Panel I – Narratives of Childhood

Eris Leigh (English Literature)

‘I don’t know enough texts’: Functions of intertextuality in Elinor M Brent-Dyer’s Chalet School series

Originally published between 1925 and 1970, and consisting of 58 titles, Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's Chalet School series was, as feminist critic Rosemary Auchmuty has pointed out, ‘the longest series of books for girls [...] and the second longest juvenile series ever written’, and yet it has attracted little critical attention. Within her Chalet School series, Brent-Dyer incorporated a variety of cultural references, ranging from religion to sport, from history to current affairs. The original hardback editions of the books underwent a variety of changes to adapt them for the paperback market of the 1960s - 1990s, and the editing and abridgement process frequently impacted the cultural references, with some being simplified, omitted, or, occasionally, even updated. This paper focuses on the more than 1200 literary references contained within the series, which range from the obscure to the instantly recognisable, and even include a selection of entirely fictitious books and authors. Looking at the ways in which these references can be categorised, this paper will consider the relationship between entertainment and education, the effects of the changes incorporated into the paperback editions and their relation to the ‘contemporary’ world of children’s literature, and the impact the references may have had on readers of the books.

Rachel Beaney (Modern Languages)

I believe that children are the future: Houston, Edelman, Fisher and Symbolic Childhood in Spanish Civil War Propaganda

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) the image of the innocent, figural child cropped up in posters, leaflets and ideological discourse disseminated by both the Nationalist and Republican sides of the conflict inside and outside Spain. At times, materials from both sides sing to the tune of Houston's 1985 hit Greatest Love of All - ‘I believe the children are our future’. Indeed, the world over ‘children and childhood become instrumental to the process
of nation state building. As Bloomfield has recently highlighted ‘as photographic subjects, child victims of war met the requirements of high-energy propaganda of agitation: the need to address and affect individuals within a collective, and to elicit and capitalise on base sentiments against an enemy.’ Lee Edelman also argues that the child represents the ‘telos of social order’ and shapes socio-politically charged structures. Symbolising heteronormative futurity, the child ‘remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention.’ This paper will explore the image of the Civil War era symbolic child with due reference to these notions. I posit that an interdisciplinary exploration of this allegorical child, which incorporates concepts from childhood studies, queer theory and cultural studies, enables us to rethink historical propaganda and notions of futurity.

Through an examination of the image of the child in Auxilio social pamphlets, posters from the ministerio de propaganda and images circulated in newspapers in the UK at the time of the conflict, I call into question idealised notions of the innocent, passive child fetishized by Spanish society’s heteronormative reproductive futurism.

Panel 2 – Transnational Identities

Julie Primon (Creative Writing)

Negotiating with Language(s): Represented object and representational means

Meir Sternberg wrote in 1978 that ‘literary art […] finds itself confronted by a formidable mimetic challenge: how to represent the reality of polylingual discourse through a communicative medium which is normally unilingual.’ Although he was, in his paper, discussing translation and literary narratives that attempt to reflect in their text multiple languages spoken within the story, this challenge is also valid for English-speaking writers who choose for their narrative a foreign setting.
It is an accepted practice to write, in English, a story set in a different country; the reader assumes that an act of translation has taken place, allowing them to understand dialogue that might happen in an unfamiliar language. However, when the characters are native to the foreign setting, the question of accurate representation poses itself: should the writer aim to include foreign language in their text, in order to be more truthful?

This presentation will look at different ways of representing a foreign setting – and particularly a foreign language – in English fiction. I will also give examples taken from my own PhD novel, and reflect over the reasoning behind some of my choices.

Josie Cray (English Literature)

A Houseboat of One’s Own

‘At last,’ Anaïs Nin exclaimed in her diary, ‘we have stepped off the earth […] into water’. After relocating to the bustling French capital in the autumn of 1936, Nin began renting the houseboat ‘La Belle Aurore’ on the river Seine. The houseboat becomes a prominent setting in Volume 2 and Fire as a writing retreat and a secret place to host her numerous lovers. It comes to double as both a liminal space where conversations take place between Nin’s fluid texts and fluid subjectivities, and as a metaphor for Nin’s unstable and disruptive position in literary studies. Across the expurgated and unexpurgated diaries, the houseboat emerges as a space where identities proliferate and the boundaries between public/private, inside/outside, fixed/unfixed, domestic/non-domestic, and European/American identity are unsettled.

This paper is concerned in particular with Nin’s negotiation of transnational subjectivity and focuses on the houseboat as a site for the transposition of South American culture and domestic imagery into the Parisian setting. Nicknamed ‘Nanakepichu’—a Quechua word meaning ‘not a home’—by her lover Gonzalo Moré, ‘La Belle Aurore’ is a liminal site where Nin recovers and reconfigures her national identities. With its oversized furniture, lamps that flood the rooms in a blue glow, and combination of unexpected household spaces and erotic hideaways, the houseboat calls into question conventional configurations of ‘domestic’
Elisabeth Jones (English Literature)

‘False Frenchwomen’: Staging the French Queens of England in Shakespeare’s History Plays

When Richard, Duke of York is defeated in battle in *Henry VI, Part 3*, his tirade against his captor, Margaret of Anjou, is framed in terms of her transgressive identity. In criticising her merciless violence, Richard not only decries her lack of feminine ‘softness’, but also – although she is Queen of England – calls her ‘she-wolf of France’ and ‘false Frenchwoman’. Many of the 1590s history plays articulate similar anxieties about the boundaries of English (and gendered) identity, yet these plays, written and performed at the height of Elizabeth I’s reign, also give a scope to the voices of female characters that is unprecedented in English historiography. Focusing on Shakespeare’s French queens, from Eleanor in *King John* to Margaret in the first tetralogy, this paper argues that the history plays’ queens offer commentaries in relation to both discourses of nationalism and the construction of history.

Panel 3 – Ecocritical Perspectives

Jim Scown (English Literature)

Soil Exhaustion in Dickens: From the mud of *Bleak House* to the dust of *Our Mutual Friend*

Allen Macduffie (2014), Justine Pizzo (2014) and Jesse Oak Taylor (2016) have each read Dickens’s fiction through an ecocritical lens. Pizzo and Taylor focus on the foggy atmosphere of *Bleak House* (1853) while MacDuffie considers the ecological resonances of
energy circulating in Dickens’s satirical portrayal of Chancery and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). This paper considers the representation of soils across these two novels.

MacDuffie argues that agricultural scientists continued to see the world in terms of providential cycles of regeneration and decay, despite advances in energy physics, but I argue that mid-century debates in British agriculture betray an acute awareness of soils impacted by the second law of thermodynamics: Articles in *The Examiner* (Nov 2, 1861) and *The London Review* (July 23, 1864), covering debates between agricultural scientists J.B. Lawes and Justus von Liebig over the exhaustive properties of chemical fertilisers, predicted ‘certain, though it may be distant ruin’ from modern farming practices.

I will explore how Dickens engages with these soil-exhaustion debates in his novels. As the ‘crust upon crust of mud’ (13) in *Bleak House* turns to the ‘dust-mounds’ (85) of *Our Mutual Friend*, I argue that Dickens grapples with the question of whether soils should be considered a renewable or non-renewable resource.

Seth Armstrong-Twigg (English Literature)

‘The most stinking brook in Britain’: River Pollution in Jack Jones’s *Black Parade*

The source of the River Taff can be found high up on the grassy slopes of the Brecon Beacons in south Wales. However, before it flows out into the Severn Estuary at Cardiff, the river meanders its way down through the many former coal mining communities that constitute the aptly named Taff Valley. Arguably, the de facto capital of this loosely defined peri-urban region is Merthyr Tydfil, and it was here that on 24th November 1884, Jack Jones – coal miner, politician and writer – was born.

In the late 1800s, Merthyr was in the midst of an industrial boom that had transformed the town from a small, rural community of sheep farmers, to one of the largest settlements in Wales. The vast influx of labour into Merthyr, at first from rural Wales and then, later on, from England and Ireland, had a significant impact on the town’s already inadequate housing and infrastructure, and soon living conditions became intolerable. Numerous outbreaks of water-borne diseases such as cholera and typhoid were reported due to the lack of sanitation, clearly intensified by the increase in population, as well as the polluting industries that used the already scarce water sources as a depository for their waste. As a young boy, Jack Jones would have been all too aware of the town’s water pollution crisis, as across the street from his house, ran the heavily contaminated Morlais Brook.

This paper will consider the history of river pollution in industrial south Wales through a reading of Jack Jones’s second novel, *Black Parade* (1935), in which the contamination of local water sources in Victorian Merthyr Tydfil is represented in vivid detail.
Liam Bell (English Literature)

Ecophobia and the Robinsonade: haunted by animals and environments

This paper builds on the concept of ecophobia, a developing area in environmental criticism that recognises the irrational fear of the nonhuman. The work of Simon Estok establishes some of the notions of ecophobia and why it is necessary for research. Understanding our anxieties that have become embedded into natural environments is essential in conceptualising human and nonhuman relations. The Robinsonade genre is ideally placed to open discussions into key areas of human / nonhuman interaction. This is due in part to characters’ proximity to textual ecosystems and the length of time they spend in environments that could be considered wildernesses. The fear of animals haunts the edges of the Robinsonade and magnifies any threat they could possibly pose. This paper will discuss themes of abjection, anxiety, and aggression directed towards nonhuman animals and environments in *Lord of the Flies* and *The Wasp Factory*, with reference to *Robinson Crusoe*. Specifically, it will analyse the cultural fear of forests, the fear of being consumed, and the apparent omnipresence of animals in the wild.

Panel 4 – Agency and the Female Subject

Devika Karnad (English Literature)

Of ‘domineering mother’s and ‘rich family tyrant’s: Matriarchs as patriarchal colluders in Shashi Deshpande’s early novels

This paper proposes to study two antagonistic female characters in Shashi Deshpande’s early novels, namely ‘Ai’ (Mother) from *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and ‘Akka’ (Aunt) from *Roots and Shadows* (1983), in order to uncover the politics of female agential representation in these texts. Such representation will be considered in light of the texts’
position within the canon of Indian English ‘bourgeois feminist fiction’ (Sunder Rajan), which allows the narratives to act as repertoires of the debates within Indian feminism in the early 80s, while also functioning as postcolonial commodities charged with representing a specifically Indian cultural identity to an international readership.

The paper will be concerned with the positionalities of these characters within the narrative, as well as the ideologies that they are shown to represent. It will argue that Ai and Akka function as foils to the protagonists’ ‘feminist’ progress through their embodiment of certain ‘traditional’ (and therefore patriarchal) cultural and religious tropes, while also simultaneously performing as the sources through which the protagonists (and the texts themselves) can inherit and root themselves in a specifically ‘Indian’ femininity. These matriarchs therefore come to represent a central anxiety or ambivalence in the narratives’ grappling with women’s agency, and complicate the texts’ commentary on women’s engagement with structures of power such as religion, caste and class. Through its exploration of Ai and Akka’s characterisation by Deshpande, this paper will thus attempt to unravel the intricacies of representing women’s agential capacities in Indian English ‘bourgeois feminist fiction’ in the 1980s.

Alaa Alghamdi (English Literature)

‘Third Space’ in Laila Halaby’s West of Jordan

This paper aims to examine the ways in which female subjectivities are constructed in Laila Halaby’s West of Jordan. It aims to look at these subjectivities that inhabit a world in ‘between’ resonating with the Eastern and Western social, political and ethnic references, arriving at what Homi Bhabha describes as a “Third Space”. Bhabha’s theory is crucial to the understanding of the transformative nature of the female subjectivities in Halaby’s narrative. It sheds light on the process by which these subjectivities and ideas are constructed under the influence of two (or more) cultures and places that have always been labelled as binaries. In engaging with Bhabha’s ‘Third Space’, this paper also supplements that theory through
critiquing the gaps acknowledged in the literature, such as his overlooking of factors including the role of gender and power.

This will be achieved through interdisciplinary theoretical and analytical stances to examine the creation of the space and the production of new forms and cultural meanings. In so doing, I argue that the female subjectivities in Halaby’s novel are situated in a unique ‘Third Space’ shaped by various cultural, political and ethnic factors. Factors such as, gender, the ethnic experience of Arab-American community in relation to other essential events (e.g. 9/11 attacks), all contribute in shaping the uniqueness of their ‘Third Space’ and its produced forms and meanings. Ultimately, I argue that new forms and cultural meanings are embodied in the ‘multiple-otherness’ of these subjectivities, as they are situated between two worlds.

Panel 5 – The Unspeakable: Grief, Death, and Mental Illness

Jac Saorsa (Creative Writing)

REACH ME A GENTIAN

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of a flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness,
even where Persephone goes... (D.H. Lawrence)

I skinned a face today. I drew gentian blue incision lines on the skin with a marker pen. I encircled the sockets, each bony abyss that cradled an eye, a sunken, deflated globe, resting in disquiet. From the chin, the mentalis, I followed the jawline up past the zygomatic arches of the cheekbones, past the ears and on past the tufts of hair that adhere resolutely to the puckered skin of a dead crown. I drew an outline around the hollow temple; a shallow crater in the surface of a cranial moon. I divided the whole face into two by drawing down the midline, and then into four with a horizontal line from the base of the nose to each ear. Finally, I drew a blue line across the blue, withered lips; dry petals in a gentian winter. I was ready.
I am an artist, a writer, an anatomist, a dissector of human cadavers. But this proposal is not for a creative piece about death, it is about life. Death itself is suffered only by the living.

Lucienne Spencer (Philosophy)

Understanding Psychiatric Illness through a Phenomenology of Speech Expression

My thesis has developed from my research in the phenomenology of illness. The literature explores various phenomenological features of embodiment that have been compromised in illness: the freedom to act, intersubjectivity, temporal processing to name a few. I was struck by the fact that the current literature passes over the form of bodily expression that I believe to be central to embodied experience: speech expression.

Merleau-Ponty proposes a unique approach to language: “the word has a certain place in my linguistic world, and is part of my equipment” (Merleau-Ponty, 2014:186). Merleau-Ponty makes two claims: first, through speech expression we give the word a meaningful place in the world and second, speech is a manner in which the subject can employ her body. Merleau-Ponty identifies speech as a bodily activity that shapes and structures a meaningful world around the subject. Speech expression implicitly ties the embodied subject with the world, and acts as the foundation for a coherent sense of reality.

I found the omission of speech expression in the phenomenology of illness surprising as so much of the literature discusses the difficulty of communication in illness, particularly in psychiatric illness. For this reason I will draw on Merleau-Ponty in order to investigate ‘the breakdown of speech expression’ in psychiatric illness. My thesis will conclude that a disruption of speech expression exacerbates the psychiatric patient’s phenomenological experience of being cut off from reality.

Claire Williamson (Creative Writing)

Is Grief the Thing with Feathers? A literary and sociological lens on Max Porter’s novella
Alongside theories which catalogue the process of mourning and offer various bereavement narratives, social psychology research echoes with the knowledge that there’s no one definition or trajectory for bereavement.

In Max Porter’s novella, *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, a bereaved family (a father and two sons, who have lost their mother) receive a visit from the deceptive and unruly Crow, an unwelcome visitor who prompts anger, brings chaos, destroys familiar language, emphasises loneliness and inspires cruelty. He also babysits, stirs the slow release of sadness, encourages intertextuality and midwives faith’s balance. Crow’s shape-shifting nature forces a re-evaluation of grief’s profile and its impact on individuals, bound up in a process of acknowledging mortality, redefining roles, navigating guilt, and choosing how to spend one’s time. The voices in the novella are separated into characters with monologues, promoting the sense of loneliness and separation in the grieving process.

In this presentation, I’ll explore the usefulness of Crow as a representation of grief, and its limitations, considering the narratability of chaotic life events, including reference to theories of bereavement, cultural traditions, literary representation and reflections by Max Porter and other authors. This exploration forms part of a doctoral study on the representation of bereavement in the 21st Century novel.

**Panel 6 – Absent Bodies**

Annie Strausa (English Literature)

Sensory Discourse, Affect and Genre in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*

My paper argues that Virginia Woolf’s feminist critique and its affective impact is illustrated and intensified by sensory discourse and concepts. I first examine a selection of Woolf’s essays to outline the radical socio-political importance that she attributes to literary ‘sensitivity’ and affect. Congruent with Walter Mignolo’s work on sensation and modernity, Woolf connects modernity’s suppression of the sensing body with exploitative and divisive (Foucauldian) biopolitics. However, she also insists that literature can resist this oppressively capitalist rationale. Literary ‘sensitivity’ and affect, according to Woolf’s definitions, can restore the human(e) bodily sensation and affect that patriarchal capitalism attempts to
eradicate. Focusing on Orlando (1928), I demonstrate that in her fiction, Woolf uses sensory language, together with formal and generic experimentation, to criticise and subvert patriarchal norms in ways that point to and help generate affect. Although I focus on themes of motherhood, female sexuality and female creativity in Orlando, I argue that in this way, Woolf not only rejects the suppression of the female body, but modernity’s wider suppression of embodied reality. Furthermore, her critique intervenes in the discriminatory corporeal discourses that are perpetuated by eugenics and other pseudo-sciences such as phrenology and physiognomy in the nineteenth century. As such, I pay particular attention to Woolf’s critique of body-sight relations that define these disciplines. Woolf re-works these and other body-sense relations not only to defy forms of suppression, but to change and challenge the hegemonic, perception-based epistemologies that I suggest, fuel this suppression.

Robert Lloyd (English Literature)

Missing Women and Spectral Presence in Shirley Jackson’s ‘Nightmare’

Although valuable critical work has been done on the writing of the American author Shirley Jackson, from critics such as Joan Wylie Hall, Bernice Murphy, and Darryl Hattenhauer, an important thematic strain in her fiction – and in her short stories in particular – has been overlooked: spectrality. This paper argues for the importance of this modality for understanding Jackson’s presentation of women’s lives and experiences in mid-twentieth-century America, and looks in particular at the phenomenon of the ‘missing’ woman in the story ‘Nightmare’, which was unpublished during Jackson’s lifetime, first appearing in the collection Just an Ordinary Day in 1996. I argue that the configuration of spectral femininity in this story is bound up with anxieties concerning women’s ‘place’ in the postwar world, as well as questions around how the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ femininity are defined and policed. A failure to adhere to these categorical strictures by wandering through the urban environment results in the enforced erasure/disappearance of the story’s protagonist, Toni Morgan. More broadly, the paper traces the way in which disappearance – both literal and figurative – can be interpreted as an instantiation of spectrality, and argues
that a recurrent concern with the desubstantialization of femininity animates Jackson’s short fiction, and, crucially, our understanding of her writing more generally.

Panel 7 – Challenging Approaches

Matthew Jenkins (Philosophy)

Deciding Desiderata: On Modelling Implicit Bias

Social psychology’s concept of implicit bias presents several challenges to virtue theory by identifying non-rational elements in decision-making processes (Rees, 2016). To meet these challenges, a precise conception of implicit bias is required. Several models have been proposed (Levy, 2015; Gendler, 2008; Machery, 2016). Holroyd (2016; Holroyd, Scaife and Stafford, 2017) contributes to this debate by proposing desiderata for a successful account of implicit bias.

This paper offers two contributions to the ongoing debate, the first is to challenge the distinctness of the desiderata offered by Holroyd (2016; Holroyd, Scaife and Stafford, 2017) and, in so doing, reframe the analysis of models of implicit bias in terms of their relevant explanatory and predictive power. The second contribution introduces a methodological consideration in the analysis of models through desiderata: some models offer explanations of available evidence such that the evidence was gathered by a method which makes the evidence itself incoherent or unstructured and therefore ought not be encompassed in a first-order explanation.

The paper concludes by offering a pragmatic solution to this problem which acts as a policy procedure on the application of the desiderata to models of implicit cognition. This proposal is that those models which offer good reasons to doubt the greatest proportion of the available evidence being part of the set of relevant evidence should be considered prior to those models which take the apparent evidence to be the relevant evidence.
Rhianwen Daniel (Philosophy)

A Wittgensteinian Critique of Chomsky: Implications for Linguistic Relativity

In his *The Language Animal*, (2016) Charles Taylor “refutes” the Hobbes/Locke/Condillac (HLC) view, according to which language is a purely instrumental device whose sole function is to encode information and describe reality. Although the original formulations of HLC have long been discredited, its central assumptions have survived into both modern linguistics and post-Fregean philosophy, surfacing in the works of e.g. Donald Davidson, Chomsky, and Jerry Fodor, and proving to be the dominant paradigm of language in the said disciplines.

Such accounts, however, are incomplete, since language performs not only a descriptive function but also a constitutive one, contributing towards shaping much of reality, such as politics, art, ethics, philosophy, and society itself. Moreover, although the HLC successfully explains one important use of language, to *reduce* language to its encoding function is both misleading and erroneous. For such a function is just ‘one province in a larger country’ (83). Moreover, the modern manifestations of the HLC belie an unwarranted naturalist tendency to extend the ‘paradigm status of science’ to domains to which it doesn’t apply (83-84).

In this paper I argue that, such explanatory overreachings aside, the modern manifestations of the HLC such as Chomsky’s Universal Grammar (UG) do not even do this successfully. For they are committed to aspects of the HLC which Wittgenstein has shown to be indefensible; and they violate two principles which are central to the scientific method: falsifiability and Occam’s Razor.

**Panel 8 – Fragmented Femininities**

Marine Furet (English Literature)

The Archaeology of her Desk: Reading the Ephemera in Angela Carter’s Archives

The archives of British writer Angela Carter (1941 – 1992) contain several assortments of printed materials alongside her drafts or fair copies of her published works. The ephemera are often gathered under titles that reflect the difficulty of categorising them – ‘Research
In this paper, I query the epistemological status of such fragments, focusing, in particular, on Carter’s use of flyers and other printed materials in her work on America. I argue that the flyers collected amongst her private papers possess biographical and literary value, and that said value may also reside in the risk of hermeneutic failure that comes with reading those fragments. Their accumulation offers a narrative of Carter’s political and intellectual evolution akin to a scrapbook made up of fragments, comparable with the biography made of ‘material and symbolic composites of fact and fiction’, in the words of historian Antoinette Burton (2013). They also speak to Carter’s compositional process and to the role of such ephemera in her cultural critique, apparent in her journalism but also in her last novel Wise Children (1992), which offers a reflection on the value of things kept and thrown, gathered and lost. I will pay particular attention to ‘The New England Project’, a folder containing a series of unfinished drafts, in which ephemeras are included as part and parcel of Carter’s research. I will argue that in using such fragments, Carter potentially situates herself in an avant-garde tradition engaged in a dialogue with such ephemeral traces as the flyer and the advertisement. In the light of recent work placing Carter in a genealogy of the avant-garde (Watz (2016) and Dimovitz (2016)), this paper will attempt to examine the role of this material in Carter’s writing techniques.

Nerida Brand (English Literature)

‘The other side of a mirror:’ Fractured selfhood and Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

“Is he a man at all?” … “He is two at least - sometimes I think he is ten.” – MEC, The King with Two Faces

This paper will explore plurality and split subjectivity in the work of Victorian novelist and poet, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge (1861-1907). Revealing a concentrated preoccupation with masks, identity crises, and doubling, Coleridge suggests that identity is performative, appropriated and under constant negotiation. In her poetry, fractured selfhood manifests through the motif of spectral doppelgängers that lurk behind ‘the other side of a mirror’ or threshold. The ‘other’ for Coleridge is always an extension of the self as the narrator journeys from condemnation and repulsion to a whispered confession that ‘I am she.’
However, Coleridge’s belief that ‘we are every one of us made up of a great many people’ enables us to meaningfully interpret the fractured self as extending beyond the doppelgänger generated by an exclusively male or female psyche.

In this paper, I will argue that a philosophy of internalised polyvocality allows us to understand how her contradictory personas can co-exist: the feminist poet offering a damning indictment of the patriarchy, the narrator either androgynous or described using shifting pronouns, and the male-centred and often misogynistic prose writer. With the female aesthete often characterised as navigating between conflicting notions of femininity, Coleridge encourages a reconsideration of this dualistic model with the self depicted as plural and spanning the spectrum of gender identities.

Arwa Al-Mubaddel (English Literature)

The ‘Death of the Subject’ and British Women Writers’ Subversive Postmodern Narratives

This paper contests the ‘death of subject’ and ‘waning of affect’ that is associated with postmodern narrative techniques, specifically when it comes to British women writers’ narratives. It highlights the period chosen for the study as it coincides with second wave and third wave feminism, involving a rich history of feminist literary theory and criticism. It discusses a new style of female writing, which is not necessarily feminine, arguing that, despite the discontinuities in their fictions, the authors selected share a self-awareness of the cultural and ideological formations of the period, in addition to being linked to a feminist literary tradition, as emerging feminist movements at the time influenced the selected postmodern women writers’ literary productions. Hence, they create a consciousness for women in their fiction amid the complex negotiation within feminist literary criticism between the deconstruction and reconstruction of the subject, employing postmodern narrative techniques to suggest the multifariousness and interconnectedness of the female subjectivities they construct. Accordingly, fragmented, disjunctive, and supposedly meaningless postmodern narrative techniques are used subversively by these women writers, which helps foreground a new configuration of subjectivity. Their techniques are
discussed within the context of Frederic Jameson’s representational paradoxes, Mark Currie’s ‘schizophrenic’ writing, and Monica Fludernick’s ‘unnatural narratives.’

Panel 9 – Experiencing Theory

Nick Viner (Philosophy)

Benjamin, Aura and the work of Art

Of the many theoretical concepts used by Walter Benjamin, that of the ‘aura’ is one that is most widely analysed and referenced. Often presented in opposition to the rise of mechanical reproduction, the idea of aura has become strongly associated with traditional artworks, while its loss has been attributed to the onset of new media technologies. This notion of the loss, or decay of aura, is one that has divided critical debate. On the one hand, the loss of aura has been cited as an argument against reproducible art (i.e., art that relies on technology), whilst on the other hand it has been used to argue against what is seen as an outmoded concept of aesthetics (i.e., autonomous art.) I shall argue, based on my interpretation of some of Benjamin’s work, for the existence of aura not as a predicate of a given object, such as an artwork, but rather as the expression of an interpersonal dynamic between the subject of the artwork and the viewer and a fundamental category of experience.

Irene Scicluna (Philosophy)

Phenomenology and Process Ontology: Husserl, Whitehead and Intrinsic Experience
This paper will make links between Alfred North Whitehead’s cornerstone idea that sociality is ontologically necessary and the phenomenological concept of passive synthesis which features strongly in the work of Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein. My proposal is to re-imagine the process of passive synthesis as one which stops short of making the transition into conscious, intentional, noetic functions. First, I will consider the implications of asking not “what happens before consciousness?” but “what happens if consciousness stays out of the equation altogether?”.

Secondly, I submit that an account of non-conscious -- crucially, non- rather than pre-conscious -- passive synthesis would describe the most basic of socialities - the autosensory interrelationality between every thing that exists. I will argue that Whitehead’s process ontology is precisely what I have described: an account of non-conscious experience built on an interpenetrating relationality of all things in the cosmos. Another way to describe it would be to liken it to panpsychism, yet sharpening panpsychism’s focus on the mind to in my view, a more accurate view: experience. Finally I will suggest that Whitehead offers a phenomenology of his own - an account of the most widely spread, basic and fundamental experience there is: a panexperentialism.