



# What Matters in Contemporary Anglophone Cultures

**Booklet**  
of abstracts and  
biographies + program

March 13th - 14th 2025  
Auditorium - Saint Charles 2  
International Conference



# Thursday

## 13 March

**8h30** Registration and welcome

### Morning Session

**9h** Opening Talk  
Jean-Michel Ganteau, Marc Lenormand,  
Sandrine Sorlin

**Panel 1 Chair** : Marc Lenormand

**9h20** **Niaz Cary-Pernon, Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry**  
"The Berlin Crisis, 1948-1949: Why does a holistic approach to British decision-making narratives matter?"

**9h40** **Maya Rousseaux, Université Savoie Mont Blanc**  
"The 'white working class' in the discourse of the British Conservative Party during the 2019 general election campaign : socio-racial hierarchy and symbolic recognition"

**10h** Discussion

**Panel 2 Chair** : Valérie Morisson

**10h15** **Diviani Chaudhuri, Shiv Nadar University**  
"Whose history? : defining what matters through education policy in India"

**10h35** **Lara Cuny, AMU**  
"The Arts Councils in the United Kingdom : selecting and hierarchising the arts"

**10h55** Discussion

**11h10** Coffee Break

**11h30** Plenary Lecture. Chair : Sandrine Sorlin  
**Marco Caracciolo, Ghent University**  
"Video Game Narrative and the Opacity of Algorithmic Agency"

**12h30-14h** Lunch on Campus

### Afternoon Session

**Panel 1 Chair** : Christine Reynier

**14h** **Laurent Quéro-Mellet, Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès**  
"Atmospheres instead of determinism: accounting for the modernism of British literary naturalism"

**14h20** **Maurice Cronin, Université Paris Dauphine**  
"The UK's "Significant Others" : The Politics of Recognition in Contemporary UK Fiction"

**14h40** Discussion

**Panel 2 Chair** : Fiona McMahon

**14h55** **Susana Onega, University of Zaragoza**  
"Digging for one's own buried past": Breaking the British Frames of Perception of the Great War and the Empire in Kamila Shamsie's A God in Every Stone (2014)"

**15h15** **Naomi Toth, Université Paris Nanterre/IUF**  
"Hearing voices, restoring faces. Poetry as attack upon and reparation of the law in M. NourbeSe Philip and Reginald Dwayne Betts"

**15h35** **Alexandra Poulain, Université Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle**  
"never-before-spoken-of": excavating stories that matter in Natalie Harkin's Archival-Poetics (2019)"

**15h55** Discussion

**16h15** Coffee Break

**16h30** Screening of the documentary film Living and Seeing Charles Reznikoff, and discussion with Xavier Kalck, Fiona McMahon and Naomi Toth

**20h** Dinner in town

# Friday

## 14 March

### Morning Session

**Panel 1 Chair :** Lily Robert-Foley

**9h20** **Véronique Béghain, Université Bordeaux Montaigne**  
« Translators matter »

**9h40** **Adriana Serban, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3**  
“Does Translation Matter? Why and Why Not?”

**10h** Discussion

**Panel 2 Chair :** Anne Crémieux

**10h15** **Lucas Champanhet, Université Paris 8-ENS Louis Lumière**  
“Skeptical realism and the opacity of what matters in the series The Bear: how to deal with our separateness in the midst of the workplace?”

**10h35** **Philippine Fauchier, Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry**  
“Black Hair matters. A case study of First Lady Michelle Obama’s silenced hair texture”

**10h55** Discussion

**11h10** Coffee Break

**11h30** Plenary Lecture. Chair : Claire Omhovére  
**Fiona McCann, Université Paris Sorbonne**  
“The Poetics of Care in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Making Literature Matter”

**12h30-14h** Lunch on Campus

### Afternoon Session

**Panel 1 Chair :** Susana Onega

**14h** **Marie-Odile Pittin-Hedon, AMU**  
“‘Keep alert. Keep alive. Keep moving’: vulnerability, invisibility and the ethics of care in Karen Campbell’s Paper Cup (2022)”

**14h20** **Lise Lefebvre, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3**  
“Perception, vulnerability, empathy: a study of English Music and The House of Doctor Dee by Peter Ackroyd”

**14h40** **Elsa Adán Hernández, University of Zaragoza**  
“What really matters in Sally Rooney’s Beautiful World, Where Are You”

**15h** Discussion

**15h15** Coffee Break

**Panel 2 Chair :** Jean-Michel Ganteau

**15h30** **Sarah Bouttier, Ecole Polytechnique/Sorbonne Nouvelle**  
“Perceiving Plants, Contemporary Poetry, and Critical Plant Studies”

**15h50** **Claire Omhovére, Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry**  
“Nestled Temporalities, Narrative Loops and Bacterial Contamination in Michael Christie’s Greenwood (2019): The Model of the Log”

**16h10** Discussion

**16h25** Closing Remarks

**16h40** **Cole Swensen**  
Poetry Reading (in partnership with Poetry Talks) dans le Jardin d’hiver - Saint-Charles 2

**17h45** Apéritifs and Drinks

# Booklet of abstracts and biographies

## Elsa Adán Hernández, Universidad de Zaragoza

Elsa Adán-Hernández wrote a PhD dissertation on Sarah Waters' neo-Victorian fictions, completed at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in Zaragoza (2022). Her main research interests concern British and Irish contemporary literature and culture, where she focuses on gender, feminist and queer studies, exploring different aspects within our contemporary cultural parameters. She is currently working as a lecturer in the Department of English and German studies at the University of Zaragoza, where she teaches subjects related to Literature and English teaching.

### **The relevance of vulnerability and interconnectedness in today's world: What really matters in Sally Rooney's *Beautiful World, Where Are You***

In *Beautiful World, Where Are You* (2021), the Irish writer Sally Rooney provides a brilliant exploration of vulnerability, interconnectedness and the intricacies of everyday life against the backdrop of a globalized world, examining what could be labeled as "millennial vulnerabilities". By following the four protagonists of the novel –Alice, Eileen, Felix, and Simon– Rooney makes readers reflect on "what really matters" in an increasingly fragmented and seemingly collapsing world, paying special attention to the power of looking after each other in order to find a meaning in life. Because of that, as I will try to explain in this presentation, Judith Butler's theories on vulnerability, relationality, and interdependence provide a compelling lens through which to analyze *Beautiful World, Where Are You*. Butler's work, particularly *Precarious Life* (2004) emphasizes that vulnerability is not merely a personal condition but a shared aspect of human life that binds individuals together within social structures, something the novel perfectly portrays, both at structural and thematic levels. Her concept of precarity and the ethical call to acknowledge interdependence also highlight that these are essential components of the human experience, something that, as I will discuss, is widely explored in this contemporary novel. Lastly, in so doing, the novel profoundly resonates with transmodernity, a cultural paradigm in which "we are seeking to examine not just the world as it is, but to reflect on the world as we make it" (Ateljevic 2013, 215), precisely what both female protagonists do when exchanging some philosophical emails in which they delve into a wide range of topics such as identity, intimacy, ambition, literature, religion and, above all, the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world. Thus, as I will explore, *Beautiful World, Where Are You* emphasizes complexity, vulnerability and interconnectedness as fundamental traits of our contemporary era.

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Rodríguez Magda, R. M. (ed.) *La Condición Transmoderna*. *Anthropos* 241 (2015): pp. 1-256.

Véronique Béghain is full professor at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne. She has written on American literature, art and opera, and on literary translation. She is the author of *John Cheever* (Belin, 2000), *Les Aventures de Mao en Amérique* (P.U.F., 2008). She has (re)translated works by O. Wilde (1996), F. S. Fitzgerald (2012), J. London (2016), G. Orwell (2020) and C. Brontë (2022) for the "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade" (Gallimard) and has recently retranslated Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* (*Les liens qui libèrent*, 2025). She is co-editor of the "Translations" collection (Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux) and has been in charge of the UBM M.A. in professional literary translation since 2002. She was awarded the French PEN Club translation prize (essay category) for her translation of Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Gallimard, 2020). She is currently Vice-President of the Association Française d'Études Américaines.

### « Translators matter »

In 1995, when he published *The Translator's Invisibility*, American translator and scholar Lawrence Venuti highlighted the invisibility to which the Anglo-American literary translator is doomed, such as resulting in particular from the "transparent" translations expected from him. This programmed invisibility, originating in a naturalizing and ethnocentric conception of translation, is not unrelated to a vision widely shared by publishers (beyond the English-speaking world) of translation as mere "glass" and translators as mere transcribers, but it also draws on the fantasy of direct access to the original creator's work that many readers nourish. Fifteen years after Venuti's pioneering work, American translator Edith Grossman published *Why Translation Matters*, a book whose title clearly signals its ambition, and which predates by three years the rise of the "Black Lives Matter" slogan and movement.

Confronted with the chronic invisibility threatening them and their work, literary translators – active agents of literary life and authors in the full legal sense of the term – are taking action more than ever today to get away from the ancillary status to which they are being confined, to make their voices audible and their names visible. American translator, critic and writer Jennifer Croft is behind the launch of the hashtag #TranslatorsOnTheCover, after *The Guardian* published her essay "Why translators should be named on book covers" in 2021 – a hashtag that has been taken up by various translators' associations around the world and by the European Commission, which has made it the title of a 188-page report in 2022. Besides, the role of "scout" or literary agent that literary translators often play behind the scenes is equally invisibilized, while it is only occasionally financially compensated and hardly ever mentioned in the pages of translated books. It is no small paradox that, at the same time, translated English-language literature has never been so visible on booksellers' tables, at literary fairs and festivals.

Meanwhile, in recent decades, reflections on translation have frequently been linked to a critical reflection on the mechanisms of domination, embracing reflections on gender and ethnicity. The "Gorman controversy" (also known as the "Dutch controversy"), in the spring of 2021, highlighted the possibility of discussing invisibilization in translation from diverse, even antagonistic perspectives, raising numerous questions that all have to do with "what matters". If we see translation as a political act, shouldn't we be working to promote minority voices and greater diversity in translation circles? Can this legitimate concern to promote diversity go so far as to make professional translators invisible, by dispossessing them of their own expertise in order to privilege the match between the author's identity and the translator's identity? (But then, what kind of "identity" are we talking about?) Doesn't professional expertise make it possible to translate all voices? Does the translator's recognized expertise count for less or more than the identity serving as a yardstick for assigning the translation to a particular translator?

These issues are furthermore reflected in the current debates on sensitivity reading, another practice calling for a reflection on "what matters," what should or should not be (re)translated, in the light of readers' sensitivities and evolving values. On a textual level, some women translators advocate deliberate interventionism, with the aim of fixing certain forms of injustice or offence done to minoritized voices and reversing domination, whether in the case of women's voices (see Fanny Quément or Noémie Grunenwald) or "correcting racist literature," as advocated by Tiphaine Samoyault, at the risk of erasing the historicity of texts. The archives of women translators, for their part, are arousing new interest, which testifies to an intersectional approach to the question of invisibility in translation.

Finally, we will look at the status of translation studies, whose difficulty in carving out a place for themselves and partial invisibilization within Anglophone studies (and more broadly within French academia) mirrors the invisibilization of male and female translators. At the same time, the expansion of translation studies contributes to the recognition of translators' work, particularly when the research is nourished by the perspectives and methods of research-creation, giving prominence to experience.

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### Sarah Bouttier, Ecole Polytechnique, PRISMES

*Sarah Bouttier is Assistant Professor of English at the École Polytechnique in Paris (IP Paris) and a member of PRISMES (Sorbonne Nouvelle). She has published widely on the nonhuman in literature and modern and contemporary poetry as well as on posthumanism, ecofeminism and literature and science. Sarah is co-editor of Legacies of Ursula K. Le Guin: Science, Fiction, Ethics (Palgrave). She is the author of a forthcoming monograph, Eco-poetics of Agency: Writing the Nonhuman in Modernist and Contemporary Poetry (Bloomsbury, 2026).*

### Perceiving Plants, Contemporary Poetry, and Critical Plant Studies

Plants amount to 80% of the biomass on earth and yet many humans repeatedly fail to notice them. This phenomenon, termed "plant blindness", leads to a lesser value being attributed to plants, and, for example, less conservation efforts in their favor in comparison with nonhuman animals. While plant-blindness may be explained through evolutionary neuroscience (plants have not constituted as much of a threat as moving animals over millennia, so that we have acquired the habit of taking them for granted) it is now considered by ecologists as a significant error leading to major disasters, since the vegetal world is a sine qua non condition for our life on earth. Within literature, poetry, because of its more flexible scales and its greater ability to detach itself from narratives, has been particularly apt to mend this gap: this paper will read contemporary poems to establish a few features of this language of attention. Poetic language, on particular plants more than on vegetal landscapes is, indeed, shaped by its attention to the minor and the unmoving, even more so in poems voicing the plants themselves. More broadly, light will then be cast on a trope that transcends literature and is found in many contemporary texts, scientific or philosophical: plant sentience. It is one of the main tropes of the relatively new field of Critical Plant Studies which this paper offers to quickly survey, and it reveals what we may coin a sentience bias: do plants need to see, hear, and feel to properly matter?

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### **Marco Caracciolo, Ghent University**

*Marco Caracciolo is an Associate Professor of English and Literary Theory at Ghent University in Belgium. Drawing inspiration from cognitive science, the philosophy of mind, and the environmental humanities, his work explores the forms of experience afforded by narrative in literary fiction and other media (especially video games). He is the author of several books, including *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene* (University of Virginia Press, 2021), *Slow Narrative and Nonhuman Materialities* (University of Nebraska Press, 2022), and *On Soulsring Worlds: Narrative Complexity, Digital Communities, and Interpretation in Dark Souls and Elden Ring* (Routledge, 2024). He currently serves as the President of the International Society for the Study of Narrative.*

#### **"Digital Narrative and the Challenges of Materiality"**

This talk focuses on how digital narrative imagines and stages multiple perspectives on materiality. Discussions in New Materialism and actor-network theory often draw a distinction between matter (conventionally seen as passive and inert in Western modernity) and materiality (which is vibrant and agential). In many of these debates materiality is invested with different, and sometimes divergent, meanings. On the one hand, it is linked to algorithmic technologies (for instance, AI systems) that are capable of behavior and even decision-making uncoupled from human intentions. These technologies are increasingly determining "what matters" in contemporary Anglophone cultures. On the other hand, the concept of materiality can refer to the lived, affective experience of the body understood in more-than-human terms--a body whose vulnerability brings together human and nonhuman life.

The paper asks how this tension between algorithmic and embodied materiality is captured by digital narrative, particularly narrative in the (inherently algorithmic) medium of video games. I will examine a range of recent "indie" games that probe the limits of human embodiment through dialogue with speculative fiction but also critique the implication of algorithmic thinking in structures of neoliberal domination. Moreover, I will discuss the way in which these games adopt formal strategies that amplify their thematic exploration of what matters, including for instance time loops in *Outer Wilds* (Mobius Digital 2019), metareferentiality in *Inscription* (Daniel Mullins 2021), or procedural uncertainty in *Immortality* (Sam Barlow 2022). In this way, digital narrative's reflection on materiality turns into a litmus test for some of the most significant challenges created by today's computational culture.

*Lucas Champanhet is currently working on a PhD in Philosophy and Gender studies supervised by Fabienne Brugère (Paris 8) and Elise Domenach (ENS Louis-Lumière), whose provisional title is “Skepticism and gender in works of art: Cavell, Adorno, and feminist epistemology”.*

**“Skeptical realism and the opacity of what matters in the series *The Bear*: how to deal with our separateness in the midst of the workplace?”**

The American series *The Bear* (2022-) seduces viewers and critics alike by showing how our attachment to places – here Chicago – and to collective projects – a family-run Italian restaurant – is a way of simultaneously replaying, deflecting and redirecting what matters to us in our relationships with others. In a “skeptical” (Cavell) context, in which the risk of inexpressiveness is always latent, the series explores the ways in which ordinary communication often fails to make us aware of what matters. Against a backdrop of social issues exacerbated by the protagonists' location in a dense, working-class urban center, the series questions the presence of a lived skepticism within our very working relationships. This process of recognizing what is unseen in our everyday lives, which Cavell described as part of the “truth” of ordinary skepticism, enables us to return to what matters in interpersonal relationships. In counterpoint, the workplace, seen here in the form of a shared project, concentrates all the tensions and unspoken issues, while at the same time offering a possible solution for redeploying what matters in a process of long-term co-activity. This series seems to us to be particularly representative of what a number of people in the United States today consider to be of particular concern in their ordinary ethical lives, and of the reasons why we tend not to perceive it immediately.

**Niaz Cary-Pernon, ENSCM, EMMA**

*Niaz Cary-Pernon earned a doctorate at Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 in France. She is an associate member of the research unit “Études Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone” (EMMA), specialising in British Civilisation and Politics. Her interests encompass British foreign policy, the Cold War, and international relations.*

**The Berlin Crisis, 1948-1949: Why does a holistic approach to British decision-making narratives matter?**

Much scholarly literature has been produced on the role Allied military forces played during the Berlin Crisis of 1948-1949 in occupied Germany after the Second World War. The traditional historical narrative focuses on American military actors, with General Lucius D. Clay, the American Military Governor in Germany, as a key figure. What tends to be overlooked is the personality and actions of Clay's British counterpart, General Brian Robertson, who never wrote his memoirs. More specifically, Robertson's pessimistic reports during the Berlin Crisis in August 1948 have frequently been interpreted as signs of defeatism, corroborating British Secretary of State Ernest Bevin's order that some of these conclusions should not be circulated within the Foreign Office. However, by adopting a holistic approach to British micro-debates during the Berlin Crisis, this paper argues that Robertson's appraisals mattered to Bevin. He considered Robertson's pessimistic assessments to shape a new political vision. This implied the necessity of creating the conditions for a peaceful and democratic Germany. The Berlin Crisis represented a pivotal moment in Anglo-German relations. Therefore, this paper employs the interpretive concept of “situated agency” to explore the networks of narratives developed by various actors involved in addressing the Berlin Crisis. The goal is to emphasise that combining a micro-historical analysis with a holistic approach reveals significant aspects of Britain's role. Utilising multiple sources, such as government publications and biographies, the paper compares the arguments presented by General Robertson with the social democratic principles advocated by the Labour Party, which held power from 1945 to 1951. Furthermore, the analysis provides a reexamination of several long-lasting historical narratives.



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### Diviani Chaudhuri, Shiv Nadar University

*Diviani Chaudhuri obtained a PhD in Comparative Literature from the State University of New York at Binghamton. Her doctoral research focused on manifestations of the colonial modern in domestic spatial relations, material culture and architectural forms in South Asian Muslim women's Anglophone life writing and novels. She currently teaches at Shiv Nadar University, Delhi, and is developing a book manuscript that brings together archeological and anthropocene fictions in order to examine shifting relationships between reality, representation, and the past.*

### **Whose history?: defining what matters through education policy in India**

This paper investigates the politics of minoritization and visibility by tracking efforts by the Indian state to take control of national identity and nationalize the past through the revision of history textbooks between 1998 and 2023. I focus particularly on the National Curriculum Frameworks (NCF) published by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) in 2000, 2005, and 2023, in addition to the National Education Policy of 2020 published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. In 1998, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at its helm. The hotly debated NCF 2000 was seen as a move to enforce the BJP's rightwing Hindu nationalist ideology by reframing history instruction in schools as value education meant to inculcate national consciousness through the study of "Indian tradition," which, while claiming to valorise indigenous pre-colonial epistemological ironically reiterated orientalist notions of Hindu spirituality on the one hand, and minimized the influence of Islamicate cultures by glossing over medieval history altogether.

When the NDA lost power to the Indian National Congress (INC)-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in 2004, a new, revised NCF was prepared as a pointed effort to 'de-saffronise' the history curricula by bringing school education in line with the vision of India enshrined in the Constitution, that is, a secular egalitarian and pluralist polity. Accordingly, the title of the history textbooks from year 6 to 8 was changed from "Our Past" to "Our Pasts." This time, the debate among professional historians hinged on the ways in which the new history curricula broke with the established nationalist framework of the textbooks predating the 2000 revisions, exposing anxieties around the rethinking of the nation-state as the sole organizing principle of historical consciousness, especially as the textbooks favored an approach that sought to emphasize the lack of a unified singular linear narrative of Indian history.

NCF 2023 was produced in the aftermath of a second BJP government which has intensified the minoritization of Muslims, severely penalized dissent, throttled independent journalism, and created a new National Educational Policy that espouses a neoliberal model of higher education that while promising autonomy in fact stifles free thinking and speech. While in 2024, the NCERT has only released revised textbooks for years 3-6, NCF 2023 is emphatic on reviving “Indian knowledge systems,” – which unsurprisingly exclude any non-Hindu contributions – and returns to a discourse of spiritual growth. While further interventions in school history textbooks are forthcoming, it is clear from the stranglehold of the BJP on institutions of higher education, what these changes will be and how they will define what matters in a world where liberal majoritarianisms can swiftly turn illiberal.

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### Maurice Cronin, Université Paris Dauphine, IMAGER

*Maurice Cronin is a lecturer in English studies at Paris Dauphine University. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the U.S. novelist and short-story writer, Flannery O'Connor. His research is currently focused on the pragmatics, ethics and politics of literary communication, principally, though not exclusively, in modern and contemporary English-language fiction. He is an associate member of the IMAGER research laboratory at Paris-Est Créteil University.*

### **The UK's “Significant Others”: The Politics of Recognition in Contemporary UK Fiction**

As the authors of the CFP for this conference suggest, “what matters” is fundamentally a political question. Politics will be understood in this paper as involving the (re)configuration of what Jacques Rancière calls the “distribution of the sensible”. This definition is particularly germane to the concerns of my paper insofar as it focuses on some aspects of the processes whereby once marginalized groupings become increasingly visible and audible in what Rancière calls the “sphere of the common”. The question of the increased visibility and audibility of discriminated populations within a society suggests that “what matters” involves a (re)distribution of attention and value. And this in turn implies that “what matters” is bound up with “the politics of recognition” (Charles Taylor). In multicultural Western countries in the postmodern era, this has frequently taken the form of an identity politics that has contributed to making those societies far more inclusive, but which also threatens to make them increasingly fragmented. As Charles Taylor argues, identity and recognition are both profoundly dialogical. Identities, whether individual or collective, are shaped in dialogue with (which often means in opposition to) what G.H. Mead called “significant others”. In practice however, separatist forms of identity politics tend to suppress this constitutive dialogism (K. Anthony Appiah).

So too, recognition in contemporary Western societies is often conceived as a monological process whereby a dominant majority acknowledges on its own terms a so-called minority grouping, whereas genuine recognition entails a transformation of prevailing standards of value (Taylor) or, to put it another way, the co-creation of a new set of shared “terms”, in the multiple senses of that word, namely conditions, language, and etymologically “limits” or “boundaries”. Literary authors and their works play an important part in this co-creation, and this is particularly the case in contemporary fiction in the UK today. By way of illustration, I will briefly examine three recently published works, Graham Swift’s short story, “England” (2014), Bernardine Evaristo’s novel, *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) and Natasha Brown’s novella, *Assembly* (2021). I will show how, in different but complementary ways, each of these works renegotiates the “terms”, redraws the “boundaries” generally associated with ‘black’ lives in the UK, and thereby partakes in reconfiguring the “sphere of the common”.

**Lara Cuny, Aix Marseille Université, LERMA**

*Lara Cuny works as an English teacher (PRAG) at the Aix-Marseille University. She holds a PhD in Anglophone Studies, specialising in British civilisation and Irish studies. Her work focuses on cultural policy in the British Isles, and more specifically on the model of the Arts Council. She is the author of *The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (1943-2016)*, published in 2022 by Palgrave Macmillan. She is a member of the Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Monde Anglophone (LERMA).*

### **The Arts Councils in the United Kingdom: selecting and hierarchising the arts**

In 1946, the British government decided to transform the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), created during the war to support the arts, into a long-term institution called the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB). Thanks to the success CEMA had met during WW2, what had previously been a matter for private philanthropy became part of the government’s prerogatives: the arts finally mattered.

The ACGB, which quickly included a Scottish and a Welsh Committee, and CEMA Northern Ireland (set up in 1943) followed a peer-reviewed system: applications were considered by advisory committees composed of “specialists” – artists, arts administrators and art enthusiasts – who made recommendations to their respective Councils. The ACGB, CEMA NI and their members were thus responsible for selecting the art works and organisations worthy of public support.

This presentation seeks to understand how the Arts Councils made their decisions: which art forms were favoured? What criteria were used? Who made the decisions? Unlike previous studies (Hewison 1997, McCarthur 2013, Sinclair 1995, Witts 1998), we propose to compare the policies of the four British Arts Councils: CEMA NI (renamed Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 1963), the Scottish and Welsh Committees within the ACGB, which were largely autonomous from the moment they were created in the early 1950s, and the ACGB itself. We contend that the policies implemented followed the same direction in the four nations, the emphasis being put on establishing ‘national’ companies with high professional standards and disregarding smaller, more traditional enterprises. We will use Clive Gray’s theoretical framework regarding the distribution of power in the arts sector to explain these decisions on what mattered (Gray 2000).

Using the annual reports as well as the archives of the various Arts Councils, including the minutes of the board and committee meetings, we will therefore shed light on arts policy in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s.

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### **Philippine Fauchier, Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry, EMMA**

*Philippine FAUCHIER is pursuing a Doctorate Degree in Anglophone studies at the Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, within ED58 and EMMA (Etudes Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone). Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the communication of First Lady Michelle Obama and is supervised by Monica Michlin (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) and Sébastien Mort (Université de Lorraine, Metz). She teaches English applied to Law and Political Science at the Université de Montpellier.*

### **Black Hair matters. A case study of First Lady Michelle Obama's silenced hair texture.**

In January 2009, when Michelle Obama became the first African American First Lady in history, the question arose whether she would "relax" her hair to fit this "raced-gendered institution" (Handau & Simien 2019). While chemically relaxed or straightened hair has historically been considered professional, neat, and attractive (Thompson 2009), this paper will develop the intersectional and political rationale behind Michelle Obama's performance in silencing her hair texture (Butler 1990; Cruz-Gutiérrez 2019).

It will rely on official White House content (including photographs, videos, and posts on social media) as well as on press articles, interviews of Michelle Obama and White House staff, and on TV appearances. It will draw upon biographies of the Obamas and on the books Michelle Obama published after January 2017 (Obama 2018; Obama 2022). It will center on her public persona from her 2008 debut on the national stage as a candidate's spouse, to April 2017 when she first sported natural hair on vacation.

The history of Black hair texture will be briefly presented, retracing issues of policing, discrimination, and pride (Okazawa-Rey 1987; Mercer 1987; Banks 2000; Weitz 2001; Byrd & Tharps 2001; Thompson 2009; Greensword 2022). While detailing the daily invisible operations and the cost of the "ritualized repetition of norms" (Butler 1993: ix) required to maintain her hair (Clayton 2020; Kantor 2012; Thompson 2015), this paper will argue that silencing her hair texture became a way of performing patriotic hair: it countered a prejudice that could have damaged her credibility as a speaker ("testimonial injustice" in Fricker 2007). Her social media posts and interviews carefully avoided the issue of Black hair texture by redirecting media attention to hairstyles, which served as a counter-narrative (Bell 1987) of Black beauty while visually and rhetorically silencing Black hair.

I will demonstrate how the First Lady prioritized her husband's agenda, anticipating the political cost of her natural hair (Kurtz 2022), and how the administration used the timely media frenzy around her hair as a diversionary tactic (Oliver 2014).

### **Lise Lefebvre, Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry, EMMA**

*Lise Lefebvre is a 5th year PhD student at Université Paul Valéry Montpellier III. She is writing her thesis under the supervision of Jean-Michel Ganteau (EMMA laboratory), and works as an English teacher for bachelor's and master's students. She is a member of the SEAC and the SAES. Her thesis is entitled "Dedans, dehors: faction, romance et éthique dans les récits de vie ackroydiens", and offers an analysis of the life narratives of contemporary British writer Peter Ackroyd.*

She first began working on the dichotomy between facts and fiction, as well as transtextuality and ethics, as part of her Master's degree, for which she spent a whole year at Cambridge University (UK), submitting a dissertation on the textual relationship between Oscar Wilde and William Shakespeare. She then decided to concentrate on contemporary literature. In spring 2022, she presented a paper on Ackroyd and faction at the EMMA PhD students' conference day, followed by a presentation entitled "Circularity and Circulation in Ackroyd's Life Narratives" at the SAES conference in June 2023, which was subsequently published in the journal *EBC* in June 2024. Her article "The Figure of the Ghost: Textual and Diegetic Haunting in Chatterton, Hawksmoor, and English Music by Peter Ackroyd" was published in the University of Zadar's *SIC* journal in 2024.

## Perception, vulnerability, empathy: a study of English Music and The House of Doctor Dee by Peter Ackroyd

Contemporary British writer Peter Ackroyd has long been regarded as a superconductor of the English tradition, promoting in his works a return to the canon. However, the aim of this presentation will be to highlight the way in which he uses the canon to reintroduce to the foreground characters and themes often perceived as secondary or even invisible. Giving voice to the eponymous character in *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993), Ackroyd reminds us of the importance he grants to the perception of vulnerability: '[y]et why is this that I am surrounded by so much great anxiety and grief of mind [...], and am frightened by the darkness within my own mind as by the night around me? [...] How is it that I have any place in the world? How do I survive?' (103). While Ackroyd repeatedly presents rewritings of the lives of illustrious people and characters, he never sidelines those who remain in their shadows. The instrumentalisation of the canon shows what is (and who is) on its margins. In this way, Ackroyd strives to render the invisible visible (a turn of phrase inspired by the works of Guillaume Le Blanc as *L'invisibilité sociale* published in 2009) by paying attention to ordinary or suffering individuals, in a constant desire to reorient the reader's perception towards the other. This demonstration will explore how a character's vulnerability leads both to a form of intradiegetic empathy and to the reader's projection towards that same individual. These elements reveal a desire for emotional reparation and a refocusing on the perception of the other. Vulnerability acts as a link between perception and affect, in a dynamic that positions Ackroyd as a defender of a world in which attention to the other is a condition of the emergence of an ethical interrogation encapsulated in the question 'what matters?'

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### **Fiona McCann, Université Paris Sorbonne, VALE**

*A Professor at Sorbonne Université, Fiona McCann specializes in contemporary literature with a particular interest in contemporary Irish and British writing. She has published several articles and book chapters on 20th and 21st Century Irish, British, South African and Zimbabwean literature, on prison writing and on the poetics of care. She is the author of A Poetics of Dissensus: Confronting Violence in Contemporary Prose Writing from the North of Ireland (Peter Lang, 2014), co-author of Le conflit nord-irlandais. Vers une paix inachevée. 1969-2007 (Atlande, 2023), and editor of The Carceral Network in Ireland. History, Agency and Resistance (Palgrave, 2020). She has also guest edited several issues of Commonwealth Essays and Studies, now Postcolonial Literatures and Arts (2013, 2016, 2019, 2021) and Études irlandaises (2012, 2017). Her current research projects include a book on care matters in Irish Fiction (Liverpool University Press), a project on literary interventions in the conversation about "Ireland's Future" (political, environmental, societal), a collection of essays on temporalities in Irish literature and culture (Peter Lang) and another on water-related issues in contemporary postcolonial literatures in English.*

### **The Poetics of Care in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Making Literature Matter**

How does literature intervene, reflect, and shape our relationships to and with care in different Irish contexts, producing a specific poetics (or, as Jacques Rancière would have it, dissensus – rendering visible that which was previously invisible)? One of the major difficulties of working with the concept of care, as many theorists have noted, is the difficulty of defining it and making it meaningful at a time when it has become so ubiquitous as to risk becoming devoid of meaning. My understanding and main point of departure is the important definition of care provided by Joan Tronto: "a species activity which include[s] everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves [sic.] and our environment, all of which we seek to weave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 1994). This understanding of care is necessarily all-encompassing, and it is what enables a wide focus on specific matters such as the microcosm of the family, the wider local and national community, and the global climate crisis and, specifically, how certain Irish writers have responded to the stakes of care.

Care operates both within formalized systems and in “the everyday more-than-human relations that support and sustain being”, in “relations of support and sustenance that are always happening in grand and negligible ways” (Amelia Defalco, *Curious Kin in Fictions of Posthuman Care*, 2023). French philosopher Cynthia Fleury shares this idea although she presents it in slightly different terms, writing about “acute care” (care de l’aigu, practiced by health care specialists) and “proximity care” (care de proximité, everyday acts and relations of care). Care is, above all, contingent upon a series of relational practices which are always shaped by context and my aim in this talk will be to investigate the ways in which some contemporary Irish novelists have exposed the seemingly “negligible” yet life-affirming and often gendered aspects of care, and how they have engaged with these multiple and intersecting practices, foregrounding frictions and contradictions as well as felicitous exchanges. Above all, however, I would like to analyze what I identify as an emergent poetics of care, focusing specifically on how the stylistic matter of these texts conveys the political agendas at stake (sparse prose, logorrhea, humour, generic blurring, and so on) and, ultimately, reveals the important space literature occupies in Ireland as a serious participant in and contributor to socio-political issues.

**Claire Omhovère, Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry, EMMA**

*Claire Omhovère is a Professor of English and Postcolonial Literature at University Paul-Valéry in Montpellier (France). Her research is broadly concerned with perceptions and representations of space in postcolonial literatures with a specific interest in the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of landscape writing in settler-invader colonies such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. All of the essays and book chapters she has recently published can be consulted on the open archive HAL. Additional publications include Sensing Space: The Poetics of Geography in Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction (Peter Lang, 2007) and the edited collection L’Art du paysage (Michel Houliard, 2014).*

### **Nestled Temporalities, Narrative Loops and Bacterial Contamination in Michael Christie’s Greenwood (2019): The Model of the Log**

Although a novel of anticipation, Michael Christie Greenwood (2019) remains rooted in Canada’s past, its colonial history, and a staple economy fueled by the extraction and commodification of an abundance of natural resources. European settlement, the privatization of Aboriginal land, and the subsequent rise of a lumber empire take center stage in a novel that derives much of its disquieting effect from a clash between the colonial pastoral it harks back to and the environmental tragedy it heralds. Greenwood nevertheless shuns away from the time scheme typical of cli-fi in which the anxieties of the present frequently inform the projections of the future. Instead, Christie explores the narrative potential of nestled temporalities modelled on the growth rings of trees. The novel’s embedded timelines bring together five distinct periods, including the age of European settlement (1908), the Dust Bowl (1934), the first Oil crisis (1974), the 2008 financial meltdown, and its 2038 aftermath when a new epidemic, “The Great Withering,” annihilates all breathing organisms. My analysis will start from the hypothesis that “the temporality of what matters may not be subject to a strictly linear logic. It involves effects of latency and aftermath, loops and repeats” (CFP). Greenwood’s narrative set-up enhances the dependencies between different types of economic exploitation and their contaminating aftereffects – collateral damages that propagate across timelines and generations, from the early colonial period into the era of mature capitalism. The Dirty Thirties and the Dust Bowl are thus replicated a century later, multiplied on a global scale by the anthropogenic activities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Relying on Object-Oriented Theory and recent developments in maintenance studies, I will finally try to explicate the kind of comfort – perhaps even the consolation – Christie’s writing procures his readers when it touches upon the plain matter of things, in the absence of any foreseeable progress or man-made solution to the environmental crisis.

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### **“Digging for one’s own buried past”: Breaking the British Frames of Perception of the Great War and the Empire in Kamila Shamsie’s A God in Every Stone (2014)**

The end of the twentieth century has witnessed the return of British fictions about the First World War as part of a memory boom associated to the age of trauma. These narratives often challenge the myth of the Great War and refocus attention on aspects previously neglected, silenced or ignored, such as the effects of war trauma, the participation of women in the war effort, or the discrimination of working-class soldiers. Often, these new war narratives attempt to recover the past as a way of illuminating the present (see Renard 2013, 327-29). In “Excavation and Memory” (1932), Walter Benjamin compared the discovery of one’s own buried past to a man digging, who must “return again and again to the same matter” to remove “the strata which yield their long-sought secrets” (576). This idea is thematised by Kamila Shamsie in *A God in Every Stone* (2014). The novel presents the First World War from the liminal perspectives of two real actors whose suffering passes unnoticed by family and friends: a middle-class English woman, Vivian Rose Spencer—an amateur archaeologist who loses her secret Turkish fiancé through the betrayal of the Secret Service—and Qayyum Gul—a Pashtun Lance Corporal demobilised after being wounded at the Battle of Ypres. The novel sets the parallel lives of these characters against a complex historical background covering from 515 BC to 1930. The paper argues that the multilayered depth, complexity and fragmentariness of the events narrated and the temporal enmeshment of diverse historical periods undermine the progressiveness of World History and set into question the British masternarratives of the Great War and the Empire, forcing readers to reconsider the frames of perception determining them and, by extension, the construction of memory and identity in terms of nationality, religion and race (see Shamsie 2009).



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**“Keep alert. Keep alive. Keep moving”: vulnerability, invisibility and the ethics of care in Karen Campbell’s Paper Cup (2022)**

Karen Campbell is a former police officer who has worked with young offenders, homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers. She was first known as a crime novelist. With *Paper Cup* (2022), she turns to mainstream fiction to tell the story of homeless Kelly who, shaken by a horrific accident she witnesses on the streets of Glasgow, embarks on a long journey home, as well as a journey from subalternity to representation and identity, personal as well as communal. The story, told from Kelly’s perspective throughout, allows the reader a unique perspective into the subaltern’s own representation of their invisibility. As Kelly tells a story that brings her, and her occasional companions’ invisibility to light, she resorts to strategies which are both psychological and narrative. This paper will start from Pierre Rosanvallon’s concept of the Parliament of the Invisible to place the novel in a Scottish, but also British (which here means English) context. It will see how Kelman’s wish “to write as one [his] own people” (Kelman, 81) to and eschew “that standard third party narrative voice” (McNeill: 4) has made novels such as *Paper Cup*, part of a tradition of “crip enchantment”, or “visions in which logics alternative to those underpinning the systems of normalcy and capitalism become thinkable” (Introna: 11). This tradition runs from Kelman to Jenni Fagan’s *The Panopticon* (2012) via Janice Galloway *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), and constitutes a body of works that represents the otherwise quite evanescent concept of “Scottish fiction”. Focusing more specifically on *Paper Cup*, the paper will then use the approach of care studies and disability studies, to show how what is achieved by Campbell in this novel is to represent “a different way of organizing society around our shared vulnerability, non-normativity and mutual care” (Introna: 11). It will also show how the sustained first-person viewpoint tells the novel apart from such famous predecessors as Ali Smith’s *Hotel World* (2001).

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### **Alexandra Poulain, Université Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle, PRISMES**

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### **“never-before-spoken-of”: excavating stories that matter in Natalie Harkin’s Archival-Poetics (2019)**

In this paper I look at Narrunga performance poet and visual artist Natalie Harkin’s award-winning three-book collection *Archival-Poetics* (2019), in which she takes to the colonial records of how Aboriginal girls were forcefully removed from their families, tribes and cultures and placed in indentured domestic labour. Using these records as raw material for the creation of a unique object which combines experimental poetry with an array of visual practices (including photography and collage), she produces a transgressive counter-archive which challenges the official records’ claim to knowledge and questions their production of indifference and effacement of individual stories, reclaiming these stories for Aboriginal memory. In Judy Annear’s words, it “indigenis[es] the colonial archive”, forging an original “poetics” that combines scraps of state records with the sophisticated archival methodologies embedded in Aboriginal culture and art, and thereby producing and performing an instance of what Aboriginal historian and curator Margo Ngawa Neale refers to as the “Third Archive.” Boring holes into the calcified colonial narrative encased within the “limestone walls” of the State Records of South Australia building in Adelaide, Harkin’s “*Archival-Poetics*” emulates “fresh water springs” that “flow a limestone-memory”, and seeks to “erode and expose” state-sanctioned lies and walled-up silences so that “our truth will appear” (*Archival-Poetics*, book 1, 25). In this paper I thus investigate the material poetics of Harkin’s practice of excavating and rehabilitating “never-before-spoken-of” ((*Archival-Poetics*, book 1, 16) stories that matter.

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### **Atmospheres instead of determinism: accounting for the modernism of British literary naturalism**

In this paper, I suggest that a new take on British literary naturalism can obtain if we pay attention to something else than what was defined as its thematic and aesthetic cornerstone: social and family forms of determinism. This narrow view has prevented both readers and researchers from focusing on what really matters in naturalist novels, which give visibility and voices to those who do not count, but also build up innovative narrative strategies for us to care about these unheroic figures. In the wake of Auerbach and Rancière's hypotheses, I will first show that the naturalist novelists do not respect the Aristotelian logic of causality by providing unconnected narrative episodes, the importance of which it is up to readers to assess. My contention is that similarly new readings of two other naturalistic tropes can be offered thanks to two currents of thought which do matter in literary studies today: atmosphere studies can help us revise interpretations of naturalistic social determinism, as can recognition theory shed new light on heredity and family. My objective is to pay attention to and unravel the unexpected modernism of British naturalism. This overlooked (pre-)modernism of the naturalist novel entails many blind spots which I want to look at. The new critical genealogy I propose bears on three moments in the history of the British novel and goes beyond the usual periodisation of naturalism at the end of the 19th century, then Edwardianism and modernism. On a corpus made up of novels from Sarah Grand, George Moore, George Gissing, Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Dorothy Richardson, and D. H. Lawrence, I consider how both atmosphere studies and recognition theory can foster new readings of the modernity and modernism of naturalist novels, of their indeterminacy, and of the family structures and interactions we find therein. Eventually, these perspectives lead to new conceptualisations of what matters when one reads such novels (in reading experiences based on the sharing of immediacy and singularity) and also of what is ethically and politically at stake when rethinking issues such as commonality and solidarity not just in novels, but in our research practices as well.

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### **The 'white working class' in the discourse of the British Conservative Party during the 2019 general election campaign: socio-racial hierarchy and symbolic recognition**

In the British political context of the 2010s, marked by various "electoral shocks" (Fieldhouse et al. 2021), particular attention was paid to the so-called "white working class" in the Conservative Party's political discourse. First explicitly referenced by Theresa May in her inaugural speech as PM in 2016, this contentious concept has been criticised, notably because of its vague definition, and as exacerbating divisions within the working class (Taylor Hill 2024; Williams 2022; Gillborn 2010). In public discourse, however, this group has been portrayed as "forgotten", "left behind", or even as a "new minority" (Gest 2016), thereby positioned as requiring special political attention (Sveinsson 2009).

The Conservative party targeted a broadly defined group of voters who could identify as part of the "white working class" by presenting itself as the champion of the working class in general, and of its white members in particular, especially following the 2016 Brexit referendum. Using the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk 1997; Wodak et al. 2009), this paper examines the role of Conservative discourse in constructing and categorising this socio-racial group as a one that mattered (once again), or even as the group that mattered most. This logic of social hierarchy aligns with a broader trend of ethnicising public debate in the context of nativist and nationalist discourse, as well as critiques of multiculturalism (De Witte 2022).

This paper focuses on the 2019 general election campaign, which led to the Conservative victory in the historic Labour strongholds in Northeast England, marking the so-called "fall of the Red Wall". It highlights the mechanisms of marginalization, invisibilization and essentialization at play in this process (Leblanc 2009). Using Nancy Fraser's theoretical framework on social justice (1998; Fraser and Honneth 2003), this paper proposes the following interpretation: by placing the white working class at the centre of its public discourse and by presenting it as the group that mattered the most, the Conservative Party secured electoral support by offering a form of symbolic public recognition. However, this strategy conveniently sidelined the two other central dimensions of social justice: wealth redistribution and democratic participation.

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### **Does Translation Matter? Why and Why Not?**

There is a consensus within Translation Studies that translation and translators are, on the whole, invisible, that they are not considered as they should be. And now translators are facing new threats from artificial intelligence systems, which appear to endanger their position even more. The reference to sight (rather than, for instance, to hearing, i.e., 'translators are inaudible') makes sense because of the importance of the visual dimension in contemporary society. Also, it is commonly assumed that humans derive most information about the world from vision and that a large part of the brain processes visual information. In any case, the terms 'visibility'/'invisibility' became very popular in Translation Studies after the publication in 1995 of a monograph by Lawrence Venuti, entitled *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (a new edition came out in 2018).

Of Latin origin, 'visible' means perceptible to the sight, obvious, conspicuous. In the beginning of the 20th century, the word gained a new meaning: range of vision under given conditions. An even more recent sense, which emerged in the 1950s, is that of being prominent, well-known; of receiving public attention and enjoying fame and success. Which of these do we mean when we say we would like translators to be visible, or more visible than they currently are, individually and as a profession? And does this matter? To whom?

All things considered, visibility means several different things, and translators themselves do not envisage it in the same way. I explore this with the help of four monographs authored by literary translators: Gregory Rabassa's *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents* (2005), Edith Grossman's *Why Translation Matters* (2010), Mark Polizzotti's *Sympathy for the Traitor: A Translation Manifesto* (2018), and Daniel Hahn's *Catching Fire: A Translation Diary* (2022).

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### **Hearing voices, restoring faces. Poetry as attack upon and reparation of the law in M. NourbeSe Philip and Reginald Dwayne Betts**

How might poetry incarnate the law in order to transform it? This paper will examine two contemporary poets who appropriate the legal archive into verse so as to speak back to the law. In *Zong!* (2008), Tobagan-Canadian poet NourbeSe Philip dissects, shreds, reconfigures and krumps the now infamous 1783 *Gregson vs. Gilbert* decision, in a case which pitted insurers against the owners of the slave ship *Zong*, after the latter laid a claim for lost goods following the massacre of Africans aboard that ship. In *Felon* (2019) and *Redaction* (2023), the American poet Reginald Dwayne Betts takes the appeals filed in contemporary bail decisions in various American states, and redacts them so as to create a poem, which, in collaboration with visual artist Titus Kaphar, he then overlays with portraits and exhibits (MoMA 2019).

Both poets restrict themselves to the words of the law alone, repeating the text in a different context so as to engage in a reflection on the specificity of legal language and its capacity to silence and obscure; both also attempt, through their formal practices, to do justice to the human beings whose lives are at stake in these legal decisions. NourbeSe Philip does this by working on vocality, in an attempt both to eulogize and to recuperate drowned voices, and seeks to rendering, through page layout and performance features, the original text 'formless', thereby sabotaging any attempt at narrative. Betts, on the other hand, seeks to reconstitute submerged forms of narrativity so as to propose an alternative account of how the law functions. His poems lay emphasis on the visual, rendering visible the singularity of bail appellants in a form which breaks from carceral documentation iconography. In this attention to the parties of the affairs, they thereby place an ethical imperative at the center of their poetic gesture and their interrogation of the legal system's administration of justice.

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