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Women and Gender Studies Section



ARTPOLITICAL – MARGARET ATWOOD'S AESTHETICS

International Online Conference

14 – 16 October 2021

Organisers: Dunja M. Mohr (Erfurt) & Kirsten Sandrock (Göttingen)

Conference assistants: Marie Rieske, Lamia Berki & Lille Haase

PROGRAMME

ALL TIMES ARE CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME (CET)

THURSDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2021

15.40 Conference Room opens on Zoom

16.00 Conference opening: **Dunja M. Mohr** (Erfurt) and **Kirsten Sandrock** (Göttingen)

Welcome Addresses:

Prof. Barbara Schaff (University of Göttingen),
Prof. Brigitte Glaser (University of Göttingen,
President of the Association for Canadian Studies
in German-Speaking Countries)

Prof. Lauren Rule Maxwell (The Citadel,
President *Margaret Atwood Society*) and
Prof. Karma Waltonen (University of California,
Past-President *Margaret Atwood Society*)

16.30 **Keynote 1: Prof. Dr. Wendy Roy** (University of
Saskatchewan, Canada) p.11
(Chair: Dunja M. Mohr)

“‘A word after a word after a word is power’: The
Politics of Art in Margaret Atwood’s Writings”

17.30 Break

18.00 **Panel 1 (room 1) Adaptation, Transmedia**
(Chair: Karma Waltonen) p.12

Joyce Goggin (Amsterdam, Netherlands) “*The
Handmaid’s Tale* across Platforms”

Annika McPherson (Augsburg, Germany)
“Adaptation as ‘Artpolitical’ Remediation: From
The Handmaid’s Tale to *The Testaments*”

Dunja M. Mohr (Erfurt, Germany)
“The Art of Storytelling and Adaptation”

Panel 2 (room 2) Gender Politics I
(Chair: Barbara Schaff) p.14

Eva-Sabine Zehelein (Otto-Friedrich-University
Bamberg, Germany) “Reproductive justice in *The
Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*”

Theodore F. Sheckels (Ashland, USA)
“The Beginnings of Margaret Atwood’s Political
Activism: Revisiting *The Edible Woman* and
Surfacing after Fifty Years”

19.30 Break

20.00 **Keynote 2: Prof. Lyman Tower Sargent**
(University of Missouri-St. Louis) p.16
(Chair: Kirsten Sandrock)

“The Importance of Utopian Thinking in Dystopian
Times”

21.00 **Online Socializing & Atwood Games Night**
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9.40 Conference Room opens on Zoom

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“The Totalitarian Face of Neoliberalism: Forms of Critique in Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last*”

Alessandra Boller (Siegen, Germany)
“‘We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print’ – Storytelling, the Distribution of the Sensible, and Atwood’s Speculative Fiction”

Ayca Berna Görmez (Ankara, Turkey) “Freedom Goes First’: The Dilemma of Freedom and Security in *The Heart Goes Last*”

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Anca Radu (Göttingen, Germany)
“*Alias Grace*: Imagining the Nation in the Victorian Age”

Katinka Krausz (Budapest, Hungary)
“‘Fit in without being known’: An analysis of a multidimensional photograph in *Lady Oracle*”

Maryam Moosavi Majd (Isfahan, Iran)
“The Study of Affect in Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam* Trilogy”

11.30 Break

12.00 Panel 5 (room 1) Comparative Approaches I (Chair: Fiona Tolan) p.24

Wolfgang Klooß (Trier, Germany)
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Eleonora Rao (Salerno, Italy)
“Home and Homelessness in Margaret Atwood and Tony Morrison’s Poetry”

Panel 6 (room 2) Politics and Storytelling (Chair: Eva-Sabine Zehelein) p.25

Katarina Labudova (Ruzomberok, Slovakia)
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Carla Scarano D’Antonio (Reading, UK)
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“Margaret Atwood’s Venture into Graphic Novels: (Aesthetic) Form and (Political) Function of the *Angel Catbird* Trilogy and the *War Bears* Series”

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Tatiana Konrad (Vienna, Austria)
"Veganism, Ecoethics, and Climate Change in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy"

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(Chair: Joyce Goggin) p.29

Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk (Białystok, Poland)
"When the Real Meets the Imagined: A Comparative Analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Herta Müller's Essays"

Tom Friedman (Kamloops, Canada) "Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* and Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer*"

16.30 Break

17.00 Keynote 4: Karma Waltonen (University of California, USA)
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18.00 Announcement of the Winner and Runner-ups of the "Best Conference Paper Margaret Atwood Society Award"

18:30 Break

20.00 Margaret Atwood Reading (Special Recording for Conference)

SATURDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2021

13.40 Conference Room opens on Zoom

14:00 Panel 9 (room 1) Gender and Politics II
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Chiara Feddeck (Aachen, Germany)
"Just because there's a silence doesn't mean that nothing is going on.' - Objectification, Gendered Trauma, and Identity in Selected Novels by Margaret Atwood"

Gabriella Colombo Machado (Montréal, Canada)
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Danette Dimarco (Pennsylvania, USA)
"Avian Aesthetics and Paratextual Practices in Atwood's Bird Narratives"

Loredana Filip (Munich, Germany)
"Literary Synesthesia and Human-Nonhuman Interactions in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy"

Shraddah A. Singh (New Delhi, India)
"Prostibots and the Capitalocene: Feminism's Posthuman Turn in Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*"

15.30 Break

16.00 Panel 11 (room 1) Feminisms, Fiction, and In_Visibility

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Fiona Tolan (Liverpool, UK)
"Twenty-first Century Gileads: Feminist Dystopian Fiction after Atwood"

Chloe Carroll (Limerick, Ireland)
"Transmedia Resistance, Fourth wave Feminism, and *The Handmaid's Tale*"

Sylvia Mieszkowski (Vienna, Austria)
"Tags, wings & uniforms: Ambivalent In_Visibilisations in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*"

17.30 Break

18.00 Keynote 5: Prof. Dr. Pilar Somacarrera
(Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain)
(Chair: Brigitte Glaser) p.38

"Power and the Posthuman: Atwood's Recent Dystopias as Read in the (Post-)Pandemic Era"

19.00 **Closing Remarks:** Dunja Mohr and Kirsten Sandrock

TIME ZONE CONVERSIONS

THURSDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2021 – DAY 1

	Welcome	Keynote 1	Panel 1 & 2	Keynote 2	Atwood Games Night
California & Oregon, US Kamloops BC, Canada (PDT)	07.00 - 07.30	07.30 - 08.30	09.00 - 10.30	11.00 - 12.00	12.00
Saskatchewan, Canada (CST)	08.00 - 08.30	08.30 - 9.30	10.00 - 11.30	12.00 - 13.00	13.00
Missouri, US (CDT)	09.00 - 09.30	09.30 - 10.30	11.00 - 12.30	13.00 - 14.00	14.00
South Carolina & Pennsylvania, US Montreal, Canada (EDT)	10.00 - 10.30	10.30 - 11.30	12.00 - 13.30	14.00 - 15.00	15.00
Portugal & England (WEST)	15.00 - 15.30	15.30 - 16.30	17.00 - 18.30	19.00 - 20.00	20.00
Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Italy (CEST)	16.00 - 16.30	16.30 - 17.30	18.00 - 19.30	20.00 - 21.00	21.00
Turkey (TRT)	17.00 - 17.30	17.30 - 18.30	19.00 - 20.30	21.00 - 22.00	22.00
Iran (IRDT)	18.30 - 19.00	19.00 - 20.00	20.30 - 22.00	22.30 - 23.30	23.30
India (IST)	19.30 - 20.00	20.00 - 21.00	21.30 - 23.00	23.30 - 00.30	00.30

FRIDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2021 – DAY 2

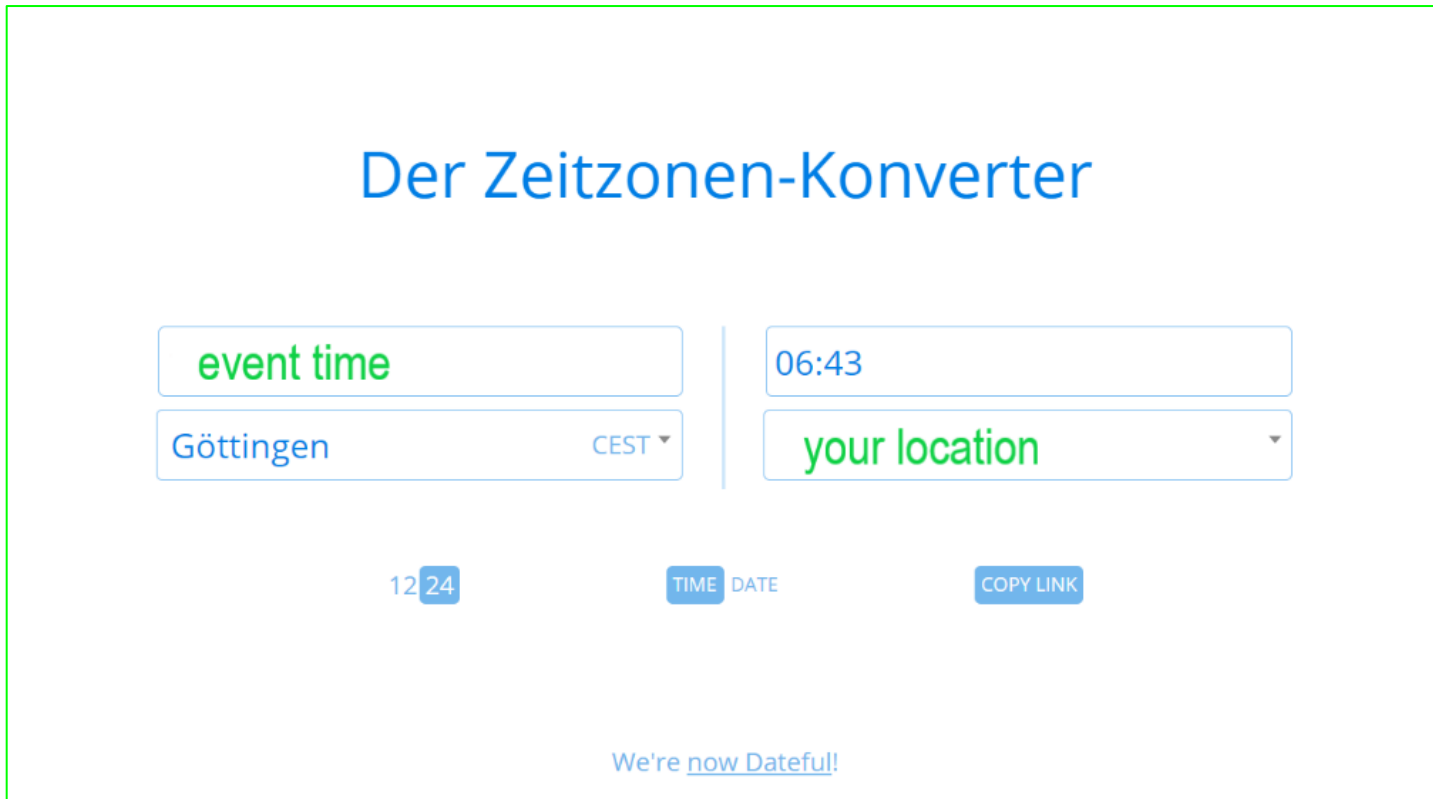
	Panel 3 & 4	Panel 5 & 6	Keynote 3	Panel 7 & 8	Keynote 4	Margaret Atwood Reading
California & Oregon, US Kamloops BC, Canada (PDT)	01.00 - 02.30	03.00 - 04.00	05.30 - 06.30	06.30 - 07.30	08.00 - 09.00	11.00
Saskatchewan, Canada (CST)	02.00 - 03.30	04.00 - 05.00	06.30 - 07.30	07.30 - 08.30	09.00 - 10.00	12.00
Missouri, US (CDT)	03.00 - 04.30	05.00 - 06.00	07.30 - 08.30	08.30 - 09.30	10.00 - 11.00	13.00
South Carolina & Pennsylvania, US Montreal, Canada (EDT)	04.00 - 05.30	06.00 - 07.00	08.30 - 09.30	09.30 - 10.30	11.00 - 12.00	14.00
Portugal & England (WEST)	09.00 - 10.30	11.00 - 12.00	13.30 - 14.30	14.30 - 15.30	16.00 - 17.00	19.00
Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Italy (CEST)	10.00 - 11.30	12.00 - 13.00	14.30 - 15.30	15.30 - 16.30	17.00 - 18.00	20.00
Turkey (TRT)	11.00 - 12.30	13.00 - 14.00	15.30 - 16.30	16.30 - 17.30	18.00 - 19.00	21.00
Iran (IRDT)	12.30 - 14.00	14.30 - 15.30	17.00 - 18.00	18.00 - 19.00	19.30 - 20.30	22.30
India (IST)	13.30 - 15.00	15.30 - 16.30	18.00 - 19.90	19.00 - 20.00	20.30 - 21.30	23.30

SATURDAY, 16 OCTOBER – DAY 3

	Panel 9 & 10	Panel 11	Keynote 5	Closing Remarks
California & Oregon, US Kamloops BC, Canada (PDT)	05.00-06.30	07.00-08.30	09.00-10.00	10.00-10.30
Saskatchewan, Canada (CST)	06.00-07.30	08.00-09.30	10.00-11.00	11.00-11.30
Missouri, US (CDT)	07.00-08.30	09.00-10.30	11.00-12.00	12.00-12.30
South Carolina & Pennsylvania, US Montreal, Canada (EDT)	08.00-09.30	10.00-11.30	12.00-13.00	13.00-13.30
Portugal & England (WEST)	13.00-15.30	15.00-16.30	17.00-18.00	18.00-18.30
Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Italy (CEST)	14.00-15.30	16.00-17.30	18.00-19.00	19.00-19.30
Turkey (TRT)	15.00-16.30	17.00-18.30	19.00-20.00	20.00-20.30
Iran (IRDT)	16.30-18.00	18.30-20.00	20.30-21.30	21.30-22.00
India (IST)	17.30-19.00	19.30-21.00	21.30-22.30	22.30-23.00

CAN'T FIND YOUR LOCATION?

If you cannot find your location's time zone on the previous timetables, please go to [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YX56DXFW](https://tinyurl.com/yx56dxfw) and enter the starting time stated in the programme (pp. 1 – 4) in the box on the top left and your location on the bottom right as pictured below. The correct time for your time zone will then appear in the top right box!



The screenshot shows a web interface for a time zone converter. The title is "Der Zeitzone-Konverter" in blue. There are two main input sections. The left section has a text box containing "event time" in green, a dropdown menu showing "Göttingen" and "CEST" with a downward arrow, and a button labeled "12 24". The right section has a text box containing "06:43", a dropdown menu showing "your location" in green with a downward arrow, and a button labeled "COPY LINK". Below these sections, there are two buttons: "TIME" and "DATE". At the bottom, there is a link that says "We're [now Dateful!](#)".

INTRODUCTION

For Margaret Atwood, politics and art inherently belong together. In the pioneering poetry collection *Power Politics* (1971), Atwood addresses the intertwining of the personal and the political, which has run through her oeuvre ever since. “Power is our environment. We live surrounded by it: it pervades everything we are and do, invisible and soundless, like air.” (1973, 7) For decades Atwood’s work has resonated as tales of and testaments to political, socio-economic, and (bio)technological concerns of our present times. While Atwood has been vocal about politics, an environmental activist, and keenly involved with the PEN association, her writings have recently acquired a new international impact that underlines the fusion of politics and aesthetics in her work. Her classic female dystopia *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) has gained momentum as a prophetic 20th-century allegory of 21st-century political developments in the US, seeing a 670% year-on-year increase in sales and firmly sitting on the *Sunday Times* bestseller list for sixteen weeks in 2017. Exceptionally popularized by the multi-E Emmy and Golden Globe award-winning Hulu TV series adaptation (Miller 2017–), Atwood’s dystopian work has received a surprising fan following, including admonitory dress-ups in Handmaiden gowns. The publication of Atwood’s recent Booker prize winning *The Testaments* (2019), a revisiting of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, came along with a global fanfare, midnight bookstore launches

including staff in the signature Handmaiden gowns, live readings, and a ‘Margaret Atwood Live’ broadcast to cinemas around the world.

In *Political Aesthetics* (2010) Crispin Sartwell terms the conceptual “intimate” (11) relationship between politics and aesthetics “artpolitical”, arguing that all political systems, and politics of resistance, use aesthetics and an aesthetic system. With reference to the importance of aesthetics for a political philosophy, Ernst Bloch has emphasized the important political function of narration, “Stage and story can be either a protective park or a laboratory; sometimes they console or appease, sometimes they incite; they can be a flight from or a prefiguring of the future” (1968). In this sense, literary and media representations and cultural adaptation practices contain a significant transformative potential that reaches beyond the page. Although arguably not all literature is driven by a political impetus, literature that intentionally triangularly oscillates between reality, speculation, and fiction provides an exceptional imaginary laboratory—what John Gardner called a “moral laboratory” (1978)—for ethical, political, and personal choices and for concerns about resilience, responsibilities/responsibilities, and vulnerabilities (cf. Johnson 1993; Nussbaum 1995, 1997, Butler 2016, Haraway 2016).

Our conference seeks to address this interaction between politics and aesthetics in Atwood's oeuvre as well as its various transmedial

adaptations. We seek to explore the various facets and layers of the artpolitical in her work, including for example the themes of social and environmental justice, Anthropocene, posthumanism, the role of religion or political satire as well as social control, and (biotech-)identity.

16.30: KEYNOTE 1 – WENDY ROY

“A word after a word after a word is power”: The Politics of Art in Margaret Atwood’s Dystopian Duology

The title of my talk comes from Margaret Atwood’s poem “Spelling,” about the spells women cast to gain personal and political power. The speaker of the poem, watching her daughter learn to spell words, considers the connection between spelling and casting spells, and acknowledges that for women, words arranged in a particular order provide access to a power long denied them. In all of her writing, Atwood arranges “a word after a word after a word” for both artistic and political purposes, but that impetus is perhaps especially evident in her dystopian duology. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019), words are equated with power, and the first novel has had enormous political as well as aesthetic influence. Many intriguing studies have demonstrated how Atwood borrowed from history and from contemporary culture and politics for *The Handmaid’s Tale*, as well as how that novel continues to have a huge impact on our cultural and political world. This talk focuses on similar aspects of *The Testaments*, and in particular on the interrelationships between the Hulu series and Atwood’s sequel novel. It also examines *The Testaments* in the context of what has been dubbed “Peak Atwood” (Globe and Mail, 28 Dec. 2019), as well as how Atwood’s words — especially her signature on a controversial open letter and a subsequent article by her in a national

Canadian newspaper that asked, “Am I a Bad Feminist?” (Globe and Mail, 13 Jan. 2018) — have been interpreted as carrying sometimes problematic political power. I argue that *The Testaments* can be seen as Atwood’s response not just to the Hulu series but also to the cultural and political concerns evoked by both of these contemporary responses to her words.



Wendy Roy is Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Canada. Her current research project, “*Women of the Apocalypse: Writing the End of the World in Canada*,” focuses on apocalyptic and dystopian writing by contemporary Canadian authors such as Atwood. She has previously published on other aspects of gender and culture in women’s writing in Canada, including in *The Next Instalment: Serials, Sequels, and Adaptations* of Nellie L. McClung, L.M. Montgomery, and Mazo de la Roche (2019) and *Maps of Difference: Canada, Women, and Travel* (2005). She has published essays on Canadian writers including Atwood, Margaret Laurence, P.K. Page, and Carol Shields.

18.00: PANEL 1 – ADAPTATION, TRANSMEDIA

Joyce Goggin

***The Handmaid's Tale* across Platforms**

Since the publication of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1985 this narrative, described in terms ranging from provocative, startling, and prophetic to simply terrifying, has spread from text to film to television and now, to graphic novel. In this chapter I will discuss artist Renée Nault's graphic adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* (2018) and the various strategies she uses in order to bring "the terrifying reality of Gilead to vivid life like never before" ([Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)). Part of my analysis will also involve looking at the intersection between the spread of Atwood's work of speculative fiction and the varying degrees of 'realness' or 'reality' between text and activists who now dress like handmaids in political protest, thereby invoking the progression of adaptations of the disturbing tale and its integration into everyday lives.

Annika McPherson

Adaptation as 'Artpolitical' Remediation: From *The Handmaid's Tale* to *The Testaments*

Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* has 'lived many lives' across various adaptations, as the author likes to point out in interviews. Taking its cue from Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006/2012) and Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation*

(2005/2015), this paper initiates a dialogue between theorizations of adaptation and media studies' conceptualizations of remediation. Tracing the adaptational processes from Atwood's novel to the Hulu TV series (2017-) and the 2019 graphic novel on the one hand, and from the series to Atwood's 'sequel' *The Testaments* (2019) on the other hand, remediation complicates the frameworks in which the adaptation, especially of the TV series, tends to be discussed. Although the 'artpolitical' (Sartwell) context shifts in each example, I argue that in spite of their significant differences, the basic 'compatibility' of the TV series and *The Testaments* in terms of worldbuilding necessitates a reconceptualization of 21st century transmedia adaptations. Based on Atwood's oft-cited technique of working historical events and contexts into *The Handmaid's Tale* ("I made nothing up"), I argue that compilation is the dominant technique that is at work across the remediated material in its various manifestations. Through an analysis of the (in terms of adaptational directions rather unusual) interactions between the series and the 'sequel' literary text of *The Testaments*, I conceptualize the 'artpolitical' remediation of *The Handmaid's Tale* as a way to trace the reconfiguration of aesthetic and politics in the context of 21st century media practices of production, distribution and reception.

Dunja M. Mohr

The Art of Storytelling and Adaptation

Why do we tell stories? And why do we *love* to hear, read, watch, design, weave, draw, paint, build, and witness stories? Where does this appetite for stories, fictional or scientific, come from? In *The Storytelling Animal* (2012) the American literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall argues that storytelling as such makes us human, claiming that “We are, as a species, addicted to story.” In his essay *Narrare necesse est* (2000) the German philosopher Odo Marquard maintains that although we live *off* the material world, we essentially live *in* an immaterial narrated world. We are, he contends, intrinsically self-narrating animals entangled in myriad stories about our past, present, and future. In *The Art Instinct* (2009)—drawing on Darwin and evolutionary aesthetics—the American philosopher Denis Dutton provocatively goes as far as to claim that art has its root in genetics, understanding arts as “a cluster of features”. Arts, Dutton asserts, are “evolutionary adaptation”. Brian Boyd’s *On the Origin of Stories* (2009) similarly outlines an evolutionary approach to art and storytelling.

Clearly then, language is a powerful tool and participates in shaping reality, “it performs real actions in the world of beings” (Heidegger, qtd. in Koelbl, 15). Stories can modulate our perception of reality and trigger real world responses and hence literary narratives contain a significant potential for societal and/or personal microtransformations. Literature can thus be perceived as a socially symbolic act (Jameson) that

aestheticizes a political unconscious, potentially contributing to the internalization (Althusser!) or the disruption of a dominant ideology, addressing politics either directly or implicitly. This intricate ‘artpolitical’ (Sartwell) relationship between politics and literature is blurry, but “the worlds that ‘Literature’ and ‘Politics’ denote have their connections, their multiple interactions, their border zones and their complexities” (Laing 2013).

In my paper, I briefly trace the importance of storytelling and its political power and adaptive drive to co-shape our world(s), turning then to power politics and storytelling in Atwood’s oeuvre.

18.00: PANEL 2 – GENDER POLITICS I

Eva-Sabine Zehelein

Reproductive justice in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

Merriam-Webster's 2017 Word of the Year was “feminism.” Lookups spiked after the Women’s March on Washington D.C. in January, when in February Kellyanne Conway said in an interview that she did not consider herself a feminist (“in the classic sense because it seems to be very anti-male and it certainly is very pro-abortion”), when in March the TV-series *The Handmaid's Tale* was released and women dressed as “Offred” protested anti-abortion and anti-choice legislation in Texas and Ohio, when in June the film *Wonder Woman* came out, and when over many months hundreds of stories of sexual harassment and assault surfaced (“#MeToo-movement”). These American examples illustrate that it is in these our neoliberal times and biomedicalized / biopolitical century when bodies, body parts and tissue are traded and transported worldwide, and women’s health, human rights and reproductive freedom are endangered in many countries including the US – e.g. recent political battles over contraception, attempts to roll back abortion rights, fetal ‘personhood’ debates, curbed access to (comprehensive) health care – that the systemics of reproductive politics need to be addressed. The lens of reproductive justice serves just this purpose. The term reproductive justice (RJ) was coined in 1994 by black feminists. According to Ross/Solinger, it means the right to have children, the right

not to have children, and the right to raise children in safe and healthy environments broadly conceived. My paper analyzes *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* (also e.g. Atwood’s *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels* speech) and teases out with an intersectional RJ toolkit Atwood’s political aesthetics in the context of a liberal reproductive politics agenda in the teeth of adverse ultra conservative political developments.

Theodore F. Sheckels

The Beginnings of Margaret Atwood’s Political Activism:

Revisiting *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* after Fifty Years

Margaret Atwood as a political novelist has received much attention due to *The Handmaid's Tale* and trilogy of *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*; however, she was more than incipiently political long before penning these books. In fact, much of her politics was fully-formed as early as her first two novels. Both the feminist strand and the environmental strand are apparent—and merging—in *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *Surfacing* (1972) and given expression raucously funny in the one book and poetically edgy in the other. Atwood is very clearly playing with both voice and form in these early novels, as one would expect a young writer to be. Some artistic choices that we might now term “Atwoodian” are not set; plus, there is a lack of assuredness in Atwood’s conclusions. But the politics are certain and presented, not in

Thursday, 14 October 2021 – Conference Day 1

dystopian terms but in starkly real ones. Thus, the early novels serve not only as Atwood's foundation but as a realistic counterpoint to the highly politicized books she is more famous for.

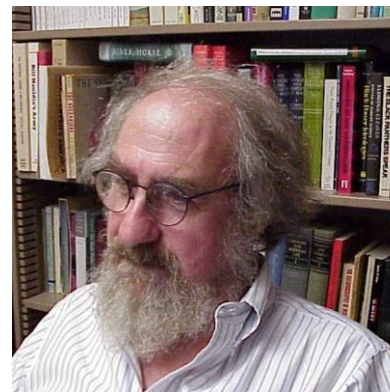
20.00: KEYNOTE 2 – LYMAN TOWER SARGENT

The Importance of Utopian Thinking in Dystopian Times

Our environment is being destroyed and scientific evidence in this and other important areas is being discounted or ignored. Our so-called leaders are corrupt and constantly lie and get away with it with the support of career politicians whose only interest is being re-elected and using their position for personal advantage. Corporations dominate the economy and politics and are only interested in what they call efficiency or the bottom line, i.e., their short-term profits. The rich/poor divide is at an obscene level. Millions are hungry or starving and homeless or live in squalor. Few people have any stability in their work, and more and more people are being replaced by automation. Racism and sexism remain endemic, and the growth of ethnonationalism produces hatred and violence throughout the world. And that was before the pandemic. On dimensions too numerous to mention, we live in dystopian times.

I have long argued that the way to counter a dystopia is with a eutopia, and today I shall argue that in our dystopian, perhaps even apocalyptic times, that remains true. Dystopias are important as warnings, but the warnings have been ignored and have become reality, even for those of us who are relatively privileged. Therefore, something different is needed, and today I want to talk about one of those somethings, positive utopias. In doing so I focus first on the recent interest in what has been

called realistic utopias, particularly the project developed by Eric Olin Wright and the best-selling book, *Utopia for Realists*, by Rutger Bregman. Then I shall discuss some aspects of the project on Utopia and/in Everyday Life that Lucy Sargisson, best-known for her book *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, and I have been working on from some years that was derailed by her worsening Multiple Sclerosis. And it seemed to me that this would be an appropriate place to rethink what utopias can say to us about education, one of the institutions that has been most impacted by the pandemic, is especially relevant to this group, is, in my view, central to what most utopians think is wrong with contemporary society, and, also in my view, is one of the most fundamental roads to an improved society. I conclude by raising some issues with our positive utopias that may undermine their ability to critiques and transform our dystopian reality.



Lyman Tower Sargent is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He has been a Visiting Professor at the Universities in England and New Zealand, a Visiting Fellow, Mansfield College, University of Oxford, an Honorary Research Fellow, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, University of London, a Visiting

Research Fellow, Centre for Political Ideologies, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford; and a Fellow of the Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand); a Fellow of the Centre for New Zealand Studies, Birkbeck College, University of London; and a Highfield Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies, University of Nottingham. He was also a Visiting Member of the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton). He was the founding Editor of *Utopian Studies* (1990-2004). He is author of *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (2010); and *Utopian Literature in English: An Annotated Bibliography From 1516 to the Present*. State College, PA: Penn State University Libraries, 2016 on. openpublishing.psu.edu/utopia and other books; and co-author with Lucy Sargisson of *Living in Utopia: Intentional Communities in New Zealand* (2004); author of numerous articles; editor of *Extremism in America: A Reader* (1995), *Political Thought in the United States: A Documentary History* (1997), and other books; co-editor with Gregory Claeys of *The Utopia Reader* (1999 2nd ed. 2017) and with Michael Freeden and Marc Stears of *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (2013); co-editor of special issues on utopianism of *Spaces of Utopia* and *Utopian Studies*. From 1997-2000 he advised the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the New York Public Library on their joint exhibit “Utopie: La quête de la société idéale en Occident/Utopia: The Quest for the Ideal Society in the West” which was shown in Paris from April to July 2000 and in New York from October 2000 to January 2001. He was co-editor with Roland Schaer and

Gregory Claeys of the catalogs in French and English published to accompany the exhibits. He is the recipient of the Distinguished Scholar Award of both the Society for Utopian Studies and the Communal Studies Association. The Society for Utopian Studies has named this award the Lyman Tower Sargent Distinguished Scholar Award.

21.00: ONLINE SOCIALIZING & ATWOOD GAMES NIGHT

- TAKES PLACE IN ANOTHER ZOOM CONFERENCE ROOM -

Follow this [link](#)¹ to join us for a fun night of Atwood themed games, small talk and networking over in our special Zoom rooms!

Head over to **The Arcade** for a round of trivia to find out who is truly an expert in all things Margaret Atwood and battle each other in teams in a heated game of Atwood Taboo and other games.

If you prefer to have some small talk and network, meet us at **The Bar!**

Want some privacy? Directly message Dr Sandrock, Dr Mohr, or the conference assistants Marie Rieske, Lamia Berki, or Lille Haase on Zoom so we can add you to your own **secret room** to chat with one another.

¹ Alternatively, copy this into your browser: <https://uni-goettingen.zoom.us/j/98113804191?pwd=UnVldTcybmdGU2ZldVlyWCtWdkZOQT09>

10.00: PANEL 3 – RESISTANCE AND POLITICS

Annika Gonnermann

The Totalitarian Face of Neoliberalism: Forms of Critique in Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*

Ever since the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1981), both critics and the wider public have considered Margaret Atwood to be on one level with George Orwell in terms of cultural relevance. As Guardian journalist Claire Armitstead asserts, “[o]nce or twice in a generation, a novel appears that vaults out of the literary corral to become a phenomenon, familiar to people the world over who have never read the book: George Orwell’s *1984* [sic!] is one and Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid's Tale* is another.” Her 2015 dystopia *The Heart Goes Last* has attracted considerably less attention despite the fact that it offers multiple interesting starting points for analysis, the most important one being the factor that the novel features not one but *two* dystopian systems: the neoliberal dystopia of contemporary America and the totalitarian Consilience project. In my paper I want to dive into the theory of formulating critique by drawing on Rahel Jaeggi’s taxonomy of ‘external criticism’, ‘internal criticism’ and ‘immanent criticism’ as published in *Critique of Forms of Life* (2019), demonstrating its relevance for classifying dystopian fiction according to the way dystopian texts criticize the extraliterary reality. As a second step, I would like to apply Jaeggi’s Application theory and thereby show that *The Heart Goes Last*

does not work with ‘external criticism’ – like traditionally dystopian literature operates with (as I will argue) – but with ‘immanent criticism: it does not try to dream up an alternative society that is to replace the dystopian one, like for instance *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does, but immanently criticizes neoliberal capitalism, by mapping its many deficiencies *without* ultimately offering a way out. This is why *The Heart Goes Last* constitutes an exciting addition to the dystopian genre, which has become rather formulaic over the last couple of years.

Alessandra Boller

“We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print” – Storytelling, the Distribution of the Sensible, and Atwood’s Speculative Fiction

“We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print,” states Offred in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, reflecting on the time before the dystopian state Gilead eventually relegated most women to positions of invisibility and inaudibility. It is therefore noteworthy that both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* mostly consist of apparently personal stories, recorded by women in different ways, and hence ponder the power of the act of storytelling; a recurring theme in Atwood’s speculative fiction. Proceeding from Jacques Rancière’s conviction that aesthetics and politics are inseparably connected to one another, and putting into dialogue Hélène Cixous’ call for women writing with

Rancière's concept of "distribution of the sensible," i.e. the legitimization of certain forms of seeing, speaking and acting, the proposed talk discusses the cultural and political work of these two speculative novels. These novels can be considered aesthetic practices that render inequalities highly visible and raise awareness for the need of a constant renegotiation of the "distribution of the sensible" in multiple manners. In particular, my talk discusses to what extent the emergence of politics can occur through Offred's and Aunt Lydia's acts of telling (life) stories and through the (imagined) reception of their narratives in the storyworld. I regard Offred and Lydia as two sides of the same coin, as women who both "intend to last" but find themselves in different positions with regard to notions of centre and margin that also affect their modes of narrating and the ensuing emergence of politics.

Ayça Berna Görmez

"Freedom Goes First": The Dilemma of Freedom and Security in *The Heart Goes Last*

The Heart Goes Last is set in USA and portrays a society in which the whole system is broke down, from banking to manufacturing; unemployment, homelessness and violence have accelerated in such a way that they constitute norms rather than the exception. The story is told around a young couple, Charmine and Stan who lost their homes, lived in their car, and lost their jobs. Their lives are now organized around

their bare lives, they struggle to survive and they are at the point where they exchange their freedom for security. Late capitalist societies are characterized by uncertainty, insecurity and vulnerability. In such precarious conditions, the dilemma between freedom and security gains utmost importance. The trade-off between freedom and security is not peculiar to contemporary societies. What is peculiar is the ratio that we confront with this dilemma has increased. Late capitalist societies exploit the fears and anxieties derived from uncertainty and insecurity and *The Heart Goes Last* projects this exploitation. An offer is made in *the Heart Goes Last*; security in exchange for freedom and as it is an offer, to accept or decline is considered as the free will. As Atwood strongly suggests, "for the sake of freedom, freedom must be renounced." The renunciation of freedom for the sake of freedom in *The Heart Goes Last* will be analyzed in relation to the theory of liquid modernity with an emphasis on capitalism, on the contradiction between freedom and security, and co-occurrence of freedom and domination. Atwood generally opens up a space for possibility of resistance, and a better future, she did little in *The Heart Goes Last*. Though she makes us to question the choices we have, the free will. Thus a discussion on free will be added to the analysis of above mentioned subjects.

10.00: PANEL 4 – IDENTITY POLITICS: NATION, PHOTOGRAPHY, AFFECT

Anca-Raluca Radu

***Alias Grace*: Imagining the Nation in the Victorian Age**

This paper focuses on Atwood's 1996 novel, *Alias Grace*, and situates it in the context of national historiography. *Alias Grace* has received ample scholarly attention as a prime example of historiographic metafiction displaying the postmodernist *jouissance* of a text that constantly tricks the reader, and featuring a protagonist that skillfully eludes attempts of both characters and readers to pin her down. The aspect of the novel that this contribution explores is that of the novel as a neo-Victorian historical fiction which incorporates foundational narratives of Canadian nation building, of the history of Upper Canada and in particular of the city of Toronto. When *Alias Grace* appeared in 1996 a debate had been going on in Canadian studies about national identity and the role of literature. Frank Davey famously argued in his 1993 *Post-national Arguments* that Canada was a post-national state without having ever experienced nation status at all. In the sixteen Canadian novels written after 1967 which he analyses, he cannot find any novel with an explicit focus on the idea of the nation and national community, but rather on individuals and their quests (*Post-national* 258-59). David Taras and Beverly Rasporich edited the third edition of *A Passion for Identity* in 1997 and Taras states in the preface that "the country seems adrift in

crisis" (1). At the same time, in her 1997 study *Nationalism and Literature*, Sarah M. Course registers the formation of an awareness of a Canadian national literature roughly a hundred years after Confederation, i.e., around 1967, the year in which Frank Davey's post-national argument begins. This paper will situate the publication of Atwood's novel within this debate, also taking into account Atwood's continuous contributions to it in other works as well, such as *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), *Survival* (1972), *Surfacing* (1972), or *Negotiations with the Dead* (2002). It suggests that *Alias Grace* is part of Atwood's ongoing interest in the intricacies and negotiations of national identity in Canada. *Alias Grace*'s representation of femininity and Irishness has a lot to add to the narrative of the nation, showing how Grace's fragile position as an immigrant Irish servant makes her vulnerable, and dispelling illusions of a fresh start in the new country. Unlike in the story of the real Grace, in Atwood's re-telling the female figure is empowered because she has her own voice and tells her story on her own terms. From her mother dying on the voyage, to Grace's little siblings, Grace's friend, Mary Whitney, and Nancy Montgomery, Grace's murder victim, the novel offers an array of female figures that feminize the history of Victorian Upper Canada, and complicate it by bringing gender, class and ethnicity to the fore of its representation. The novel does not have an easily identifiable politics, but a seducing aesthetics that, in playful post-modernist manner, leaves the multiple questions it raises unanswered, indicating that a straightforward version of the events

it neither possible nor desirable. By looking at the world of the penitentiary and the asylum, dissecting the mind of a criminal and displaying the impotence of medical and legal authorities to understand and control that mind as well as by exposing the sexual and moral corruption of domesticity, the novel cuts to the core of central institutions of public and private life on which building a new country should rely. Simultaneously, the novel is a contribution of the story of the nation by filling in gaps left out of the official record for being unpalatable or incompatible with its politics.

Katinka Krausz

Fit in without being known”: An analysis of a multidimensional photograph in *Lady Oracle*

As Coral Ann Howells writes in her monograph on Margaret Atwood, “*Lady Oracle* is a story about storytelling.” Indeed, in the novel the protagonist, Joan Foster, presents numerous intertwining narratives that cast light on her tendency to invent alternative personalities. My paper focuses on a photograph depicting Joan with her Aunt Lou that repeatedly appears in the narrative and becomes a catalyst for the fabrication of stories. The photograph has only two physical copies but it is multiplied by the various interpretations offered by Joan. Based on her accounts, the picture simultaneously depicts her as a teenager with her aunt; her aunt with her other (non-existent) aunt; and her own duplicate,

a writer of Gothic romances, with an unidentified other person. The aim of my paper is to observe how Joan utilizes the seeming emptiness of the photograph and its need for completion with additional information as a tool that serves the fabrication of multiple identities. As female characters who employ photographs to assume control over their own narratives are a recurring feature of Atwood’s novels, I propose to observe how Joan’s character fits into Atwood’s oeuvre, too.

Maryam Moosavi Majd

The Study of Affect in Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam* Trilogy

Modernity’s materialization, exploitation and destruction of nature along with the rapid biotechnological developments, and excessive consumption is the central cause of environmental and ecological distress today. Some contemporary narratives consider the threat posed by the humanist concepts, and critically challenge the ideology which has to be overcome by creating biotechnological dystopias with posthuman beings. Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam* trilogy challenges the ethics of the human value systems and their possible future with intricate scientific details. Atwood voices her concerns and questions the very idea of human survival in an era when capitalism became so naturalized, and the imagination of any possible alternatives to what is currently happening to our world seem to be impossible. Alarming her readers about the consequences of negligence and abuse of nature, she depicts

the fall of man through a dystopian/utopian apocalyptic narrative demanding the readers to take these issues seriously. The *Maddaddam* trilogy makes use of narrative techniques which Atwood has been using in most of her novels and expands the way those prominent themes are developed. Of particular interest for our research is the way Atwood affects her readers and activates emotional responses in them. Therefore, this research utilizes an interdisciplinary approach and draws on insights from affect studies and cognitive science to have a better understanding of the techniques deployed in Atwood's trilogy, which appeal to the readers through embodied cognition and invoke emotional responses in them.

12.00: PANEL 5 – COMPARATIVE APPROACHES I

Wolfgang Kloöß

Margaret Atwood's Retelling of *The Tempest* in Comparative Perspective

The paper attempts to position and analyse Atwood's *Hag-Seed* (2016) in the context of selected cross-genre adaptations of Shakespeare's romance, with Aimé Césaire's dramatic treatment *Une tempête* (1969), Peter Greenaway's filmic version *Prospero's Books* (1991), as well as some pictorial representations of the play's material at the fore. Besides Atwood's thematically and ideologically inspired retelling of *The Tempest*, special emphasis will be placed on the performative aspects, such as the staging of Shakespeare's work, which are highlighted in her novel.

Eleonora Rao

Home and Homelessness in Margaret Atwood and Tony Morrison's Poetry

This paper discusses the striking similar yet different ways Margaret Atwood and Tony Morrison's poetry look at the question of being or feeling at home. In particular, Atwood's penultimate collection of poems, *Morning in the Burned House* (1995) and Morrison's song cycle written some twenty years ago, "Whose House is This?" (which became the

epigraph of her 2012 novel *Home*) create a haunting atmosphere of alienation, of an eerie, shadowy and dissembling domicile. Both texts offer a scenario in which the lyric I longs to feel at home and secure. However, the sense of stability and safety they relentlessly try to hold on to, constantly escapes them.

12.00: PANEL 6 – POLITICS AND STORYTELLING

Katarina Labudova

Happy Endings: Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* and *The Testaments*

The endings of Margaret Atwood's latest dystopias *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) and *The Testaments* (2019) depart from the realm of her typical anxieties and the open-endedness of her previous speculative fiction novels. As ever, she exploits fairy tale characters, settings, motifs and plots in her fiction not just to evoke the resonant forms of storytelling but to create intertexts that parody and give alternate or even reversed meaning to fairy tale tropes. Atwood sees fairy tales as open sources providing input for rewriting and subversion. This paper focuses on the strategies Atwood uses to reconstruct the traditional policies of Bluebeards, resourceful girls and evil witches and inscribes a constructive ambiguity. Drawing on previous critical work by Sharon Rose Wilson, Susan Seller and Sarah A. Appleton, it examines the new functions that fairy tale elements acquire in Atwood's dystopian writing. By linking the fairy tale with dystopian genres, Atwood injects political turbulence into her speculative writing, problematizing human rights and ecological nightmares. Her fairy tale infused hybrid genre enables the dystopian prison to be simultaneously the dark enchanted forest of a fairy tale, offering the same challenge and hope of finding a path to a happy ending.

Carla Scarano D'Antonio

An Intertextual reading of the politics of storytelling in *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood

My article explores how Margaret Atwood deconstructs dichotomous visions of women and proposes a reconstruction of women's identity in the dominant sociopolitical context, suggesting alternative aesthetic systems. This implies self-knowledge and acceptance of both the good and the bad side of their identity; the acknowledgement of this reality is required in order to survive. This acknowledgement engages the readers in a process of critical thinking about the world that surrounds them, that is, a world of language, though the story also refers to a 'real' world where things have happened and might occur again. Atwood's technique of both referring to a physical world and revisiting myths, fairy tales and literary classics gives space to a rethinking of the rules and roles of the dominant society. At the same time, it questions the readers' position in this world as well as power relations in society. The emphasis is on transformation but also on saving human culture in a wider perspective, which implies a tenacious survival and a constant metamorphosis. She challenges the narratives of the dominant society by exposing their inconsistencies and hypocrisies but confirms their power. This leads to multiple readings, resulting in a polyphonic concept of language.

14.30: KEYNOTE 3 – BRIGITTE GLASER

Margaret Atwood's Venture into Graphic Novels: (Aesthetic) Form and (Political) Function of the *Angel Catbird* Trilogy and the *War Bears* Series

Margaret Atwood has repeatedly commented on her longstanding interest in comics, as a consumer, a producer, and a critic of the same. Her curiosity about the flourishing genre of the graphic novel does therefore not come as a surprise. Her own creative output, whether the cartoons she made when she was a young woman or the *Angel Catbird* trilogy and *War Bears* mini series she co-produced during recent years, combines the aesthetic and the political. In my presentation I will assess the changing form and quality of her ventures into comic literature, by reading her work against the historical background in which it arose, by exploring the technological and aesthetic dimensions of these texts, and by examining the political agenda that drove these ventures. I hope to show that even though the aesthetics opted for by Atwood may differ, the topics she addresses in her cartoons and graphic narratives resemble those that are also taken up in both her novels and her short stories. These include questions on women's place in society, ecocritical concerns about environmental degradation and scientific experimentation as well as a preoccupation on the author's part with Canadian culture and identity.



Brigitte Johanna Glaser is Professor of Anglophone Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Göttingen, Germany. She has published two monographs on 18th-century English fiction and 17th-century autobiographical writing respectively.

During the last few years her research focus and publications have been on colonial and postcolonial literature as well as transcultural writing. Her publications include articles on modernism, the First World War, and contemporary Canadian fiction as well as transnational writing. A co-edited volume of essays on *The Canadian Mosaic in the Age of Transnationalism* appeared in 2010, one on *Narrating Loss* in 2014, and one on postcolonial and transcultural writing (*Transgressions/Transformations: Literature and Beyond*) in 2018. Her most recent co-edition is *Shifting Grounds: Cultural Tectonics along the Pacific Rim* (2020).

15.30: PANEL 7 – POLITICS AND ETHICS IN ATWOOD'S SPECULATIVE FICTION

Manuel J. Sousa Oliveira

Both Fox and Cat: The Politics of Ambiguity in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

In Margaret Atwood's Gilead novels, several oppositions arise in the context of the oppression of women by a totalitarian dystopian regime, such as complicity/subversiveness, action/passivity, and utopia/dystopia. This paper proposes to explore the ambiguities in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019) to argue that the ultimate project of hope in both novels requires that freedom be achieved by actively engaging in moral choices. There are two interrelated modes of ambiguity this paper will focus on: aesthetic and political. Ambiguity will be understood as a device which opens up the text for multiple meanings, thus engaging the reader in the complexities of character and narrative, on the one hand, and in political thinking, on the other. For instance, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, though a victim, Offred finds it hard to exclude herself from the responsibility of her own oppression. These sort of ambiguities, however, create complexities in the text which make its political language opaquer. It appears, then, that *The Testaments* is less politically ambiguous as not to prompt misunderstandings of Atwood's intended social commentary. Nevertheless, to varying degrees, both novels remain aesthetically ambiguous at specific instances. In moments

of self-awareness, the female characters – particularly Offred and Aunt Lydia – apparently reflect the tensions of the dystopian society through the medium of language. Without reconciling the differences within and between the texts, this approach recognizes how the novels manage to expose the complexities of power politics through the device of ambiguity.

Tatiana Konrad

Veganism, Ecoethics, and Climate Change in Margaret Atwood's "MaddAddam" Trilogy

This paper focuses on Margaret Atwood's "MaddAddam" trilogy – that includes *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013) – to discuss veganism as a powerful ideology in ecologically precarious times. The trilogy envisions a post-apocalyptic world that is the result of humanity's careless treatment of the environment. Veganism becomes a tool through which Atwood's novels provide a harsh critique of capitalism and its major aspects – abundant production and conspicuous consumption. The trilogy blames humanity's avaricious attitudes to the environment that is taken for granted, exploited, and abused. Atwood's novels display consumption of meat as a cultural product of the era of humanity's colonization and rapid destruction of nature. Veganism is thus used in the trilogy to censure our current food habits and traditions, criticize capitalism, promote animal

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rights, and reinforce the nature of the current environmental collapse as explicitly human-made.

15.30: PANEL 8 – COMPARATIVE APPROACHES II

Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk

When the Real Meets the Imagined: A Comparative Analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Herta Müller's Essays

The paper presents the results of a comparative analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and essays written by Herta Müller. The point of departure for the analysis is the reference to the Romanian regime of Ceaușescu contained in the *Historical Notes on The Handmaid's Tale*, which constitute an integral part of Atwood's novel. Juxtaposing the aforementioned novel with Herta Müller's essays, the paper reveals conspicuous parallels between the actual experience of living under a regime, omnipresent in the texts of the Romanian-born German author, and the dystopian narrative of Offred, the protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*. The discussed texts are examined through the lens of the poetics of experience, that is, they are treated as a record of an individual experience which has the power to influence the reader through emphatic involvement.

Tom Friedman

Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* and Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer*

Margaret Atwood's 1981 novel *Bodily Harm* and Joan Didion's 1977 novel *A Book of Common Prayer* both engage the intertwined relationships among gender, politics and the exercise of power. Rennie Wilford and Charlotte Douglas are 'outsiders' by virtue of their genders who must navigate the complex relationships that dominate political and family realms, and must finally come to terms with their own pasts and their own identities in the face of personal danger. Ste. Antoine and Boca Grande represent exotic and threatening spaces in which the novels' protagonists are forced to develop survival strategies. In my presentation I will refer to Atwood's "Torture" and "Notes Toward a Poem That Can Never Be Written" (*True Stories* [1981]), both poems having been written contemporaneously with her novel. And I will demonstrate that Carolyn Forché's poems "The Colonel" and "The Visitor" (*The Country Between Us* [1981]) are important intertexts for understanding the development of Atwood's concepts of power relationships. The poems help in a broader appreciation of the themes of the two novels, specifically the ways in which Wilford and Douglas are transformed from detached—somewhat naïve—observers to victims of the powerful forces that degrade and subjugate.

17.00: KEYNOTE 4 – KARMA WALTONEN

Beyond Didacticism: The Relationship between the Personal and the Political in *Oryx and Crake*

Much discussion of *Oryx and Crake* has been devoted to putting together the pieces Atwood has left us—evidence of the destruction of the natural world, the rampant misuses of science, the horrors of privatization, increasing class stratification, etc.

What these discussions too often neglect is the parallels Atwood creates between the apocalypse of human society and the breakdown of meaningful human relationships. This is shown in the parallels Atwood creates between Jimmy's mother and Crake, parallels in imagery (Jimmy is disgusted by headless chickens, but not by his adolescent fantasies about headless women), and parallels in Jimmy's role in and reaction to the breakup of his parents' marriage and Crake's cleansing of the world. In fact, many of his hindsight musings can be applied to either of the incidents: "Why hadn't he seen it all coming and headed it off, instead of playing at mean ventriloquism." Unfortunately, Jimmy is not able to make the connection between the two catastrophes and how in both instances he failed to see what was coming. The reader, however, is able to make this connection, noting how Jimmy behaved in parallel ways only to find parallel regrets. Yet parallel may not be the best way to describe the relationship between these events. Rather, we can understand these

events as parallel in the same way that concentric ripples in water are parallel. That is, they are circularly parallel, but also causative, with the smaller circles creating the larger ones.

Although Jimmy cannot foresee his mother's departure, Crake's apocalypse, or the relationship between the two, Atwood wants us to do better. She also uses the structure of the novel to wake her audience to events Jimmy remains passive about. The presence of these hints brings us to a conundrum Atwood identifies. How didactic to be?: "Are you to be a detached observer, pursuing your art for its own sake . . . Or ought you to be a dedicated spokesperson for the downtrodden on this earth" (*Negotiating* 106). The question the reader asks of Jimmy is the same Atwood asks of writers: "Does your inaction lead to a societal crime?" (*Negotiating* 102). Atwood writes; we are to read. Carefully. We become the protagonist, searching through the ruins for the signs (both political and personal) Jimmy missed.



Dr. Karma Waltonen is a senior lecturer at the University of California, Davis, where she teaches professional writing courses, like Writing in Social Justice and Writing in Health Science, and specialty courses on Atwood, *The Simpsons*, *Doctor Who*, and Writing & Performing Stand-Up Comedy. She is the former President of the Margaret Atwood

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Society and the editor of its journal, *Margaret Atwood Studies*. Her most recent publication is a textbook: *Who's Your Source? A Writer's Guide to Effectively Evaluating and Ethically Using Resources*. She is the 2015 recipient of UC Davis's Academic Federation Excellence in Teaching Award.

14.00: PANEL 9 – GENDER AND POLITICS II

Jayde Martin and Katherine Parsons

Re-reading Oryx's Narrative: The Exploitation of Women of Colour Under Corporate Capitalism in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

As a sex-trafficked woman of colour under corporate capitalism, the character of Oryx is crucial to understanding the intersection of race, gender, and class politics in *Oryx and Crake* (Jefferys, 2005; Wolkowitz et al, 2013; Jha, 2016; Bohrer, 2019). This paper examines the erasure of her narrative agency as critiquing the power of corporate-capitalism to silence minority experiences under the guise of liberty (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Neville, 2005).

Previous studies have touched upon the problematic white male perspective of the text (Hall, 2009; Dunning, 2005), a critical oeuvre from which this paper builds to examine the role of corporate capitalism in motivating Oryx's ability to enact and narrate her experiences. Her journey from enslavement to freedom is made ambiguous under corporate-capitalist self-exploitation (Baudrillard, 1998), which she perceives as social mobility. This is echoed by Atwood's dual construction of Oryx's narrative (plainly expressed, yet undermined by the elusivity of her narrative voice and troubled agency), which represents the effects of corporate-capitalism in overwriting the exploitation of women of colour.

This duality is central to Atwood's aesthetics, raising consciousness of the politicised erasure of Oryx's narrative agency. Atwood's use of bildungsroman, temporal layers (Aldama 2009), and character focalised third-person narrative obscures Oryx's maturation from the reader. Although these devices promise clarity, Oryx is representationally denatured (Baudrillard, 1983) by the mediative devices through which she is perceived.

Chiara Feddeck

“Just because there's a silence it doesn't mean that nothing is going on.” – Objectification, Gendered Trauma, and Identity in Selected Novels by Margaret Atwood

The female body is often objectified and used, something Atwood writes about with irony in her 1990 essay “The Female Body”. Connected to this objectification is trauma inflicted upon women both in the personal realm but also in a larger context. Both things are of course caused and fueled by patriarchy and misogyny and it is here where the political enters the personal. However, the female body can also be a powerful tool for women to create their own space and to find their identities when they break through the borders put around them by patriarchy or by themselves for protection, as victims of traumas tend to do. They need to cross these borders in some way to heal from their traumas and become survivors instead of victims. Hence, the female body can

simultaneously be a symbol of subjugation but also of power. These are topics that often recur in Atwood's work in various ways and this paper will explore how characters in her work heal from their trauma and find their identities. I will look at the novels *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Bodily Harm* (1981), and *The Robber Bride* (1993) and the different ways the characters deal with objectification, trauma, and trying to find their identity as they cross personal and national borders.

Gabriella Colombo Machado

Care-giving as Rebellion in Atwood's Gilead

In this presentation, I will explore the implications of an ethics of care to the totalitarian regime of Gilead in both of Atwood's novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Gilead's regime works by undermining personal relations and imprisoning individuals into strict social roles. Effectively, it hinders the possibilities of care to happen. Ethics of care highlights the responsibilities we have to each other, while pointing out the dangers in failing them. In Gilead, it is impossible to care for one another, because the rigid social hierarchy does not foster potential sites for intimacy or sharing. Without being able to give and receive care, every human connection becomes an act of rebellion against the regime. Thus, Offred and Ofglen communications about Mayday become dangerous. Also, Offred and Nick's relationship signifies a defiance against the status quo. When a minimum of care

happens, as in Nick and Offred becoming attached, possibilities of resistance also occur. Before fostering a relationship with Nick, Offred would probably not have escaped Gilead. Similarly, in *The Testaments*, opposition to the regime is only achieved through caring about and care-giving others. Agnes Jemina and Becka's friendship is the reason Agnes and Nicole are able to escape Gilead with the incriminating information on the workings of the regime. Care focuses on responsibilities we owe to each other and how we might empower each other through our interdependency. Gilead exemplified how a society might attempt to move care further into invisibility, only to have care turn around as opposition, defiance and rebellion.

14.00: PANEL 10 – ECOCRITICISM, POST- AND NONHUMAN

Danette Dimarco

Avian Aesthetics and Paratextual Practices in Atwood's Bird Narratives

Birds have been consistently important to literary authors throughout modernity, but they are still the most neglected classification in growing work in Animal Studies. Even plants have found their place. In order to close the gap between ornithological and literary knowledge, this paper places avian aesthetics at the heart of its consideration of Atwood's bird narratives. The paper will discuss Atwood's long-time interest in and commitment to bird life, conservation, and bird activism. It will gloss her involvement in projects like the growing and selling of "Atwood's Blend" shade-grown coffee by Balzac's Coffee and her commitment to the Pelee Island Bird Sanctuary. Especially, it will situate her children's book *For the Birds* (1990), and its paratextual and educational environmental messages, as a literary forerunner to her graphic novel *The Complete Angel Catbird* (2018). *Slate* magazine has noted how the latter work "sits at the intersection [of] Atwood's love for superheroes, cats, birds, and mythology." While this is so, *Angel Catbird* also provides readers with an opportunity to experience a moment of "convergent evolution" (Jennifer Ackerman, *The Genius of Birds*)—where bird abilities (flight, technical aptitude, socialness, song, artistic/aesthetic creativity, spatial and temporal "ingenuity," and overall "adaptive genius") are linked directly

with human ones, once again stressing Atwood's faith in the interconnectedness of all life, as well as her belief in the power of art to push for action in caring for our natural world.

Loredana Filip

Literary Synesthesia and Human-Nonhuman Interactions in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy

The use of literary synesthesia in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy could be understood as an illustration of the artpolitical in her work. Rather than focusing on the cautionary plot, post-apocalyptic scenario or dystopian elements, this paper aims to address the innovative ways in which the author enacts a critique of the Anthropocene: the use of literary synesthesia in what I call 'survival scenes.' In these highly descriptive scenes, which occur like a halt in the main narrative, Atwood reworks the common conception of 'survival' as struggle or a life and death scenario. She shifts the focus to human-nonhuman interactions to introduce a new layer of meaning to the notion of 'survival.' This shift is achieved via the use of literary synesthesia in order to highlight a less anthropocentric view of the self. This literary device allows her to criticize the Anthropocene via different angles: it does not only blur the boundaries between the human and non-human, but it also reflects upon identity formations in a posthuman world. Thus, these scenes incorporate both an environmental approach and an interrogation of human identity. For

instance, they mediate a critique towards the humanist belief in the superiority of the mind as the hallmark of the human genius. Instead, they emphasize the essential role of bodily sensation and the importance of the material self. If synesthesia is an “intersense analogy” (O’Malley 393), the self can no longer separate its mind from the body. Finally, Atwood’s critique also stresses the function of literature as an expressive medium where art and politics meet.

Shraddha A. Singh

Prostibots and the Capitalocene: Feminism’s Posthuman Turn in Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last*

Jason W. Moore defines the Capitalocene as the “Age of Capital”, a “geopoetics for making sense of capitalism as a world-ecology of power and re/production in the web of life” (Pg.). Thus, within the ambit of the Capitalocene discourse is an attempt to focus on the exploitation of the planet and nature via systems that operate within the web of power, culture, and economy. Unlike Moore, scholars like Donna Haraway (2015) and Matt Hern and Am Johal (2018) have used the term and later preferred new coinages of their own like Chthulucene and Corporatocene respectively. While not getting into the argument about the appropriate markers for defining the Capitalocene era or rejecting any of the proposed terms, my paper seeks to establish that Capitalocene itself offers possibilities of dwelling on new ways of

exploring literature by highlighting the issues that emerge with production, circulation, distribution, and consumption within the basis of understanding society at large. Margaret Atwood presents us with various probabilities of altering humankind and nature in a future riddled with a sense of precarity with the use of biotechnology in her web-serialised novel *The Heart Goes Last*. Power, and the desire for more, fuels most of the research conducted today; and the deeper structures of technological projects need to be analysed to decode the difference between purposeful research, materialism, and fetish. Therefore, the paper is an attempt to showcase how examining speculative fiction like Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last* through such a framework offers new insights to deliberate on the impact of capital and civilizational fetishism on life and work that is instrumental in creating a sense of othering that is challenged by posthuman feminist thought via Rosi Braidotti’s and Donna Haraway’s intervention.

16.00: PANEL 11 – FEMINISMS, FICTION, AND IN_VISIBILITY

Fiona Tolan

Twenty-first Century Gileads: Feminist Dystopian Fiction after Atwood

Thirty-five years after its publication, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is more relevant and more urgent than ever. In this paper, I return to Atwood's modern classic and examine its influence and legacies in contemporary feminist dystopian writing. With some reflection on the current publishing surge in the kinds of contemporary texts that Atwood recently referred to as the "children of *Handmaid's Tale*" (*The Guardian Book Club*, 11 Feb 2021), I consider how Atwood's second-wave feminist concerns around liberty, sisterhood, reproductive rights, bodily autonomy and resistance to the patriarchy are re-imagined in the twenty-first century, both in *The Testaments*—Atwood's own twenty-first century return to Gilead—and by a later generation of "post-feminist" women writers. Atwood's 1980s novel casts a long shadow. In this paper, I compare her own revisiting and reconfiguration of Gilead to some other recent texts by dystopian writers such as Charlotte Wood (*The Natural Way of Things*) and Sophie Mackintosh (*The Water Cure*). By reading *The Testaments* alongside further examples of twenty-first century women's dystopian fiction, I consider how we might examine and assess the politics of Atwood's own "child of *Handmaid's Tale*" alongside the

contemporary gender politics of other works of recent fiction inspired by Atwood.

Chloe Carroll

Transmedia Resistance, Fourth wave Feminism, and *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has inspired a form of feminist aesthetics that dresses contemporary protests for women's rights. A prominent point of inspection, particularly the *Hulu* television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, is intersectionality. The title has created a collective identity under which feminists unite and identify against the contemporary threat of Puritanical values within politics. I aim to explore how the image of the Handmaid, meant as a means of subjugation, now illustrates defiance and unity. The Handmaid has transcended the page and screen having integrated into popular culture to become a global symbol of feminist resistance against patriarchal power. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a progressive contribution to current discussions of fourth wave feminism, expanding upon their interests to include global issues and inclusive of *all* women's rights. I intend to pursue this research to present by examining gender, body, identity and linking how Margaret Atwood's novel was effective during Ronald Reagan's presidency yet even more impactful now, during Donald Trump's presidency, when projected into social consciousness by means of transmedia.

Sylvia Mieszkowski

Tags, wings & uniforms: Ambivalent In_Visibilisations in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*

The dystopian regime of Gilead – in the TV version of *The Handmaid's Tale* (since 2017) as in the eponymous novel by Margaret Atwood (1985) on which it is based – uses several visual markers to facilitate controlling its population. In the case of the handmaids, that is, the fertile women who have been seized by the state for a 're-population programme' based on ritualised rape and sexual slavery, the most prominent of these visual markers are the red ear-tag, the white headgear known as 'wings' and the red garments. Different questions of in_visibility or in_visibilisation are attached to these three items, and I am particularly interested in their ambivalences. The tags, if seen in the context of 21st century piercing culture, could very well pass as body art and thus a form of self-expression (and given the pre-Corona phenomenon of 'handmaids parties' it is not to be ruled out that it might, one day, be embraced as such). In Gilead, however, several factors position it on the side of dehumanisation, alongside other visual markers (like branding) that originated as a practice of marking 'human property' slavery. There is a double origin to the wings the handmaids wear whenever they leave the house: in the notion, known to several cultures/religions, that covering women's hair is a sign of (sexual) modesty; and in class-stratified dress codes, according to which this type of headgear identifies

servants. For Gilead's regime the wings serve the additional purpose of restricting the handmaid's peripheral vision, which helps to disorient and isolate them. Yet, as several examples will demonstrate, the very same wings also protect the handmaids from having their facial expressions too closely monitored, which is instrumental in organising resistance. Clothes are colour-coded and tightly regulated in Gilead, according to gender and class: Commanders and guards wear black; aunts brown, middle- and upper-class wives blue/green, domestic servants and working-class people grey-green and handmaids scarlet. The latter not only evokes sexuality (Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* comes to mind) but also makes the handmaids easy to spot in this surveillance-obsessed society. In addition, the uniformity of red dresses, sweaters, cloaks, scarves, gloves and umbrellas aids to eliminate the women's individuality. Yet, as Offred puts it so succinctly when she observes "They should have never given us uniforms if they didn't want us to be an army", the uniformity of the red cloaks also produces unintended Foucaultian effects of counter-conduct. In my talk I shall be reading tags, wings and uniforms as tools of in_visibilisation that are all ambivalent, albeit in different ways. I shall analyse their roles in the logic of the spectacle and with regard to the aestheticization of violence, against the backdrop of postfeminism (Rosalind Gill), neoliberal feminism (Sarah Banet-Weiser), and popular feminism (Catherine Rottenberg).

18.00: KEYNOTE 5 – PILAR SOMACARRERA

Power and the Posthuman: Atwood's Recent Dystopias as Read in the (Post-) Pandemic Era

These times of the COVID-19 pandemic can be described, more than ever, as times of the Posthuman in the context of the current anxieties about the possible extinction of humanity because of the effects of the current (or future) pandemic(s). In 1977, Ihab Hasan produced a statement, which can be considered as the original declaration within the humanities of the advent of a “posthumanist culture”: “we need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism”. Margaret Atwood tunes into the preoccupations of posthumanism since one of her main concerns is the exploration of what it means to be human. Atwood is clearly worried about the degeneration and extinction of the human race and its natural environment, both in her early works (*Life Before Man*) and in her dystopias, such as the *MaddAddam* trilogy, *The Heart Goes Last*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Crake, the mad scientist of *Oryx and Crake* puts it bluntly: “As a species we're in deep trouble, worse than anyone's saying”.

As Jeffrey J. Cohen observes, we live in a “monster culture”. Drawing on Cohen's seven theses about monsters, it is my contention that the

COVID-19 pandemic has brought the monstrous to the fore. The Coronavirus is a tiny, but lethal, monstrous creature — despite its innocent and almost attractive pom-pom aspect — it has entered many of our bodies and, by extension our society, provoking fears that can easily be exploited by political regimes to develop new forms of power and control of the population, as Atwood has already demonstrated in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In my lecture, I will use the well-known trope of Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* (1818) as a connecting thread, given its pervasiveness in Atwood's work – both fictional and poetic – from “Speeches for Dr Frankenstein” to the *MaddAddam* trilogy. As Ron Broglio points out, Shelley's famous novel is one of the most explicit Romantic breaks from the human. Victor Frankenstein — who prefigures the mad scientist in Atwood's dystopian fiction — acknowledges that “his human nature turns with loathing of [his] occupation” (Shelley). Only three years after the bicentennial of the publication of Mary Shelley's masterpiece, the obsession with monsters, zombies, robotics, genetic engineering and cyborgs is thriving more than ever. In *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, fertile women are transformed into reproductive monsters at the service of a dictatorship which, like Victor Frankenstein, transgresses natural law. In *The Heart Goes Last*, cyborgs and prostibots are used to control the population's sexual drive in another totalitarian regime which promises people happiness if they are submissive.

In my lecture, I intend to re-examine Margaret Atwood's dystopias in light of the developments ongoing Coronavirus outbreak, along with the political and social consequences it has created, in order to shed some light upon the Covid-19 global pandemic as a world-wide crisis of human values.



Pilar Somacarrera is Associate Professor of English and Canadian Literature at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM). In 2016 she was certified to become Full Professor by the Spanish Agency for the Assessment of Research. She has translated three of Margaret Atwood's poetry collections into Spanish: *Power Politics* (*Juegos de Poder*, 2000), *The Door* (*La puerta*, 2009) and *True Stories* (*Historias reales*, 2010). In addition to working on Margaret Atwood, she has published numerous articles in international journals about other Canadian women writers such as Alice Munro and Mavis Gallant, and Ann-Marie MacDonald and edited a book about the reception of English-Canadian Literature in Spain (*Made in Canada, Read in Spain: Essays on the Translation and Circulation of English Canadian Literature*, 2013). In 2016-17 she promoted and sponsored Margaret Atwood's honorary doctorate from her university, the first she received in a Spanish-speaking country. Her most read

and quoted pieces on Atwood are her two chapters in the first and second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (both edited by Coral Ann Howells in 2006 and 2021): "Power Politics: Power and Identity" and "Margaret Atwood on Questions on Power"; and her essay on the political dimension of Atwood's poetry: "Witness is What You Must Bear: Politics in Margaret Atwood's Poetry", published as a chapter in the volume *Literature for Our Times: Postcolonial Studies in Twentieth Century* edited by Bill Ashcroft et al. (Rodopi, 2012). She is currently working on a monograph in Spanish about the monstrous in Margaret Atwood's works, due to appear in 2022.