beyond

(15-17 SEPTEMBER, KETTLE'S YARD AND FITZWILLIAM COLLEGE)  
 CONVENED BY NATALYA DIN-KARIUKI, SUBHA MUKHERJI, CARLA SUTHREN  
 AND ROWAN WILLIAMS

**Migrant Knowledge grew out of the cumulative research on the five-year ERC funded project *Crossroads of Knowledge in Early Modern England: the Place of Literature*, based jointly in the Faculty of English and CRASSH, and led by Subha Mukherji (Principal Investigator).**

People, things, ideas and languages have crossed borders since the earliest of times. Such passages have entailed epistemic shifts and encounters, transactions and transformations. A *Crossroads of Knowledge* initiative, this public event brought together scholars, artists and activists to think about migration and what it does with, and to, knowledge. In tune with the *Crossroads* project, we began in the early modern world, but moved freely across periods to dwell on the urgent experience of migrancy in our own times. We acknowledged and explored the many meanings of 'migration' and 'knowledge', to probe the history of their interrelation, and to use our imaginative engagement with crossings of knowledge in its many forms.

The event – envisioned as a something of an anti-conference – was expansive, daring as well as committed. It offered a rich and varied offering of genre-bending talks, performances, artistic presentations, a multi-media installation and story-telling workshops stimulated debate about migration across times and cultures, attending to historical specificity without eschewing social and cognitive realities shared by diverse experiences of movements across borders. The event was opened at Kettle's Yard with a talk by Subha Mukherji on the imaginative, ethical, affective and aesthetic possibilities – and vexations – of migrant knowledge from the sixteenth-century to our own times; on continuities and differences; and on the complexities of the dynamic between longing and belonging. Talks followed by Nadina Christopoulou and A.E. Stallings who shared their experience of working with the Melissa Network, an organisation which seeks to empower, and enable active citizenship for, migrant women and children in

Athens. This was followed by haunting poetry readings from Angela Leighton and A.E. Stallings, cutting across themes of political migration and the movement of words and ideas between languages and forms. The day's talks were concluded by a conversation between Rowan Williams and Regina Schwarz on the subject 'Loving Justice' – the focus of Regina's recent book. Carla Suthren wrapped up the evening's proceedings by introducing and launching *Trade Winds*, an art-installation by Susan Stockwell held at St Peter's Church, Kettle's Yard, in conjunction with *Migrant Knowledge*, and commissioned and funded by the *Crossroads* project. This exhibition uses coins, international paper currency, maps, text and travel tickets to explore migration in the contemporary world.

The second day was held in Fitzwilliam College and opened with a discussion between Clair Wills and Darshan Tatla around migration and the oral tradition. This unexpectedly involved spontaneous singing of Punjabi qisses by Darshan. This session was followed by talks by Valentina Castagna, Dine Diallo and Marina Warner, who introduced the work of *Stories in Transit* and *Giocherenda*. These included narratives from activists, poets, translators, musicians and storytellers who work with the *Stories in Transit* project in Palermo, including – crucially – young immigrants who have arrived in Palermo and are turning to stories to find a home in the mind. The audience then participated in a stimulating workshop where they joined *Giocherenda* members in a collective game of migrant story-telling, 'given' the wheel of arbitrary circumstances, and imaginary allies and obstacles.

The afternoon began with a compelling talk by Rosita D'Amora on turbans as objects that travelled, carrying and transforming knowledges as they crossed a variety of thresholds in the early modern world. Yousif M. Qasmiyah followed by reflecting on the role of migration in his own work, and offered moving readings of his poetry. Supriya Chaudhuri opened up the itinerant knowledge in the travel narratives of Ludovico di Varthema, while Jonathan Gil Harris



addressed 'A Vision of the Virgin Mary in a Malabar Temple, 1498', unpacking the cognitive dislocations of an early modern migrant from a position Harris himself occupies: that of a contemporary migrant from the West to India. The next segment of the day saw a lively conversation by members of the Good Chance Theatre, remembering and, in part, re-living their experience of making theatre in – and subsequently about – the Jungle camp at Calais, and sharing with us their plans for the future. The day was rounded off by Edmund de Waal's presentation on his artwork, *Library of Exile*, on show at the Ateneo in Venice till end-September: a talk that was at once an imaginative *tour de force* and a deeply felt and profoundly moving familial narrative of migration which provides the context for the meditative object that is his 'Library'.

The third day in Fitzwilliam College opened with an early modern panel featuring Natalya Din-Kariuki speaking about travel writing in this period, and John Gallagher addressing the epistemic practices of immigrant notaries in London. This session was complemented by an eye-opening presentation by members of the Migration Museum, and a subsequent conversation with Clair Wills. To conclude the morning, Anupam Basu explored vagrancy and labour, and their role in generating specific forms of knowing, in early modern rogue pamphlets, while George Oppitz-Trotman presented his research on travelling players and the concept of the stage. After lunch, Annabel Brett put the politics of translation under the spotlight in her talk on 'Knowledge in translation', informed by an unerring intuition of the entwinement between political and linguistic frontiers, and of the movement of meaning between the local and the global. Meanwhile, Olga Demetriou explored legal categories and their social ironies in her talk on 'Forms of Knowledge in Refugee Recognition'. In conclusion, Dragana Jurišić spoke with startling humour, pathos and craft about her photographic work in re-tracing the journey of Rebecca West in former Yugoslavia (as recorded in West's 1937 book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*). The event concluded with a round-table

discussion, led by Rowan Williams, and gathering in views from a remarkably committed audience. This conversation raised difficult, challenging and at times contentious and painful questions that had arisen accretively in the course of the three days, testing the limits of our imagination and expressive registers, our ethical lucidity and emotional resources, and of the possibilities of knowledge and unknowing in the face of the strange and the alien.

This event has enabled a unique imaginative enlargement and cross-fertilisation, way beyond the remit of regular academic conferences. It has been liberating, joyful and troubling in equal measure, and has received an unprecedented response from attendees and participants, vividly suggestive of its impact on our ways of thinking and structures of feeling. Songs and stories have kept spilling out of people, just as bewilderment, loss, longing, and at times rage, have staked their claim in our collective thinking and practice. *Migrant Knowledge* has, at the very least, re-modelled the event of academic conversation. Its urgent polyphony resonates with what Louise Glück says about art:

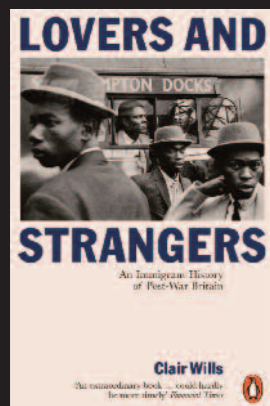
*'Art is not a service. Or rather, it does not reliably serve all people in a standardised way. Its service is to the spirit, from which it removes the misery of inertia. [...] – where the flat white of the page was, a field of energy emerges.'*

We put our hope in this field of energy, which we have felt palpably as *Migrant Knowledge* has taken shape and stayed with us. We are grateful to be closing our project with this rebuke to inertia and the call to stretch ourselves, in more ways than one, as we take on our increasingly hybrid reality, and try to apply our historical knowledge to the urgent unknowabilities of the world we live in.

**Dr Subha Mukherji**  
 Senior Lecturer in English Literature  
 Fellow of Fitzwilliam College

# DIARY

Clair Wills, the new King Edward VII Professor of English Literature, reflects



I am writing this on the island of Lampedusa in the southern Mediterranean, where on a clear day you can see Tunisia. Eighteen months ago I spent Easter here, and I was struck by how similar the place seemed to the small West of Ireland town I knew in the 1970s – bar the weather of course, and the food. At Mass on Easter Sunday the old women sat towards the front, the kids turned somersaults, and the teenagers chatted and checked their hair. The men hung around in groups at the back of the church and didn't wait for communion – the only difference I could see was that in Skibbereen the men were farmers in their Sunday suits, and on Lampedusa they wore the uniforms of the coastguard, the military police and the border patrols.

Returning in the tourist season the population has swollen from 6000 to 25,000, but the military presence is still palpable. Several times a week the coastguard picks up small groups of migrants, often

travelling in their own boats from Tunisia, and sometimes in the smugglers' rubber dinghies from the Libyan coast. They are landed in the militarised section of the harbour, a few feet from the tourists queuing for their dolphin watching tours. When I was there no-one seemed to notice.

One of the books I have with me is Amelia Gentleman's 'The Windrush Betrayal' – an account of the effect of the policies designed to create a 'hostile environment' for illegal immigrants on long-term legal residents who do not have all the papers to prove their right to remain in Britain. Gentleman is good at describing the – deliberately – dehumanising processes that people caught up in the hostile environment are subjected to – from the practice of describing individuals as 'Migrant' in official documents, rather than using their names, to the tortuous requirements to report to officials at various centres and the officials' refusal to listen, to the experience of detention itself. It is easier to deny someone citizenship if you no longer regard them as a person.

Several meanings get attached to the idea of the 'good' immigrant, and very often they contradict one

another. Good can mean the most 'desirable' (that is, the most like us), or the most 'deserving'. The paradox is that immigrants who are regarded as deserving are so often those who have been thoroughly dehumanised by their experiences. In the late 1940s there was a debate in Britain about whether the Displaced Persons in refugee camps on the continent would make 'better' or 'worse' immigrants to the UK, than economic migrants from southern Italy, India, Ireland and the Caribbean. People expressed fears that a camp mentality meant that people would find it hard to be 'productive' members of society (within the tacit judgement implied by that term).

Here on Lampedusa, the 'good' immigrants are the ones from Somalia or Eritrea, who have struggled through famine and war and the hellhole of the Libyan camps. They illicit sympathy. By contrast the Tunisians who arrive under their own steam are more strongly disliked. They are reasonably well-dressed; they arrive with backpacks; they look remarkably similar to you and me. In effect they are perceived as being 'too Western' to be truly 'deserving' immigrants. They haven't suffered enough. It is a failure not so much of sympathy, but of empathy – a failure which in

Britain was encapsulated in UKIP's 2016 'Breaking Point' poster.

Britain is clapping itself on the back for belatedly waking up to the effects on its own citizens of the active government policy of creating a hostile environment for immigrants. The popular outrage over the Windrush betrayal is read as proof that, despite the racism experienced by black immigrants to Britain in the 1950s and 60s, they are now accepted, by their neighbours if not by the government. On this reading, they were the 'good immigrants' all along. *It is the wrong lesson.* It should be read instead as proof of the need to treat migrants with dignity however they arrive, and wherever they have come from.

**Professor Clair Wills's most recent book is *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain*.**



## PYX PATH

On a January morning, on Malvern Hills, I was standing in a cloud moving north when a magpie alighted on my kit, declaring the beginning of the end. The rain dropping from the branches made the sound of a stream. The wind made the sound of flapping robes. For some reason we don't yet understand, very little has changed.

Down on the patios of Great Malvern, a squall whips the canapés off the table. First is food, the dread delight, the body of belief. When they go to bed, they leave the TV on all night, like corpse candles.

Led by an invisible hand, the endless grey cloud moves towards the event horizon, somewhere nearer Wales. I picture the foundries, with all their fires going out; and further west the tide, with its huge scintillations, beginning to tum.

Now the fog is laden with smoke from the next county. There is a faint ditch and bank at the base of North Hill. There is a faint disc barrow on Table Top Hill. The ancient track is lined with clover. The ditch is choked with silverweed. High in the elder, on a twisted branch, the magpie turns to curse the day. His is the call of the chainsaw. It cuts through a silence of grounded larks.

**Dr Rod Mengham**  
Reader in Modern English Literature

## Climate Fictions / Indigenous Studies

24-25 January, Alison Richard Building, University of Cambridge

'CLIMATE FICTIONS / INDIGENOUS STUDIES' WAS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE FUNDED BY THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN THE ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES (CRASSH) THAT TOOK PLACE IN CAMBRIDGE FROM 24-25 JANUARY 2020, ALONGSIDE AN EXHIBITION OF ARCHIVES AT THE KEYNES ROOM IN THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

The conference aimed to open a productive channel of discourse between, on one hand, narrative studies on the eminent 'genre' of Climate Fictions, and on the other the Indigenous epistemologies that continue to probe and resist the ideologies that have led to the present-day ecological and political crisis. So far within the small domain of English Humanities, contemporary climate fiction by Indigenous authors such as Alexis Wright, Louise Erdrich and Linda Hogan have presented an urgent need to converse with scientific and social-scientific approaches to climate change. Centring these literatures, especially at a University such as Cambridge that is deeply implicated in climate-capitalism (see <http://zerocarbonsoc.soc.srccf.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Fossil-Fuel-University-Report.pdf>), is vital to confront the racial and Eurocentric nature of climate change discourse which often overlooks those who are leading the resistance in theory and praxis.

These literatures tie the material to the literary, forging new links between resurgence movements and academic scholarship. These literatures also provide a narrative space for the local exigencies of land to feature within a global discourse on climate.

A part of the conference's ambition was to locate the contemporary climate crisis in continuum with human history's interaction with nature, tying both settler-colonialism and resource-capitalism to catastrophes like flash floods, melting glaciers, and soaring temperatures. Indigenous populations around the world are affected through forced displacements, that, in turn, have had a profound impact on their politics, cultures, languages, and literatures. The complicity of governments and academic institutions in abetting the ramifications of this crisis has brought together an allied community of writers, scholars, activists, artists and filmmakers to form a network of strength and solidarity that transcend national lines. Several movements and landmarks like *Idle No More*, *Dakota Access Pipeline Protest*, *Niyamgiri*, and *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, builds upon a strong culture

of protest within and outside the realm of Indigenous fictions, illustrating how the questions of repatriation and justice for Indigenous populations around the world are central to any literary discourse on the contemporary climate crisis.

The keynote address at the conference was delivered by the acclaimed Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Her books include *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, *The Gift Is in the Making*, *Lighting the Eighth Fire* (editor), *This Is An Honour Song* (editor with Kiera Ladner) and *The Winter We Danced* (Kino-nda-niimi editorial collective). The conference was open and free to the members of the University and the general public.

### Siddharth Soni

PhD Candidate, Faculty of English

The co-convenors of the conference were Ananya Mishra, Louis Klee, Robert Newton, Siddharth Soni and Dr Shamira Meghani.



Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla, 'Sketch of Squatters', (1864) State Library of New South Wales (CC BY 4.0)



Factory of the Future, Oslo Architecture Triennale, September-November 2019. © Simon Daw.

# FACTORY OF THE FUTURE

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT FOR IMAGINING OTHERWISE

**A longer version of this article by Zoë Svendsen is published online in Howround, for the *Theatre in the Age of Climate Change* series, which shines a light on the crucial role artists have to play in creating new and empowering narratives for our highly uncertain times. It makes visible the many connections between environmental and social justice, between global and local concerns, and between collective and personal responsibility.— Chantal Bilodeau, editor.**

starts to emerge. It is not necessarily a traditional message-based role of overt acts of persuasion, but one that undertakes the speculative and provisional work of imagining, depicting how we might live within very different social and economic conditions. It is a challenging requirement: for so many of us living in cultures built on fossil fuel use, it is much easier to see losses and sacrifices than it is to see what might be gained by a transition to a world that faced up to the crisis. We have even come up with a term for our current situation, “high-carbon culture,” which explores the contradictions we currently live in—that we, in high-carbon culture, are fossil-fuelled and environmentally damaging regardless of our motivation or capacity for change. It is also, however, a myth that the systemic change that is needed cannot occur quickly or decisively, as the Rapid Transition Alliance demonstrates: humans are adept at large-scale, rapid, lasting, transformational change.

As a lecturer in the Faculty, I undertake practice-as-research, creating public performance projects, working with a network of theatremakers nationally and internationally. Having made a show called *World Factory* that immersed audiences in the ethical conflicts embedded in consumer capitalism, we asked ourselves: What next? Supported by an artistic residency whose aim was to explore future scenarios in relation to climate change, I looked at how the economic system could be changed, through a process I call “research in public,” where research that ordinarily goes on behind closed doors becomes a conversation held in public—at relaxed events publicized on social media and in cafés or theatre foyers or anywhere informal.

In response to these conversations, my collaborators and I devised forty-nine economic and legislative changes to enable human and planetary flourishing. We then put these to audiences in the performance installation *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE* at the Barbican Centre in London over five days in September 2018. Actors improvised stories of a transformed City of London based on the scenarios that were discussed, argued over, and voted on by audiences.

The task for audience and actors alike was to imagine what it might be like to live in a “new normal” of social and environmental flourishing. The creation of the imagined stories was structured in a way that was built on collaboration—not consensus. It was networked, multi-perspectival, and took place over time. No single person (maker, expert, or audience) was present at every moment. Each generation of audience watched

“Those who tell the stories rule the world.” With that claim, George Monbiot opens his book *Out of the Wreckage*, a call to arms for a world beyond neoliberalism. When it comes to stories, it matters who tells them, as well as *what* the stories are and *where* space can be found in culture for imagining otherwise.

The fight over who gets to tell what story is ongoing, but there is also another role for the arts—to flesh out what those other stories might be. When this happens, a generative role for the arts in relation to politics



WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE at the Barbican Centre, London, September 2019. © David Sandison

stories created from discussions held earlier by other audience members and worked on scenarios themselves, which would be watched by others. This principle of generational, generative thinking is embedded in the heart of the future direction of the project.

In response to the Barbican installation, my performing arts company, METIS, was commissioned to create a bespoke version for the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019, which we developed in collaboration with the Cambridge Conservation Initiative. Entitled the *Factory of the Future*, the artistic “output” is now a video installation, but also encompasses workshops and consultative conversations in Oslo. Added to our stories of a post-capitalist London are stories of a transformed Oslo in a post-fossil fuel culture. To source the stories, we have been working with architects, urban planners, and local citizens to imagine what Oslo might be like under economic conditions designed to enable the flourishing of both humans and the environment.

This is not the fashioning of another utopia—the scenarios we generate are multiple, overlapping, partial, and also at times contradictory. They aim at the very act of imagining rather than achieving consensus about what is to be done. Yet, by insistently imagining

our way beyond the charge of lacking realism (as in ‘people just won’t do it!’) we’ve started to take pleasure in willfully and doggedly ignoring those despairing whispers, enjoying instead our forays into a culture of repair, recuperation, and mutual recognition of diverse values.

At the very least, then, this practice of imagining otherwise is a kind of bearing witness, offering a reminder in the historical record for those in a climate-crisis-ridden future of self-interested survivalism, who might look back and ask, ‘*How the hell did they let it happen?*’

For the longer article – and links to the *Theatre in the Age of Climate Change series*, please see here <https://howlround.com/series/theatre-age-climate-change-0>

**Factory of the Future** was presented at the Oslo Architecture Triennale in collaboration with Design and Architecture Norway and the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, 26 September – 25 November 2019.

**Dr Zoë Svendsen**  
Lecturer in Drama and Performance  
Faculty of English

# Sapphire Rush.

Keen eyes sift the silt. The rainforests of Madagascar are alive to the sound of sapphire miners, many thousands arriving in less than a year. No grit, no pearl, and so on with azure glass. What is termed remote becomes less so, even in the application of an adjective. As the distance from human settlement diminishes, the footpaths become wider, then turn to claggy mud. The latest valley is among the last of the island’s ancient habitats, and with them the last of many species. Extinction gems. The land is protected on paper, and as parks, but down come the rainforests, slashed and burnt into portable gems, leaving a valley of potted bore pits and spoil heaps. Teachers and farmers seek their fortunes down tubular holes. Artisanal by the standards of institutional depletion, but scarring nevertheless. Receding dark pencil holders are evident to the surveying drone, and all for baubles that hold blue to the light. Evening will not sew these blue sails. Plastic sheets and tents litter the valley. Everything carried a day’s walk, even chickens and goats for food, to the new towns of the wild sapphire. Everything’s illegal, but poverty is free. Ideology loops the loop and ecologists have called on the government to send in the army. Provenance labels pass through light-fingered trades, leaving indelible stains that would show up under a torch, but who is there to read by torch and stone. What blue returns, what reflections of the sun shine back into the eyes of the professionals and bling. Down the track, quick riches leave polished fingerprints among the authorities, while the valley becomes an ochre warren. Rocks are smuggled under tongues. Madagascar has become the gravel pit of sapphire extraction, along a trail that runs through Sri Lanka and on into the markets of the bejewelled. When people buy sapphires, they kill lemurs.

**Dr Drew Milne**

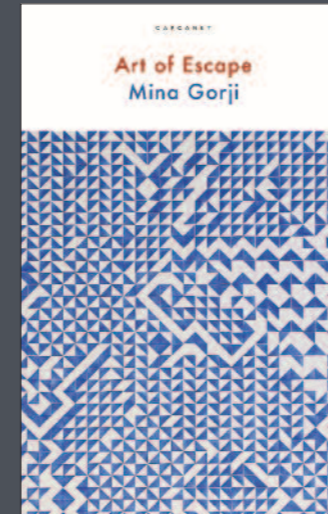
This poem is from Drew Milne’s poetics research project on transpositions of Frank O’Hara. Drew Milne’s collected poems, *In Darkest Capital* were published by Carcanet in 2017. Recent chapbooks include, *earthworks* (Equipage, 2018) and *Lichens in Antartica* (Institute of Electric Crinolines, 2019). *Third Nature* is forthcoming from Dostoevsky Wannabe. He is the Judith E Wilson Reader in Poetics and a fellow of Corpus Christi.

# HAVING A PEPSI WITH YOU

after Frank O'Hara

is even more fun than open mic poetry  
or singing old adverts or dining out  
on the souls of plankton in fish pie  
or being sick to the stomach all giddy  
for the prospect of the latest chapbook  
announcing that the revolution has got  
going at last and not a moment too soon  
for alliances to a once and future song  
oh I'd like to teach the world to dance  
to move so beautifully that activism  
becomes the new ballet and fizzy drinks  
are no more baby shambles than hot yoga  
is the best way of spending sugar rage  
while all plans to replenish greenwash  
come as nought but fizzing distraction  
just as out of the mouths of ideology  
flow forth great glugs of contradiction  
such as the watersheds to be protected  
from the industrial manufacture of rot  
we're talking remediation for river banks  
and the viability scenarios of capital  
chortle chortle cue handkerchiefs here  
but there is more need of water than  
there is water to go around and drought  
is a polite word for systematic thefts  
amid the carbon output of factory pop  
in the distribution of total extraction  
or shifts that would make them old news  
part of the map of oblivion abstracted  
and oh so flat over the coffee table  
joined together by the black waters  
and dark cocktails of a branded world

**Drew Milne**  
Judith E Wilson  
Reader in Poetics

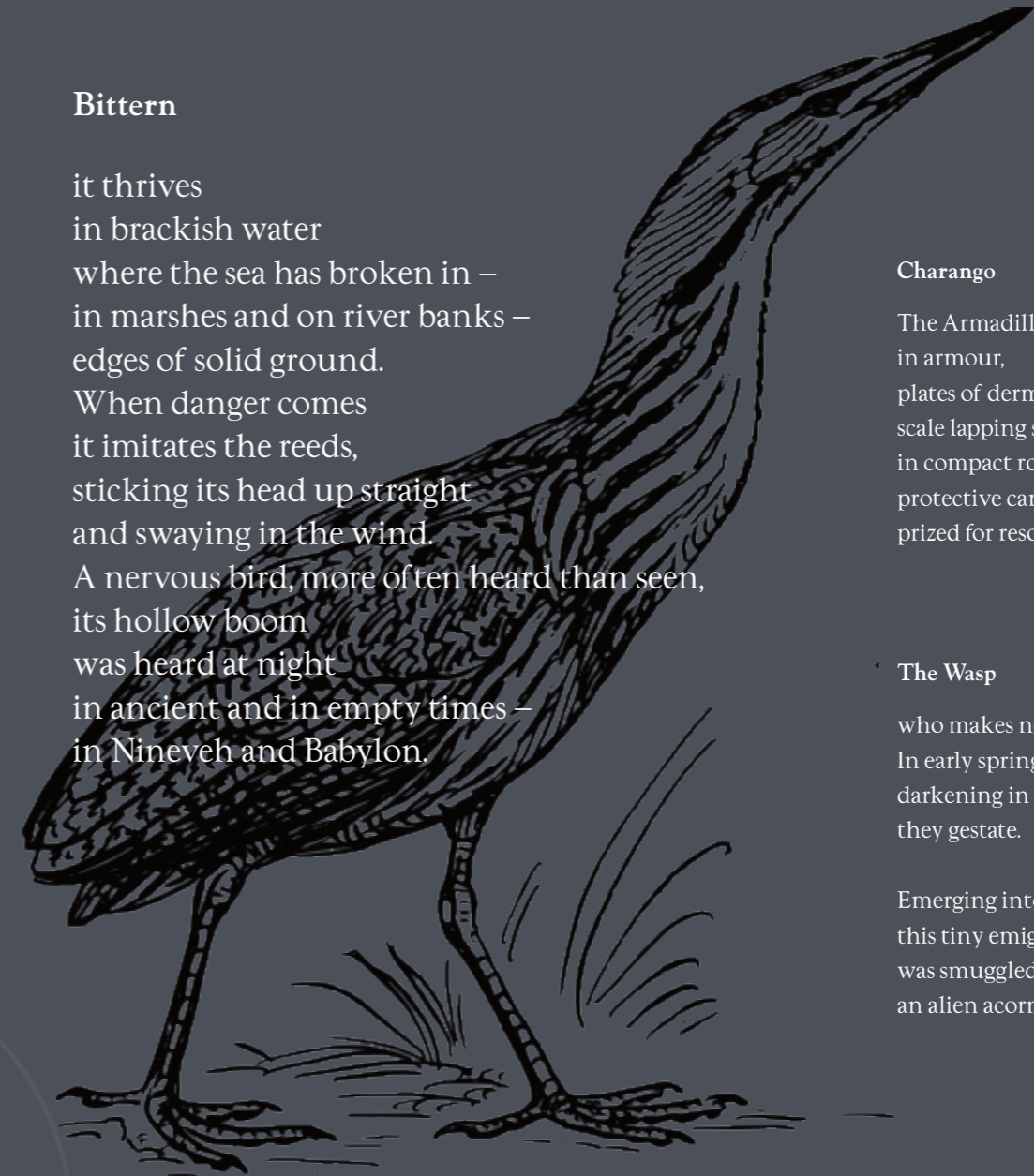


# ART OF ESCAPE

These poems are from **Dr Mina Gorji's** debut collection 'Art of Escape'  
published by Carcanet in January 2020.  
[https://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?owner\\_id=999](https://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?owner_id=999)

## Bittern

it thrives  
in brackish water  
where the sea has broken in –  
in marshes and on river banks –  
edges of solid ground.  
When danger comes  
it imitates the reeds,  
sticking its head up straight  
and swaying in the wind.  
A nervous bird, more often heard than seen,  
its hollow boom  
was heard at night  
in ancient and in empty times –  
in Nineveh and Babylon.



## Charango

The Armadillo lives alone  
in armour,  
plates of dermal bone,  
scale lapping scale  
in compact rows -  
protective carapace  
prized for resonance.

## The Wasp

who makes no honey gave us ink.  
In early spring oak galls appear:  
darkening in autumn  
they gestate.

Emerging into English light,  
this tiny emigrant  
was smuggled in Aleppo oak –  
an alien acorn.



# DIARY

## DANCING ON THE EDGE

Jason Scott-Warren looks back on a year of upheaval

### IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE THIS WAY.

I'm writing this on a train, heading to London and the City of London Magistrates' Court, where I'm going to plead not guilty to a crime that I did commit. The crime, committed in April, involved sitting down on the road in Oxford Circus, as part of the Extinction Rebellion climate protests. The police had determined that this peaceful protest was causing serious disruption to the life of the community and ruled the whole area out-of-bounds for protest under Section 14 of the Public Order Act; just to stand on the pavement in sympathy with the protest was an offence. Until an officer approached to warn me that I was about to be arrested, I hadn't known whether I'd be able to go through with it, but as soon as she did I fell silent. A few minutes later, clutching my bottle of suncream, I was being carried to a police van by four officers. I was taken to a nearby station and held for eight hours.

The police were severely overstretched as they sweated through their work that day, but they behaved with kindness and professionalism. In the van they admired the execution of my home-made protest sign ('KEEP CALM AND BUILD AN ARK') and advised me on which of the various menu options at the station might be edible. 'I guess you're hoping that Theresa May will sit up and take notice,' one of them said to me. 'Good luck with that'. During my confinement, I was allowed to keep my novel, I was offered tea, coffee or water every half an hour, and I found the vegetarian chilli surprisingly palatable. When I was finally released without an interview, it took me a while to reorient myself. But I made it back to Oxford Circus by midnight, to find policemen dancing with protestors around the pink boat.

It is a kind of dance, with the police, with the state, and with the public, this strategy of disruption that XR has formulated in a desperate attempt to move the fate of the planet to the top of the political agenda. The plea today, and the subsequent trial where I will be found guilty and given a conditional discharge, plus costs of £600-£1000, is another part of the dance. Our first steps did a lot to raise awareness, but five months on nothing much has changed. We are still mired in Brexit, and more protests, bigger protests, are being planned for October.



Meanwhile I am looking back on a year of wall-to-wall activism, a year in which subtle arguments about early modern literary culture have been crowded out by the search for rhetorics and actions that might inspire change. In private, I've been grappling with a debilitating sense that the long timescales of academia—the process of patient, collaborative accumulation, interrupted by sudden cascades of understanding—might be mythical. Will the rare books and manuscripts still be safe in the libraries in ten or twenty years? Will low-lying Cambridge be underwater for large parts of the year in one, two, three decades' time? How should my writing and teaching change in response to these corrosive questions (should I be writing and teaching at all?) As the Amazon burns and Greenland melts, all bets are off, and (as Lear's Fool might put it) we are left darkling.

**Update, February 2020:** Jason was found guilty and fined £800, plus £380 costs.

**Dr Jason Scott-Warren** is reader in Early Modern Literature and Culture, and Director of the Cambridge Centre for Material Texts.



# CONVERSATION AND CONSERVATION

THE CAMBRIDGE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE, THE ARTS, SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMME AND THE FACULTY OF ENGLISH

In 2016, over 500 people moved into the refurbished David Attenborough Building (DAB) on the New Museums Site as the foundation for the Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI). For more than half a century, Cambridge has been the focus of a cluster of global and national conservation activity, and CCI has grown from a long-held ambition to catalyse research, policy and practice collaboration.

Within CCI, the University of Cambridge Conservation Research Institute (UCCRI), provides a base for academics from Zoology, Geography, Plant Sciences and Land Economy, with strong links to both the Museum of Zoology and Botanic Garden. UCCRI hosts a growing community of doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, many of who work closely with colleagues from the conservation bodies that founded CCI with the university, including the Cambridge Conservation Forum, BirdLife International, the British Trust for Ornithology, Fauna and Flora International, IUCN, the RSPB, Traffic International, Tropical Biology Association, and UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

Partners work in more than 180 countries and support an MPhil in Conservation Leadership led by the Department of Geography that attracts early career conservationists from across the world. To date, more than 158 students from 75 countries have graduated, and a further five countries are included in the 2019-20 cohort of 21. In the almost four years since it was filled,

the DAB - as it is dubbed by most occupants - has become a thriving hub for conservation science, policy and practice.

From the outset, the CCI community has sought to work closely with like-minded colleagues across the university and has a number of interdisciplinary initiatives. One of these, the Arts, Science and Conservation Programme (ASCP), grew from an initial commission awarded to the contemporary environmental artists Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, who opened the building with a pop-up exhibition in what is now the Whale Café, entitled *Conflicted Seeds + Spirits*, and with two permanent slate wall installations on the East and South side of the building.

Working closely with the humanities to create space for new approaches and conversations is core to ASCP, and, since 2016, several collaborations have grown with the Faculty of English. First of these was an exhibition with Robert Macfarlane, who - with a series of objects and short essays - curated six glass cases in the DAB stairwell - on his engagement with the conservation and environment movement, from early influences such as Edward Thomas and Nan Shepherd, through to his current explorations of the Anthropocene.

Since then, CCI has collaborated with the Centre for John Clare Studies for a meeting on John Clare and the Art of Birdwatching, co-organised with Mina Gorji, Sarah Houghton-Walker and Paul Chirico, and holding workshops exploring the science, literature and culture of the bird species, cuckoo and nightingale. Poet Ruth Padel has curated an exhibition in the glass cases, and



CCI has co-hosted a single poem competition on a theme of Nature and Place with The Rialto, and with judges including Kathleen Jamie and Michael Longley.

A number of readings have taken place, including after a joint initiative with Magma magazine, on poetry and climate change, that paired eight of CCI's climate analysts with the poets, John Kinsella, Elizabeth Jane Burnett, Daljit Nagra, Jos Smith, Momtaza Mehri, Claudine Toutoungi, Kathryn Maris and Polly Atkin, and which led to a workshop on poetry, climate and activism.

In early 2019, Zoe Svendsen was CCI's artist-in-residence, running a series of workshops, and, as part of her work with METIS Arts, drawing CCI participants into discussions about future scenarios *FACTORY OF THE FUTURE* and *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE*, her research-in-public, or *Conversations on Conservation*, that has led onto installations, performances and conversations with the public at the Barbican in London, and the Oslo Architecture Triennale.

In mid-December 2019, with Pembroke College, CCI will host a seminar entitled, *Owned by Everyone: the plight, poetry and science of the salmon*. Co-organised with Mark Wormald, and bringing a diverse community of academics, writers, freshwater biologists and fishers, the event will explore role Ted Hughes played as a catalyst for river and fisheries conservation, including the establishment of the West Country Rivers Trust. And 2020 will see residencies for the poets, Matt Howard, Anna Selby, and Jos Smith, and a revived Rialto competition, to be judged by Pascale Petit. Our hope is that such work will diversity and flourish in the future, alongside residences, events, and exhibitions with a wide range of arts researchers and practitioners interested in nature, and the environment.

**John Fanshawe**  
 Curator of Arts, Science and Conservation, Cambridge Conservation Initiative  
 Senior Strategy Adviser, BirdLife International

**Oxford Ragwort**

From Etna's cinder slopes  
to the Botanic garden –  
*Senecio Squalidus*  
escaped;  
it slipped out of its cultivated bed,  
the ancient cemetery walls,  
the city's bounds,  
following the gaps  
in paving stones,  
the new-laid tracks  
of railway lines,  
south-east  
along the clinker beds,  
into the heart of London:  
bomb craters,  
burnt-out scrubland,  
scorched earth again.

**Half-lives**

Secret histories  
in stone –  
sometimes a filigree  
of leaf and bone,  
sometimes the wind  
will shape itself  
in isotope,  
lifetime in a flash  
of thermoluminescence.

**Empire of the Dandelion**

Blowball, Puff-Ball, *pis-en-lit*,  
Priest's Halo –  
Sin in the Grass,  
one tiny spore  
proliferates –  
an empire spread on air; dandelion –  
blown across oceans by ill winds,  
weed and bitter remedy –  
chicoria, pissabet,  
*bittera tzelaut*.

**Dr Mina Gorji**  
Senior Lecturer in English Literature  
Fellow of Pembroke College

'The Parisian  
square looks like  
a small piece of  
Nature which has  
been locked up for  
misbehaving.'  
*Emile Zola*

**LE SQUARE VILLEMIN**

There is a blackened old horse chestnut tree, pollarded many times in its youth but now allowed to grow its grey slender upper limbs without let. Around its unruly base, springy wands of new growth shoot in all directions. The tree is surrounded by shrubs, chosen for variety but hidden from view of the public by a thick screen of laurel. It is only from this window, giving onto the back of this planted border, that the extent of tangle, of the giving and taking of endlessly changing amounts of space, light and the gases of the air can be shared, although shared from a distance. The plants grow out of piles of dead leaves, occasionally trodden into a mulch by park employees who push through the laurels, intent on urinating against the tree. Otherwise, there is no disturbance, not even from birds that drop here materials they need for their nests. In the left-hand side of my window is the outline of a tool shed hardly used. It is surrounded by a ragged yew hedge and wire netting that creates a cordon around the premises and, more effectively, a trap for more leaves. The roof of the shed is barrel-vaulted with beautiful, curving ribs like the keel of a ship before planking is attached. An old pallet has been slung across it. Others have been tossed into the space between hut and wire fence. A clean aluminium chain hangs down from one corner of the roof, occasionally catching the light that is always seeking but rarely finding it. Leaning at twelve different angles are twelve poles, twelve slim columns of wood, two metres long and too thick for one hand to encircle. Lovingly fashioned, they were placed here when first acquired and have rested in the same positions ever since. And leaning against the twelve is an old, black, sit-up-and-beg, French bicycle that I have never seen anyone mount or park. The poles, palettes and leaves are all at rest, but the bicycle is not. I think I can hear the distant murmur of bicycle tyres, spinning along the Quai Villemin, and the quiver of the sparrows in their dust baths. Beyond them lies the great shining interval of the Canal St Martin, where the sliding barge is forgotten, the water fowls rest, the protection of citizens is guaranteed. I imagine the trees in the private gardens of the 7<sup>e</sup>me arrondissement, where the high walls contain them like so many vases of cut flowers. Until the day when the leaves begin their mass desertion, as if by a silent concord, breaking away from the branches of trees in troops, in ever increasing numbers. And across the river, out of sight, and out of hearing, there are herring gulls rampaging through the Tuileries.

**Dr Rod Mengham**

Fellow of Modern English Literature

# REALITY IS THERE TO BE CORRECTED;

## OR, HOW I TOYED WITH THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Sophie Seita, Reading Fountain: A Lecture Performance in Two Parts, Royal Academy, London, 2017.



**Sophie Seita discusses her practice-as-research in the Faculty**

For the last three years, I spent a lot of time developing a practice and pedagogy that combines creative and scholarly endeavours. In addition to some standard academic projects, such as publishing my book *Provisional Avant-Gardes: Little Magazine Communities from Dada to Digital* (Stanford University Press, 2019) and a number of articles, I also worked on various performances, lecture-performances, installations, videos, and multimedia collaborations. Because I am not only a scholar but also a poet, translator, and performance artist, my creative and critical practices go hand in hand. I'm interested in experiments with forms of writing, publishing, and 'making public'. Lecture performances, in particular, are a hybrid format that allows me to merge or interweave academic language with poetry, non-linear narrative, memoir,

costume, projections, choreography, performative delivery, props, and a set. In all of my projects over the last years, I tried to explore research questions performatively, collaboratively, and pedagogically, in the hope of offering imaginative ways of producing and distributing knowledge.

I used the time and resources of my Cambridge Junior Research Fellowship to develop my research-based creative practice or what in academia is now often termed 'practice-as-research'. In other words: the recognition that creative work that is based on research or scholarship that's more creative can be as rigorous as academic scholarship in the form of say an article or a conference paper. Such experimental forms of research allow for new ideas, innovative forms of

communication and expression, and can thus also enrich and embolden an audience, readers, and collaborators politically.

For the 2017 Festival of Ideas, the curator Yates Norton and I transformed the JE Wilson drama studio into an absurd 18th century salon, full of mounds of shredded paper, miniature paper theatres, projections, and washing lines inspired by Diderot's entry on the wigmaker in his *Encyclopédie*—everything functioning as a set for my performative lecture, which was recently published as an artist book by the Chicago- and Berlin-based press *Other Forms*.

That lecture performance was part of a three-year long project of what I've lovingly called my imaginary

conversations with Enlightenment thinkers, writers, and scientists; conversations I turned into material for a series of performances, videos, sound pieces, texts, and installations, which culminated in a solo exhibition at [ SPACE ] in Hackney last summer (June-July 2019). It was a sprawling project marked by a criss-cross of genres, media, and approaches to thinking, making, and sharing. It playfully investigated the Enlightenment's obsession with (scientific) truth, rationality, and empiricism and our inheritance of these forms of knowledge and their dissemination. I was motivated by a politics of attention and hospitality and a curiosity of how to make historical material contemporary in a way that acknowledges its specific problematics along the axes of gender, sexuality, race, and class.

Why did I pick the Enlightenment? Enlightenment texts and ideas have been taken as the foundations of the humanities. They are our origin stories: this is how we got here. The Enlightenment's values of universality, progress, and individualism, as well as its commitment to progress and to widening knowledge have shaped so much of our thinking, our understanding of the rights of individuals or groups. But the same ideas and practices also led to exclusions or were used to justify the exploitation of the planet; were also responsible for colonialism, for establishing a hierarchy based on gender and race. Practice-as-research is one way in which we might explore these histories and ideas performatively. My friend and collaborator—Simone Kearney—described my project as 'a queer feminist translation of enlightenment tropes, texts, characters in the form of a performance — as if these texts had been interjected and mangled by (queer) love and imagination, and the defiance (free, on fire!) it is buoyant with — a performance that, itself a translation, fuses with the translations of others (the music, the sculptures etc.) who have themselves translated this translation (!). So it is a performance that is itself an embodiment of a kind of de-centring.'

**Dr Sophie Seita**

JRF, Queens' College (2016-2019).

In September 2019, I took up the post of Assistant Professor at Boston University, specialising in poetry, poetics, and performance.



Sophie Seita, *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*, or, *Paper Tigers*, London, 2019.



## 9

# WIDENING PARTICIPATION:

## the Cambridge Festival of Reading and Writing

In December 2017, the Cambridge Admissions Office launched a project to extend the University's widening participation provision. The Widening Participation Project Fund (WPPF) exists to help faculties and departments share the University's expertise with students from areas with low progression to higher education. The Faculty of English ran an inaugural project in 2018-19 and has been awarded funds to continue its work in the 2019-20 academic year.

One of the wonderful things about the undergraduate degree offered by the Faculty of English is that there are relatively few barriers to entry for students from less-privileged backgrounds. Aside from a real love of reading and the -University mandated- A\*AA offer, potential students must hold an A Level (or equivalent) in English Literature or English Language and Literature. Almost all UK sixth forms and colleges offer one or both of these A Levels, meaning that the degree does not become off-limits at sixteen for students whose schools can't offer a full selection of subjects.

Of course, admission is often much more complicated than this: there are all sorts of factors that might make it difficult for a less-privileged student to achieve the necessary grades and then to show the sort of interest in literature—and breadth of reading—that is expected at interview. The English WPPF project seeks to bridge some of these gaps in rural Norfolk communities.

We worked with NEACO (the Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach) and Insight (a University programme run to help local students explore higher education options) to identify schools with lower than average progression to university. Each of our target schools is located in a neighbourhood where participation in higher education is in the lowest national quintile (POLAR 1). You can read more about the POLAR classifications and check your own postcode here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/young-participation-by-postcode/>.

Once we'd identified schools and recruited a team of enthusiastic teachers, we set about delivering a programme of research-inspired resources to students in years nine to thirteen. As the Faculty has a partnership with the BBC's National Short Story Award (discussed in the previous newsletter), we concentrated on developing materials connected to reading and criticising short stories. After studying four half-term-length modules on different aspects of reading and writing short stories, students were invited to submit a critical essay on one of the BBC NSSA 2018 short stories to be judged by a panel here in Cambridge. We received a huge number of entries: over 150, from students of different ages in different schools. The excellent quality of the essays showed how hard the students had worked. Participating teachers reported higher levels of interest in Literature and better attainment in English more generally.

The project culminated with the authors of the 80 best essays being invited to Cambridge for a day long 'Festival of Reading and Writing' in July 2019. Students attended four mini-lectures on short stories, a small-group supervision, and had lunch and a tour of St. John's College. The day concluded with a prize-giving ceremony for the winners and runners up in each category.

The aim of the work we're doing is to foster an interest in reading beyond the curriculum and to teach some critical skills that will help students develop arguments in all humanities subjects at school. We hope to see many of these students applying to Cambridge over the next few years: and for those that don't, the time spent thinking about what and how they should enrich whichever route they pursue after leaving school.

Anyone interested in the project is welcome to email Claire at [clw64@cam.ac.uk](mailto:clw64@cam.ac.uk) with questions or ideas.

### Dr Claire Wilkinson

Teaching Associate in Eighteenth Century English Literature and Faculty of English Widening Participation Project lead



## WRITING ABOUT HOME



How do we imagine our homes, our homelands? How do we pass on ideas of home to the next generation? How do people think about home when they are forced into migration, as refugees?



Literature Cambridge's 2019 summer course Fictions of Home explored ideas of home in a range of writings from the early nineteenth century to the present day.

How does the modern idea of home emerge in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice*; how does a house become a home? What does home mean in Dickens's powerful autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield* (1850)? In the early twentieth century, how does Katherine Mansfield understand home in her innovative and moving short stories; and what does it mean in Virginia Woolf's novel of London after the First World War, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)? And finally, we explored how refugee writers in our own time discuss the terrible loss of home they have faced. We studied stories from the *Refugee Tales* anthologies, ed. David Herd and Anna Pincus, alongside *The Displaced* (2018), ed. Viet Nguyen, and Nguyen's own collection of stories, *The Refugees* (2017).

Our teachers included English Faculty members Oliver Goldstein, Alison Hennegan, Isobel Maddison, Corinna Russell, Trudi Tate, and Clare Walker Gore. Oliver Goldstein gave a reading of Tennyson's poem *Maud* (1855) in its entirety. This powerful work is written in the voice of a young man who feels out of place in his homeland (mid-nineteenth century England). It's a story of love found and lost; of hope and delusion; of homeland and homelessness. Ann Kennedy Smith gave a talk on Anne Clough, Ida Darwin and Helen Gladstone, women who changed Cambridge in the 1870s-80s. Their work connected town and gown, and transformed Cambridge as a home for students and Fellows. We visited places of interest, including Girton College, the first home for women students in Cambridge; the Wren Library at Trinity; and Kettle's Yard, where a representative of the local charity CamCrag gave a talk on the experiences and needs of refugees in and around Calais, and what Cambridge people are doing to help. (<https://camcrag.org.uk/>)

### Trudi Tate

Fellow of Clare Hall  
[www.literaturecambridge.co.uk](http://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk)



## IMPROVING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVITY IN THE FACULTY

I'd like to introduce myself as the Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Officer in the Faculty. This is a new role and its establishment is part of efforts within the Faculty to create a culture that promotes and values equality, diversity, and inclusion across all areas of Faculty activity, including teaching, learning, examination, research, recruitment, and administration. I've been working closely with Gavin Alexander, as former Chair of the Athena SWAN Committee, and with the student representatives on the EDI Steering Committee to achieve this.

Over the course of my two-year office, I set out to be as effective as possible and make positive changes that will affect the working lives of Faculty staff and students for the better. Each term my plan has been to focus on research or initiatives loosely related to the protected characteristics recognised by the 2010 Equality Act that will improve equality and diversity in the Faculty and foster a greater sense of inclusivity. Obviously, the work cannot be completed in a single term, but this strategy ensures we can make progress as a Faculty on a number of fronts.

My first priority in Michaelmas 2018 was to take forward a number of requests from the Staff Student Decolonisation Working Group. We now have guidance on using racially charged language in lectures and a summary of how to report racial discrimination or harassment on the EDI webpages [www.english.cam.ac.uk/equality/](http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/equality/). These are important in making explicit to staff and students that the Faculty is not a place where racism will be tolerated and our determination to create an inclusive teaching and learning environment. However, implicit biases play a role in inequality too, so over the summer I have researched best practice at other departments and universities for encouraging diversity in staff and graduate recruitment. I look forward to discussing possible adjustments to our current practices with colleagues and at Faculty Board this coming academic year.

In Lent 2019, I began investigating the experiences of disabled staff and students by sending out a questionnaire about how accessible the Faculty is - not just the building, but meetings, seminars and the wider intellectual culture associated with the Faculty too.

I am now implementing the suggestions made in the survey. I also took some practical steps to improve accessibility: we now have an accessibility statement, clear policy and process for the recording of lectures, an infographic encouraging awareness of invisible disability within the University and sample exam scripts from 2018 and 2017 have been typed up so that they are accessible to students with visual impairments and learning differences.

In Easter 2019, I focused on exploring how we can tackle the negative aspects of the work culture in the Faculty and how it impacts on our personal lives. I hosted a lunchtime discussion on 'work-life balance and work culture', which generated good, practical suggestions for improvement that I hope PRC will consider in detail this year. The session generated a lot of interest, though inevitably many said they were too overworked to attend. Despite this, it's an issue we need to keep monitoring and attempting to tackle. In 2015, only 35% of Faculty of English staff agreed that they were 'able to strike the right balance between my work and home life' (University Staff Survey). When asked again this year, this percentage had fallen to 25%. This shows significant variance from the School as a whole where 49% agree and from the University as a whole where 62% agree.

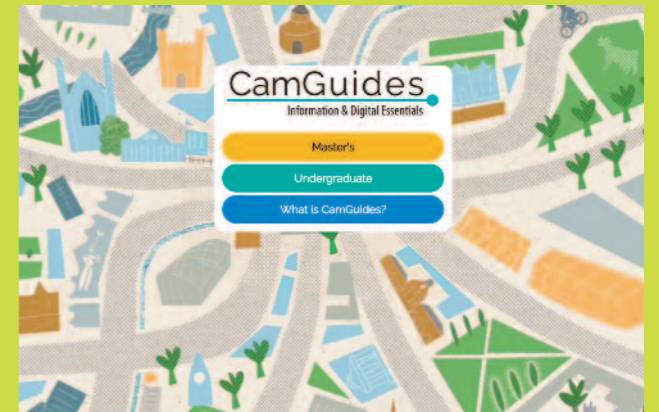
In 2019/20 I will be focusing on economic inequality and its impact on undergraduates transitioning from school to University and gender inequalities. If you have ideas about work that should be tackled in these or other areas please email me: [ad666@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ad666@cam.ac.uk).

### Alex da Costa

Senior Lecturer  
Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Officer  
Faculty of English

## CAMGUIDES: SUPPORTING TRANSITION TO TAUGHT MASTER'S STUDY

Library Manager Helen Murphy discusses her award-winning work creating CamGuides.



It will probably come as no surprise that a taught Master's degree at the University of Cambridge is a challenging task. Research across the higher education sector, though, suggests that for many students the challenge lies not with higher level engagement with the subject matter. Instead, the research demonstrates that these difficulties seem to lie in mastering academic practices related to study, such as academic writing, time management, and referencing, as well as negotiating a shift in identity when becoming a Master's student. This isn't helped by our assumptions that similarities in teaching and assessment between undergraduate and Master's courses means there is little transition to be had, nor by short orientation periods.

In January 2018, the Cambridge Information Literacy Network decided to try to do something about the problem of transition to Master's study in Cambridge. As a member of the network, and newly qualified with a degree in digital education, I took on the role of creating and designing a pre-arrival online resource for all taught Master's students, regardless of discipline, background, or mode of study. The result was CamGuides, which launched in August 2018.

Divided into six sections, CamGuides focuses on the information, research and academic practices commonly required for Master's level study. It includes topics as diverse as critical thinking, searching social media, designing flow charts, picking the right reference management software, and much more. Existing students generously offered their thought, and video clips and quotations are incorporated throughout, their wisdom improving the resource considerably. It is designed to tackle head on some of the transitional issues Master's students face, both in Cambridge specifically and more broadly, and it is an open educational resource, so it can be accessed without any official Cambridge affiliation.

Not all of the content will be relevant to all students - how could it, with over 180 courses available? Instead, students are encouraged to read only what they think will be relevant, and to apply the content back to their knowledge of their subject and its discourse. The goal is for students to identify how they might prepare for their degrees in advance of arriving in Cambridge, to learn about software they'll need, or resources they'll use, so that when they do get to Cambridge they can spend their orientation period settling in, making friends, and finding out where the nearest supermarket is.

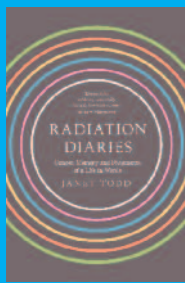
CamGuides for Master's has definitely proved popular, with 25,000 hits in the pre-arrival period in 2018; at time of writing, we are on course to meet, if not exceed, this figure this year. It was a runner-up for the Digital Award for Information Literacy, in recognition of its innovative approach, and as the main creator, I was awarded the new Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences prize for Technology Enabled Learning by Cambridge University Press. The CamGuides set was completed in August 2019 with a similar resource for Undergraduates, underlining our commitment in the Cambridge library community to providing "consistent, equitable access to resources required for learning" (Cambridge Information Literacy Framework, 2018). Most important, though, is the feedback from students. An English MPhil student, for example, told us that CamGuides "provided resources that were instrumental to helping me settle into academic and social life at the University". For me, at least, this is worth more than a dozen prizes.

**Helen Murphy** is the Library Manager, English Faculty Library, and Learning Developer, School of Arts and Humanities Libraries



# A suspicion that all of us live through the imaginary...

Former president of Lucy Cavendish College, Janet Todd discusses her recent books, published by Fentum Press in 2018 and 2019



While president of Lucy Cavendish College, I suffered three bouts of cancer, the last ending in a month's radiotherapy. To keep myself sane and prevent too much whingeing to colleagues, every morning I wrote a diary before setting out for 'nuclear medicine' in Addenbrooke's. A

few years later, a publisher offered to print it as *Radiation Diaries*. By then I realised that the diary was not only an account of fear and illness but also a memoir of my literary life. Or rather my life in literature. During the most acute phase of treatment when alone under the machine, I was assailed with quotations not from the fiction I'd spent my professional life investigating but from the passions of childhood, *Paradise Lost* and the luxuriant poetry of Dylan Thomas. I was ambushed by memories of a colonial past and a ghastly Welsh school.



*In boarding school, sometimes ice formed along the bed-heads below an always open window. 'Cold never hurt anyone,' said Matron. I put my socks over my hands. In time, while pedalling my legs under the sheet to create warmth, I wondered about Milton's 'frozen loins' of the 'populous North', an idea I rather liked, ignorant of the difficult engendering. I never found Milton especially sexy but he was good company in a cold bed.*

Jane Austen's *Sanditon*, Fentum Press, 2019

As a girl, I didn't appreciate Jane Austen, but, now old, I find her books delivering more and more riches. Serendipitously considering my future project, in *Radiation Diaries* I mentioned the fragment of her final novel, *Sanditon*, while considering the global cult of Saint Jane:

*'I love its freakish invalids and hypochondriacs who invest every mouthful of buttered toast with drama, self-medicating with wild hyperbole. Has anyone but Jane Austen mocked the changing hues of disease while noting them on her own body or poked fun at feebleness confined to an armchair? Not sainthood perhaps, but greatness.'*

I had intended spending my remaining years writing novels, but was waylaid by the opportunity of editing *Sanditon* for a general reader. I provided a lengthy introduction. To stress its satirical comedy I included 25 illustrations, mainly contemporary cartoons and caricatures, such as this one by George Cruikshank.

In the introduction I related *Sanditon* to the strain of rambunctious humour largely omitted from the finished novels but surfacing throughout Jane Austen's life, in her childhood writings of course but also in later spoofs intended for family amusement and in her private letters. I connected the fragment with her own circumstances, the peripatetic nature of her final years, her spinsterhood, anxiety about money and speculation, her mockery of health fads, and of course her own illness.

I wrote that, at the end of the work, *'we are left with a sense of universal absurdity, a suspicion that all of us live through the imaginary - working on our minds or bodies, detaching desire from common sense. We become uneasy, diseased, with bodies supposedly fascinating to others as well as to ourselves, or minds ludicrously ennobled and distorted by the fantastical world of books. How we, along with the characters, step off the shifting sand of self-obsession and speculation and place our feet back on safe rock is not explained by Sanditon, for the brilliant fragment remains enigmatic from beginning to open end.'*

**Janet Todd**  
Newnham College

# RECLASSIFICATION

**In 2018, the library began an ongoing project to reclassify our collection. This was in response to decolonising work being done by students and in particular to the need to encourage students to think beyond Eurocentric approaches, as highlighted in the open letter from the 'Decolonise the English Faculty' campaign in 2017.**

It made sense for this project to begin with contemporary literature, integrating works written in English from our American and Postcolonial sections. Students of the contemporary paper are encouraged to consider the current historical moment, including the impact of globalisation, and viewing literature on a global scale is a key part of this approach.

Even when not writing about it directly, students are writing from their own historical moment. As we continued the reclassification project into the earlier historical sections in the library this summer, it became apparent how far critical approaches, from ecocriticism to gender studies, have developed within, and been shaped by, this globalised context, engaging with global political issues from climate change to gender politics. Across literary periods, these politicised theoretical approaches benefit from a global view of literature in their application.

This year, we introduced a new element to the reclassification project, creating a 'B' section for secondary works currently held under 'E'. As 'E' now signifies literature written in English, whole shelves of critical works which looked at the history and literary landscape of Britain in each period no longer fitted there. The fact that these books were held in 'E', which spans all 3 floors of the library, to start with, is revealing of how much our classification system presented criticism and context related to the British isles as the norm. As we remove geographical divisions from primary texts, we have had to create more geographically

organised sections for history and criticism. The separation of primary and secondary texts marks out historicist criticism as a school of thought in itself, making a historicist approach more of a conscious choice for students figuring out their own theoretical bent.

Criticism and theory, unless directly treating the work of one writer, will now be separate from primary texts, as philosophical, feminist, postcolonial and other explicitly theoretical approaches always were. Primary texts will be presented together as part of a global literary history of writing in English, rather than placed in the limiting context of a historical timeline of Britain. It is exciting to think how connections between texts and theory might be made differently when the activity of choosing secondary works is separated spatially from finding primary ones.

We will be slowing down for a while now on moving the books around, and settling into the new layout. It has taken lots of measuring, rethinking and rearranging, but as we continue on this long term project, it is clear that changing the library space has exciting implications for how people interact with it. The decision to reclassify, and further the decisions on how to go about it, were informed by the way students are already saying they want to be able to use the collection, and built around the paths they are already taking through the Tripos. We hope to encourage students to display their work as it connects texts across the collection by curating exhibitions for the library's Benson gallery, and to continue learning from them about the shape this project and the library itself should take going forward.

**Caitlin Carr**  
Library Assistant  
English Faculty Library





## Reviving the JE Wilson **DRAMA STUDIO**

### Lorraine Carver

**I joined the Faculty in June 2018 as the new part-time Administrator for the Judith E Wilson Drama Studio. It has been an incredibly busy year, booking over 200 sessions and focussing on updating and upgrading studio resources, both in terms of equipment and processes, to improve studio functionality.**

Along with being an amazing rehearsal space for the wider University community, it's an informal, dynamic, and intimate setting providing a blank canvas for visiting practitioners and educators. In addition to teaching, we've hosted filming projects and film screenings, performance seminars and workshops, multimedia projects and art installations, immersive theatre performances and poetry readings. We've enabled conferences and symposia, hosted the launches of both the Judith E Wilson Centre for Poetry and Poetics and the Cambridge Literary Review.

Technical improvements include a new lighting desk and installation of new house lights that offer more than a simple on-off switch. Complementing these are a set of colour LED spots and washes, allowing multiple configurations which encourage users to explore the potential of their work and its presentation. Although the Drama Studio is unable to provide full-time technical support, the new system is very accessible and simple guidance equips users with the skills to experiment.

The Studio has been transformed over the past year, not only physically, but by playing host to a diverse programme of events and activities. It has become a creative catalyst, enabling expression of ideas and technique and deconstructing and reimagining preconceptions to embed practice. The Studio affords a platform for discussion, analysis and dissemination of current thinking in the areas of theatre, performance, poetry, and poetics.

The Drama Studio wishes to foster the discovery of new ways of working and interpreting ideas through performance, research, and experimentation. We would like to continue to inspire and support the work of people and their projects by enabling their access the space and providing opportunities to embrace their own creativity. To facilitate this, each term prospective applicants are encouraged to visit the Judith E Wilson web site to submit an inquiry.

What follows are some responses from students regarding their use of the studio this year:

#### **Rosa van Hensbergen (PhD student)**

In respect of her up and coming Performance seminars with Anne Stillman: *Karaoke for Samuel Beckett*; *Emily Dickinson's Imaginary Friends* and *T.S Elliot She Do the Different Voices*.

"...to bridge the creative and academic, to give students a way into discovering difficult-to-access performance works and archives."





**Rehearsals for *Maklena* – Maria Montague**

One of Ukraine’s most celebrated plays by Kulish with first English translation and directed by Maria Montague to fully develop and explore and rehearse the play to bring it up to a professional standard – with performances at the Cambridge Junction and Camden People’s Theatre, London.

“It was such a wonderful experience and we were all really proud of the production - and learned a great deal from the whole process. Our week’s run in London sold out every night! And we were really pleased with how the production continued to develop over the course of the tour. We couldn’t have wished for a better space to rehearse, thanks to the residency in the Judith E Wilson Studio”

**Evan J Silver (MPhil student) – *Howl: An Odyssey* – J E Wilson funded project.**

HOWL: An Odyssey – a staged reading/workshop. a queer, multimedia theatrical adaptation/re-vision of The Odyssey. Our Odysseus is not a man but an Argo in a continual state of reconstruction, a fluid fellow of many waves, never still and always becoming. A work-in-progress. A public event intended to spark a dialogue about contemporary adaptation and the queering of classic texts, as well as to garner feedback for the work moving forward. In that sense it is also part of our research and development process.

“The opportunity to workshop our new play in the Judith E Wilson Studio was an invaluable asset to our research and development process. This experience allowed us to workshop not only our new script in performance but also more technical elements of production, including lights, sound, and projections, using the Studio’s own equipment. These explorations laid the groundwork for the show, which would

continue its theatrical life in London and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The Judith E Wilson Studio was a key and foundational chapter of our creative journey.”

**Matt Parvin (PhD student) – Performance Seminars programme**

Drama & Performance Seminar series The Drama & Performance Seminar series aims to explore questions of performance within theatrical contexts both contemporary and historical, with a special emphasis on ideas of the dramatic and performance in practice

“We wanted to revive the Drama & Performance Graduate Seminar Series as we noticed a growing community of graduates studying or interested in the area. The Drama Studio is perfect for our seminars. It’s a very flexible space, which lets our speakers tailor their presentation to their area of expertise. They can perform, or bring performers, or play audio and video.

We have had some brilliant speakers along, including Lynne Kendrick (speaking about auralty in theatre) and Dana Mills (speaking about ‘protesting bodies’). Our attendees really responded to their talks, and the seminars have aided the convenors in their research projects.

Our experience in the Studio has encouraged us to broaden our sense of what the Drama and Performance seminars can be. We’re reaching out to academics, performers and companies from a number of disciplines, and giving them free reign to present a seminar in whatever form they like.”

**Helen Murphy – Deputy Librarian, English Faculty Library Schools Outreach workshops**

“The English Faculty Library helps out with outreach



activities on a fairly regular basis, and we are often asked to provide workshops or specific library-related activities for school groups. It was the size of a particular school group (2 groups of 25 Year 9 students) which led us to ask to use the drama studio for a workshop on ‘fake news’, but the space itself inspired us to adopt a completely different approach to our teaching. We are so used to working in traditional classrooms, where we stand at the front and they sit at desks in front of us, so it was completely refreshing to turn the drama studio into a newsroom for the afternoon.

Armed with news stories (some true, some fake), the Year 9 students researched and then delivered news bulletins, while their classmates used what they’d learned about fake news to identify whether the story was true or false. The space itself, and conversations with our knowledgeable and generous Drama Studio Manager, made us think more creatively about how we could deliver our teaching in a unique environment, and I think it improved the workshop considerably.”

**Sarah Jilani (PhD student) - DecoloniseEnglish**

Decolonise English consists of undergraduate and postgraduate students interested in texts dealing with anti- and de-colonial thought, gender, race and sexuality at the Faculty of English, Cambridge. World Cinema Screenings which are relevant to the history and contemporary legacies of Empire, colonialism, and resistance.

Film Screening of *Concerning Violence* (Dir. Goran Olsson 2014)

“The first and only screening we did have at the Drama Studio was a great experience. The technical side of things worked perfectly and the room facilitated a cosy environment for viewing and discussion. It was great to

have such a place to use to make the screening feel much like everyone was at the cinema, and I hope in future I can organise similar events in the Drama Studio.”

**Sophie Seita (Junior Research Fellow)**

I used the Judith E. Wilson Drama Studio, somewhat tucked away in the Faculty’s basement, for a number of different projects. I rehearsed there (for example: for a lecture performance at the Royal Academy; or together with Naomi Woo I worked on an homage to Pauline Oliveros, responding to her postcard series *Beethoven Was a Lesbian*); I held a research and development workshop there with theatre makers, poets, and academics; I hosted readings with local, national, and international poets and (sound) artists; I led a workshop about repetition, practice-based pedagogy, and the concept of remaking, involving movement and voice exercises. The students of my “Experimental Writing by Women” M.Phil seminar launched the magazine we developed in the classroom there.

I love the Drama Studio; and I’ll miss it. I’ve seen a lot of great and weird things there and it’s a space that has allowed me to experiment with my performance practice, with my teaching, with curation. Universities need these spaces that aren’t classrooms and that aren’t galleries; spaces that foster interdisciplinary, multimedia, and embodied learning. I believe in the transformative potential of language and of formal experiments, of alternative ways of teaching and learning.

9



# A FLY GIRL'S GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY

Lola Olufemi (Selwyn, 2017) tells Philip Knox (English Faculty Access and Outreach Officer) about her new book, co-authored with Cambridge graduates Odelia Younge, Waithera Sebatindira and Suhaiymah Manzoor-Kahn: *A FLY Girl's Guide to University: Being a Woman of Colour at Cambridge and Other Institutions of Power and Elitism* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2019)

**- Tell me about the collaboration that led to *A FLY Girl's Guide to University*.**

All of the authors met in FLY ('Freedom Loving You') — a space in the University for women and non-binary students of colour to politically organise and provide support and solidarity for one another. We planned and carried out campaigns on everything from Prevent, racism and sexism to the Marketisation of HE and we also ran political education workshops. Our aim was always to make the institution a more liveable space. We didn't want formal recognition, to be embraced, or co-opted — we wanted to be abrasive. Looking back at histories of resistance in Cambridge and elsewhere, we saw this obstruction as the way people have managed to call attention to institutional and societal problems. As we were getting close to leaving the institution, Odelia, the editor of the collection, suggested that we should collect our writings and student journalism into a book. We wanted some kind of evidence of the work we had undertaken within the institution. We knew there was a likelihood that our efforts would be written out of the institution's history.

**Many of your own contributions to the book deal with your involvement in the initiative to decolonise the curriculum within the English Faculty. What does it mean to decolonise the study of English literature, and what did you learn from the experience of pressing for that change?**

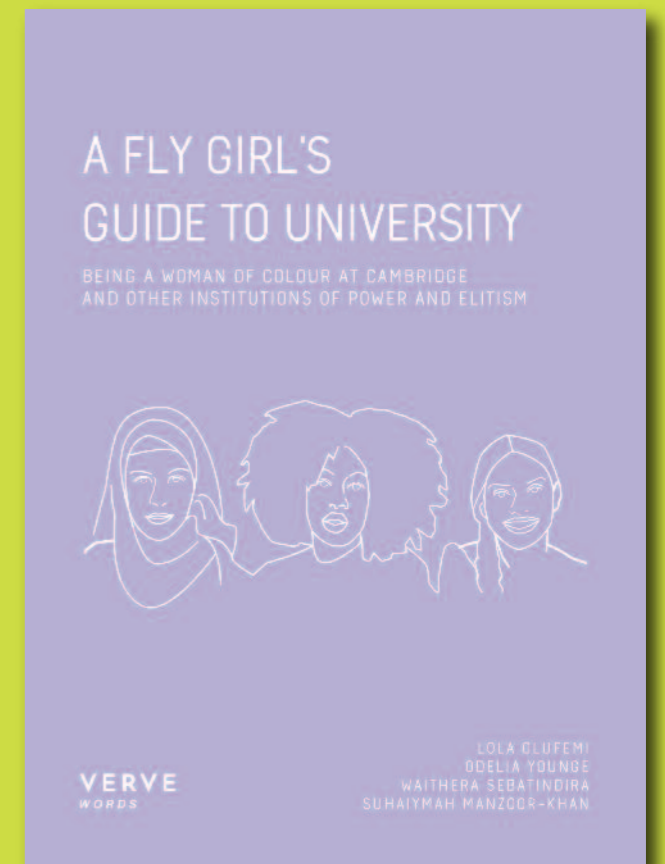
I like to think about decolonisation in the way Frantz Fanon thought about it — as a process of complete disorder. It is a process that seeks, amongst many other things, to repatriate land and resource, reckon with colonial encounter and encourage us to examine how western knowledge production is inextricably linked to colonial domination. Institutions are still in many ways exploitative and extractive, and in former colonies, the history of English Literature as a discipline was about the maintenance of cultural authority. Histories of exploitation have resulted in the ability for certain frameworks of knowledge to be seen as somehow neutral or objective. Knowledge is not neutral: how does that fact change how we teach, how we learn, our perception of the canon, our view of certain authors as representative of certain time periods? Decolonisation seeks to mess up what we know about literary history.

The movement was started by students of postcolonial literature. We took these tools of analysis we were learning in the classroom and tried to apply to them to

where we were — in this institution. What does it mean to think about English Literature as bound up with a history of what is legitimate knowledge — whose lives, histories and voices matter, whose don't? I learnt that when you question the legitimacy of institutional power, you receive push-back and misinterpretation. But I also learnt that students, when they come together, are informed and energetic enough to be disruptive to institutional mechanisms.

**If you could give one piece of advice to a young woman of colour arriving in Cambridge to study English, what would it be?**

Be as subversive as you can in your approach to your own learning. Realise that there is a world that waits for you when you reject what the institution or the faculty tells you is the only way to succeed. When I divested myself of this idea that I was defined by the marks I got, I had so much fun. I was able to think through the questions that were important to me, follow my interests, give my work meaning. Use your study to think about the world around you. Look for community and look after yourself.



# 'A CULTURAL PHENOMENON': exploring the impact of research in public life

IN RECENT YEARS, UNIVERSITIES HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY CONSCIOUS OF THE FACT THAT RESEARCH, OFTEN FUNDED THROUGH PUBLIC FUNDS, CAN AND SHOULD HAVE 'IMPACT' IN THE WIDER WORLD. REBECCA ROBERTS REFLECTS ON THE PROCESS AND TALKS ABOUT THE FACULTY'S WORK IN THIS AREA.

'A cultural phenomenon', 'engaging and fun', 'captivating', 'revelatory' – some of the feedback received from members of the public, policy makers, journalists, artists, and musicians about the many wonderful non-academic happenings which have grown from their academic roots in Faculty members' research. Sometimes planned-for, sometimes unexpected, the impact of research on the public sphere comes in many forms, and reporting on it is an opportunity to celebrate successes beyond those of standard academic gain, and demonstrate the value of the English Faculty's work to British and international cultural and political life.

Here are some highlights:

## A good death?

Laura Davies and Emma Salgård Cunha have been leading workshops with a variety of professionals involved in end-of-life care, using literature to explore what it means to have a 'good death'. Together with public outreach events and a website, their work has enhanced the professional and personal development of individuals for whom death can often be seen as a failure, changing attitudes and opening new dialogue around death and dying. <https://good-death.english.cam.ac.uk>



Digging Deeper course logo.  
Credit: Digging Deeper team, image provided by Orietta Da Rold

## Cultivating book culture

Orietta Da Rold's co-creation of the *Digging Deeper* online course series on medieval book culture with Stanford University has opened up a traditionally closed area of study to an international audience. With thousands of participants from over a hundred different countries, *Digging Deeper* has broken down traditional barriers to medieval manuscript studies. <https://lagunita.stanford.edu/courses/English/DiggingDeeper1/Winter2015/about>

## Lost words and rediscovered talent

Robert Macfarlane's books *Landmarks* and *The Lost Words* have inspired a new nature literacy movement. Grassroots campaigns have placed over eight thousand copies of *The Lost Words* in British primary schools. Trails and exhibitions inspired by the book have been installed across the country and enjoyed by thousands of visitors. Excerpts from *The Lost Words* adorn hospital walls. A musical adaptation of the book, *Spell Songs*, has been performed at the BBC Proms and toured around the country.



Deathly Encounters! A Good Death outreach event at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.  
Credit: Trish Biers, used with permission

Credit: Trish Biers, used with permission

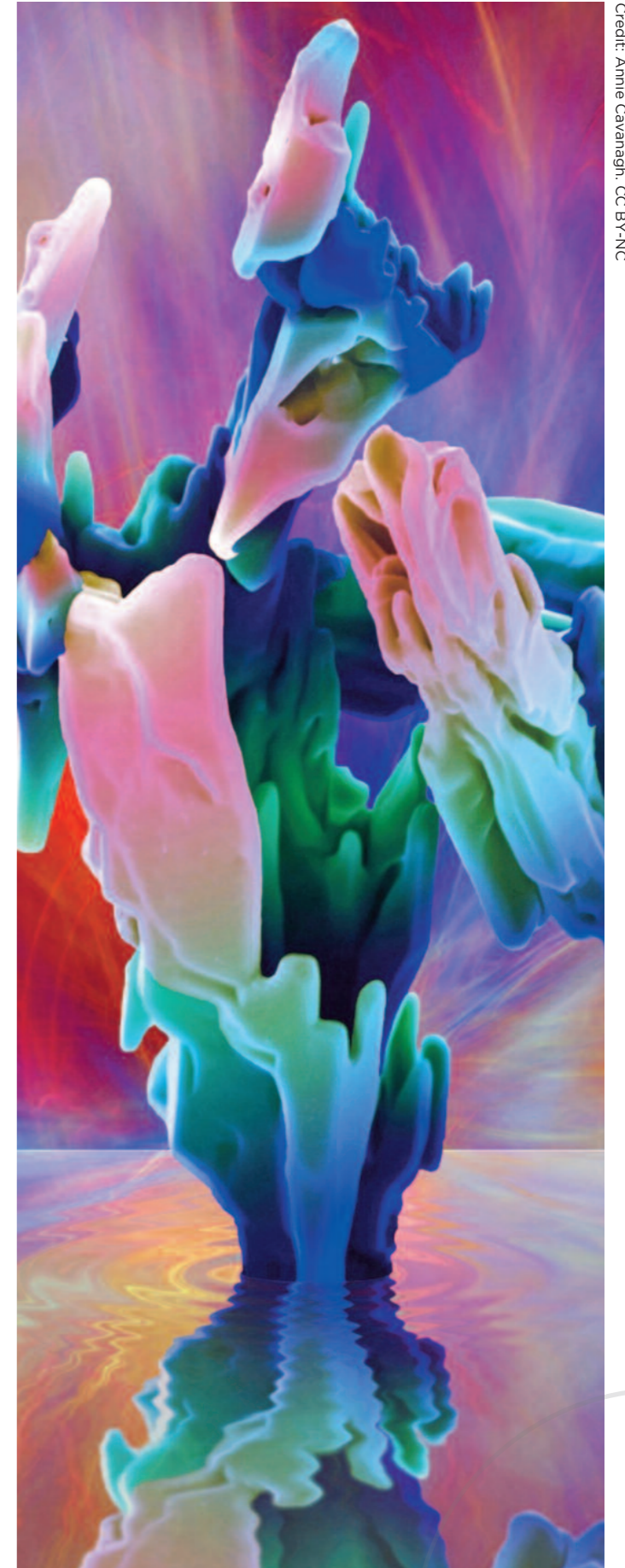
Robert's research into, and promotion of, the writings of Nan Shepherd triggered a revival of interest in her work, eventually resulting in Nan Shepherd being announced the new 'face' of the RBS £5 note, the first woman to appear on a Scottish £5 note.

## Politics, participation, and performance

Zoe Svendsen's practice-led participatory theatre research projects *World Factory* and *Future Scenarios* have brought new forms of political theatre to the stage, challenging audiences to question their role in global politics, capitalism, and climate change. *Future Scenarios* has just finished a residency at the Oslo Architecture Triennale, working directly with urban planners and architects to influence future policy and planning through this internationally important event.

These projects are just a small sample of the impact which researchers at the English Faculty have had in the public sphere. Lively, and increasingly interdisciplinary, research, coupled with active public engagement has resulted in many exciting outcomes. Other impactful projects – many of which have been featured in previous newsletters – include exploring the narratives surrounding artificial intelligence, celebrating the wealth of knowledge brought through migration, working with the BBC Short Story Award and school children to enhance literary criticism in schools, marking the International Year of the salmon through science and poetry – inspired by poet and salmon fisherman Ted Hughes, and changing the way Shakespeare is taught in schools through an analysis of his significance in East Africa. The latest news can be found on the Faculty's website and Twitter feed (@EnglishUniCam).

**Rebecca Roberts,**  
English Faculty REF Impact Administrator



Morphine crystal. Credit: Annie Cavanagh. CC BY-NC

Credit: Annie Cavanagh. CC BY-NC



Photo credit: Sam Dean

# TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

When I was an undergraduate in this Faculty, thirty years ago, I was offered a strangely distorted vision of literary history and critical practice. Most of my teachers and fellow students were men; apart from Jane Austen I studied no female authors. And yet many of the best lecturers were women, and those included the occupants of some of the key professorial chairs – Marilyn Butler, Anne Barton, Jill Mann. Fast forward to 2014, and while around 75% of the Faculty's undergraduates were women, that proportion dropped to 60% at postgraduate level, 50% of lecturers, and 0% professors. Yes, in 2014, the Faculty had eleven professors, all men.

Our subject still treats women unfairly, though the problems now look rather different.

The Faculty has this year been given an Athena SWAN bronze award for our work on gender equality. The rather mystifying name originates in a collaboration, aimed at advancing women in academic science, between the Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) and the Athena Project. The first awards were made in 2006, and in 2015 the Athena SWAN charter's scope was expanded to cover the whole range of academic subjects. English and Music are the first Faculties in the University's

School of Arts and Humanities to apply successfully for accreditation.

The award may be based on existing good practice or progress towards gender equality, but it also rewards an institution's willingness to recognise areas where it needs to do better and to propose realistic and achievable measures to make improvements. In our case this means the plans we have developed that are directed at closing the gender gap at Tripos (which sees female students doing less well than male students, despite fully anonymised marking systems), increasing the proportion of women in senior

academic positions, and keeping more women in English and ASNC studies at postgraduate level and beyond.

For the first time in the Faculty's history, after a wave of new appointments, women make up more than 50% of our academic staff. Our students have noticed this increase in junior role models, but our need for more women in senior academic roles is pressing. Our two principal chairs in English and Anglo-Saxon are now occupied by women – Clair Wills and Rosalind Love – but female academic staff are still far from being proportionately represented and rewarded. Change is vital to the Faculty's future health: we need to be able to tell our female undergraduates that they have an equal chance of a first, of going on to graduate study, of making a career in the profession; and that needs to be true. We have thought hard about the ways we teach, examine, develop reading lists, run supervisions and seminars, conduct meetings, support staff and students, and timetable events. We have made the Faculty's walls a space that provokes thought and conversation about diversity and representation in English Literature. We have thought about what messages we send when we ask yet another white man to give a big public lecture.

We started the process of preparing an Athena SWAN application more than three years ago. The work was done by a team whose members included students and staff from across English and ASNC. We are already making a difference, with numerous small and large, more or less visible, changes to the Faculty's operation, fabric, and (dare I say it?) ethos. But we have much more work to do as we strive to redress the inequalities experienced by our female colleagues and students, and to address the further challenges where gender inequality is compounded by other injustices such as racism, explicit and implicit.

**Gavin Alexander**

Reader in Renaissance Literature, Faculty of English Chair, Athena SWAN committee





# REMAINS TO BE SEEN

Remains to Be Seen by David Rushmer was published by Shearsman Books in May 2018.



David Rushmer was born in 1965, and is a Senior Library Assistant in the English Faculty Library. *Remains to Be Seen* is his first full collection, containing key poems dating from the 1990s, with the majority thereafter composed in the 2000s. They include work previously published in the pamphlets; *Sand Writings* (1991), *The Family of Ghosts* (2005), and, *Blanchot's Ghost* (2008).

REMAINS TO BE SEEN  
DAVID RUSHMER

## THE HOSTAGE (after Blanchot)

“...suspended  
in this night  
  
at a loss  
to the immediate  
  
my breath held  
by another

## JOURNEY THROUGH THE BODY

*moment after the world has been achieved  
when speech advances  
in flames*  
  
words  
bleed through the skin  
  
flushing a carcass  
  
tear my lungs  
with the spread of your wings  
  
the sky  
a fist  
inside my veins

## NIGHT SNOW

sky unloaded of its ghosts

## THE TRANSLATION

with the subtlest  
music of words,  
the flourish  
gesturing in the text. “The Experience  
a sentence  
  
to stretch between  
white blossoms  
& fault lines,  
after all forms of  
disappearing path  
snowfall  
to bury my tongue

## THE DRIFT

drift into thinking  
at intervals only  
Souvenirs translated as nightmares  
when he speaks  
of what he has not yet discovered  
verbal coincidence  
or vapour,  
being diffused into the body,  
between the outer and the inner world.  
View of the sun: the same obscurity.

## THE MOTHER

reading *your mother*  
in a poem  
a book of water  
another  
current threaded  
full moon blossomed  
morning  
laced through with  
blood  
dust  
he colours of butterflies  
like ribbons of air  
memories *evaporating*

# ENGLISH FACULTY NEWS

## SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS, 2019

### Publications:

Ned Allen has introduced and edited *Reading Dylan Thomas* (Edinburgh University Press 2018), containing essays by Deborah Bowman, Leo Mellor, Rod Mengham, and others.

David Grundy has published *A Black Arts Poetry Machine: Amiri Baraka and the Umbra Poets* (Bloomsbury Academic 2019).

Steven Connor has published *The Madness of Knowledge: On Wisdom, Ignorance and Fantasies of Knowing* (Reaktion 2019).

Subha Mukherji has edited *Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and his World: A Conversation* (Medieval Institute Publications/ De Gruyter 2019).

Louise Joy has published *Literature's Children: The Critical Child and the Art of Idealization* (Bloomsbury Academic 2019).

Sarah Haggarty has edited *William Blake in Context* (Cambridge University Press 2019), bringing together thirty-eight essays on William Blake.

Jan-Melissa Schramm has published *Censorship and the Representation of the Sacred in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press 2019).

Priyamvada Gopal has published *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (Verso Books 2019).

Sophie Seita has published *Provisional Avant-Gardes* (Stanford University Press 2019).

Jennifer Wallace has published *Tragedy Since 9/11: Reading a World out of Joint* (Bloomsbury 2019).

Steven Connor has published *Giving Way: Thoughts on Unappreciated Dispositions* (Stanford University Press 2019).

James Riley has published *The Bad Trip: Dark Omens, New Worlds and the End of The Sixties* (Icon 2019), a new cultural history of the late-1960s and early 1970s.

James Riley has co-edited *The 1960s: A Decade of Modern British Fiction* (Bloomsbury 2019).

### Events:

On 10 and 11 January, Dr Laura Davies and Dr Emma Salgard Cunha convened the CRASSH-funded conference 'A Good Death: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Dying Well'.

On 11 January, Dr Ned Allen convened 'W.S. Graham 1918–2018: A Centenary Symposium' to celebrate the centenary of the poet's birth.

On 31 January, playwright David Edgar presented the 2019 Judith E Wilson Lecture, 'State of Play', looking at the story of new playwriting in postwar Britain.

On February 8, Laura Wright presented the keynote speech 'On the Multilingual Background to Standard English' at the Eleventh International Conference on Middle English, University of Florence.

On 8 February, Drew Milne hosted a screening of *Now Circa* (1918), directed by Redell Olsen, followed by a discussion with the director.

On 16 February, Diarmuid Hester organized 'TRASH! Waste and Excess in Queer Cultures' at the Faculty, an interdisciplinary symposium exploring waste and excess in LGBTQ+ life and culture.

On 25 February, Andrew Zurcher and Sophie Seita organised a poetry reading by Karen Sandhu and Mina Gorji at Queens' College.

On 19 March, Kasia Boddy and Susan Larsen invited Keith Gessen, author of *A Terrible Country*, to join them in conversation at the Faculty.

On 20 March, Subha Mukherji gave an invited lecture at McGill University on 'Knowing Encounters: Law, Legibility and the Rhetoric of Presence in the Early Modern Imagination'.

On 8 May, Zoë Svendsen spoke at 'Ecological Issues and Environmental Problems in Theatre and Performing Arts', New Drama Festival, Institute of Theatre, Bratislava, 4–9 May.

On 10 and 11 May, Jason Scott-Warren and Caroline van Eck convened the CRASSH-funded conference 'Exuviae: Distributing the Self in Images and Objects', in celebration of the 21st birthday of Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*.

On June 7, the Cambridge Theory, Criticism, and Culture Seminar invited two leading contemporary avant-garde poets, Steve McCaffery and Karen Mac Cormack to read at the Judith E Wilson Drama Studio.

On 15 June, Ruvani Ranasinha gave the keynote at the Faculty's 'New Postcolonial Concerns: An Interdisciplinary Graduate Workshop'.

On 12 and 13 September, doctoral candidate Elin Danielsen Huckerby convened 'Philosophy, Poetry, and Utopian Politics – The Relevance of Richard Rorty', a CRASSH-funded conference, sponsored by Ross Wilson.

From 14 to 19 July, and 21 to 26 July, Trudi Tate organised two summer courses for Literature Cambridge: Virginia Woolf's Gardens and Fictions of Home: Jane Austen to Contemporary Refugee Writers.

On 7 August, Jennifer Wallace gave pre-Proms talk on tragedy and tragic tales, Imperial College Union.

On 23 September, Laura Davies and Emma Salgard Cunha launched their new website and resource 'A Good Death?'. They also received £1000 from the ESRC to host a public event on 2 November.

On 24 October, Diarmuid Hester launched a new queer Cambridge audio trail: a free, self-guided one-hour audio trail that reveals the rich and often radical history of LGBTQ+ Cambridge.

### A selection of 'impact' activities:

On 26 April, Dr Michael D. Hurley ran a postgraduate workshop on the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins with Dr Stephen Tardif (University of Toronto) at the University of St Andrews.

Sophie Seita's IMPACT award-funded first solo show *My Little Enlightenment Plays* ran from 13 June to 6 July at SPACE in Hackney.

From 29 June to 1 July, the Faculty worked with the Prince's Teaching Institute to offer an English Enrichment Residential in Cambridge.

From 15 September to 17 September, Subha Mukherji and other members of the ERC-funded project 'Crossroads of Knowledge', hosted a three-day public event called 'Migrant Knowledge, Early Modern and Beyond' at Kettle's Yard and Fitzwilliam College.

On 8 October, Priyamvada Gopal was invited by The Guardian to pick watershed moments and fearless people to be honoured in Black History Month. She chose George William Gordon as her unsung hero to celebrate.

From 28 October, Ross Wilson runs a five-week reading group for students at HMP Whittemoor as part of the 'Learning Together' initiative.

On 29 October, Sarah Jilani spoke at 'Bright Nights: Empire!', an after-hours public event at Kensington Palace.

**The Faculty is pleased to welcome the following appointees:**  
Caroline Bassett - Professor of Digital Humanities

Dr Mary Newbould - Co-Investigator on the AHRC 'Sterne Digital Library' Project

Ms Bhanu Kapil - Judith E. Wilson Poetry Fellow

Dr Rebecca Barr - University Lecturer in Gender/Sexualities Studies

Dr Lisa Mullen - Teaching Associate in Modern and Contemporary Literature with Film

Dr Shamira Meghani - Teaching Associate in Postcolonial and Related Literatures

Dr Bonnie Lander Johnson - Teaching Associate in Renaissance Literature

Dr Mathelinda Nabugodi - Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship

Dr Oliver Morgan - Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship

### In addition:

Doctoral candidate Abi L. Glen has been appointed as the 2019 AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Fellow at the Fitzwilliam Museum.

Louise Joy has been awarded the Crausaz Wordsworth Fellowship at CRASSH for Lent term, for her project entitled 'Enlightenment Progressivism: Literature, Education and Freedom'.

James Raven has been elected a Fellow of the British Academy.

### Prizes:

Doctoral candidate, Felicity Sheehy, has been awarded the 2019 Jane Martin Poetry Prize, sponsored by Girton College.

Helen Murphy's pre-arrival resource for taught Masters' students, CamGuides, was a runner-up for the Digital Award for Information Literacy 2019, and won the CUP Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences prize in technology-enabled learning.

Edward Allen has won the Marianne Moore Society Annual Essay Prize for his article in *Twentieth-Century Literature*, "'Spenser's Ireland", December 1941: Scripting a Response'.

Anna-Maria Hartmann has been awarded the Roland H. Bainton Prize 2019 for the best book on early modern literature published in the previous year for her monograph *English Mythography in its European Context 1500-1650* (Oxford University Press 2018).

# A LOVE ARTIST

NOVELIST AND FORMER READER IN THE FACULTY OF ENGLISH,  
**JOHN HARVEY**, INTRODUCES HIS NEW NOVEL **PAX**.

In my latest novel *PAX* a contemporary artist finds himself inspired by the trip the great painter Rubens made to London in 1629, when he came as envoy of the Court of Spain to negotiate peace between Spain and England. The initiative was Rubens' own idea: what is surprising is that he succeeded. But it is not surprising that he *wanted* to do this because an artist who loved the human body so warmly would hate the mutilation and massacre of war. Rubens acted in the midst of the mass-homicidal Thirty Years War (1618-48).

My contemporary artist thinks, but what a different world it was, when an artist could make peace between nations. And I like Rubens more as I see England, half-filled with aggressive prejudice, dying to tear itself out of Europe. We can see Rubens the peacenik in the paintings on my front and back covers. In front *Pax* the Goddess of Peace squeezes a bare breast so milk arcs into the mouth of the infant god of Prosperity (the canvas, known as 'Peace and War', is in the National Gallery). The back cover shows a detail from 'The Four Continents', which was painted during a brief European truce. This is Rubens' way -- not our way -- of depicting World Peace: a lounging love-in under one big tent of the river gods, Plate, Nile, Danube and Ganges with the pretty geniuses of America, Africa, Europe and Asia. In the centre of our eye-shaped frame is the eye of Africa herself, a black woman who wears a blood ruby. She alone in the painting meets our eye directly.

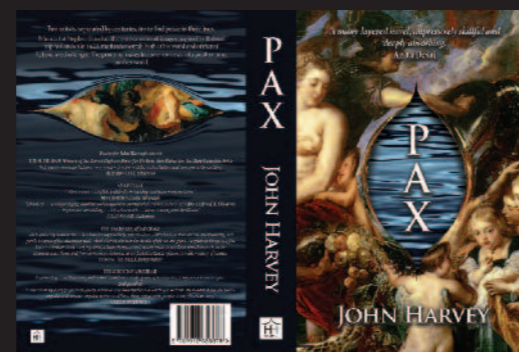
She connects with the contemporary story, in which my artist, Stephen, is falling desperately in love with his black model Mae though both are married – even as it also seems that an intrigue his wife Robyn has had may be unravelling. Meanwhile a blade whirrs over the Art School where he works,

as the new Principal prepares to restructure: while both Stephen and Robyn must worry where their daughter Sally is heading.

Rubens had a daughter, once... And in London Rubens too is on the track of an intrigue: what did pass between his neglected wife, Isabella Brant and his best apprentice, Anthony Van Dyck? Rumour mutters about the village of Saventhem, in Belgium, where Van Dyck may have stopped secretly when Rubens believed he left for Italy. Rubens and Bloodsmith, both, study the enigmatic portrait of Isabella that Van Dyck left (it is in the National Gallery of Art in Washington). The reader will wonder, I hope, what resolutions may come to the multiplying relationships.

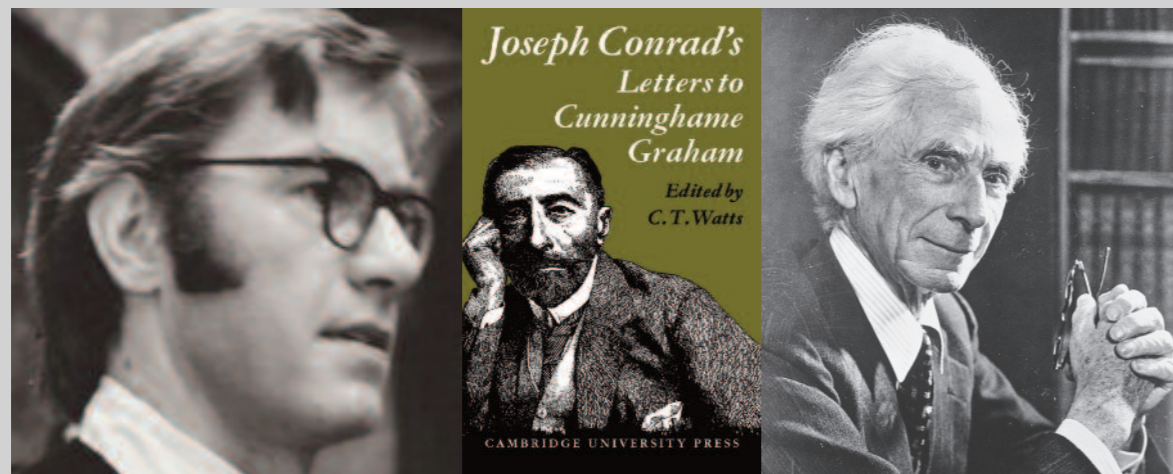
In short *Pax* treats complication in marriage and gives an anatomy of infidelity. It also asks whether union and division between the nations of the earth may operate in similar ways to betrayal and love between women and men.

John Harvey was a Reader in the Faculty until 2009: for more about his novels and criticism see [www.john-harvey.co.uk](http://www.john-harvey.co.uk). *PAX* is published by Holland House Books, October 2019.



**Cedric Watts:**

## ‘Shocked, dazed and trembling’: Starting Research in English in 1961



**Early in October 1961, I returned to Cambridge to start my research in English. I was 24, having served in the Royal Navy before becoming an undergraduate. My chosen topic was ‘Joseph Conrad and Anti-Rational Primitivism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’.**

By ‘Primitivism’ I did not, of course, mean ‘Primitiveness’. On the contrary, I was using the term as defined by A. O. Lovejoy and George Boas in their book *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*. I meant: that nostalgia for relatively primitive states of being which is sometimes expressed by sophisticated writers. The topic had the appeal of paradox and the incentive of personal sympathy.

In that month, my bank account had already received my first grant for research, a termly cheque for £100 funded by the British taxpayer after parental means-testing. (My father, who had served in battlefields of the Great War, now worked in the gentlemen’s outfitting department of a Co-operative store.) I had taken a first-class degree in English in the summer, so I was feeling

confident. Then I received a letter asking me to visit Dr Muriel Bradbrook in the English Faculty Office. Thinking that she would give me advice on how to proceed, I duly arrived there.

She told me that she had read my application. ‘Part of it I do not understand; and what I understand I do not agree with’, she said. ‘I am therefore declining your application. If you pursue your research, it will not be at Cambridge University.’

Shocked, dazed and trembling, I walked unsteadily out of her office. I had a letter from Bertrand Russell in my pocket, but I hadn’t thought to show it to her.

The letter from the Earl Russell read as follows:

Dear Mr. Watts,

Thank you for your letter and for the interesting introduction. I have read both with a great deal of interest. To begin with a small point, I think you are quite justified in your quotation from *My Philosophical Development* though the view expressed in your quotation is one which I ceased to hold later. As for the strange sympathy between Conrad and myself, I cannot pretend that I have ever quite understood it. I think I have always felt that there were two levels, one that of science and common sense, and another, terrifying, subterranean and chaotic, which in some sense held more truth than the everyday view. You might describe this as a Satanic mysticism. I have never been convinced of its truth, but in moments of intense emotion it overwhelms me. It is capable of being defended on the most pure intellectual grounds – for example, by Eddington’s contention that the laws of physics only seem to be true because of the things that we choose to notice. I suppose that the feeling I had for Conrad depended upon his combination of passion and pessimism – but that perhaps is a simplification. You ask whether my feeling for Conrad was based on a common sense of loneliness. I think this may have been the case, but the experience, while it lasted, was too intense for analysis.

Yours sincerely,  
Bertrand Russell.

Later, having regained some self-possession, I asked Dr Ian Jack for advice. He was in charge of English studies at my college, Pembroke. He advised me to consult Dr Graham Hough, who was genial and encouraging. ‘Look’, he said, ‘All you have to do is submit a revised application. Make your new application as un-opinionative as possible: make it sound drily scholarly. Perhaps some comparative textual study of Conrad’s works.’ ‘For example, comparing serial versions and book versions of some of his shorter works?’ ‘Exactly,’ he replied.

So that’s what I did. In due course, my new application was accepted conditionally. The condition was that at the end of the first year of my research, I should submit a report to the

English Graduate Office. If the reader approved it, I could then proceed. Well, I gained the necessary approval. I then found numerous unpublished letters by Conrad to his radical friend Cunninghame Graham, so my thesis evolved. Eventually, it became *Joseph Conrad and R. B. Cunninghame Graham: Their Friendship in Its Literary Aspects*. It was submitted precisely at the end of the funded three years, on the 30th September, 1964 (My supervisor, Douglas Brown, had died in 1963, alas, and – incredible as it seems now – was not replaced, so I supervised myself in the last year of research).

There was one more twist in the tale. I found that at my viva voce examination, the external examiner would be Professor Peter Ure, and the internal examiner would be Dr Muriel Bradbrook – the very person who had told me in 1961 that I was not fit to do research at Cambridge. The viva, however, went well; perhaps she did not remember our earlier encounter; and, as I left her room at Girton College, she said: ‘I advise you to take this thesis to Mr Black at Cambridge University Press.’ I took her advice; Michael Black was encouraging; and, in 1969, Cambridge University Press published my edition, *Joseph Conrad’s Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham*, which, among many other matters, pointed out the inadequacies of G. Jean-Aubry’s two-volume *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*. As a consequence, Cambridge University Press eventually produced the nine-volume set, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, which appeared between 1983 and 2007.

I still look back on that letter from Bertrand Russell with intense gratitude. No expert on Satanic mysticism, I can at least appreciate his saintly kindness.

**Cedric Watts**  
Emeritus Professor of English  
University of Sussex

# Starting Research in 2019

1st year PhD candidate, Wilfredo Gomez, reflects on his first impressions of Cambridge as a graduate student in the Faculty of English.

What might it mean to be an aspiring disabled hip-hop scholar at the University of Cambridge? Having previously pursued graduate studies in the United States, I was accustomed, and some might say (classically) conditioned, to encounter some skepticism and concern over yet another “hip-hop scholar” entering academia, the mere mention of “hip-hop,” raising questions of legitimacy, credibility, rigor, and overall seriousness. And with that context, I was curious to know how my interests and (research) questions would be received in this elite educational space, one that helped shape the Harvards and Yales of the world. Sharing these interests elicited a variety of responses that ranged from surprise (“They let you do that at Cambridge?”), to bewilderment (“...and so you came to the U.K. to study American popular culture?”), to a commentary suggesting that such a project could exist anywhere in the U.K., except of course Oxbridge.

I received these responses as cultural data that might help illuminate and better inform my experiences of graduate student life in the United States. A senior tutor highlighted the unique nature of the collegiate system, while stressing above all else that what Cambridge valued was brilliance and the prospects of producing novel ideas. It is perhaps in this context that a faculty member helped broker introductions to postgraduate students with related research questions, and Junior Research Fellows whose areas of interests might serve as lens through which to frame interdisciplinary work while staying true to the central tenets of literary studies. Victorian literature may not be hip-hop, but question centered on disability, narrative, and representation illuminated common ground that highlights how one goes from PhD student to the title of doctor. Similar parallels would be found with those who held interests in sounds studies and classical music.

Yet another scholar would admit to having limited experience with hip-hop music and the scholarship that covered the area of inquiry. And yet in spite of that admission, there was a willingness to be vulnerable—an openness towards listening and learning, a welcoming of new ideas, and an embrace of interdisciplinary scholarship. This interaction was profound on a number of levels. At a comparable institution (stateside), said admission of an unfamiliarity with a prospective student’s (let alone matriculating student) interests might result in a notice of rejection, an inability or unwillingness on the part of faculty to fully support and nurture one’s academic growth and professional development.

As someone socialized within the American academy, I would not have expected such a moment of genuine vulnerability on the part of a faculty member. The slightest disconnect between a potential advisor and student might result in the assumption that a prospective student just would not “fit in” with the culture nurtured in said department. Yet another expectation would suggest that scholars, rarely, if ever, express a willingness to learn a field of study they are not already familiar with, the task of taking on a new postgraduate student (with “groundbreaking” interests too heavy a burden to accept). As a saying popular in U.S. academic circles goes, “scholars stop reading after tenure.” In a moment of surprise, the faculty member (at Cambridge), not only expressed a willingness to listen and engage hip-hop, they did so with great enthusiasm (and expectations). An added layer of nuance found parallels between research interests calling for new encounters, productive tensions, new interlocutors, and a broadened approach towards the work.

Through these interactions and others like them, I have received: invaluable advice on academic life at Cambridge, book suggestions, an invitation to work collaboratively with postgraduates and faculty across disciplinary pursuits, and have received support from postgraduates, library staff, and Junior Research Fellows from throughout the college system. All of this and I have yet to express how much of a joy it has been learning from undergraduates and postgraduates, having gained insights into the lives and histories that shape life in the U.K, particularly as someone whose body is racialized in the United States.

In closing, I am reminded about the circumstances under which I was encouraged to pursue an application to the University of Cambridge, my best friend having pursued postgraduate studies at Cambridge. From an outsider’s perspective, I marveled at how transformative the Cambridge experience seemed, focusing on the beings and becomings we encounter and negotiate upon our departures and returns. I welcome the unknown as a being becoming at Cambridge, embracing a rich history that looks forward as it reflects upon traditions and effectively seeks to build upon them, embracing new ideas and perspectives. That too will become part of my Cambridge hip-hop story.

## THE LAND OF COCKAYNE

I'm on top of the world with blood all around  
there are four springs and a line of poplars  
on the planet's rim being borne along

without stint. The book in my hand disappears  
and I rid myself of the drone of the past  
but an overpowering need to look back

far out to sea, to the West of Spain  
shows nothing left but cinders afloat  
no halls nor bowers to scan.

I have waited too long  
for the release mechanism  
there is nothing in Paradise, nothing there

but burst water mains, ever flowing  
like innate ideas of Brexit.

Drearily, drearily, shall we go  
the song hangs heavy in the air  
on a winter's night say I love you

to no-one. The words will rise like smoke  
from the page, and find their own way home.  
See the swarm flying from west to east

where is no night and only day  
thanks to emergency floor lighting  
whose glow unsteady like alabaster

is fixed in the bed of a northerly stream.  
There even gravity loses heart  
as the stones arise from their deepest sleep

and break, break, break,  
in the seas off Dogger.

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