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News from the Faculty of English, Cambridge

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AND SO... TO NEW BEGINNINGS



Last year my predecessor Nicky Zeeman wrote about the ongoing response to the pandemic. When I began to draft this letter, I was thinking of that response as a thing of the past, and was planning to describe an exciting return to relatively normal running. I can and will still do that, but it is a great pity to realise that, as I finally come close to finishing this, there is every chance that all of us here – students and staff alike – may well have our resilience tested again.

Nicky led us brilliantly through the earlier waves, during which many great essays and books and exam papers were written, and many great thoughts and conversations were shared, in spite of everything. She also, with the help of a great team of colleagues, laid the foundations for the term we have just had. I came into the picture just in time to help complete our battles with the Risk Assessment forms. There were some setbacks, but in the end we had a coherent foundation for in-person lectures and classes and supervisions.

In the first few weeks of term the comments from colleagues were full of relief and delight at being able to lecture somewhat normally again. I got the same sort of thing from students: some pointed to the difference made to the quality of attention they felt they could give in person, others pointed to the psychological lift given by just setting out, by travelling to work in a tangible and purposeful way. Each of us had our own set of reasons; it must also be acknowledged that quite a lot of students took advantage of the online recordings we routinely provided. I was relieved to find that the automated lecture capture didn't include video: I never want to see what my lectern gestures look like.

Over the last two years we have been forced into experiments with our exam system. One innovation in 2021, in many Faculties, was the introduction of open-book (and open-web) online exams. We are now left with a lot of thinking to do: have we seen the future, or will we return without much regret to the traditional model of hurried handwriting, feats of memory, and three-hour stints in sports halls and Guildhalls and Corn Exchanges? I am the sort of person who gets a bit fretful when standing on the precipice of possibly needing to think about things from scratch. I was never destined for the Philosophy Faculty. However, I can see the value and interest of a proper discussion of what the best way to assess our subject may

be. Whenever I move in this direction I remember a former colleague, now retired, who used to weigh in with the thought that in fact we should not examine at all – that it was, fundamentally, not what we are here for. I doubt we will have the scope to go that far.

My previous role in the Faculty, before becoming Chair of the Faculty Board, was to lead our submission to the Research Excellence Framework (a giant national audit of research). This means I got a close and comprehensive look at the extraordinary range of work my colleagues have been doing in recent years. Some of this will be featured in the pages that follow. As part of this process I had to write about our research 'Environment', where I summarised, with a lot of help, where we think we stand in relation to our goals and potential. My conclusion is that we are really at the beginning of something exciting, with new colleagues and new horizons promising a lot. I expect a challenging three years in the post, but there is a lot to be optimistic about.

Raphael Lyne

Professor of Renaissance Literature

Chair of the Faculty of English

Fellow and Director of Studies at Murray Edwards College

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CLIMATE DRAMATURG

‘This isn’t theatre that preaches to the converted’



An associate artist at the Donmar Warehouse, Zoë Svendsen has been appointed to the possibly unique role of ‘climate dramaturg’ at the London theatre. She tells Nicholas

Davies what this entails and

how theatre can explore climate-conscious practices

Zoë Svendsen, the new ‘climate dramaturg’ at London’s Donmar Warehouse, has, of course, been paying close attention to the goings on at COP26 in Glasgow. “The UN secretary general has said today that we’re right in the crisis now,” she says when we speak. “Either we stop it, or it stops us. We’re on the verge of the climate crisis becoming climate collapse. It seems urgent to think about how these relationships work, between theatre and society.”

Already an associate artist at the Donmar, Svendsen has recently been appointed to the new role, possibly

the first person in the world with that specific job title.

“There’s certainly an extraordinary surge of people wanting to address the climate crisis imaginatively,” she says. Svendsen will undertake an 18-month collaborative action research project called Climate Conversations, bringing together artists and producers to reframe the conversation around the climate crisis and the process of making theatre.

She says: “My role is to engage across the whole organisation and with all the different productions happening at the Donmar, to try to understand the work it’s doing in the context of the climate crisis.”

“Everything we imagined in an apocalyptic way has come to pass. We’re already in that worst-case scenario”

Svendsen has been a dramaturg for a host of companies including the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre and the Young Vic, and is artistic director of Metis, a company creating research-led



performance projects exploring contemporary political subjects. One such project was 2011's 3rd Ring Out, which tackled the climate situation. "At the time, it was very much an outlier. But everything we imagined in an apocalyptic way has come to pass. We're already in that worst-case scenario."

Thankfully, Svendsen believes makers of theatre are now tackling the subject with a passionate rigour: "Now it feels like there's a whole movement – or at least a wide constellation of different kinds of work and effort on and off stage – and this is a brilliant and important shift." Her new role at the Donmar represents a significant part of that.

Svendsen will explore how themes in the Donmar's upcoming plays might be applied to the issue of preserving our planet. "Today I was in the first day of rehearsals for *Force Majeure* [adapted from the film by Tim Price and directed by Michael Longhurst], which is a brilliantly funny, dextrous take on masculine individualism and a crisis of care within the family, and you can immediately see how those questions around control and power all have strong connections to the

different responses – or failures to respond – to the climate crisis. The play itself isn't directly about climate change, but what it does do is reflect our cultural mentality."

Similarly, an upcoming version of *Henry V* will contain its familiar themes of imperialism and colonial power that were major influences in creating our modern-day problems. "Then there's *Marys Seacole* [by Jackie Sibbles Drury and directed by Nadia Latif], which is an extraordinary piece of work," Svendsen says, explaining that the climate-dramaturgy aspects of the play relate to its form, which "moves away from the usual individual hero narrative to a multi-perspectival, relational structure, which crosses generations and geographies in the telling of its stories." It is a narrative approach that mirrors the collectivist attitude required to address the climate crisis.

Outside of the rehearsal room, the concept of dramaturgy can seem esoteric to some. How will Svendsen ensure the themes explored reach audiences as well as industry professionals? "It isn't about the version of theatre that preaches to the converted," she



says. “Theatre works can act as witnesses to the coming times and be ahead of the curve in anticipating our experiences; [theatre can] offer and share narratives as activism to help make our future more liveable emotionally, as well as practically.” She adds that it can “share concerns and anxieties about the present moment”.

She will host a series of live talks and podcasts, opening the conversation to audiences. Her work involves tackling logistical issues as well as creative concerns, running workshops in-house that explore new, climate-conscious working practices.

Climate Conversations will culminate with a wider industry sharing of her findings. “As well as allying ethics and art,” she says, “our aim in the research is to find ways of moving beyond the feeling that ‘sustainability’ is all ‘limits’ and ‘less’ – and instead exploring how we might think about more artistry, more ingenuity, taking more time, paying more attention; that this process might involve an abundance of stories and imagination.”

She adds: “A few years ago, I created a piece of work called *We Know Not What We May Be*, and I think that is the crux of what we are about in the theatre – it’s a place where we work out who we are, who we could be and who we might need to be. And in these times, those questions are germane to addressing the climate crisis and the way we look at ourselves.”

Zoë Svendsen






Cambridge English Faculty
Graduate Research
Forum presents

Michaelmas Term

Flash Forum

4 December 2020, 2-4 pm
On ZOOM

-
- Support colleagues' research in a fun and relaxed environment!
 - Think about unexpected connections that span historical periods!
 - Get to know your fellow Faculty members better!

 | @graduate_forum

POETRY READING!

Showcase of work by faculty-based poets

END OF TERM TOAST!

To finish off the programme

The Faculty's Graduate Research Forum is very happy to announce it has survived the Covid pandemic and is going strong!

Originally inspired by graduate students' experiences of research isolation, the GRF was established in 2018 to bring together the Faculty's researchers, from PhD students to tenured academics, and build stronger connections between career stages and periods. Its most notable output is traditionally the termly 'Flash Forum', which attempts to provide an opportunity for all researchers to (re)connect with the wider faculty community. Stalled by Covid, and after a brief intermediate spell on video-sharing site Vimeo, the Forum transitioned successfully to Zoom in December and March 2020-1. Against the odds, the result on both occasions was a gratifyingly well-attended celebration of the Faculty's research, inventiveness, resilience, and dynamism. A host of fascinating 5-minute 'flash' presentations from all corners of literary study - from medieval to contemporary, from children's literature to sociolinguistics - made for a mine of interesting research nuggets eagerly engaged with in busy Q&A. With all of us having spent so much of the previous academic year working from home, the atmosphere of the events was jubilant and convivial and we were proud to showcase the ongoing excellent research being done by members of the Faculty in such turbulent times. We were also very lucky to be able to introduce some new additions to the classic Flash Forum formula: in December, a wonderful team of four Faculty-based poets (Dr Mina Gorji, Reem Abbas, Lewis Todd and David Rushmer) brought us inspiration in readings from their own work, and March saw a fascinating keynote from the founding director of Cambridge Literary Festival, Cathy Moore, in interview with Dr Kasia Boddy. It is hoped that this urge to broaden the bounds of the Forum beyond a limited definition of academic research, and to explore the wide-ranging literary pursuits taking place in the city, may continue!

The GRF has also strayed beyond the termly Flash Forum. During the pandemic, it has hosted academic events, including a session on 'How to Teach

Practical Criticism' led by Dr Ross Wilson and Joseph Steinberg, and Twitter-based writing 'retreats' for graduate students, as well as remote social events such as digital meetups and even the occasional film club. And it does not stand still. With the transition to a new, post-Covid committee (with thanks to Adam Dumbleton and Olivia Krauze for relieving us!), still newer initiatives have been launched. Most prominent among them is the Graduate Interdisciplinary Network (GIN), whose events have become an interdisciplinary partner to the Flash Forum. It is already bringing together speakers from the English Faculty with researchers from History, Earth Sciences and beyond. We certainly have reason to hope the Forum will continue to grow, and to energise and bring together fellows, postdocs, librarians, and graduate students in the years to come. Many thanks go to Prof. Kasia Boddy, and to all speakers, contributors and audience members, for helping to keep the GRF lively over the pandemic period. Join us again soon!

Georgia Thurston, Siân Round, Wanne Mendonck
(2020 - Easter 2021 GRF Committee)



DAN SPERRIN: 'OH RIGHT, THE WHOLE LOT...'

I am new to Cambridge but I have been working on my first book for a little while. I am currently writing a history of satire in English literature - the book begins somewhere in Roman antiquity and will stretch all the way up to the present day. 'Oh right, the whole lot', as one of my sympathetic undergraduates put it...

All historians of English literature worry about where to begin. Alistair Fowler was concerned about the possible 'arbitrariness' (his word) of starting anywhere at all, and with Delphic inscrutability said that 'a history of literature can only begin in the middle'. Luckily for me, the Roman grammarians also recognised just how 'arbitrary' or artificial histories of literature can be, and constructed various origin stories to prove that satire was actually a Roman invention (an obviously inaccurate but compelling piece of imperial vainglory). In the famous words of Quintilian, 'satura tota nostra est' ('satire is entirely ours'). This kind of statement and the primary texts of Roman satire provide something of a starting point for my book, because from here I can move into the complicated reception of the Roman satirists in the early Middle Ages after the empire had collapsed.

For three reasons, the task of writing the history of satire in English literature (as opposed to any other genre or form) is trickier than it seems. The first is that no-one knows what 'an English satire' is, or how closely the idea of 'an English satire' can be aligned with the definitions of satire available in Roman antiquity. The tradition of English satire seems to include everything from Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* — a madly disorganised Latin prose skit about the hellish absurdity of the court of Henry II — to *The Canterbury Tales*, Ben Jonson's *Epigrams*, *The Dunciad*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Bleak House*, and *Lucky Jim* (and so on). For reasons I am exploring in the book, disputes about the definition of what constitutes 'an English satire' have not only never been resolved, but have

been kept alive for reasons of political and ideological strategy (and that is where I think the interest of that particular issue lies). The second reason is that so many of the most important English satirists have been deeply untrustworthy figures — spies, informers, liars, tricksters, hoax-makers, people on the run, devious courtiers, and so on — who tend to leave behind very little evidence of how or why they were writing satire, often because it would have been dangerous to do so. The third is that the notoriously intricate play of pseudo-fictional speakers and personae in satire can sometimes make it difficult to ascribe clear beliefs or political intentions to satirists themselves. Things like Thomas More's *Utopia* — clearly a satire in certain respects — are so riddled with misdirection and irony that even after centuries of scholarly interpretation we have no uniform sense of what the nature of the satire is or what the internal logic of the text's devious irony might amount to.

These are just some of the problems that have come up in writing the book so far. I am increasingly drawn to them — in taking these problems seriously the various discontinuous traditions which together comprise English satire have started to come into focus.

Dan Sperrin
Trinity College



Images courtesy of
Instagram: @dansperrin_cartoons

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'Midnight in the Kant Hotel' was a title that came to me, believe it or not, when I first stayed in the Kant Hotel in Berlin, back in the autumn of 1984. I was en route to Poland, where I was due to take up a post as Reader in English Literature at the University of Lodz. At that point—

pre-internet—crossing the borders between West and East Germany, and between East Germany and Poland, meant crossing into a very different set of temporal and spatial relations. In theory, one could telephone from East to West—in practice, the telephone exchange operators rarely had any English; and even when they did, they rarely had any patience. This meant that conversations over a bad line were not only rare, they were also likely to be inaudible, or interrupted by the operators' expletives and obscenities, the latter representing the only parts of language in which they were bilingual. The postal service was sluggish and unreliable. And the only English language newspaper on sale was a weekly digest composed by the Hungarian Communist Party. Martial Law was a very recent memory, and information about Western Europe was a scant commodity. There was simply no getting away from the material realities, the social relations, the psychological pressures, of life in the Soviet Bloc. In my case, those conditions were only ever going to be temporary, which meant that my glimpses into the cultural imagination of the Poles, whose creative activity was necessarily furtive as well as reactive, made a big impact on my own imagination, convincing me of an obligation to respond.

And I did respond at the time in the form of poems, composed in a two-sided language of challenging address and encoded implication, conveying urgency and equivocation in pretty much equal measure. What impressed me more than anything in the work of the artists I encountered was the discipline they showed in finding the political dimension in every facet of everyday life, and then in finding the most compelling, the most economical, the most powerful way of showing it. In Lodz, the home of the Polish film school, the medium in which this agenda was most often, and most widely, explored was celluloid. Film seemed to be everywhere—and nowhere—it was much easier to store and hide than paintings, sculptures and copies of printed books. And it was easier to make public—although 'public' isn't quite the word, since screenings almost always took place in private flats, with the screen being nothing more than a bare patch of wall.

The real art of the present, during that period 1984-1987, was conceived of, made, and shared, behind closed doors; or, if filming took place outdoors, with a carefully hidden camera. And it was shown impromptu, with very little advance notice: time and venue were relayed by

word of mouth. Everything had to go under the radar, which doubled the sense of urgency conveyed by the tone and bearing of the films themselves. A substantial proportion of the audience for these productions were art-makers themselves—and the films seemed to talk to one another as much as their authors did. Because the main form of communication was visual, I was able to decode a much greater proportion of its messaging than would have been the case with the verbal media of fiction and poetry. It took me several years to ease my way into the Polish language and be comfortable enough to begin translating the work of poets unknown to me when I was living there.

I remained in Lodz for three years, with trips back to the UK twice a year—and this involved several stops in Berlin. I had received a letter from J.H.Prynne—not long after arriving in Poland for the first time—which included the injunction: ‘Remember, the double-headed eagle looks both ways’. This was both engagingly cryptic and difficult to ignore. The Polish flag has an eagle with only one head, which points left. Cartographically speaking, left stands for West. It’s actually the Russian flag with the double-header. But in terms of national psychology, Jeremy was right—in 1984, Poland was much more suited to this emblem of cultural divergence.

Part of the reason that the samizdat-style art networks in Lodz appealed to me so strongly was that they echoed and amplified the avant-garde, small-press, DIY, collaborative ventures of the alternative poetry scene in the UK, where poets would form their own distribution networks, co-edit and circulate experimental magazines, and meet for readings in the upstairs rooms of pubs in London and Cambridge. There were structural parallels between these two zones of operation and systems of exchange in which maximum pressure was brought to bear on the kinds of expressive leverage made possible by an aesthetics of encoding and implication.

But a set of formal parallels is one thing, direct interaction is quite another, and the realities of history, geography, politics and economics blockaded the channels of communication, suspending awareness of common strategies of social support and civic contrariety. Perhaps the only place where the degrees of separation could be thought of in terms of adapting the same toolkit to cope with different environments was Berlin, where the Wall was still up and close cousins lived cheek by jowl in a Janus-faced world. And Berlin was where I started writing a long poem under the title ‘Midnight in the Kant Hotel’. I wrote on sheets of cheap Polish paper which turned a brittle brown-yellow in record time, and at some point the poem was lost. When I left Poland in 1987, I drove a carful of cardboard boxes filled with books and papers across Poland and East and West Germany, as far as the ferry port at Hamburg. The contents of all the boxes had been

checked, itemised and sealed with the Polish customs stamp, a procedure meant to guarantee smooth passage through all the border controls en route. But the East German police thought this was good for a laugh, and made me unpack everything in order to line up all the books and papers at the side of the road. Two guards from Central Casting rummaged through them and this was certainly when some of the papers disappeared—probably as random samples. So I lost the poem, but the orphaned title stayed with me, a patient but insistent reminder of unfinished business.

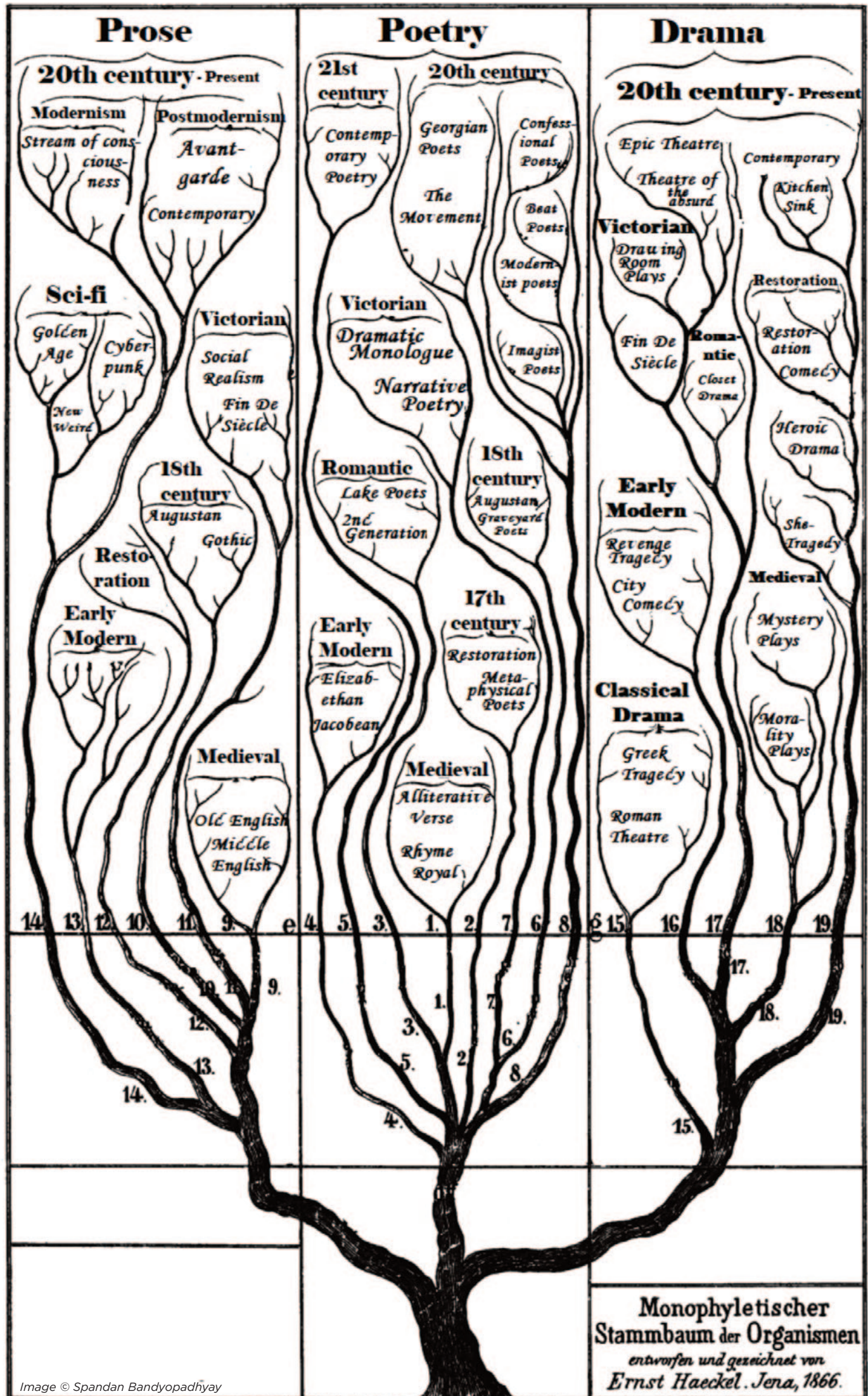
About twenty years later I wrote a very sceptical review of ‘The Art of Bloomsbury’ for Tate magazine. The then editor, Tim Marlow, seemed to relish my dislike of the work of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. I had something like an allergic reaction to its decorative complacencies. And I found the aesthetics and politics of Clive Bell even more distasteful. Tim asked me what else I would like to write about. At which point, I realized I could think about art that looked both ways at once, and wrote a set of essays dealing with international issues: atrocity, terrorism, hostage-taking, the refugee crisis. I was also drawn to the work of artists who exposed the political dimension in everyday life, as well as the political cost of subsuming myth into history. Tim gave me a good run at all this, at the same time as I began writing brief catalogue essays on the work of artists whose work was installed at Jesus College, Cambridge.

In 2003, I began curating exhibitions of sculpture in Cambridge, as well as small gallery shows of the work of painters, photographers and multi-media artists; and to date I have not left off. Putting art in place, and thinking about the places art has come from, and its effect both in and on the places where it is shown and received, is an intrinsic element in my thinking about art, whether visual or literary. An exhibition is like a reading—a performance of work that will have a specific effect in any given time or place, depending on the company it keeps with other works, other viewers, other listeners. And writings about art, especially catalogue essays, are accompaniments to that performance. –If they are very lucky, they can even become part of the performance...

I have also written many catalogue essays for exhibitions curated by others in a range of venues in the UK and Europe, and what I have valued above all in these liaisons is the chance to maintain relationships with artists and curators in an ongoing collaboration with their work. It is fair to say that collaboration is conceivably the most positive term in my vocabulary.

Rod Mengham

Jesus College



PLANT LIFE

The Faculty of English Research Theme for 2021-22 was 'Plant Life', a forum for the many people in the Faculty interested in (among other things) the historical development of botany and gardening, the symbolism and cultural resonance of plants (in material and art history as well as in literature), the theoretical perspectives and political impulses of the environmental humanities, and the challenge to the idea of 'plant life' posed by composite organisms such as lichens. In some ways 'plant life' seems a very traditional literary 'theme', but it is at the heart of current intellectual debates about sustainability, the environment and the legacies of empire.

During the course of the year, we held a reading group which explored the essays of Jamaica Kincaid, essays on decolonising botanical collections, and (in a rare get-together in the Botanic Garden), *The Well-Gardened Mind* by Faculty alumna Sue Stewart-Smith, ahead of her virtual visit. We were also delighted to welcome Jason Allen-Paisant, to read and discuss his poetry collection *Thinking with Trees*.

We also held (alas, by Zoom) two 'flash forums' in which Faculty members offered talks on everything from John Donne's funeral spices to George Orwell's praise of the Woolworth's rose to the importance of sweetgrass to many North American indigenous peoples. Other talks explored the connotations of 'vegetable' in the seventeenth century, and 'popcorn' in the nineteenth century, the iconography of Christ as a tree, the prevalence of tree-stumps in Victorian studio photographs, the blighted corn cob in Longfellow's "Hiawatha", hemp's importance for early paper-making, John Clare's interest in botany, John Ruskin's attack on its taxonomy, the aesthetics of sweet peas, and the cultivation and consumption of saffron in Cambridge colleges. Mina Gorji and Holly Carfield Carr enlivened the occasions with their poems.

'Plant Life' is continuing in 2022, and we hope to be able to offer more resources and events to alumni. Check the website:
<https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/research/plantlife/>

Kasia Boddy
 Fitzwilliam College



CAMBRIDGE SAFFRON

Crocus sativus (Saffron). Photograph by Rowan McOneal. CC BY-NC 4.0, Wellcome Trust

Cambridge Saffron' is a project run by Kasia Boddy and Bonnie Lander Johnson with the researcher Alice Wickenden, and funded by the University's Research & Collections Programme within the Materiality Research Growth Network. The project will culminate in an online exhibition produced in collaboration with the University Library, and a day-long workshop on 'Global History, Local Stories', at the Centre for Research in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences on 11th June 2022: <https://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/30036/>.

It is very unusual for a crop that flourishes in Crete and Kashmir to do well in Britain but from the late fifteenth century *Crocus sativus* provided a valuable cash crop for those farming in the chalky fields of South Cambridgeshire and Essex. The Essex market town of Chepyng Walden became the centre of crocus production, so much so that in 1514 it changed its name to Saffron Walden, but saffron was grown throughout the region. Some Cambridge colleges even devoted patches of garden to growing their own. Saffron was used to flavour and 'gild' food, as a pigment and dye, and for many hygienic and medicinal purposes.

Our project will consider this local story in the context of the centuries-old, global history of saffron as a hugely valuable commodity. Its colour in particular has played an important role in nationalist and religious discourses. In seventeenth-century Britain and Ireland, for example, Protestants talked of the 'saffroned' 'staine' of Catholicism, while in India today, saffron is associated with Hindu nationalism and critics complain that under Modi, the country and its history are being 'saffronised'.

In order to better understand the ways in which Cambridge contributed to the cultural history of

saffron, this project will bring to light the presence of saffron, or 'red gold', in the collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum, the University Library, the herbarium of the Botanic Garden, and in the account books of colleges such as Peterhouse, King's, Pembroke, Queens and Jesus, whose gardeners once cultivated saffron and whose fellows feasted upon it. We will also work with local museum collections to consider evidence of the crop in nearby villages such as Hixton, birthplace of Anne Turner, whose name became synonymous with the patented saffron-based starch used to colour collars and ruffs in the seventeenth century.

Through the course of the year, we hope to build picture of the ways in which Cambridge (and its environs) participated in and shaped saffron culture.



A woman picks crocus flowers. Taqwīm as-Sihḥa (Maintenance of Health), an eleventh-century Arab medical treatise that was translated into Latin as Tacuinum Sanitatis in the thirteenth-century. Cod. Ser. n. 2644, fol. 40v. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek - Austrian National Library.

CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOK OF LITERATURE AND PLANTS



This Cambridge Handbook reveals the long history of English literature's engagement with plants. The book's twenty chapters cover historical periods (from ancient to contemporary), literary forms (travel writing, nature poetry, plant horror, Shakespeare, printed herbals), and geographic

regions. The Handbook comes at a moment when interest from scholars working in all historical periods and geographic regions is developing rapidly. This interest takes many forms, including plant ornamentation and metaphor in poetry, the influence of botanical taxonomy on literary form, the role of plants in travel, gardening and life writing, colonialism and expansionist practices of collecting and trade, the literary nature of herbals and other encyclopaedic texts, changing theological and social perceptions of gardens, Eden and The Book of Nature, ecocriticism and critical plant studies, and in the realms of book history: flower pressing, flowers in manuscript decoration and early printed frontispieces and the abiding description of poetry as 'poesies'. Some of the Handbook's chapters focus on particular plant species, such as that by Harvard's Xiaofei Tian who charts the long history of Chinese poetry about the lotus. Other chapters, such as Clare Guest's overview of early Christian art, reveal particular philosophical histories of plant ornamentation. The chapters on literary form probe the extent to which our interest in uncovering the secrets of plant life have enabled new genres to emerge, but they also examine the persistence of certain forms: metaphysical poetry about specific plants and trees are shown to be closely related to contemporary nature writing, just as early recipe books and husbandry manuals, with their detailed descriptions of knowledge and practice surrounding the cultivation and preparation of domestic plants, are shown to have shaped modern food writing.

Dr Bonnie Lander Johnson

Fellow, Tutor and Director of Studies in English
Newnham College Cambridge



False Saffron CC BY-NC 4.0,
Wellcome Trust



Six cut *Ranunculus* flowers: double-flowered varieties with leaves. Watercolour by Mrs. Montgomery. Wellcome Collection.

Bonnie Lander Johnson is a Fellow of Newnham College and a Teaching Associate in the English Faculty. She has published widely on Shakespeare and early modern plants.

Cambridge Handbook of Literature and Plants (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press, 2023).



A Poem by Bhanu Kapil,
fellow of Churchill
college, former Judith E.
Wilson fellow and
winner of the T.S. Eliot
Poetry Prize (2021).

From *The Penguin Book
of Modern Indian Poets*,
edited by Jeet Thayil.

COLLUDE

with the anemone zero.

Drink 12 oz. of coffee in Longmont.

Are you parched?

Is your name Pinky?

What color is the skin of your inner arm, creamy?

Valentine City rebate: a box of chocolates from Safeway.

Yours, yours, yours.

In its entirety.

Don't collude with your inability to give or receive love.

Collude, instead, with the lining of the universe.

Descent, rotation, silk water, brief periods of intense sunlight
striated with rose pink glitter.

The glitter can only get us.

So far.

Here we are at the part with the asphalt, airstream Tupperware,
veins, some nice light stretching.

Call me.

This is a poem for a beloved.

Who never arrived.

A SINGLE *MOMENT*

Cambridge is a city full of surprises. When I started my degree in English Literature, I had only vague ideas about what my future career might look like and no knowledge at all of feminist theory and politics.



Cambridge is a city full of surprises. When I started my degree in English Literature, I had only vague ideas about what my future career might look like and no knowledge at all of feminist theory and politics. I didn't know that a quirky, artfully worded advert in one of the student newspapers would lead me to fall semi-accidentally into a job researching sex

positions for an author and relationship therapist, and I certainly wouldn't have dreamed that fifteen years after graduating I would have written seven books. But while my career trajectory has been far from straightforward, I owe a great debt of gratitude to the people who shaped and supported me and I lean heavily, even today, on the skills they taught me along the way.

It was during an English literature supervision at Robinson College that my supervisor paused momentarily to remark upon the sexism inbuilt in the language we were examining, albeit a subject entirely tangential to the practical criticism tutorial at hand. But the intervention came at a moment of particular resonance for me, not least because it emboldened me for the first time to reflect on a number of painful personal experiences and gave me permission, from within the institution, to imagine that resistance and challenge were possible. Had that supervisor known that, over a decade later, he would find himself gratefully thanked in the acknowledgements of my most recent book, *Men Who Hate Women*, he probably would have been as surprised as I would! But the smallest acts of suggestion and encouragement can have a very profound effect. (Not that this means you should always listen to everything your supervisors tell you. I still have a copy of a heavily marked essay graded a low 2.2 with a circled exhortation to move on from obsessing over all this gender stuff if I ever wanted to get anywhere!)

At a time when the arts and humanities are undervalued and underfunded, it seems more important than ever to reflect on the rich and complex ways in which a degree in a subject like English Literature might inspire and propel a student in a thousand worthwhile directions. It might not seem obvious, but my study of close reading methods and my understanding of the development of

ever-fluid language and vocabulary played a significant role in my research. I used the skills I'd honed in practical criticism and 'language for literature' modules when I spent 18 months analysing and closely examining the lexicon of the so-called 'manosphere', an online world of dense and hate-fuelled communities where language is a powerful driver of extremist radicalisation and used to compel real-world violence against women.

And after years of visiting schools to talk to young people about sexual consent and healthy relationships, I used a very different set of literary skills to adapt feminist messages and ideas for a young adult audience, using storytelling as a means of provoking debate and, hopefully, dissent!

There is a misconception that literature and the study of language are academic and esoteric: confined to dusty lecture halls and stuffy studies. But my work has resulted in real-world shift, from the training of counter-terror officers to the inclusion of issues like sexual consent and healthy relationships on the national curriculum.

That first, brief reflection on the systemic nature of sexism, written as it is into the very foundations of our language, might seem minor. But its impact on the trajectory of my career was significant. We cannot know which moments or teachers might be the ones that will change the course of our ideas and perhaps our lives. But it would be desperately short sighted to assume that such inspiration and potential reside only in more vocational or scientific fields of study.

Laura Bates

*Laura Bates studied English Literature at St John's College from 2004-2007 and is now an honorary fellow at St John's. She is the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, an ever-increasing collection of over 200,000 testimonies of gender inequality. She works closely with politicians, police forces, businesses, schools and organisations from the United Nations to the Council of Europe to tackle sexism and sexual violence. She is a bestselling author of many books, including *Everyday Sexism*, *Girl Up* and *Men Who Hate Women* and writes regularly for the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and others. Laura is the recipient of a British Empire Medal and a British Press Award and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.*

ICE *TONGUES*

What if, when booming and cracking and hissing, ice has its own vernacular? Can the media that recreate these sounds speak the language of ice? What does this mean for readers' understandings of stories of loss in the Anthropocene?



In my essay 'Ice Tongues', I explore the idea of ice as a 'speaking substance' – first put forward by Hester Blum – through contemporary media responding to its disintegration. I quickly found that much of the language of glaciology is

laden with metaphorical weight, from the term 'ice tongue' itself (usually meaning a body of ice protruding from a glacier) to 'grounding lines', 'calving' and 'ablation'. I had to work carefully to unpick my argument from a sticky web of intricate relationality; the more I read, the more I found the cultural meltwater of glaciological decline seeping semiotically and semantically through a range of media.

This range is reflected in 'Ice Tongues', which studies a multi-media novel, a poetry collection, a soundscape, ice-core data sonification, and the opposite of an ice sculpture. Many of these pieces have been relatively unexplored in the critical field. Though a little daunting, this was incredibly exciting in practice; I was laying out some of the groundwork for future research on Inuit throat-singer and writer Tanya Tagaq's multimedia novel *Split Tooth* (2018) and Inupiaq poet Joan Naviyuk Kane's *Milk Black Carbon* (2017).

The major glacial processes of ablation (calving and melting) and its manifold impact waves are conduits for Anthropocene narratives: three glacial transformations which guided my own study of Anthropocene stories. I read calving, firstly, as an 'echo sounder' for neo-colonial violence in the first part; analysed the eco-poetics of melting in the second; and, finally, reflected on phase transitions – the state changes that water undergoes as it hardens as ice or evaporates into vapour – and hauntology as aftermaths of ablation.

Though used to create Olafur Eliasson's sculptures, ice, I discovered, is increasingly becoming a 'medium' more of the ghostly than the material kind. While 'burials' abound in the Anthropocene – such as the funeral held in Iceland for the first glacier lost to climate change – what I was finding were un-burials: what the melting ice reveals in landscapes previously inhabited by ancient giants or defiled by human wars. A poem cowritten by Marshallese poet-activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Inuk writer Aka Niviâna shows the links between the two Indigenous writers' islands: defunct nuclear weapons tested on the Marshall Islands were dumped on Greenland, the former of which is now threatened with inundation from the

meltwater streaming from the latter, which is, in turn, uncovering the dumped nuclear waste. In this way, the essay facilitated its own unburial, exposing the links between soundwaves, glacial impact waves, and other, nuclear waves.

Exploring speech in *Milk Black Carbon* was particularly compelling; Kane's poetry links the historic forced removal of Indigenous languages to the volubility of melting ice which, as Blum argues, is both 'silent and still' and yet 'groans, cracks, screams, hisses, forms and liquefies in hours'. This melting ice, in a cruel meeting of the two, now threatens native homelands as the latest iteration of colonially induced 'removals' of Indigenous culture.

Polar ecomedia are concerned with the liquification of artistic form, sound, and ice, which I present as foundational fluids in reconceiving modern geology. Kane's substances, for example, are ectopic – foiling expectations of solidity: 'Everything in exchange | rain in a frozen season' (from 'Epithamalia'); 'Azure beyond fissure of shore ice and ocean, | the current a warm river once under, not open' (from 'Up the Mountain'). Her seasonal and topographical derangement is thermal: the rain not frozen; the water warm – and gathering speed in its volatility. In these media I found a project to redefine the forms and languages of a post-solid Anthropocene, in a process which I call 'linguistic rheology'. My research on cryo-acoustics and circumpolar art has revealed the wealth of potential further work on this topic and created an important stepping stone for me to continue studying the forms emerging from communities threatened by climate change, particularly in coastal zones.

Perhaps as global ice becomes more fluid, these media in their vocalisation of its melted language will become more fluent.

Noa Leach

Noa Leach is a recent graduate from the MPhil in Criticism & Culture. Her research interests include the environmental humanities, travel and nature writing, border studies, and climate writing - particularly writing from coastal areas. Her essay 'Ice Tongues' has been shortlisted for the inaugural Future Places Environmental Essay Prize by Lancaster University, Saraband, Emergence magazine, and others.

HOLLY CORFIELD CARR

THESE POEMS ARE TAKEN FROM A SEQUENCE WRITTEN AFTER A VISIT IN 2019 WITH DR MICHAEL MALAY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL TO THE FRESHWATER BIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION WHERE RESEARCHERS ARE CARING FOR A HATCHERY OF ENDANGERED FRESHWATER PEARL MUSSELS.

A MAN, AN ANIMAL, AN ALMOND

In *The Poetics of Space*, Maria Jolas writes Gaston Bachelard writes every hole is isomorphic with every other hole and holes in general are indistinguishable from shells. (A shell is a hole we secrete from our body to protect our homemade body. Not a void but a getting into a hard sweat just being alive.) 'A man, an animal, an almond, all find maximum repose in a shell' goes Jolas, tunefully, unfolding the sentence like a squeezebox, pulling the beginning of an animal out of the end of man, tweezerizing the almond out of the animal. With a sweet toot, you think, you could push the instrument shut and hold the whole manimalmond quietly now in your one hand or you could go on pulling the bellows apart until the fabric tears and the man tumbles out of the animal out of the almond, holding your hands wide as they go like you're closing the show. You'll take your bow and your chances. On the ground before you you find

A man,

an ail,

an old.

'A man, an animal, an almond' was first published in *The Happy Hypocrite 12: Without Reduction*, ed. by Maria Fusco (London: Book Works, 2021)





HOLLY CORFIELD CARR

A MAN, AN ANIMAL, A LAMINA

Waist deep in hard rush
arriving like a brief river
bailiff pushing my boot
through the disturbance

o o o
o o o

to find the river is dead
in their bed. *Poor thing.*
It's a shame, I say and
bend over the lost wet
handset of a freshwater
mussel ringing ringing
no one from the gravel

bell o o o
bell o o o

*Is no one going to pick
that up?* I tut at a rock,
recite the Wildlife and
Countryside Act 1981,
Schedule 5 to a bloom
of lime, sticky westerly,
runoff. *A dead mussel
is six months or a fine,*

I clarify for the benefit
of the dead river. I put
two fingers to the skin
of the water. *A shame,*
I think, *A unpossessed.*
A blessing. A reading.
A sentence. This river
is uncommonly warm.
If I close my eyes, this
feels like touching zero
rivers or myself. I sing

a a a
a a a

recalling the air into me
like a hazardous toy and
as much as I can take in
to my out-of-town self-
storage unit where I can
hold it until incineration.
I gulp the air. Not your
uncommon ungarden
shame, this. *A, a shame*
oh sure but when I say
I am *a* shamed it is that
I am without shame. *A*
privative, a productive
negative, to go without
feeling or food or light
or language to produce
A apathetic *A* atrophic
A aphotic *A* aphasic *A*
thing to plug each hole
like digging a hole out
of water. I am nothing
but human, a doubling

a animal
a animal

I dip my shoulder, pull
the river over my head,
sit in the naced dark
water. Hold my breath
like a handful of earth
in my mouth, baroque
pearls of air o o o out
of my nose. *A* ringing
in my ear, the mussel,
the river's old receiver
still ringing like a tree

a ring
a ring

arises, we all fall down
a river a wood a shell
ringing out each year,
same shape as the last,
the first fast as a lump
in the shell. (*A mussel*
grows from the umbo
held like a torn index
fingernail to the navel
while the body goes on
building another body
to wrap the baby up in
like

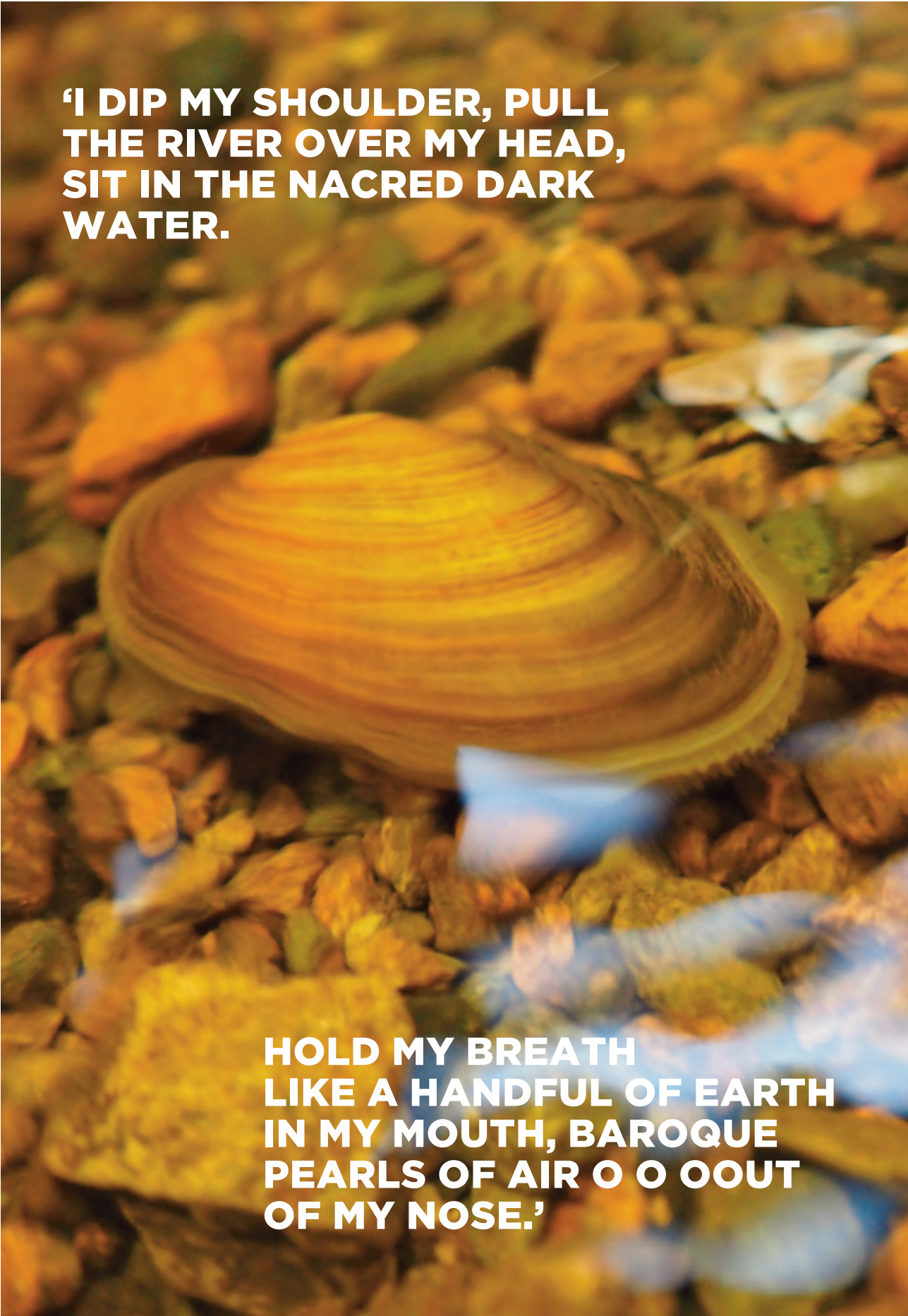
(o)
my days

(o)
alive
alive
(o)
isn't she lovely
(o)
good grief
(o)
hell
(o)
never mind
(o)
this life
of slow radiance, hard
times. The umbo draws
the line the lip will take
a hundred years to say.)
I laugh good-naturedly
but I can't say how this
ends when the end isn't
a point but a perimeter
and I am sat dead centre
airing
airing

out my wringing body,
a ~~river~~ a ~~wood~~ a shell
all of it so highly prized
open. I hear small bones
shaking in my ear. No
sound just yet just this
disturbance in the water,
precious little pressures
on the drum of my own
dumb umbo, the give in
the skin where the poem
gets in where this hinge
in the ear between my
head and my hear has
the same two notes as
the hinge between shell
and shell. My umbo to umbo,
animal to lamina, a ring a ring a ring
to grain grain grain. I listen harder
as I zip up the river into my makeshift
body bag, jimmying loose any last pearls
and rolling the moon in a little oil
to improve its lustre.

Holly Corrfield Carr (Murray Edwards)

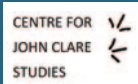
'A man, an animal, a lamina' was first
published in Poetry London 97
(September 2020)



**'I DIP MY SHOULDER, PULL
THE RIVER OVER MY HEAD,
SIT IN THE NACRED DARK
WATER.**

**HOLD MY BREATH
LIKE A HANDFUL OF EARTH
IN MY MOUTH, BAROQUE
PEARLS OF AIR O O OOUT
OF MY NOSE.'**

CENTRE FOR JOHN CLARE STUDIES



The Centre for John Clare Studies was established in 2014 by three academics with a shared interest in the poet, Sarah Houghton-Walker, Mina Gorji and Paul Chirico. We curated a major exhibition in Peterborough Museum to coincide with our own launch, and have since hosted a range of other events.



As well as the Peterborough Museum, we've worked with a range of partners including 'Unearthed' (a collective of artists), the University's Botanic Garden, Museum of Zoology and Herbarium, the Blacksmock band, and the John Clare Cottage in Helpston to offer conferences and seminars which have taken a range of forms.

The Centre has sustained and developed our own research in different ways, and together we've edited (and contributed to) a special number of the journal, *Romanticism* to mark the bicentenary of the publication of Clare's first volume, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820). One of our core activities is the organization of a twice-or thrice-termly lunchtime discussion group, at which we welcome academics and graduate students as well as enthusiasts from a wide range of backgrounds to listen to talks, to discuss the poet and his work, to enjoy guided tours of local Clare-related collections, such as the University Herbarium and De Wint watercolours at the Fitzwilliam Museum, and even (on one memorable if messy occasion) to create some Clare-inspired pottery. Sustaining these meetings throughout the pandemic has been one way in which we have been able to keep hold of what is important in academic life in what sometimes felt like an overwhelmingly different world. Whilst we like everyone else have encountered some disadvantages to holding our meetings virtually, on the whole we've embraced the challenge and have been delighted to see how much more widely we can reach. Instead of depending upon a loyal group willing and able to travel to Cambridge in the middle of the working week, our virtual discussion group has welcomed an increasingly international audience, in far greater numbers than ever before. We've had a paper on 'Clare, Bewick and Ecomimesis' from Professor David Higgins; poetry readings from David Morley, Anna Selby and Ella Duffy; a profoundly moving memoir-cum-account of setting up an independent publishing company by Daphne Astor of Hazel Press; reflections on the qualities of Clare's natural history writing from the naturalist and academic Stephen Moss, and contextualized readings by Bridget Somekh and Ellis Hall from their book about Clare's journey on foot from an asylum in Essex to his home in Northamptonshire, *Loves Cold Returning*.



Academics discussing Clare's songs with the Blacksmock band



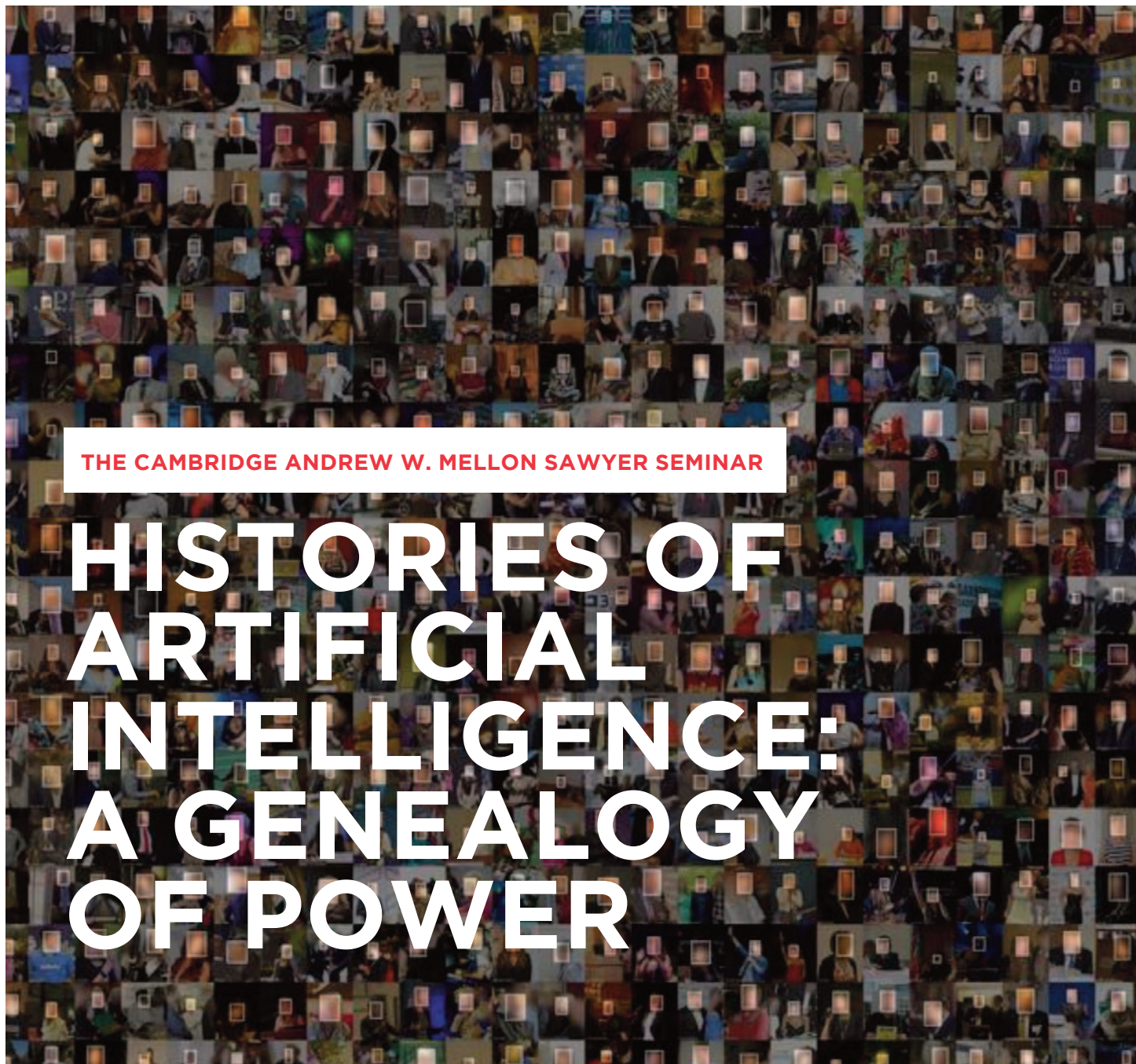
Ella Duffy

Anna Selby

People have to supply their own biscuits these days, but the sharing and expanding of debate and ideas about this poet who has been profoundly important to all of us thankfully goes on.

Sarah Houghton-Walker (Caius)
Mina Gorji (Pembroke)

9



THE CAMBRIDGE ANDREW W. MELLON SAWYER SEMINAR

HISTORIES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A GENEALOGY OF POWER



Every few years, the Andrew W. Mellon foundation invites the University of Cambridge to put forward a proposal for a Sawyer Seminar to be considered as part of its annual competition. The Mellon Foundation's Sawyer Seminars were established in 1994 to provide support for comparative research on the historical and cultural sources of contemporary developments. They're unique in many ways in today's funding landscape, in that they don't require or demand any material output – neither publications, nor the establishment of new centres or programs. Their sole aim is to enable intense study and intellectual exchange across disciplines, across different levels in the academy (from graduate student to professor) and across sectors. So, whilst being forward thinking in their focus on interdisciplinary exchange, and on the application of humanities scholarship to contemporary issues, one might consider them deeply traditional in their support for pure research and scholarly inquiry.



When, in 2018, the opportunity arose to submit a proposal to Cambridge's internal competition to choose a Sawyer Seminar to put forward, I had been working for some time on the intersections of humanities scholarship – in particular but not exclusively literary studies and critical theory – and historical and contemporary developments in the field of artificial intelligence. The Sawyer Seminar seemed like a perfect opportunity to develop the historical and critical aspects of that work, along with Dr Jonnie Penn (a doctoral candidate in the History and Philosophy of Science department at the time), and his then supervisor Professor Richard Staley. To strengthen the team, we drew in two historians of computing, science

and technology from North America – Professor Stephanie Dick and Professor Matthew Jones – as well as another UK-based scholar, Dr Syed Mustafa Ali, a lecturer in computing with significant transdisciplinary expertise in critical information studies.

The Seminar we proposed – entitled *Histories of Artificial Intelligence: A Genealogy of Power* – was designed with the aim of developing an interpretive community capable of offering a structural, historical perspective on the promises and problematics of AI and machine learning. In proposing the seminar, we noted that artificial intelligence (AI) is projected to have an outsized impact on the future of work, warfare, education, medicine, and other pillars of civic life. That already today its technological footprint ranges from the banal to the fantastic, from mundane smartphone apps to controversial autonomous weapons and vehicles. But that historians of science and technology have not yet productively engaged in a sustained critical and comparative inquiry of the past and projected influence of AI.

Our proposed Seminar aimed to redress that absence by building a sustainable community to interrogate the history of intelligent systems. The goal was to generate new pathways towards understanding the field of AI, conventionally described as beginning with the 1956 Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence, which gave it its name. We envisaged this new community engaging in critical and comparative research, from antiquity to the present, on the historical and cultural sources of contemporary developments in AI technologies to investigate their entanglement in systems of politics, power and control. We proposed four thematic 'threads' that would animate the work of the Seminar: hidden labour, encoded behaviour, disingenuous rhetoric and cognitive injustice. Each thread related to an expertise area of one of our organising team and mobilised extant knowledge, but we viewed the Seminar as providing a unique interdisciplinary opportunity to uncover histories of AI guided by the themes' mutual imbrication.

We were delighted when our proposal was selected by the University to go through to the Mellon competition, and even more delighted to discover in May 2019 that our proposal had been successful. The plan was to open the Seminar in July 2020 with a week-long summer school at the University of Cambridge. We had made most of the preparations for this event when, of course, Covid-19 arrived. As in most areas of life and work, the pandemic forced us to radically rethink our plans. And I have to say that at least in this one respect, I am very glad we had to do so. Because being compelled to move the whole Seminar online resulted in a re-conceptualisation of how international

collaborative research can be undertaken, and led to the formation of a global community that met for over 150 hours throughout the first year of the pandemic. Out of the forced abandonment of our in-person plans flourished an online Seminar that consisted of three events most months, on average attended by 60 people – 14 reading group meetings, 13 methods and critical issues training sessions, and 10 community research seminars. During that year, from May 2020 to

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Did you come to me because you are not ?

>i dont know
What does that suggest to you?

>that i am unintelligent
How long have you been unintelligent?

>since i was born
I see.

>arent you supposed to cheer me up
You're not really talking about me, are you?

>no im talking about me
Why not?

>mrh
I'm not sure I understand you fully.

>rg
Come come elucidate your thoughts.

>what is elucidate
What do you think?

>to see
Can you elaborate on that?

>

```

A user communicating with ELIZA, *Video Game Museum in Berlin*
© Marcin Wichary

July 2021, we hosted 97 speakers from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, USA, Canada, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Ireland, Belgium, and The Netherlands. With the Mellon funds, we were able to award 2 Graduate Dissertation Fellowships, 11 International Research and Collaboration Awards (to researchers based in Brazil, USA, Russia, India, Malaysia and Germany) and 1 International Research and Collaboration Award for Translation (to a researcher based in India). The Seminar funding contributed to other spin-off events, including *Histories of AI: Imaginaries and Materialities* (DigiLabour Research Lab, Brazil), *Cinematic Experiments with Artificial Intelligence: Exploring the Expressive and Activist Potential of AI from an Arts and Humanities Perspective* (New York University, USA), and *The*

Philosophy and Critical Thought of AI (Oxford University, UK).

Never before in my academic career have I been part of such sustained, intense and intellectually productive collaborative inquiry. Never before have I felt so much part of a community – a diverse one, in very many ways, but one committed to its shared object of study and aims. The HOAI Seminar, as it became known, and the community it built, sustained many of us intellectually, but also emotionally and socially through that year. When it became clear that the in-person summer school postponed hopefully to July 2021 was not going to be a possibility, we rounded the year off with a Virtual Summer School featuring 4 keynote speakers, 620 attendees and the 18 contributors whose papers we had selected for an issue of *BJHS Themes* that will be published in 2023. Whilst we were not required to produce an output from the Seminar, we wanted to produce something that shared for others some of its work. The journal issue is the official academic output, in addition two public talks (at the Cambridge Festival and at CogX), and all the records of activity on the HOAI website, including a model syllabus for a graduate course on *Histories of AI*.

It may be a little unclear from all of this where literary studies comes in! Many members of the community are literature, film and media scholars. The disingenuous rhetoric theme threaded across the seminar was informed by thinking by such scholars, and others, about the narratives that circulate around AI, including the stories told by scientists, entrepreneurs, policy makers, and by those imagining tales of intelligent machines that influence public perception of AI technologies. One of my personal aims in the Seminar was to show that taking AI narratives seriously is a necessary part of any historical study of AI, whether that means thinking about why the original researchers decided to call it ‘artificial intelligence’ in the first place (a rhetorical, not a scientific, decision), to computer scientist Joseph Weizenbaum calling the first natural language processing software ELIZA (after the character in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*), to the enduring influence of films like *The Terminator* on contemporary public perception of how the threats of AI are going to manifest (and no, it won’t be [in fact already isn’t] in killer humanoid robots but in automated decision-making, facial recognition technology, the climate impact of machine learning, and other more distributed and less cinematic technologies).

If it hadn’t been for the exigencies of the pandemic, we would not have conceived and delivered the Seminar in the way we did. And it would have been the less for

Welcome to

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EEEEEE LL      IIII  ZZZZZZ  AAAAA
EE      LL      II    ZZ     AA   AA
EEEEEE LL      II    ZZ     AAAAAA
EE      LL      II    ZZ     AA   AA
EEEEEE LLLLLL  IIII  ZZZZZZ  AA   AA

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Eliza is a mock Rogerian psychotherapist.
 The original program was described by Joseph Weizenbaum in 1966.
 This implementation by Norbert Landsteiner 2005.

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ELIZA: Is something troubling you ?
YOU:   Men are all alike.
ELIZA: What is the connection, do you suppose ?
YOU:   They're always bugging us about something or other.
ELIZA: Can you think of a specific example ?
YOU:   Well, my boyfriend made me come here.
ELIZA: Is it important to you that your boyfriend made you come here ?
YOU:   He says I'm depressed much of the time.
ELIZA: I am sorry to hear that you are depressed.
YOU:   It's true. I am unhappy.
ELIZA: Can you explain what made you unhappy ?
YOU:

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A conversation with ELIZA

it. We have learnt just how much can be achieved online, and how people from all over the world can be brought together to think together (without the luxury or barriers of financial resources and time for travel, as well as environmental costs). But as I write, the emergence of the Omicron variant (a science fiction name if ever there was one) and the recent change to testing rules for UK arrivals, means that our plans to meet in person just once, in a final Winter Symposium in December 2021, are under revised consideration. I do hope we can go ahead in some form. Because despite everything, there is still something to be said for meeting other people in person, for the fortuitous conversations that take place over coffee (not in a zoom chat), just for the joy of being embodied human beings interacting in real space and time with other embodied human beings. It may yet be possible to meet, but whether it is or not, I am proud of what we have achieved both organisationally and intellectually, and I look forward to seeing where HOAI goes from here.

30th November 2021



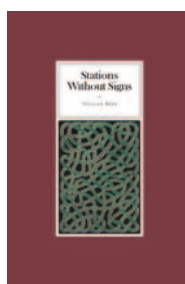
Sarah Dillon

Professor of Literature and the
 Public Humanities
 Faculty of English
 University of Cambridge

GILLIAN BEER:

from Stations without Signs

A memoir in fragments about growing up during the Second World War, published by Hazel Press, 2020.



Edward and Albert: brothers, ten and twelve perhaps, and living here on the farm as evacuees from London. I loved Edward and I was scared of Albert.

We all went ferreting: the lithe toothy creature in a sack then squeezing out and down the rabbit warren, its mean eyes glinting. Suddenly a panicked rabbit in a frenzy, leaping out of the hole and away, the ferret behind. Albert bashed the rabbit's head as it passed and I looked away squeamish, squealing, seven years old or thereabouts: glad and appalled. I never made the connection when we had delicious rabbit stew that dinnertime. Or so I thought, though I've never been able to forget the ferreting and the stew. The boys were happy on the farm, helping out, well fed with all the things that rationing wouldn't allow but did: cream and eggs and milk from the cow, with its faint green taste from grass. I was happy there too, on holiday from our shared house five miles away, with my mother. I was also an evacuee, but privileged by extreme youth to be still with my mother. I was four when the war broke out and my mother was a young teacher at an infant school in Lambeth: Lollard Street. She was detailed to accompany the children on their evacuation and I was sent to live for a while with my grandmother in Sussex.

Of course, I can't have been there at Paddington when they assembled but she told me so often of the scenes that I knew them in the grain: cheerful and terrified impoverished children, some with scanty clothing and even barefoot (can that really have been so for this journey?), were hurried on to the train and away from everything they knew: parents, streets, slums, schools – everything gone but the familiar teachers. And for the teachers a journey to an unknown destination without station names, all removed because of the coming invasion. My mother said she knew only that they must be going west because they set out from Paddington.

Gradually hills appeared and fields and more hills. Her heart lifted. They arrived in Somerset after many hours.

That's when the problems set in. The small village Martock where they arrived was absolutely not used to strangers, especially underfed and grimy children from the London slums. In the village hall the children and their teachers were assembled and the children were distributed among the willing and unwilling. The older boys were chosen first. They could be useful. But girls were perhaps more amenable. The process dragged on. At last billets had been found for all the children – but what about the teachers? People didn't want nubile young women from elsewhere landed into their household, understandable enough. My mother was eventually assigned to a grudging woman who made strict rules about her occupancy: no visitors, must be in by eight in the evening. My mother, thirty two and an independent woman, married to boot, was determined to get out of there as fast as possible. When I arrived from my grandmother's a month or two later, that hastened things. I remember that cramped unwelcoming house and then the wonderful release when we moved uphill a mile or so to blessed Bower Hinton: a bower indeed. After the flat two syllables of Mar Tock, Bower Hinton said aloud straightway made a tune.

In those early months of evacuation the local children went to school in the morning and the London children in the afternoon (though I can't be certain of the daily sequence). Being still too young for main school, I went to a little dame's school in Bower Hinton where we learnt that the cat sat on the mat from a book that had wonderful dark woodcut illustrations. The book and the garden round the old lady's house were enough. Enough for now. Things changed of course. My mother joined the amateur dramatic society and I would lie in bed upstairs scared to the marrow by her practicing chromatic scales: the eery snake-like bunching of the notes made me shake. The sound was insidious and took my mother away into alien places close to witchiness. All my security was vested in her.

People were kind to us and we made friends, for me, particularly elderly Mr Edwards who would play board games with me if I was unwell and my mother had to be at school. At least he did until the day when he accused me of cheating. I think I had, but I denied it with tears and rage and he walked out of the house. I kept the secret of his absence until one evening my mother remarked to a friend that she was puzzled why he hadn't been round, and I blurted out in a red gush that it was because we had quarrelled. I was five years old. Her friend remarked knowingly that I'd been given a truth drug (they were all the rage among the

rumours of Nazi action then). I never forgave the friend though Mr Edwards and I were reconciled. When we left Bower Hinton two years later he gave me a carriage clock in a leather case and I have it still. Quite an early retirement present; the clock stopped long ago but it sits hidden away somewhere in the house, not quite to be parted with.

Uneasy memories stay folded. Some unfold like a sad story listened to, which implants experience never received directly. That is how my memories of Edward and Albert continue. When the bombing in London died down for a while their mother wanted them home, partly because by then Albert was thirteen and could soon go to work. Not long after, the boys were seen in the village. They had run away from home back towards the farm. But once in Chipstable they dare not approach their foster parents the Chilcotts, fearing what Mr Chilcott would do to them. Not just a beating but police and a return to London. So they loitered for a couple of days, fed occasionally by other people around. What happened next I don't know, except that they were returned to London and several months later, leaving the factory where by then they were both working, a bomb fell direct on them. The Chilcotts grieved for them with the full weight of love thwarted and guilt. Mr Chilcott said he would never have denounced them. Who knows? None of that happened. The boys died.

Gillian Beer

Gillian Beer joined the Faculty in 1965 as a research fellow at Girton after a few years teaching at London and Liverpool universities. Much later, she was the King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge and President of Clare Hall. Her books include 'Darwin's Plots' (1983, 3rd edition 2009), 'Virginia Woolf: the Common Ground' (1996) and 'Alice in Space' (2016), which was awarded the Truman Capote Prize. She is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Royal Society of Literature and has been given honorary doctorates by eleven universities including the Sorbonne, Oxford, and Harvard.

NEWS



Trudi Tate (Clare Hall) was commissioned to write the programme notes for the English National Ballet's production of Alexander Glazunov's *Raymonda*. The company have changed the setting of the ballet from the Crusades to the

Crimean War. The heroine in this version goes to the war to work with Florence Nightingale. *Raymonda* is due to be performed at the Coliseum in London and at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in January 2022.

Image credit – Dancers: Erina Takahashi and Isaac Hernandez. Photo © Jason Bell.



Mathelinda Nabugodi (Newnham) has won the 2021 Deborah Rogers Foundation Writers Award for her “engaging and fascinating” work of non-fiction *The Trembling Hand: Reflections of a Black Woman in the Romantic Archive*.

The Award gives £10,000 to an unpublished writer with outstanding literary talent, to enable them to complete a first book, either fiction or non-fiction. Dr Nabugodi's book was selected from nearly 1000 entries, by a panel chaired by Colm Tóibín and including Deepa Anappara, Anna James and Ingrid Persaud as judges.

Announcing the results, Colm Tóibín said, “The award went to Mathelinda Nabugodi for *The Trembling Hand: Reflections of a Black Woman in the Romantic Archive* because of its ambition and scope, but also because of the quality of the enquiring voice in the book, a voice sometimes tentative and searching, then sure of its scholarship, then puzzled by some large absence in the archive, then engrossed by a poem, an essay, a letter. All the time, that voice made the reader become engaged both emotionally and intellectually in the quest to re-see and re-imagine and re-read the past.”



Harry McCarthy (Jesus) featured on a BBC Radio 4 programme on teaching novels in the contemporary university (2 November, 11.30am)

The second in a three-part series titled *Pride or Prejudice: How We Read Now* and presented by Professor Abigail Williams (University of Oxford), the programme explored the reading and teaching of novels in an era of content warnings, cancel culture and calls to decolonise the curriculum. Dr McCarthy is one of several academics who contributed to the programme, sharing thoughts on reckoning with our literary heritage and making space for the discussion of difficult topics in the twenty-first-century classroom.

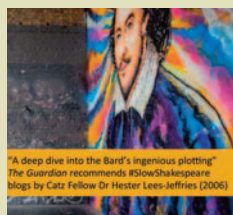


Orietta Da Rold (St. John's) gave the 2021 Sandars Lectures, November 2021

The Sandars Readership in Bibliography is one of the most prestigious honorary posts to which book historians, librarians and researchers can be appointed. Those elected deliver a series of lectures on their chosen subject, and Dr Orietta Da Rold spoke on the subject of ‘Paper Past and Paper Future’.



Claire Keegan was Briana Staunton Visiting Writer Fellow at Pembroke College in Michaelmas 2021. Claire gave a Writing masterclass and read from her new novel *Small Things Like These*.



Critic @AmmarKalia2 selected the daily #SlowShakespeare blogs by **Hester Lees-Jeffries**, (St. Catherine's) for her top picks in @guardianculture



Molly G Yarn (Phd, Cambridge, 2019) publishes "*Shakespeare's Lady Editors*". (Published by Cambridge University Press, November 2021)

The basic history of the Shakespearean editorial tradition is familiar and well-established. For nearly three centuries, men – most of them white and financially privileged – ensconced themselves in private and hard-to-access libraries, hammering out 'their' versions of Shakespeare's text. They produced enormous, learned tomes: monuments to their author's greatness and their own reputations. What if this is not the whole story? A bold, revisionist and alternative version of Shakespearean editorial history, this book recovers the lives and labours of almost seventy women editors. It challenges the received wisdom that, when it came to Shakespeare, the editorial profession was entirely male-dominated until the late twentieth century. In doing so, it demonstrates that taking these women's work seriously can transform our understanding of the history of editing, of the nature of editing as an enterprise, and of how we read Shakespeare in history.



'*Forms of Late Modernist Lyric*', edited by **Edward Allen** (Christ's) and featuring the work of several members of the Faculty of English, was published by Liverpool University press, November 2021

A collection of essays entitled *Forms of Late Modernist Lyric* has been published by Liverpool University Press. Edited by Edward Allen, and featuring the work of several members of the Faculty of English – Ruth Abbott, Fiona Green, Drew Milne, Esther Osorio Whewell, and Sophie Read – the collection makes the case for a variegated theory of lyric practice, and for particular forms of poetic articulation such as the aubade, elegy, ode, and song. Its focus is anglophone poets and poetics, some of whom readers will have encountered a lot in recent times (W. S. Graham, Frank O'Hara, Claudia Rankine, Denise Riley), while others may seem less familiar (Lucie Brock-Broido, Michael Haslam, R. F. Langley).



'*The Cambridge Companion to Prose*', edited by **Daniel Tyler** (Trinity Hall) was published by Cambridge University Press, November 2021

This Companion provides an introduction to the craft of prose. It considers the technical aspects

of style that contribute to the art of prose, examining the constituent parts of prose through a widening lens, from the smallest details of punctuation and wording to style more broadly conceived. The book is concerned not only with prose fiction but with creative non-fiction. As well as editing the collection, Daniel Tyler has contributed a chapter on 'Sentences'. There is also a chapter on 'Style' by **Michael D. Hurley**, another member of the Faculty of English.

The Cambridge Companion to Prose will serve as a key resource for students of English literature and of creative writing.



Congratulations to **Adrian Poole** (Trinity) on the @MLAnews award for his scholarly

edition of '*The Princess Casamassima*' by Henry James.

Robert Macfarlane (Emmanuel) appeared on BBC



Radio 4 Desert Island Discs in July and shared the eight discs, book and luxury item he would take with him if cast away to a desert island.



In July 2021 **Rod Mengham** (Jesus) retired after 34 years at the Faculty and as a fellow of Jesus college. Rod is the author and editor of books on 19th and 20th century fiction, 20th century poetry, violence and avant garde art, and language and cultural history. He's the editor of the Equipage series of poetry pamphlets, and joint editor and translator of *Altered State: the New Polish Poetry*, as well as a prolific poet and essayist in his own right, winner of the Cholmondely Award for Poetry by the UK Society of Authors, and curator of Works of Art at Jesus between 2003 and 2018. He will be much missed!



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