

# Building Bridges, Bridging Gaps: First Student Conference of the MA English and American Studies

## Diversity: Linguistic, Cultural and Literary Perspectives

Thursday, 13 June in U5/01.22

18:15	<b>Guest lecture</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Chandni (Anjali) Rampersad (Universität Duisburg-Essen). <i>Head-dresses, Hoops and Stays: Fashioning Ladies in the 18th Century</i></li></ul>

Friday, 14 June 2024 in U5/02.17

8:45	<b>Welcome Speech</b>
9:00	<b>Keynote</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Prof. Dr. Christoph Heyl (Universität Duisburg-Essen). <i>Miss Jones takes an omnibus to Baghdad: Perceptions of Urban Diversity in London</i></li></ul>
10:00	<b>Coffee break in U9, second floor</b>
10:30	<b>Panel I: Literary Perspectives</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Iryna Pushko. The Image of Mother as a Bridge to the Motherland in Marina Lewycka's <i>A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian</i></li><li>Bojana Milikic. The Traditional Muslim Understanding of Depression as Exemplified in Leila Aboulela's <i>The Translator</i></li><li>Leonard Karl. Diversifying Configurations of the Human: Post- and Transhumanism in Cyberpunk Dystopias</li></ul>
12:00	<b>Coffee break in U9, second floor</b>
12:30	<b>Panel II: Cultural Perspectives</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ruslana Khariv. Narrative Empathy and Readers' Interaction with Omegaverse Fan Fiction: A Case Study</li><li>Amelie Biersack. Against the French, Against Their Fashion: Muslin Dresses and Their Satire in Print</li><li>Kristina Steiner. (The Lack of) Female Representation and Diversity in Male-Dominated Sports as Depicted in Walter Tevis's <i>The Queen's Gambit</i> (1983)</li></ul>

Iryna Pushko. The Image of Mother as a Bridge to the Motherland in Marina Lewycka's *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*

In 2022, the start of a full-scale Russian invasion urged a record number Ukrainians to flee the war zones and seek shelter in Europe. More than 200,000 people have chosen the UK as the country of their refuge. However, the Ukrainian community have existed in Britain long time before the war. Starting from end of WWII, Ukrainians have been immigrating to the UK to primarily due to economic reasons. They have managed to integrate into the new society and at the same time tried to preserve their own national identity.

The daughter of Ukrainian migrants, Marina Lewycka, who was born in Germany and then moved to the UK, discusses this topic in her debut novel *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*. The novel tells a story of a Ukrainian migrant family from Peterborough and is narrated by the daughter Nadezhda, a second-generation migrant, who is concerned by the life decisions (marrying a young Ukrainian woman Valentina) of her 84-year-old father Nikolai after the death of the mother.

While the novel raises the topics of illegal immigration, integration, as well as Ukrainian history, in my paper, I would like to focus on the portrayal of the mother of the family and how it mirrors the nostalgic and idealized image of Ukraine as the motherland of Ukrainian immigrants in Britain. I argue that in the novel, the mother is the absent character who is the embodiment of lost and distant motherland. When talking and reminiscing about her late mother, the narrator projects on this image her connection and sentiment towards her country of origin.

Bojana Milikic. The Traditional Muslim Understanding of Depression as Exemplified in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*

The evolving attitudes towards mental illness in the Muslim world reflect substantial progress over the past few decades. What was once construed as a lack of faith in Allah is now increasingly acknowledged as an illness influenced by both biological and environmental factors. Despite this progression, the earlier viewpoint persists among the Muslim population, making it imperative for non-Muslims to acknowledge its prevalence and gain familiarity with it.

This presentation promises a nuanced exploration of depression within the context of traditional Muslim perspectives, using Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* as a rich literary example. An examination of the character Sammar offers insight into this traditional approach. The analysis draws upon religious interpretations of the Quran regarding depression from various sources.

In this presentation, I will analyse Sammar's behaviour following the death of her husband to demonstrate how it aligns with depressive tendencies—manifested through a lack of self-care, motivation. The paper contends that depression has traditionally not been recognized as an illness in the Muslim world, as evidenced by the author's initial unawareness of its depiction in her work, as well as Sammar's attempts to suppress and conceal her emotions. Additionally, the analysis will delve into how traditional Muslim views link depression to a perceived lack of faith, leading the main character, Sammar, to question her religious convictions in the face of her mental struggles.

This paper holds significance in the contemporary discourse on mental health, emphasizing the lack of awareness regarding cultural differences in approaching mental health concerns. The persistence of traditional views within the Muslim community underscores the importance of this exploration. The analysis of Sammar's journey will provide valuable insights into cultural attitudes towards mental health, fostering a more comprehensive dialogue on the intersection of faith, culture, and mental well-being.

Leonard Karl. Diversifying Configurations of the Human: Post- and Transhumanism in Cyberpunk Dystopias

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault famously argues that man is “only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old” (xxiii), defining this early 19th-century conception of “him as a living being, an individual at work, or a speaking subject” (341). In the wake of Foucault’s work, Enlightenment philosophy and its liberal humanist epigones have been subjected to radical critique from postcolonial, queer feminist, as well as Marxist angles, branding its conception of the ideal human form as a limited and limiting one. Under the umbrella term of posthumanism rally critical voices that seek to reconsider what it has traditionally meant to be human. Thus, any inquiry into diversity in literature therefore benefits from and necessitates a reflection on this Western tradition that has othered the non-white, queer, disabled, and non-biological as lesser instantiations of human life. While it is by no means a monolithic category, philosophical posthumanism nonetheless claims to emerge from a radical interrogation of humanist assumptions. Posthumanism’s estranged cousin, transhumanism, however, leans heavily into humanist ideals as it reconfigures the quest for endless (bio)technological optimization of the human body as an individual right of the liberal subject acting out of enlightened self-interest. Disentangling posthumanism and transhumanism proves an arduous and possibly futile task as the two coalesce around the core themes of bodily modification, high-tech, and virtual reality in the dystopias of cyberpunk science fiction. It is the purpose of this presentation to examine the diverse (re)configurations of the human within cyberpunk science fiction and to ultimately risk judgement whether these stand in a (critical) posthumanist or (liberal) transhumanist tradition. In order to do this a posthumanist critique of liberal humanist ideals is outlined, preceding an examination of post-/transhumanist actualizations in three canonical cyberpunk texts: William Gibson’s 1984 *Neuromancer*, as well as Pat Cadigan’s 1991 *Synners*, Neal Stephenson’s 1992 *Snow Crash*.

Ruslana Khariv. Narrative Empathy and Readers’ Interaction with Omegaverse Fan Fiction: A Case Study

In her book *Empathy and the Novel*, Keen mentions that “novel-reading [is] a stimulus to the role-taking imagination and emotional responsiveness of readers” (vii). When it comes to fan fiction, fan readers do not only “feel empathy with (and sympathy for) fictional characters and other aspects of fictional worlds” (vii) but are even more affected emotionally due to their prior ‘empathetic connection’ with the characters from the original story line. At the same time, the setting (alternative universe or canonical framework), the sub-genre of a fan written text, and the tags predispose the empathic involvement of fan readers in the story/characters. Omegaverse as a generic frame for ideological world building in fan fiction encompasses a range of tropes that gather an amplified empathetic affective response from the fan-audience that “turn into a strong driver of emotional investment in a narrative” (Keen, “Embodied Reader” 46).

Fan fiction as a global digital phenomenon provides an opportunity for fans to engage with diverse content of their choice; especially with English being a lingua franca content creators often contribute in English to any global fandom, making the majority of content accessible to the majority of users, hence, enabling the intercultural dialogue within an originally non-anglophone fandom which has expanded due to the era of digitalization and global accessibility.

The central theme of my study revolves around narrative empathy and how it manifests in the context of omegaverse fan fiction of a popular Japanese fandom *Bungo Stray Dogs*. This case study is limited to the analysis of one fan-written story *Paperweight* by the most\_happy published both on Twitter and AO3 (Archive of Our Own) and seeks to explore the correlation between narrative empathy within the fan-written text itself and the empathetic responses expressed by readers in their comments on both platforms. My goal is to establish the changes and/or consistencies in the fan-audience’s affective interaction with fan fiction by stating that the media influences the valence

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of the readers' empathetic response to the texts due to the variations of fan-texts' presentation (the concise utterances in Twitter threads vs the completed chapters on AO3).

### Works Cited:

Keen, Suzanne. *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford UP, 2010.

Keen, Suzanne. "Narrative and the Embodied Reader." *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative Theories*, edited by Robyn Warhol and Zara Dinnen, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 43-55.

Amelie Biersack. Against the French, Against Their Fashion: Muslin Dresses and Their Satire in Print

"Our ladies, however, would undoubtedly save themselves some suffering by ceasing to expose themselves, half-undressed, to the fogs and frosts of our island" (Beddoes 131). The neoclassical *Age of Undress* and its dangers to society, whether real or imaginary, have been the subject of countless instances of criticism. Doctors, concerned parents, and caricaturists alike scolded fashionable young ladies for wearing the latest fashion that had spread across the channel from France: muslin gowns so delicately woven they were nearly transparent. Dhaka muslin was the most scandalous and expensive culprit in this moral panic of Regency era Britain – a fabric imported from what was then Bengal and coveted by Europeans for its sheerness and "exoticism". British critics of this latest trend, however, did not only reject muslin, but also condemned those French ladies who, through their desire for a foreign, novel type of fabric, made muslin gowns fashionable across Europe.

This paper examines how satirical prints in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain utilised the portrayal of fashionable muslin dresses to convey Anti-French sentiments to their readership. To do so, two prints by British caricaturist Isaac Cruikshank, *Parisian Ladies in Their Winter Dress for 1800* and *The Lilliputan Satirists* are being analysed and compared regarding their portrayal of muslin gowns and of the women wearing them.

### Works Cited:

Beddoes, Thomas. *Essay on the Causes, Early Signs, and Prevention of Pulmonary Consumption*. 1799.

Kristina Steiner. (The Lack of) Female Representation and Diversity in Male-Dominated Sports as Depicted in Walter Tevis's *The Queen's Gambit* (1983)

In the history of mankind, sports have been primarily considered an all-male facility. From Ancient Greece to the Middle Ages and later Victorian times, there seemed to be no adequate place for women aside from the stands. However, if women chose to participate seriously in athletics, they were ultimately deemed somewhat deviant since they acted against their "natural female development" (Colker and Widom 1980: 48). Stemming from the widespread belief that the 'weaker sex' should not exhaust itself by bodily work or physical exercise in order to sustain health for childbearing, nursing and motherhood, a powerful form of biological sexism was consolidated that inhibited female representation and participation in sports for years to come. Although developments in terms of women's rights and feminism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have caused this sexist ideology to become more peripheral, women remain, still today, underrepresented in disciplines typically considered 'masculine' (e.g., rowing, weightlifting, or intellectual sports like chess).

In this paper, I want to shed light on the (lack of) female representation and diversity in male-dominated sports, focusing on competitive chess as represented in Walter Tevis's *The Queen's Gambit* (1983). This paper aims to investigate the themes of discrimination and ostracisation which will be demonstrated by a closer examination of the female protagonist, Beth Harmon, and her experiences as a young female professional chess player. Drawing on a realistic portrayal of

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patriarchal ideology and misogyny, Tevis's novel does not allow a female professional to prevail without major setbacks and hindrances. Hence, this paper argues that excelling in a 'male sphere' such as competitive chess is integral in forming Beth's deviant femininity which, in turn, threatens the traditional patriarchal system and, thus, gets her punished via mechanisms of ostracisation and self-destruction.