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# **The Postmillennial Sensibility in Anglophone Literatures, Cultures and Media 29 June – 1 July 2017, Košice, Slovakia**

## **PLENARY SPEAKERS**

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### **IDEOLOGY IN THE MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE OF TELEVISION DOCUMENTARIES ON TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES IN THE UK: A MIXED PORTRAYAL**

By adopting a critical sociolinguistic approach, this plenary talk discusses the representation of itinerant communities of travellers and gypsies in the UK and Ireland by a small, purposive sample of British television documentaries broadcast on public and commercial channels. Given that the wider population generally knows very little about these peripatetic, marginalised social groups, the role of TV documentaries in shaping and/or influencing viewers' beliefs and attitudes is potentially quite significant. Documentaries are widely perceived as providing authentic factual information in an unbiased manner. The mimetic reproduction of reality is a key feature of these factual films, which gives them an aura of reliability and objectivity based on proven knowledge. In reality, however, their truth is 'murky' and their multimodal discourse is palpably ideological.

The presentation focuses on three areas in particular: (i) how the choice of topic and angle adopted by each documentary especially impacts on the group's representation because this is a potentially major source of bias and prejudice; (ii) the language and visual features that characterise the films and especially the imbrication of the language in the narrator's voice-over and the types of questions asked by the investigating reporters; and (iii) in addition to the analysis of linguistic aspects of these documentaries, the presentation touches on how visual images are used, and, in particular, the way in which they are combined with the voice-over in order to add further authenticity.

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## **HILARY MANTEL'S WOLF HALL AS POST-MILLENNIAL HISTORICAL FICTION**

It has been argued that the increasing discontent at the current social, political and economic order is resulting in a new cultural sensibility which, whilst questioning the validity of grand narratives (as postmodernism did and does), paradoxically holds on to them in a desperate attempt to provide the individual with a sense of purpose and motivation to move forward. Consequently, this post-millennial sensibility—which Vermeulen and Akker (2010; 2015) refer to as 'metamodernism'—leaves aside typically postmodern dystopias and ironically embraces and resurrects utopias by infusing itself with a 'neo-romantic' feel.

As an intellectual experience, Romanticism evoked a mythical past and fostered a sense of organic history (Kaiser 2004) that arguably constitutes the core of the nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006). Likewise, the Romantic interpretation of history cannot be separated from the birth of the historical novel (Lukács 1971), which in turn connects this literary genre to the very notion of nation.

Considering the prominent role that historical fiction plays in contemporary British literature, which has been interpreted in some quarters as a reaction against the typically post-structuralist and postmodern rejection of grand narratives and, therefore, a return to history (Boccardi 2009), this paper aims at examining Hilary Mantel's critically-acclaimed, award-winning novel *Wolf Hall* (2009) (the first in a trilogy on Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's controversial Principal Secretary). In order to do so, it will provide insight into Mantel's characterisation techniques, narrative style, and choice and treatment of themes in the novel, so as to ascertain – on the assumption that Cromwell himself is metonymic of the nation (Rosenstone 2006) — (1) why and how this piece of historical fiction may be seen as metamodern; and (2) what the implications of this assertion might be from a national identity perspective.

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## SESSIONS

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### **POSTMILLENNIAL SHIFT IN TRAUMA NARRATIVES: CONFRONTING THE VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR IN CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE LITERATURES**

Postmillennial period has been characterized by the rejection of postmodern relativism and irrationalism and of victimary thinking and politics (Gans, 2000). In literature, this shift is reflected by the exhaustion of the original victimary experience and the emergence of narratives from the other side. Such shift in trauma narratives brings also concerns with potential unethical appropriation of the past, however their recent emergence in both German and Anglophone literatures confirms La Capra's effect of belatedness linked to the Holocaust (2001). The following paper presents two novels of such departure, Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* (2001) and Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (published in English in 2009) which both suggest the limitations of Holocaust experience and memory in which no perspective on history is ever complete. While Seiffert, who is a contemporary British author, chooses an indirect approach to the events of the WWII via the concept of postmemory, Littell, a contemporary American author, confronts us with a detailed account of Nazi perpetration from the first-person perspective. Both novels explore tensions between private versus public memory and they also engage with Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory which works productively through negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing (2014). We aim to discuss these novels as a contribution to the discussion of the epistemology of 21<sup>st</sup> century trauma discourse in which such narratives can be used in a productive way.

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### **DIGIMODERNISM AND LITERATURE: THE CASE OF RUSHDIE'S *THE ENCHANTRESS OF FLORENCE***

Kirby argues in *Digimodernsim* that while digimodernism drastically changed the cultural environment of our time and replaced the irony and skepticism of the postmodern era with infantilism, earnestness, endlessness, and apparent reality, it is almost possible to argue that digimodernist literature does not exist. According to him, digimodernist symptoms are mainly found "across contemporary culture, ranging from "reality TV" to Hollywood fantasy blockbusters, from Web 2.0 platforms to the most sophisticated videogames and from certain kinds of radio show to crossover fiction." Because of the onward and never-ending tendency of texts in the digital media, digimodernism does not privilege a finished textual mode, and in literature crossover fiction is the only form that shares the textual mode of the new era. Other than that, digimodernism's relevance to literature seems limited to the facilitation of the physical production of and access to literature, socialization of reading, amateurization of criticism. The actual digimodernist forms, hypertext or electronic interactive literature adopted by creative writers can hold the attention of the reader only to some extent and offer no fertile ground for producing fascinating literature.

However, while it may not be easy to think of a digimodernist literature per se, there can be literatures affected by the perceptual changes and concepts available in the digital era. I would like to think of Rushdie's 2008 novel *The Enchantress of Florence* as one such example. Internet surfing as a method of research, fast multidirectional linkage enabled by the internet, the experience of virtual reality, the concepts such as an avatar, or an extended memory unit, and fusion as a means of composing a new image unwittingly permeate our imagination and are materialized as fictional elements of our era. All of these are visible in the novel. The novel tries to link the secularized prince, possibly a proto-humanist Mughal emperor Akbar with several important figures of European Renaissance such as the secular politician Machiavelli and the scientifically minded explorer Amerigo Vespucci. The unlikely convergence is realized through the adventurous Mughal Princess—Akbar's great aunt—Angelica's daring progress through many borders and cultures. And a supposed descendant, by the name of Mogor dell'Amor or Noccilo Vespucci, of a union between this princess and a Florentine shows up at Akbar's court to tell an impossible story of their family relationship.

Although the *Enchantress of Florence* received mixed criticism, it certainly makes a fascinating and absorbing reading with an interesting speculation on the never-before-imagined interconnectedness between civilizations. And the digital culture adopted by the novel has explosive entertainment values unimaginable in a hypertext or electronic interactive mode of writing. Akbar falls in love with a woman produced by his imagination rather than all the pretty women in his harem, reminding us of our absorption in virtual reality. The Princess has a servant called The Mirror who resembles her and to whom she delegates her obligations even including sexual engagements, who looks a lot like an avatar. One hears about the news of a long-lost friend from a woman called a memory palace. Her own memory has been erased and instead the story of the lost friend has been inscribed in her mind. What else is she but an extended memory?

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## **POSTMILLENNIAL SENSIBILITIES IN THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

The postmillennial age is typified by the need and ability to create and control the content around us at an increasingly dizzying pace. As we transition from the Third Industrial Revolution, with the rise of computers and technology, to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where the lines between human and artificial intelligence are increasingly blurred, the challenge of finding our place in the world is taking on existential relevance.

Computer neural networks can mimic, and in some cases, already exceed the capacity of our brains, in the apparent task of reasoning, but what explicitly human behaviors will remain beyond the purview of technology? Creativity, spontaneity, whimsy, deep emotion, and the ability to process history in a way that values parts of history, while ignoring others, may be areas where we still have a comfortable lead over the exponential advances in artificial "cognition".

My background in literature combined with my current research in the role of linguistics in human/machine hybrid geopolitical forecasting helps reveal the potential and the risks of where we are headed.

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## **ASEXUAL AND AUTISTIC: GEEK MASCULINITIES IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SITCOM**

The post-millennial period can be characterized in various ways – this paper will focus predominantly on the 21<sup>st</sup> century as “the age of autism” (Kirby, 2009: 227) and “the age of the geek” (Hurley, 2016: 13), and how these concepts influence the discourse of modern masculine identities in the US television fiction, as well as in online discussions.

The social category of ‘geek’ has become linked to social status, wealth, and pride in one’s intelligence and knowledge: labeling oneself as a geek has become “a badge of honor” (Hannafor, 2009: n.p.), fashioning the basis for the production of modern masculine identities. However, male geeks in current television fiction are frequently portrayed in concord with the old stereotypes of socially inept, asexual geniuses, whose failure to establish and maintain romantic and/or sexual relationships is inevitable. In addition, these television geeks often toe the line between eccentricity and mental health issues, bringing to the forefront Kirby’s claim that current cultural texts may code autism as “the ready-made antithesis of the peculiarities of today’s world” (231). One of the contexts in which autism, according to Kirby, directly counteracts hegemonic social order is the context of masculinity: in a postfeminist discourse which sees traditionally masculine characteristics as “dubious, as absurd or inadequate or implicitly misogynistic (...) autism [is] then constructed as the ever-incipient sickness of masculinity” (232-233). Moreover, the concept of the seemingly autistic geek as asexual brings into forefront the difficult relationship between asexuality, masculinity and autism. Masculinities that hinge on displays of (hetero)sexual interest and power (Kimmel, 2005: 6) might be difficult to reconcile with the concepts of mental health issues or disinterest in sexuality, and “while disabled people argue that the asexuality ascribed to them is a myth, some asexual people maintain that asexuality is not a disorder, illness, or deficiency. This mutual negation is driven by the efforts of both to avoid the stigma of connection to the other” (Kim, 2014: 273).

This paper aims to examine how asexual geek masculinities are constructed in the US television fiction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely in two popular sitcoms, *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-) and *Community* (2009-2015). Both shows feature a male protagonist who can be classified as a geek, exhibits the traits commonly associated with autism-spectrum conditions, and displays very low or no sexual interest, offering the possibility of analyzing the coexistence and interaction of asexuality, geekiness and neurodiversity in the spaces of masculine identities. Additionally, Internet-based discussion of these two characters is analyzed, in order to provide insight into the reception of these portrayals by the modern audiences.

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## **REANIMATING THE ENGLISH HISTORICAL NOVEL IN THE 21ST CENTURY – THE CASE OF DAVID MITCHELL’S *THE THOUSAND AUTUMNS OF JACOB DE ZOET***

This paper will offer a detailed analysis of David Mitchell’s novel *One Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) as a herald of the possibilities opening up for historical fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The English historical novel has risen to prominence since the 1980s and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century this strong interest in the past shows no signs of waning. While nearly every account of historical fiction refers back to the model established by Walter Scott and his continuing influence can be detected in a significant number of novels written today, some contemporary historical novels seek to develop new approaches to the past and new strategies of representing it. Suzanne Keene (2006) distinguishes between “residual” and “emergent” forms of historical fiction, or between traditional historical fiction and formally innovative novels. Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* or, more recently, the very successful Tudor novels by Hilary Mantel have demonstrated intriguingly new ways of writing about the past. Significantly, Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* won the first Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, launched in 2010 in order to “celebrate the new resurgence of the genre he created” ([www.walterscottprize.co.uk](http://www.walterscottprize.co.uk)). Naming Mantel “the most celebrated writer of historical fiction in Britain this century,” Joseph Brooker (2015) credits her with finding new methods of revitalising the historical novel, besides the far more common instances of historical revisionism or metafictionality.

Brooker regards David Mitchell’s novel *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010; shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize in 2011) as comparable with Mantel’s innovative approach. Set at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a Dutch trading post in Japan, the novel brings to life this particular time and place through its attention to details of the setting, fragmentary narrative structures, nuances of language and especially its insight into the consciousness of the main characters. Locating Mitchell’s book in the context of recent historical fiction, this paper will attempt to identify and explore the writer’s key strategies of animating the past. The underlying hypothesis is that novels such as Mitchell’s or Mantel’s illustrate a noticeable new tendency in the historical novel at the turn of the century.

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## **THE “POST” AESTHETICS AND IDENTITY IN SALVADOR PLASCENCIA’S *THE PEOPLE OF PAPER* (2005)**

In his study of recent American fiction, “Speculative Realism and the Postrace Aesthetic in Contemporary American Fiction”, Ramón Saldivar identifies a tendency which is, in his view, both responding to and developing various aspects of postmodern fiction. He uses the term “post-postmodern” and “postrace” to refer to this kind of fiction which includes, in his view, Salvador Plascencia’s novel *The People of Paper* as well. The novel is seemingly reminiscent of the love story which turns out to be a formal experiment both using and undermining postmodern and magic realist narrative techniques. In addition to this, however, in this novel Plascencia depicts various aspects of

Mexican/Hispanic (American) culture which is treated in a different way than in traditional ethnic or immigrant novels. This paper will analyze Plascencia's use and aesthetic response to postmodernism and postmodern vision of the world and the way cultural identity is reconsidered in the context of contemporary postmillennial sensibility and the theories of the end of postmodernism such as digimodernism (Kirby) and postrace Aesthetic (Saldívar).

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## **DESIRE FOR GRAND NARRATIVES: A METAMODERN READING OF THE FILM *K-PAX***

Iain Softley's 2001 film *K-PAX* is invariably referred to as belonging to the genre of science fiction. It is a story of a most convincing delusional who is treated at the Psychiatric Institute of Manhattan by a doctor who gets increasingly curious about his patient's confabulations. Prot, the patient in question, self-confidently claims that he comes from a far-away planet to spend some time on Earth, and offers scientifically plausible yet incredible information to his doctor and other persons involved. Gradually his positive but baffling influence on other patients cannot be ignored while the doctor reveals segments from his past through hypnotherapy. Frustrated by his inability to build a consistent case out of Prot's explanations, Dr Powell begins to question the accepted medical and civilizational paradigms that he made his professional career on, and develops a more intimate relationship with Prot until Prot turns catatonic exactly at the time he was supposed to leave the facilities and return home as he announced beforehand. However, one of the female patients inexplicably disappears.

However, on the official web-page of the film, the director states that *K-PAX* does not fit into any genre: "It asks us to look beyond the rational and to admit the possibility of different versions of the truth, beyond the limits of our knowledge. And to look at our relationships, the world and the universe with hope and wonder." While these remarks echo of postmodernism in evoking plurality, relativism and uncertainty, it is possible to interpret them as signs of a new sensibility that has been identified as Metamodern by Dutch cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their 2010 essay *Notes on Metamodernism*.

The present paper aims at exploring various aspects of the film in order to test them against the basic tenets of Metamodernism in the conviction that they correspond to them despite the superficially dominant aspects of science fiction. The point is that Metamodernism purveys more spheres than one may think of which may prove it more deeply grounded and relevant to the present moment as an emerging structure of feeling pointing towards a possibly new grand narrative.

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## **BEING HUMAN: METAMODERN OSCILLATION IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD AND VIET THANH NGUYEN'S *THE SYMPATHIZER***

The emergence of metamodern theory expresses the urge to label and define attempts of making sense of the world following the real, imagined or wished for end of post-modernism. Neoromantic endeavours of contemporary American art e.g. the film *La La Land* come, maybe somewhat ironically, in times of Brexiteering in the UK, polarization and post-factual rhetoric in the US. The positive reception, shower of prizes and general praise of Damien Chazelle's romantic musical comedy-drama, *La La Land* indicate the yearning for romance and dreaming. Neoromantic sensibilities, if indeed *La La Land* is to be considered neoromantic, perhaps legitimize themselves as upshots of times even if they fulfil but a longing. Perhaps it is the role of critical theory to be ahead of the era, by reacting to the longing in the artefact, and as such have a reciprocal effect on art.

Metamodern theories however do not focus only on neoromanticism but arguably depict a way of being in ongoing oscillation. When oscillation is accepted as a way of being neoromanticism can be rendered a reaction to manifestations of this process, as a kind of escape or beautification.

The vacillation between two poles, as the main characters way of being in Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel titled *The Sympathizer*, can perhaps be interpreted as a performatist oscillation. It is important to note however as Vermeulen and van den Akker in the 2010 article point out that oscillation in a metamodern sense isn't between two but many poles. It is not a balance, they say, but modern and postmodern at the same time yet neither. These processes can be depicted in the interpretation of this novel.

In my analyses of the novel I compare a post-colonial interpretation of Nguyen's novel with a metamodern one. My objective is to pinpoint the difference between these interpretations, which highlight the difference between postmodern and metamodern theories. I argue that metamodern theories are more humanistic in their attempts in our post-fact, post-truth times.

To my mind ongoing processes of negotiations of self-worth versus abstract ideals are ongoing humanizing even homeostatic processes. They are specifically defined in our times, perhaps as metamodern.

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## **RADICAL FEMINIST DISCOURSE: IN LINE WITH BEING ONLINE**

The development of post-millennial radical feminist discourse is shaped by the growing role of computer-mediated communication in the promotion of feminist theories and activities – a phenomenon commonly referred to as the 4<sup>th</sup> feminist wave (Munro 2013). Paradoxically enough, despite its high visibility in the social and cultural space of Anglophone countries and major influence on public opinion worldwide, online radical feminist discourse (oRFD) seems to be relatively understudied as a linguistic phenomenon. This report will present an overview of the key features of oRFD in terms of content and cognitive organization, linguistic self-presentation strategies, and vocabulary.



The cognitive structure of oRFD is organized around the complex macro-concept *female oppression*, which forms the nodal point of the discourse (using the term suggested in (Laclau, Mouffe 2001)). The macro-concept incorporates a set of semantic components, notably *male complicity*, *pervasiveness*, *resistance to change*, and *mimicry*. The choice of self-presentation strategies by radfem bloggers often results from the writers' intention to provoke or scare the "unprepared" readers, helping to linguistically construct the image of a radical feminist as a resister challenging traditional gender roles and expectations. The imperative to deconstruct and subvert patriarchal ideology accounts for the high prevalence of interdiscursive elements, often used for satirical purposes. Finally, the lexical texture of oRFD is shaped by a spectacular variety of terms for numerous forms of gender-based violence and discrimination faced by women (*femicide*; *female infanticide*; *sexual exploitation*; *rape culture*; *victim blaming*; *gaslighting*; *mansplaining*; *mind control*); detrimental socio-economic, psychological and medical effects of gender abuse and/or discrimination on women (*women's Stockholm syndrome*; *female pain/harm*; *trauma*); negative qualities attributed to men as a dominant gender (*male entitlement/parasitism/necrophilia*).

The report will also briefly examine some widespread communicative practices in online interaction between members of radfem online communities, such as callout, whereby a user publicly challenges sexist attitudes or behaviours displayed by another user.

Our findings are based on the analysis of 1,200 articles in English posted on radfem blogs in 2010-2015.

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## **JAMES BOND VERSUS M: CHANGING PATTERNS OF MASTER-SERVANT DISCOURSE IN THE OLD AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

In the twenty-four 007 movies released so far one could see the dynamism of the master-servant relationship between M and James Bond. The dynamism involves growing position of 007, who gradually becomes more a partner than a subordinate. The end of the previous and the beginning of the new millennium makes the changes particularly visible. The article analyses the discourse between the two characters as a token of the changes. The linguistic tools used include style, speech acts, politeness and negotiation strategies and the overall structure of their discourse.

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## **POSTMILLENNIAL MASCULINITY: DESOCIALIZED FATHERS IN AMERICAN CINEMA**

In the light of cultural debate that proposes the end of postmodernism and the emergence of a new cultural paradigm defined by the influence of communication technologies, authors like Gilles Lipovetsky (2005), Alan Kirby (2009), and Robert Samuels (2007) continue to place emphasis on identity politics as they announce a new quest for identity. Affected by electronic media, the 'post-postmodern' era blurs boundaries between the public and private realm producing the 'de-

institutionalized, volatile individual' (Lipovetsky, 2005) severely influenced by 'interrupted', 'displaced', and 'fragmentary' text, which incites a strong antisocial sense of subjectivity. And it is this fragmentation of experience accompanied by the desire for intensity that estranges one from society and induces schizoid behavior or, as Alan Kirby proposes, pseudoautism. Simultaneously with this, American cinema has in the past decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought forward an image of the American father, who is significantly alienated from society and exhibits a strong characteristic of desocialization and autonomy. In films like *Captain Fantastic* (2016), *Manchester by the Sea* (2016), *Jauja* (2014), *Steve Jobs* (2015), *Toni Erdmann* (2016), *Midnight Special* (2016), and a number of others, fathers rise to the challenges of pervasively consumerist society and attempt to protect their children with their own adequate notion of truth. At the heart of these representations is the image of engaged fathers, who claim their legitimate right to parenting, while at the same time demonstrate their autonomy by providing estranged environments for their children as they themselves struggle with behavioural alienation. This focus on fatherhood in American cinema also mirrors cultural emphasis and attention paid to fathers in social and political contexts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and emerges as a result of democratization of gender relations and of the parent-child relationship.

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## **A POSTMILLENNIAL SENSIBILITY IN SAM SHEPARD'S MATURE PLAYWRITING**

Sam Shepard has often been regarded as one of the theatrical innovators who "conferred upon the American stage its postmodernity in the 1960s"; the playwright-actor-director whose artistic creativity began in the early ferment of the Off-Off Broadway movement interjected "a youthful, exuberant, and experimental voice that extended [the audience's] appreciation of a postmodern aesthetic" (Roudané, 2002). In the course of a career that spans half a century, from the Vietnam era to the America of Donald Trump, Shepard has evolved from alternative theatre to mainstream recognition and Hollywood, gaining both critical regard and media attention. During the five decades of writing, the veteran American playwright has frequently been labeled "quintessentially American," and even, perhaps arguably, the "most American" of America's dramatists. According to cultural critic Leslie A. Wade (1997), "[d]rawing from the disparate image banks of rock and roll, detective fiction, Hollywood B-movies, and Wild West adventure shows," Shepard's texts "function as a storehouse of images, icons, and idioms that denote American culture and an American sensibility." Significantly, even if decades of his works have indeed resonated with American audiences, Shepard eludes facile classifications: tapping into and juxtaposing a wild range of sources, genres and styles, he has tended to tease his audiences with very theatrical pastiches of myth and reality, consistently defying totalizing exegeses. At the outset of the new century, the playwright clearly continues to reinvestigate the possibilities of the dramatic medium in a visible attempt to challenge both his audiences and himself, striving for an authentic idiom to render postmillennial America.

The present paper reflects upon Sam Shepard's playwrighting in the 2000s that looks back on almost fifty years of his career and, at the same time, expands his vision, signaling new interests. It centers primarily on two of his most recent plays, *Kicking a Dead Horse* and *Ages of the Moon*, which, intriguingly enough, had their world premieres in Ireland, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 2007 and 2009 respectively. The paper seeks to offer an insight into these elusive, multilayered texts which, in some respects, feel like a somewhat unsettling summation of, and a subversive comment on, Shepard's artistic achievement. The uncanny plays that resonate with Beckettian echoes and affinities while revisiting the familiar Shepard topography negotiate the boundaries between the actual and the

remembered, or fictitious, raising debates about, among other things, authenticity, violence, aging, mortality, loss and love, culpability and the possibility of expiation. It will be demonstrated how Shepard reviews here the main concerns of his career and extends his interrogation of American culture and American sensibility, especially American masculinity, addressing the weight of the past upon the present. Special emphasis in the discussion will be placed on the growing importance of a contemplative, even ethical element to Shepard's mature dramatic vision. The "Playwright Laureate of the West," as Shepard was hailed in 1980 by *The New York Times*, apparently displays here a greater readiness to re-examine economies of domination harking back to the Western codes of manhood as well as an increasing concern for relational thinking, connectedness and empathetic bonding.

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## **MARK HADDON'S *THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME* AS A SPECIMEN OF METAMODERN FICTION**

If metamodernism is actually an oscillation between "a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony" (Vermeulen and Akker 2010), maybe one of the most complete instances of metamodern fiction can be found in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: by presenting an autistic 15-year-old narrator, Christopher, the novel displays the clash between a hyper-rational character who always wants to find mathematical or logical truth and a world in which irrationality, empiricism and haphazardness dominate. Incapable to understand any kind of sarcasm and in constant search for the ultimate truth, even through a Sherlock-Holmesian investigation, the naive protagonist, as a matter of fact, is the opposite of the typical postmodern character and he is directly linked to that metamodern irony which is "intrinsically bound to desire" (Vermeulen and Akker 2010).

The aim of this paper is to use the metamodern perspective as theorised by Vermeulen and Akker in order to determine to what extent *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* exposes an exemplary 21<sup>st</sup>-century kind of narrative, a narrative constantly negotiating between the modern and the postmodern. To do so, this negotiation will be emphasised by highlighting which elements seem to belong to modernism and which ones to postmodernism. Furthermore, it will be shown how the novel disrupts not only the classical conception of detective novel, but also the postmodern detective novel by introducing an apparent linearity, the frustration of that linearity brought by the bewilderment human society produces in an autistic boy, and the frustration of that frustration generated by the ability of the protagonist in avoiding all the obstacles and discovering the truth.

In the end, it will be analysed how both classical and postmodern detective fiction are subverted by the unconventionality of the main character's behaviour. In fact, he often makes digressions on matters which are completely irrelevant for the plot (such as mathematical problems, pictures, diagrams, reflections on his own syndrome, etc.) and acts in a way incomprehensible for a non-autistic person. This is why Christopher is not only an instrument for finding the truth, like stereotypical detectives are, but he contains in himself the deconstruction of the interpreting subject, representing the actual unresolved enigma of the novel.

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## **AUTHENTIC, INDULGENT, WHOLESOME 21ST-CENTURY COOKBOOKS AS "POST-POSTMODERN" ARTEFACTS**

Cookbooks have played an important role in foodwork since Antiquity. From commercially published volumes to haphazard scrapbooks filled with handwritten recipes and magazine clippings, they have been helping us with our kitchen chores, providing inspiration when we were stuck in a culinary rut, and motivating us on the nights when we really did not feel like cooking. However, as I argue in the present paper, cookbooks can be read for more than their utilitarian purpose. While they are undoubtedly written and compiled to provide cooking instructions, they are just as useful in helping us understand the social and literary context in which they are created. As Janet Theophano put it, cookbooks often become "intimate stories" which enable their authors to share "their own life stories, their versions of their communities, and the visions they have of society and culture" (2-3). In the present paper I set to analyse nine cookbooks written by female authors and commercially published in the United Kingdom after the year 2000. I understand these books as both cultural and aesthetic artefacts. My aim is to explore the notions of themselves, of the culture they live in, and of aesthetics that the authors present in their works, bearing in mind that the 21st century cookbook is a business commodity as much as it is a personal creative project. The objective of this paper is to prove that the analysed cookbooks portray a specific image of idealised contemporary femininity, which exhibits a number of the characteristic features of postmillennial philosophy and aesthetics outlined in the writings of Ihab Hassan, Billy Childish and Charles Thomson, Josh Toth, and Nicolas Bourriaud, namely authenticity and sincerity (as opposed to postmodern irony), personal truth (as opposed to postmodern relativity), and spirituality (as opposed to postmodern scepticism). Further, I attempt to situate these cookbooks within the context of a broader feminist debate on the impact of domesticity on the female subject, arguing that the selected cookbooks represent a postfeminist understanding of the domestic sphere as a naturally feminine realm, which enables female self-actualisation and identity construction.

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## **SUBJECTIVE REALITY OF DOCUMENTING IN DIGIMODERNISM**

Postmodern, in its complexity and paradoxical dualism, exploiting the means offered by modernism and simultaneously opposing the modernist world view rooted in reason, logic, and structure, became dominant in cultural studies just a few decades ago, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With rapid changes and evolution of contemporary society, postmodern philosophy, manifested in diverse range of cultural products, is facing challenges and many critics call for new terminology that is more suitable for

expressing the reality that goes beyond the postmodern. Digimodernism, suggested by Alan Kirby in 2009, is one thrilling alternative that might have this potential. Digital technology, as a tool that has the ability to radically modify reality, dramatically influences human perception and more than ever before allows the observer create subjective, personal realities that seem to give space to comparable and acceptable alternatives to the objective truth. Text and visuals in digimodernism become temporary, fluid and just to the moment. This phenomenon may have a dramatic impact on visuals and ways of interpretation observable in documentaries. The aim of this paper is to find the ‘fingerprints’ of digimodernism in contemporary iconic postmodern documentaries by analysing the relationship of text and visuals that characterize these works and to find answer to the question whether digimodernism can offer accepted as a sufficiently strong basis for describing the cultural realm after the end of postmodern.

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## **HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF FOOD REPRESENTATION**

The role of food cannot be ascribed solely to satisfying one of the basic human needs. The food has become the object of numerous sociological, cultural, ethnographic, linguistic, philosophical researches as it involves appealing to cultural, historical, social, industrial and other practices of people consuming it (Barthes, 2013; Fischler, 1988; Tomaščíková, 2016). The present paper aims at investigating historical and cultural aspects of food representation in the media including the texts on the packages.

A leaflet contained in a bar of chocolate produced in Kazakhstan has an extract from one of the American Indian myths and a text telling about the peculiarities of chocolate production at the Rakhat factory (Almaty, Kazakhstan): *“One of the American Indian myths says that the god of the air, Kecalcoatle, gave cocoa tree to mankind after he had been driven away from the Eden-like Garden. This tree was predestined to be the substitute for favor and delight left in Eden”*. This extract contains a narrative, the function of which is to carry and transform ideologies and practices to individuals, to be a basic mechanism that allows people to make sense of their experience of real (Barthes, 2013). In this case the narrative serves to link food to cultural practices of other societies that date back centuries ago, thus, the narrative by using specific language means (*Kecalcoatle, cocoa tree* and others) becomes a medium linking today’s consumers, their eating practices with eating and cultural practices of the American Indians. Consequently, two different epochs and societies, their social and cultural practices are compared by means of the narrative, the central element of which is such food element as chocolate. It should be mentioned that chocolate as an important type of food is able to link different epochs and practices alone, but without a narrative the relevant fields of knowledge that allow to contrast different historical and cultural aspects do not become actualized. The process of linking, comparing and contrasting the practices of various societies, their epochs etc. takes place in the mind of a modern consumer.

Thus, food, remaining the means of satisfying the basic human needs, is by means of the narrative transferred into a different sphere and becomes an element of culture: the consumer views chocolate not only as something sweet that can make him/her pleased, but also as an important element that formed the identity of American Indians. From the point of view of Semiotics, chocolate becomes a sign of a different historical and cultural identity.

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## **AUTISM AND PSEUDOAUTISM IN THE POSTMILLENNIAL COMING-OF-AGE NOVEL**

Alan Kirby (2009) suggests that we live in the age of autism, noticing both the rising number of diagnosed cases of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the widespread popularity of cultural representations of the autistic mind. This popularity is well-reflected in the fact that, as Robert Rozema (2014) points out, ‘narrators with Asperger syndrome have become their own kind of literary trope’. Kirby (2009) relates the cultural interest in the autistic condition to the changing character of what he calls ‘digimodernist society’. He maintains that the effect of new technologies on their users can lead to desocialization, diminished capacity to relate to other people and loss of empathy, i.e. to the development of pseudoautistic characteristics that lack the neurological basis of clinical autism.

In my paper I will provide a comparative analysis of two postmillennial novels, Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2004) and Joe Dunthorne’s *Submarine* (2008). The protagonist of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is now considered the prototypical Asperger character – ‘the high-functioning, hyper-verbal savant’ – (Rozema 2014) who inspired the wave of fiction with positive representations of the autistic hero with special skills. On the other hand, *Submarine* presents the pseudoautistic condition of the young protagonist that gives him much less attractive personal qualities. I will compare the two protagonists to discuss differences between autism and pseudoautism. Autism appears in Haddon’s novel as a clinical condition that produces a highly individual perception of the world that the reader and society can find interesting, even attractive. On the other hand, the pseudoautistic behaviour of Dunthorne’s adolescent hero appears as culturally induced psychopathology that, if widespread, may threaten the functioning of human society.

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## **THE TUDORS AS A POST-MILLENNIAL HISTORICAL TELEVISUAL TEXT**

The Tudor dynasty drew more attention than any other part of British history for historical filmmaking and television drama production. The central point of this interest is Henry VIII, the King of England and his wives. His dramatized representation on stage goes as far back as Shakespeare’s play ‘Henry

VIII' produced in 1613 and published in 1623 (Bevington, 2016, p. n.a.). In cinema, the first film, *The Execution of Mary Stuart* (Edison 1895) was produced in 1895.

This paper focuses on *The Tudors* (Hirst 2007). The Tudors storyline is constructed around the Henry VIII's private life. It is a sexualized and gendered historical text. It is constructed as a historical soap opera containing all the characteristics of the genre through betrayal, gossip, vengeance...

This paper aims to explore the popularity of a television drama text about 16<sup>th</sup> century as a cultural product in 21<sup>st</sup> century in a global era. The paper investigates the position of the audience in varieties of text reading (Hall, 1980, p.118) to observe presentism in making the past as present. It searches for answers to the following research questions: 1. How does popular culture reconstruct the past for the contemporary identities? 2. How does history and historical memory determine the essentials of national identity through televisual constructions in a global era?

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## **THE POST-ROMANCE IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *STONE GODS***

The paper analyses the concept of time, space and gender-transcending romantic love as portrayed in the novel *Stone Gods* (2007) by Jeanette Winterson. The narrative consists of three interconnected stories set in various times and spaces that are bound together by a protagonist Billie/Billy Crusoe and his/her lover Spike/Spickers who always fall in love in the most improbable places when facing economic or ecologic destruction. Even though the whole novel bears the signs of dystopia, it nevertheless includes multiple poetic passages that emphasize the human connection as the basis of humanity, even when one of the lovers is a robo sapiens. Love is thus seen as an ultimate human and humanist feature that serves as a solid and stable point of reference in a world that often does not make sense. In the novel Winterson embraces human past and potential future and folds it into a fluid and omnipresent history of mankind and love without prejudice that is presented as the only meaningful alternative to consumerism, bigotry, or consumerism. The flourishing romance is also connected with attempts to save the last virgin lands and nature, the paradises that are threatened to be lost. Winterson thus brings back to life the Romantic connection between self, nature, love, and meaning, and contrasts it with the postmodern dystopian warning about the extent of ecological and political crisis mankind is facing.

PANEL:

## WOMEN'S MOBILITY IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

Chair: **Myriam Boussahba-Bravard, Université Paris Diderot, LARCA.**

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### **FROM *THELMA AND LOUISE* TO *FURY ROAD*: DE-GENDERING THE ROAD MOVIE?**

Film space has long re-enacted the traditional generic division which associates open and public spaces with the masculine, and the enclosed and domestic spheres with the feminine. Entire genres (westerns, noir films, adventure or war films, etc.) crystallized the opposition, assimilating female mobility to a form of transgression, unless drastically channelled by male leadership (*Westward the Women*, William Wellman, 1951). Over the second half of the twentieth century, women's gradual claim to the public sphere and space met with much cultural resistance on screen, where the road movie, in the 1970s, glamorized the figure of a new American Adam, symbolically recapturing a lost continent of masculinity and freedom (*Easy Rider*, Dennis Hopper, 1969; *Vanishing Point*, Richard Sarafian, 1971; *Duel*, Steven Spielberg, 1971, *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, Michael Cimino, 1974). Even more romantic versions of the genre reasserted the prominence of male agency, tapping onto the obvious phallic symbolism of the car to tame and temper rogue or underdeveloped femininity (*Bonnie and Clyde*, Arthur Penn, 1967; *Badlands*, Terrence Malick, 1973; *Sugarland Express*, Steven Spielberg, 1974; *Pink Cadillac*, Buddy Van Horn, 1989). In such a context, *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) emerged as a radically new intake on the road movie, rewritten as an ode to female social, sexual and emotional emancipation. *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller), released in 2015, went one step further, eliminating the titular Max from one of the main franchises of the genre in an opening twist that turns the outmoded hero into a mere accessory throughout the film. The film was hailed or branded as a feminist vehicle, yet another example of a new liberal slant characterizing the present-day cultural industry.

Still, is re-writing the road movie in the feminine, complete with Dior ambassadress Charlize Theron as Imperator Furiosa in command of a monster truck, to be understood as de-gendering a vehicle for triumphant masculinity? How many of the original generic stereotypes transpire in these feminine versions of road-movies written by two male directors? Such are the questions that this presentation will be addressing, examining how both *Thelma and Louise* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* address and struggle with the very gender stereotypes they appear to be targeting. Shaping the liberated heroines into present day versions of the outlaw (*Thelma and Louise*), or writing the female lead as a Christ-like surrogate mother figure, may also read like just another male fantasy of women empowered along stereotypically masculine lines, which questions the possibility of exploring other modes of female heroism and agency in genre movies.



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## **FORMAL BOUNDARIES AND THE ETHICS OF GENDER IN JOHN ADAMS'S AND JUNE JORDAN'S MUSICAL *I WAS LOOKING AT THE CEILING AND THEN I SAW THE SKY* (1995)**

One of the foremost living American composers, John Adams (b. 1947) is especially renowned for his operas and staged oratorios (*Nixon in China*, 1987; *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*, 2012). In contrast, little attention has been devoted to *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky*, his one contribution to the homegrown genre of the Broadway-style musical. Composed to a richly poetic libretto by Caribbean-American feminist writer June Jordan (1936-2002), *Ceiling/Sky* received mixed reviews when it was premiered in Berkeley in 1995, and most critics still describe it as a relative failure, to the extent that they are aware of it at all. The purpose of this paper will be to examine the formal and ethical ambiguities of a work whose complexity may be one of the causes of its difficult reception. When Adams and Jordan agreed to collaborate on this piece, they were both newcomers to the genre; they approached it from outside the Broadway tradition, pursuing very different and, to a significant extent, incompatible agendas, so that the music of *Ceiling/Sky* frequently appears to run against the grain of the lyrics (at one point, Jordan berated the composer for what she termed “libretto violations”). As Jordan’s published text and personal statements reveal, she thought of *Ceiling/Sky* as a Shakespearean comedy that reveals the perfectibility of human nature when the lives of its characters, a group of ordinary, flawed twenty-something Angelenos, are disrupted by a major earthquake. This reflects Jordan’s belief in the human spirit’s ability to overcome boundaries of gender, race, and economic status. Adams was more interested in writing a darkly ironic piece modeled on Kurt Weill’s and Bertolt Brecht’s *Mahagonny-Songspiel* (1927): whereas Jordan privileged romance, Adams tried to emulate Brecht’s “epic theater,” with its emphasis on emotional distance and hard-headed critical thinking. Ultimately, the difference is best understood in ethical terms. On the one hand, Jordan embraced a Romantic (or Cavellian) perfectionism which owes much to the Transcendentalist tradition of radical individualism; on the other hand, Adams was keen to distance himself from the neo-Wagnerian principles to which he had been attracted in some of his earlier works—she wanted the audience to identify with all-to-human characters in search of justice and freedom, whereas he treats them as stereotypes whose main function is to draw attention, by contrast, to the bewildering complexities of actual experience. In the light of this fundamental disagreement, the treatment of gender turns out to be a particularly contentious issue, as well as the one area in which Jordan and Adams appear—albeit sporadically—to have come to an unspoken understanding. Two storylines will be examined in this respect. One concerns Mike, a closeted police officer whose friendship with a female journalist eventually forces him to come out; the other focuses on Consuelo, a Salvadoran immigrant whose African-American boyfriend has just been jailed for a petty offence. Whereas Adams doubles down on Jordan’s pat, simplistic treatment of Mike’s predicament, denying him the warm, humanizing music that would have made it emotionally believable, he lavishes richly expressive songs on Consuelo, turning this equally clichéd figure into a visionary heroine comparable to Pat Nixon in *Nixon in China* or to the Virgin Mary in his Nativity oratorio *El Niño* (2000). Jordan’s ethics of empathy thus prevail, if only for a few moments.

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## **BRITISH WOMEN'S LATE 19<sup>TH</sup>/EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY PHILANTHROPY IN THE BALKANS: GENDER AND MOBILITY ISSUES**

In *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travellers in the Balkans* (1991), contributors looked to inward/ outward frontiers that came to complexify the already shifting representations of the Balkans. This liminal territory between East and West had indeed fuelled orientalist imaginations, as Maria Todorova had evidenced in *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). In a chapter entitled 'Two Victorian Ladies and Bosnian Realities, 1862-1875' published as part of *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons*, Omer Hadžiselimović sought to explore another layer of British discourse on the Balkans by seeing how female discourses could be apprehended back in Britain and how they constructed the Balkans for a Victorian readership. He remarked that Adelina Paulina Irby's *Travels*, which recounted her philanthropic commitment to educate girls in Ottoman Herzegovina and Bulgaria since 1865, was prefaced by former Prime minister William E. Gladstone. Hadžiselimović contends that not only did Irby need that political endorsement because 'Bulgarian atrocities' by Ottoman irregular soldiers had been contested in 1876 by Gladstone's arch-rival, Conservative Premier Benjamin Disraeli, but also 'she was desirous of the masculine stamp of approval' (3) which was meant to give greater legitimacy to her testimony.

This study seeks to test Hadžiselimović's hypothesis further by looking at an under-explored aspect of British female philanthropic commitment to Bulgaria in the context of the 1890s Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire. By then, Bulgaria had become independent from Ottoman rule and the presence of Liberal women in Bulgaria offering shelter to Ottoman Armenian refugees came at a time when the Liberal party was heavily split back home as to the place of women in the public sphere. With reference to the involvement of Lady Henrietta Hayter as part of that relief scheme, it will be investigated how women around her tried to influence the charitable giving behavior of members at an international level – thereby inviting imaginary mobility on the part of donors, both male and especially female – while maintaining the *status quo* on the issue of female suffrage back at home.

## PHD SESSION

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Presentation: **ADAPTATION: AT A CROSSROADS**

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Presentation: **MEDIA DISCOURSE ON TEACHERS AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY IN SELECTED BRITISH PERIODICALS**

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Presentation: **EXLORING SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE WORKS OF WALPOLE AND HAWTHORNE**

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Presentation: **SOCIAL SEMIOTICS IN ANALYSIS MEDIA DISCOURSES: MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATION DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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Presentation: **ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORKS *HYPERION* BY JOHN KEATS AND *THE DEATH OF EMPEDOCLES* BY FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN**

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Presentation: **CHANGING MEDIA DISCOURSES: REPRESENTATION OF BULGARIANS AND ROMANIANS IN THE SELECTED BRITISH NEWSPAPERS**