

Diversity: Linguistic, Cultural and Literary Perspectives Spanning Regions and Disciplines: Bamberg, 25 April 2024

Eva Katharina Bauer (Graz/Paris): Shifting Temporal Perspectives in Eco-Linguistics: A Comparative Study of Future Representations in Climate Change Discourse at the United Nations Climate Change Conferences

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time, which is why climate change communication has grown to become a “booming industry” (Nerlich et al. 2010) over the last few decades. Generally, the role of language can have a major influence on how individuals think about and react to environmental issues. Especially linguistic constructions, for example temporalities, can play an important role in how certain issues are perceived since temporal dimensions can be connected to ecological issues (Weinrich 2001).

My research explores the intricate relationship between climate change communication, language, and time, focusing on different perspectives and representations of the future in contexts surrounding the United Nations Climate Change Conferences in 2022 (COP27) and 2023 (COP28). By analyzing media outlets in English-speaking nations, this study seeks to discern patterns in how language, particularly in connection to futurity, might influence perceptions of the ongoing climate crisis. According to Penz and Fill (2022), topics such as climate change have largely been “excluded from ecolinguistic research until recently.”

Given the surprisingly limited exploration of the climate crisis within the field, this research, on a broader level, seeks to address this gap by investigating the critical subject matter. While the challenge of environmental decline has been recognized within the discipline of ecolinguistics, and ecological perspectives in the study of language are increasingly prevalent, a more detailed examination of future oriented approaches in climate change discourse is necessary. Thus, this analysis is crucial not only for instigating change within the field of linguistics but also for fostering global awareness through an interdisciplinary approach.

Emma van Ommen (Paris/Venice): Classifying Bahamian Creole: A Step Towards Inclusivity and Diversity within the English Language

The English language, being the most widely spoken language in the world, has been subject to many different changes and influences. The diversity of the English language itself cannot be hard to argue, as globalization and imperialism have resulted in different accents, dialects, and other language varieties that are spoken in different parts of the world. Some of these varieties have developed so far that they are classified as creoles. The classification of creoles is considered to be an elusive subject among linguists, with many not agreeing on what the term actually signifies, and whether or not certain language varieties could be categorized as such. Many creoles are often under-researched due to this obscurity. One of these varieties is Bahamian Creole, a language spoken in the Bahamas, which is often referred to as Bahamian English, due to its similarities with ‘Standard English’. In my paper I will argue that Bahamian Creole is a language that is closely connected to the cultural identity of the people of the Bahamas, and that the continuous classification of it as simply another variety of English has harmed its existence. In the context of diversity, and with the wish of celebrating diversity, I want to highlight the importance of including creole languages and other non-standard varieties within English language studies. I will do this by focusing on the influence of Bahamian authors such as Susan J. Wallace and Anthony Dahl, who have attempted to write down their language with their own orthography. I will focus on the importance of their literary work for the survival of the language, and the importance of linguistic attention towards language varieties like Bahamian Creole.

Book of Abstracts

Jenthe van Rheede (Bamberg/Paris): Multimodal Communication: Instant Messaging in *Heartstopper: Volume One* (2019)

Digital communication is omnipresent in our society, and especially young people are almost constantly in touch with others via various forms of digital communication. It is still uncommon to see this phenomenon represented in literature, and reading about characters communicating digitally is the exception rather than the norm. However, many contemporary young adult books aim to be true to reality by portraying their characters as having an online presence and connecting through instant messaging. Graphic novels, in which stories are told through a combination of visual and textual elements, are particularly well-suited for such storytelling. Just like the platforms and applications that enable digital communication, graphic novels are multimodal: both use text and image to convey meaning together.

I aim to explore how digital communication is represented in the young adult graphic novel *Heartstopper: Volume One* (2019) by Alice Oseman, and how this representation compares to the digital communication practices of teenagers in real life. By researching the ways in which teenagers interact with their peers through instant messaging, I can compare this with why and how the novel's characters use instant messaging to communicate. It is important for teenagers to find their experiences mirrored in the books they read, enabling them to safely explore their own challenges, such as how to navigate the world of digital communication. Reading and studying young adult literature can lead to critical reflection on how teenagers in real life engage with and through digital communication platforms.

Heartstopper has received a considerable amount of attention in the bookish domain, and was adapted into a Netflix TV show in 2022. It is a diverse novel because of its portrayal of a same-sex relationship, as well as through its multimodality and its inclusion of digital communication.

Laura Hochsteiner (Graz/Venice): 'The World Will Finally See Us as We Are'—Dis/ability and Life Writing: Taking Control of the Narrative in Alice Wong's *Year of the Tiger* (2022)

Diversity and plurality can go together with and be created by, for instance, race, class, gender, age and (dis)ability. For a long time, the last group, i.e., the disability community, has often been marginalized, perceived as a burden to society and silenced. The medical profession in particular has largely pathologized and essentialized people with disabilities, and many parts of society have done so as well. However, in recent years, disability activists have attempted to both modify and counter such dominant discourses, oftentimes by crafting their own life narratives. One such US American activist who challenges preconceived notions with her memoir *Year of the Tiger* is Alice Wong. My paper will analyze how Wong's text represents her disability experience and ableism in the current US American climate and how her work challenges the idea of a "life worth living." It will also investigate how her disability intersects with other aspects of her identity such as race and gender. These research questions will be answered with the theoretical aid of critical disability studies, life writing studies and Asian American studies, which will be outlined at the beginning of my paper. After the theoretical groundwork has been laid, a close reading of selected passages will be conducted. By taking these steps, the overall aim of this paper should be achieved: my paper will demonstrate that Wong construes disability in her memoir as a different, alternative form of living that creates unique and valuable insights into what it means to be human and what it means to be alive while actively leveraging her own life story to promote political, social and cultural change.

Book of Abstracts

Anna Lorenzon (Venice/Graz): Escaping Visual Culture. The Character of Joelle Van Dyne in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*

Visual culture is nowadays considered predominant in Western societies. Sight is believed to be superior to other senses while people are used to search for visual beauty for instance in art. In 1990, in the essay "E Unibus Pluram", David Foster Wallace analyses the effects of television on people arguing that "we receive unconscious reinforcement of the deep thesis that the most significant quality of truly alive persons is watchableness" (155). This statement underlines the extension to which visual culture pervades American lives and the importance not only of watching but also of being watched.

In the novel *Infinite Jest* (1996), Wallace shows the reader a huge quantity of characters which display physical differences, deformities, and disabilities. Some characters try to escape visual culture by wearing a veil that hides their deformities. One of them is Joelle Van Dyne, whose physical appearance is never explicitly revealed, even if she is described in contradictory terms being both "The Prettiest Girl of All Time" and a member of the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed. However, Joelle Van Dyne seems to be able to escape visual culture thanks to the radio program she hosts at late night.

In this paper I will investigate the use of sound to escape sight and to create communality. Through sound studies theories I will explore how Joelle Van Dyne's voice can be a means to create intimacy and connection among her community of radio listeners. Sound studies theories will reveal how resonance between bodies generate not only connection but also empathy and affection.

Lara Brändle (Bamberg/New York): "Is Murder Madness? Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction"

The domestication of "madness" and with it a shift in the perception of "madness" as a female condition can be considered one of the big shifts of the nineteenth century. Alongside these developments, mental illness also arrived in courtrooms: with the M'Naghten rule in 1843, criminals could now be found not guilty on the grounds of insanity. Using this context, this paper will investigate if and how women's transgressive acts of murder are contextualised as madness in the Gothic and the realist mode. This will be exemplified by two novels: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). Beyond their transgressive acts of suicide and murder, these characters will also be considered in light of their race (Bertha Mason) and class (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*). This paper will argue that the degree of social criticism that is negotiated through the representation of madness in connection with murder in women in Victorian fiction is tied to the realist or Gothic mode. The more Gothic a novel is, the more murder is the pinnacle symptom of their madness, thus recontextualising murder as madness and reducing a woman's agency. The more realist a novel is, the more murder is the transgression and not recontextualised as madness, thus leaving more agency to women.

Book of Abstracts

Evan Magkoutas (Paris/New York): Re-Imagining America's 'No Man's Land:' Spatial Approaches in Ellis Island Narrative Films

From America's "no man's land," and a front door to Heaven on Earth, a golden cage and a Purgatory, Ellis Island carries a particular social, historical, and cultural significance in the collective American imaginary built upon immigrant stories of American citizenry and ghost stories of people in-between. In the cinematic world, filmmakers have used these stories playing with fact and fiction in their reimaginings of the 'Island of Hope/Island of Tears' as a locus of origin, assimilation and fulfillment of dreams, primarily for the new citizens of the New World but also, as a place of trauma, alienation and separation for the deported, the ailing and the dead.

This paper examines the different approaches of studying Ellis Island as a cinematic space in its most major and recent reimaginings on the big screen, from Elia Kazan's *America, America* (1963), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), to Emanuele Crialesi's *Nuovomondo/Golden Door* (2006) and James Gray's *The Immigrant* (2013). All of these films recount the transatlantic journeys of European immigrants at the beginning of twentieth century as a global phenomenon, depicting in their own variations of the melodramatic mode, America's immigration policy as a double-edged sword which oscillates between "bold inclusiv[ity]" and "brutal exclusiv[ity]" (qtd. in Dolmage 37). By applying Antoine Gaudin's cinematic approaches to Ellis Island narrative films, I will discuss the visual representation of immigrant experience at the beginning of the twentieth century focusing on three different spatial angles: the genre space, the architectural space and the spectral space. I will argue that making sense of the cinematic tendencies in Ellis Island films, from genre, spatial and aesthetic points of view helps shed light onto the various ways Ellis can be further exploited as a cultural, filmic, educational space for commemoration as well as different practices of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Ellis Island; film studies; cultural geography; American studies; immigrant experience.

Kae Borkeloh (Graz/Paris): 'But I ain't soft' – Enqueering *Moonlight's* (2016) Intersectional Renegotiation of Black Masculinity

The paper will delve into the nuanced portrayal of Black masculinity in the critically acclaimed coming-of-age drama *Moonlight* (2016), written and directed by Barry Jenkins. With the intersection of Blackness and queerness being largely ignored or even stigmatized for most of the past cultural representation of Black masculinity, *Moonlight* gives reason to scrutinize the outcome that an intersection of questions of identity, masculinity and sexuality can have for the representation of Black masculinity. As the title of the movie's adapted play by Tarell Alvin McCraney *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* suggests and the movie repeatedly alludes to, Black boys and men are expected to keep up an overly 'masculine' persona or facade at all times, that can, here, only be dropped when the soft light of the moon turns them blue. These 'blue' moments of emotionality, intimacy, and vulnerability occur repeatedly in Jenkin's film, and thus they allow other facets of masculinity to shine through. The paper unveils how it is within these scenes, that intricately interweave themes of Black male identity formation in conjunction with intimate relationships between men, that distinct spaces emerge wherein individuals find the liberty to express emotions, embrace vulnerability, and exhibit affectionate and nurturing behavior. These 'inter-male' relationships or moments of closeness are interpreted in my paper as a way of queering in the movie. Queering, on the one hand, because same-sex closeness has no legitimacy in typical constructions of Black masculinity or is even dismissed. But also, queering, in terms of the sexual identity of Chiron, the movie's protagonist, that is conveyed in some of the analyzed scenes. Ultimately, my 'enqueery' of *Moonlight* shows that the movie provides room for a more multifaceted and less confining representation of Black masculinity countering narratives of aggression, dominance and violence commonly attributed to Black male characters in the U.S. media landscape in the past.

Keywords: Black masculinity, Film studies, Intersectionality, Queerness

Book of Abstracts

Ege A. Özbek (Graz/Paris): Cinematic Diversity: Postfeminism and Masculinity in *Leave No Trace* (2018)

Contemporary U.S. cinema has been marked by a shift in the portrayal of gender norms, with masculinity and fatherhood being redefined in recent decades. This transformation can be attributed to the achievements of second-wave feminism, which has challenged and transformed mass culture in various ways, leading to a new era usually referred to as postfeminism. This presentation examines the diverse representations of masculinity, fatherhood, and postfeminism in American cinema through *Leave No Trace* (2018). It argues that the film presents a nuanced portrayal of masculinity and fatherhood rather than following the dominant postfeminist fatherhood narrative. The movie subverts traditional gender roles and explores themes of family and human connection within a wilderness setting. Through the depiction of a strong-sensitive but incapable father and a “wise-beyond-her-years daughter” (Hamad 111), the film contributes to the postfeminist discourse while also challenging it to some extent, thus producing a diverse representation.

While filmic representations of gender roles may take longer to change than the broader culture, they remain a significant cultural marker of shifting social values. Thus, we can observe how the representation of masculinity and fatherhood changes and diversifies over time. This also allows us to explore the United States through a cultural practice, films, which shape our perceived realities. Ultimately, the presentation argues that *Leave No Trace* provides a valuable contribution to the diversity of representation of (postfeminist) fatherhood and masculinity within the landscape of contemporary U.S. cinema by inviting us to meditate on the meaning of parental roles and father-daughter relationships.

Works Cited: Hamad, Hannah. *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary U.S. Film: Framing Fatherhood*. Routledge, 2014.

Katharine Wilson (Bamberg/Graz): Staging Testimony: The Creation of the Addressable Other in Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*

Although the representation of trauma testimony in Black women’s literature has been frequently analyzed, scholarship discussing testimony in performance is much less abundant. This paper examines how Ntozake Shange’s choreopoem *for colored girls* physically and textually depicts the formation of a successful witnessing community of Black women in order to begin the trauma healing process. By developing a close reading of the poems where all characters appear onstage (“dark phrases,” “my love is too,” and “a lay in on of hands”), this paper shows how Shange represents the journey from attempted trauma testimony without a witnessing community through the process of creating a group of addressable others, to the successful transmission of testimony. Utilizing the techniques of plurisignance and translucence proposed by Karla Holloway, *for colored girls* successfully integrates elements of the Black female literary tradition to enact the development of a witnessing community of addressable others that enables the beginning of the healing process. The blend of literary, poetic, musical, choreographic, and theatrical practices used to explicate the trauma testimony process makes Shange’s text not only prioritize the voices of Black women, but also serves as a powerful example of generic diversity.

Book of Abstracts

Alina Waitzmann (Bamberg/Paris): The Narrative of Victimisation of the Conservative, Patriotic, Straight, White, American Male in Tom MacDonald's Rap Music

When dealing with diversity, there is always the flip side of antagonising those threatened by change. The music of Canadian rapper Tom MacDonald seems to have become a voice for US American people who feel left out and disadvantaged in today's society because they do not belong to a minority, e.g., in terms of their sexuality or race. The paper argues that Tom MacDonald's music installs a narrative which claims the victimisation of the conservative, patriotic, straight, white American male and, further, that this narrative constructs identity. The hypothesis is being discussed with the help of Philipp Mayring's qualitative content analysis (cf., e.g., Mayring 2015), tracing Tom MacDonald's argumentation throughout a corpus composed of seven songs, namely *People So Stupid*, *The System*, *Fake Woke*, *Snowflakes*, *In God We Trust*, *American Flags* and *FACTS*. The songs' selection process, which is based on the factors of recency, success, and content, is laid out for reasons of transparency. The corpus is being analysed based on the categories of conservatism, patriotism, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. Respectively, for each category, the rapper's stance is deducted from his lyrics and put in context. The research shows that the rapper's arguments are intertwined and at times contradictory. An essential strategy he utilises is belittling and disregarding other people's opinions while portraying the lyrical I as a victim of the same people and their views. Throughout the rapper's lyrics, the lyrical I takes on the role of a victim while discriminating against others. A victim identity is being formed, and the narrative is thereby being changed: the aggressor becomes the victim.

Sara Fabbri (Venice/Barcelona): *Saturday Night Live* and the Affirmative Consent Movement

Over the past three decades, there has been a significant push to incorporate discussions about sexual consent into public school sex education programs. These initiatives, often characterized by their creativity, have proven effective in drawing attention to critical issues surrounding sexual assault, especially within the university setting. One particularly noteworthy movement emerged in 1991 at Antioch College, a liberal arts school in the United States. This movement, known as the affirmative consent movement, was symbolized by the powerful slogan "yes means yes." It advocated for a clear and unambiguous form of consent, emphasizing both verbal communication and non-verbal cues or gestures as essential elements for both parties involved in sexual activity. The innovative approach of requiring enthusiastic consent garnered both praise and criticism. This paper aims to delve into the history of the affirmative consent movement and explore how it was portrayed on television, specifically within a *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) sketch that gained prominence in 1993. This sketch, titled "Is it Date Rape?" depicted a game show in which two Antioch students competed to accurately judge situations involving sexual misconduct. To shed light on this topic, this research will draw upon Neil Gaiman's work, "Amusing Ourselves to Death," which examines how information has evolved into a form of entertainment and how it shapes our culture through symbols and metaphors rather than clear-cut messages. In this context, the paper seeks to offer a brief historical overview of the affirmative consent movement and analyze its portrayal on SNL, a quintessential late-night television variety show known for reflecting and redefining public discourse. Television, as a mirror to society, has played a pivotal role in molding and reflecting societal attitudes and values, making it an intriguing subject for examination in the context of the "yes means yes" campaign.

Book of Abstracts

Aleksandra Franczyk (Bamberg/Barcelona): An Artificial Friend?: The Ethics of an AI–Human Companionship

Artificial Intelligence in becoming undeniably commonplace in increasingly more areas of our lives now: from customised entertainment, through virtual assistants and self-driving vehicles, to humanoids employed in service. The ethical questions surrounding it are no longer a hypothetical consideration of the past, but a pressing issue of today.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun* presents us with the concept of an Artificial Friend – a humanoid robot, a children's companion, a household aid. The story is told from Klara's, the robot's, perspective, which causes the reader to sympathise – empathise – with her, as they can easily forget about the fact that Klara is a machine. The AF seems to be a perfect friend, always helpful, always ready to listen and learn. But Klara's troublesome status resurfaces time and again in the novel. She is what Kim and Kim in "Humanoid robots as "The Cultural Other"" called the 'cultural other'; on the one hand a human-made invention, on the other too human-like to simply be an object. Attitudes towards the 'artificial other' vary: Klara inspires awe, but also causes fear, she is sometimes treated only as an object, a servant or even a slave to the humans, at other times as a thinking, sentient being – and finally, in the novel's disturbing posthuman turn, as a vessel for a potential 'continuation' of human life. These diverse attitudes among the characters are dependent on various factors such as one's background, age, or personality.

In my research I show the conflict between Klara's role as an Artificial *Friend*, and human's discordant attitudes towards her, or her species in general. I ask: we might have created a perfect friend, but do we really want one and are able to treat it as an equal? What constitutes a *friend* and how does Klara fit into this role? Is there something that differentiates her, something that she will forever lack? And finally: can we handle this new diversity we have ourselves created? *Klara and the Sun* causes us to re-evaluate our relationships with the exponentially developing technology as well as with each other.

Şeyma Yonar (Graz/Barcelona): Voices of Nature: Narrative Diversity and Ecological Awareness in Contemporary Canadian Short Stories

Literature is a distinct form of knowledge in which narratives have important roles. These narratives include diverse voices. In Canadian literature, nature as the setting and also as a character plays an important role. As ecological concerns are drawing more attention than ever, in contemporary literature writings on nature and the environment provide a complementary force on environmental issues. In this paper, I analyze the different narrative voices by explaining their possible meanings and effects, and their functions in short stories. By focusing on Zsuzsi Gartner's "The Second Coming of the Plants" (Best Canadian Short Stories 2019), Wendy Bone's "Abdul" (Cli-Fi: Canadian Tales of Climate Change), and Lee Maracle's "Cedar Sings" (First Wives Club) I aim to show the effectiveness of these diverse voices in terms of conveying emotive notions and the impact of the ecological challenges on characters and nature. I contend that each short story raises awareness of the ongoing environmental issues through its distinct actors and narrative choices. The short stories share a common element which is the witnessing of the destruction of nature by humans. Therefore, the "environmental loss" (Löschnigg 2023) is the framed matter that echoes in the stories.

Overall, eco short stories have an eminent impact on how we perceive nature, and foster compassion for it. To depict the environment from the point of view of the fauna and flora is a particularly powerful choice for conveying ecological issues as well as advocating for the utmost diversity in terms of the narration forms.

Book of Abstracts

Leonie Unkel (Bamberg/Krakow): Towards a Narratology of Age(ing): A Study of Narrative Time in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

Since the introduction of feminist narratology, there have been various new trends in the field of narratology that look to uncover the inherent diversities within an area once believed to be incurably addicted to formalism and structuralism. In my talk, I will focus on a context-oriented view of the study of narrative and aim to expand the prominent contextualist narratologies by introducing age(ing) as a new contextualist category. As part of a postclassical, contextualist approach, I seek to link concepts of age studies and narratology in order to reveal that the 'classic' narrative category 'time' is not 'neutral' or 'universal' but has to be understood as a function of age(ing). Informed through a revisionist view, I will present a study of narrative time in Kazuo Ishiguro's famous novel *The Remains of the Day*. I argue that the realisation of the narrative category time in the novel is dependent on age(ing), thereby questioning the properties 'classic' narratology attributes to it. Additionally, a context-sensitive reading of the novel will offer new insights and reveal age(ing) as a major theme of the texts. I therefore argue for an age(ing)-conscious approach to narrative theory in order to provide a more detailed study of narrative structures and continue to diversify narratology.

Francesca Corsetti (Venice/Barcelona): The Living Muse: Sapphic Echoes in the Poetry of Olive Custance

Olive Custance, mainly known as Lady Alfred Douglas, is often remembered more for her romantic relationships with both men and women than for her poetry. However, her work has received a growing interest by twenty-first century scholarship (see Jad Adams, 2023; Sarah Parker, 2014; Patricia Pulham, 2007, 2020). Custance belongs to a circle of female aesthetes that played a crucial role in shaping British Decadence. Like her contemporaries Michael Field and Vernon Lee, she not only shared the male-writers' fascination with Ancient Greece, but she also drew on their experimental works to support a marginalised tradition of female Hellenism (Evangelista, 20). In their effort to shift from being objectified muses to becoming active agents, women poets at the turn of the century started to replace goddesses as sources of inspiration with living figures. In *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity* (2014), Sarah Parker offers a novel perspective on this shift in women's Decadent poetry: like other poets of her time, Custance's production predominantly comprises poems addressed to contemporary figures, reflecting a need to move away from reliance on mythological muses. The response provided is that real life individuals may offer a vitality and immediacy to the creative process that historical personas, such as Sappho, cannot provide (Parker, 33). However, Sappho's image has been extensively recreated in the visual arts and by Victorian poets such as Swinburne, Tennyson, Field and Christina Rossetti. Indeed, by appropriating Sappho's voice and verse, these poets reshaped and challenged the conventional understanding of her figure. The interaction with contemporary writings about her, and not just with Sapphic fragments, entailed a continuous flow of novel narratives that contributed to the modern characterization of Sappho herself. Building on Parker's inquiry and Bauer's analysis, I argue that Sappho's persona is, in fact, just as fluid and ever-evolving as contemporary figures. Therefore, this paper reconceptualises and investigates "Sapphic" influences in broader terms on Custance's first volume of poetry, *Opals* (1897), especially focusing on the representation on homoerotic desire.

Key words: Olive Custance; Decadence; Sappho; Hellenism; fin-de-siècle

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Book of Abstracts

Celina Hofstadt (Venice/Paris): When Diversity Met Romance: Genre, Representation, and Romantic Ideals in Alison Cochrun's *The Charm Offensive*

Romance as a literary genre has been argued to be traditionally conservative, its function being the integration of a protagonist into society through the entering into a romantic relationship. Nowadays, romantic comedies, in literature, as well as on screen, feature an increasingly diverse cast of characters, telling love stories of societal groups that had previously been underrepresented. One such novel trying to remedy the exclusivity of romantic ideals is *The Charm Offensive* by Alison Cochrun. The queer romance novel, published in 2021, focuses on the relationship of an Indian-American man and a white American neurodivergent, demisexual man who meet on a reality television dating show. The show is called *Ever After*, fairytale themed, and meant to showcase heterosexual love. Thus the novel not only gives a voice and a love story to characters who differ from the traditional romantic leads, but it also directly questions the romantic ideals that permeate our culture, from fairytales to Hollywood rom-coms to reality television, and how the lack of representation of societal groups impacts the romantic expectations of individuals belonging to these groups. Being a romance novel, however, *The Charm Offensive* performs this reflection while staying within the structure of the genre, using common tropes, and ending with a marriage proposal. Despite their initial difficulties to perceive it, the two protagonists are just as fit as anyone else to live a monogamous life within society. Thus, in my paper, I will investigate the question whether a queer, diverse romance such as *The Charm Offensive* can still be called conservative. I will examine the novel's treatment of the genre and subversion of tropes, as well as its direct commentary on romantic ideals in popular culture by drawing on theory on the romance genre, representation, and romantic ideals in our capitalist culture.

Bilge Gral (Bamberg/Paris): "Unity in Diversity: Exploring Concepts of Time and Democracy in Walt Whitman's 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry'"

Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" has undergone changes in various editions after its first publication in the 1856 edition of his renowned poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*. However, it preserved its embracive essence together with its central concepts: time and democracy leading to unity in diversity. This paper discusses the ferry as a metaphor for the flux of time and as a symbol of democracy to shed light on how unity in diversity is processed in the poem. The inclusive nature of the ferry contributes to the concept of democracy, while the concept of time gains depth through tense shifts. Whitman attaches both concepts to human experience. The poem creates a sense of continuum with imagery, and the use of tense shift facilitates connecting the past, present, and future times. Besides, it displays that temporal changes are challenged with unchanged experiences across time. On the other side, the disparate and interconnected temperament of the passengers on board complements the perception of diversity within the concept of democracy. In relation to this, Whitman draws a parallel between nature and democracy. Thus, the ferry can be perceived as a prototype of a democratic society, and it takes after its embracive feature from nature. Through a critical analysis, this paper aims to present the concept of time and democracy underlining the unity in diversity in the poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", demonstrating how time can function as a shared experience of passengers and readers across time, and how democracy is introduced as a unifying power that connects individuals with distinct identities, thereby indicating the celebration of unity in diversity.

Keywords: Walt Whitman, Crossing Brooklyn Ferry, time, democracy, unity, diversity, nature, imagery, tense shift, unchanged experiences, disparate, interconnected

Book of Abstracts

Margherita Lanza (Venice/Bamberg): Ethnic and Political Diversity in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Nigeria as ‘A Collection of Fragments Held in a Fragile Clasp’

The concept of ethnic diversity in a postcolonial country experiencing civil war becomes a matter of life and death. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, published in 2006, delves into ethnic and political identities in Nigeria during the late 1960s Biafra war. In her portrayal of the 1967-1970 Nigerian war, which tragically claimed the lives of over two million individuals, Adichie focuses on the circumstances in which, within a single nation, postcolonial African history gave rise to hardship for refugees and migrants. This paper aims to outline the struggle of ethnic diversity influenced by colonialism in Nigeria, along with the various ethnicities portrayed by the main characters in the book.

The characters and symbols of this war are the sisters Olanna and Kainene, who represent, through their relationship, the animosity between Northern Nigeria and Eastern Nigeria. However, the facets of this book are multiple, as diverse as the characters described, who portray not only different ethnic identities but also different political views. In fact, when discussing African written fiction, there has been an urge to raise awareness towards the inhumane nature of colonialism and the biased and stereotypical portrayal of Africa by imperial powers. In postcolonial African states like Nigeria, which comprises two hundred languages and ethnicities, “the assertion of a home community based on a single language, culture, and custom must necessarily create a significant population of outsiders and exiles” (Strehle 656).

After providing historical context and employing textual analysis, I will attempt to describe the ethnic and political diversity portrayed in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the various identities created by Adichie through her characters.

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Maria Angela Sperlí (Venice/New York): Being the New Negro Woman: Negotiation of Women’s Bodies and Identities in 1920s America

The New Negro Woman is a pivotal figure in early 20th century America and had substantial cultural significance; she was created from historical and social change, and as such, the New Black Woman changed the course of history for black women. The idea of the New Black Woman combined the characteristics of the 1890s New Woman — who pushed the limits of patriarchal expectations put on women, seeking independence and striving for radical societal change — and the cultural and sociopolitical trends of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance. This paper is a smaller part of a more extensive ongoing research on the figure of the New Black Woman in 1920s American literature as written by authors from the Harlem Renaissance, and the two texts chosen are two African-American novels: *Plum Bun* by Jessie Fauset and *Quicksand* by Nella Larsen; both published in 1928, these novels respectively tell the stories of Angela Murray and of Helga Crane, two mulatto young women that deal with the issue existing as Black women in 1920s America. In particular, the paper analyzes Angela’s journey to emancipation and self-acceptance, and Helga’s search for an identity. These two women’s journeys through attempting to negotiate their bodies and identities and understanding how to balance gendered expectations with racial expectations bring them to two drastically different outcomes; however, it seems both women cannot find their space in late 1920s America as New Negro Women: at the end of the novel, Angela will stand fiercely — although lonely, until the very end— as the New Negro Woman in France, and Helga will die miserably as the Old Negro Woman in the Deep South.

Poster presentation

Mehmet Emre Tutan (Graz/Krakow): *The Boys*, Parody and Forced Diversity

Superheroes have been an important part of the visual media in the past few decades. While most of the superhero movies and TV shows approach diversity in the friendliest way possible to avoid any negative comments, it is also possible to see some “bold” superhero content that presents its ideas without fear of backlash. Amazon Prime’s *the Boys* (2019) is exceptionally unique when it comes to this. Although the show deals with superheroes, it shows things that we are not accustomed to seeing on traditional superheroes. *The Boys* has drawn attention with its satirical approach to many issues, including the representation of diversity. With its unique world where superheroes dominate every sphere of daily life, it has become possible to see a whole new perspective on representation of diverse characters in superhero media.

This presentation delves into the representation of diverse characters in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexuality in *the Boys*. As well as investigating the function of these representations, whether the representation of diversity in *the Boys* challenges or reinforces the stereotypes will be demonstrated. This presentation will not only show how the world in *the Boys* views diversity but will also delve into some specific characters from the show and analyze their motives and mindset behind their actions when it comes to diversity.