

SAUTE CONFERENCE 2023
5-6 MAY, UNIVERSITY OF FRIBOURG
ABSTRACTS

Keynote Lectures

Max Saunders (University of Birmingham)
Fictions, Fakes and Futures: Uncertainty in Untrusting Times

Friday, 10:15

Chair: Julia Straub

Room: MIS 10.01 13

Prof. Max Saunders is Interdisciplinary Professor of Modern English Literature and Culture at the University of Birmingham. An expert in literary modernism (see e.g., *Self Impression: ije-Writing, Autobiografication, and the Forms of Modern Literature*, Oxford UP 2010), he has published widely on various aspects of autobiography and life-writing. He also led an ERC-funded project “Ego-Media Project” from 2014–2019. Max Saunders recently completed a monograph titled *Imagined Futures*, in which he explores the “To-Day and To-Morrow book series” – a series comprising 110 volumes (short speculative essays) by authors such as Robert Graves, Vera Brittain, Bertrand Russell, who all, in the 1920s and 1930s, sought to envision the future. Prof. Saunder’s talk will be based on this project and connect the conference theme to speculative thinking.

Claire Squires (University of Stirling)
In Publishing We Trust? Literary Gatekeeping in the Post-Digital Age

Friday, 17:00

Chair: Kilian Schindler

Room: MIS 10.01 13

Prof. Claire Squires is Professor in Publishing Studies and Director of the Stirling Centre for International Publishing and Communication at the University of Stirling, as well as Director of the Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities. With a professional background in trade and academic publishing, her research focuses on the history of the book and book cultures in the 20th and 21st centuries, digital publishing, literary prizes and book festivals. She is the author of *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Palgrave 2007) co-editor of *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 7: The Twentieth Century and Beyond* (CUP 2019), and with Beth Driscoll *The Frankfurt Book Fair and Bestseller Business* (CUP 2020). Prof. Squires’ talk will bridge the two disciplines of linguistics and literature by engaging with the notion of trust in the publishing industry.

Prof. Chris Hart (University of Lancaster)
The Cognitive Semiotics of Politics: Language, Image, Gesture

Saturday, 11:00

Chair: Steve Oswald

Room: MIS 03 Auditoire C

Prof. Christopher Hart is Professor of Linguistics at Lancaster University. His research lies at the crossroads of cognitive science and critical discourse analysis and is broadly concerned with the relationship between language, cognition and social/political action. Much of his work has focused on anti-immigration discourses and discourses of civil disorder, which he has approached in terms of the key semiotic resources they build on, be they textual and cognitive (metaphor, trust, objectification, frames, viewpoint, image schemas, etc.) or multimodal (gestures, images, etc.). In his talk, Prof. Hart will offer a view on linguistic resources for trust management in public discourse and discuss their effectiveness as strategies of influence.

1.a) Language and Literature

Friday, 13:30-15:00

Chair: Simon Swift

Room: MIS 10 01.04

Emily Smith (University of Geneva)

Uncertainty and Ubiquity: Shakespeare and Stock Phrases

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good experience, must be in want of a truism. Communication, as Ronald Langacker has argued, is largely dependent upon ‘stock phrases, familiar collocations, formulaic expressions, and standard usages’ (Langacker 1987: 35). This dependence is often as strong in scripted speech as it is in spontaneous speech, indicating that clichés and stock phrases serve a purpose beyond cognitive economy or mere convenience.

Students and readers in early modern England were frequently advised to copy and collect stock phrases, or commonplaces, as they read, and many of these contemporary collections survive today. The dramatic works of William Shakespeare, as Lukas Erne and Devani Singh have demonstrated, were recognised to be fruitful sources of such commonplaces early in his own career (Erne and Singh, 2020). This Shakespearean commonplacing tradition continues to this day, as illustrated by the adoption of the Bard’s phrases upon everything from newspaper headlines to novelty mugs.

Clichés seem to provide exhaustive sententious wisdom for the ages. However, this paper will argue that many such truisms in fact thrive on uncertainty. Combining literary and linguistic approaches, it will examine the absence of specific referentiality – or the space left for interpretation by such phrases as “too much of a good thing”, “something wicked”, and “much ado about nothing”, and point to the importance that this indeterminateness carries for a commonplace’s afterlife. Uncertainty, this paper will suggest, is one road to ubiquity.

References

Lukas Erne and Devani Singh. *Bel-vedère*. Cambridge University Press: 2020.

Ronald W. Langacker. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar, I*. Stanford University Press: 1987.

Ian MacKenzie (formerly University of Geneva)
Translation, Uncertainty and the Spirit of Trust

Analytic philosophers discussing translation often emphasize uncertainty. Quine insisted on ‘the inscrutability of reference’ and ‘the indeterminacy of translation,’ and Davidson went further, describing all understanding as ‘radical interpretation’ and denying that reference plays an essential role in the relation between language and reality. Yet Quine and Davidson also provide the basis for entirely contrary conclusions based on trust. They invoke the ‘principle of charity’: we must ‘maximize agreement’ and assume our interlocutors to be largely correct in their beliefs. They appeal to epistemological and semantic holism: our beliefs face ‘the tribunal of experience’ only as a whole, and the meaning of a word or concept is linked to many others. Davidson further rejects the very possibility of radically different conceptual schemes. Hence the chief impediment to correct understanding and translation is not the field linguist’s difficulty of determining reference, or the existence of radically incommensurable viewpoints à la Kuhn, but rather the dynamic nature of concepts, which are forever being extended and applied in novel circumstances. As Hegel argued in the *Phenomenology*, concepts that turn out to be incompatible with others or inadequate to reality will be revised or replaced by better ones. And all our concepts are revisable (though obviously not all at once). Concepts have a history, so understanding texts from the past requires retrieving past meanings, and fusing them with one’s present horizon. Understanding contemporary texts requires a permanent awareness of ongoing conceptual change. This talk will argue that translation should be informed by both such an awareness and what Robert Brandom (2019), freely interpreting Hegel, calls ‘a spirit of trust.’ It is such a spirit – as opposed to giving up in the face of supposed incommensurability – that allows conceptual change and novel ideas to spread in and across languages.

Patrick Jones (University of Geneva)
Henry James and the Phenomenology of Life

When Lambert Strether exhorts Little Bilham to ‘live!’ in Henry James’s *The Ambassadors* (1903) we trust that we know what he means. What, after all, could be more self-evident than the idea that life should be experienced as fully and enjoyably as possible, and that it is a mistake not to do so? Nevertheless, the obvious good sense of Strether’s injunction becomes haloed with uncertainty the moment that it is subjected to even a small amount of analytic pressure. Logically speaking, it is an obvious tautology: within the context of the novel, Bilham is already living in the sense that he is alive and leading a life. Furthermore, living is not a determinate activity like swimming. Indeed, being alive is the condition of possibility for experiencing anything at all; it is not something than one can experience, or ‘do’, in and of itself. Although most choose to ignore it, critical responses to this philosophical uncertainty have tended to take two forms: either Strether’s injunction is dismissed as ‘cognitively empty verbiage’ (to borrow D.D. Todd’s formulation) or it is deconstructed in such a way that any trust in its meaning and affective force is deemed ideological. In this talk I will suggest that these arguments are unsatisfying and will propose an alternative methodology for approaching the peculiar dialectic of trust and uncertainty that attends Strether’s injunction and all other emphatic, affirmative ways of talking about ‘life’ in ordinary language. Resolutely anti-vitalist, this phenomenological perspective reveals these tautological verbal forms to be indicative of the complex structures of attachment that undergird our lived experience of life.

1.b) Fakes and Impostors

Friday, 13:30-15:00

Chair: Thomas Austenfeld

Room: MIS 10 1.16

Kirsten Stirling (University of Lausanne)

Narrative providence:

truth and predestination in the Scottish “found manuscript” tradition

The metafictional device of the found manuscript can be traced throughout the history of the novel, used for example in *Don Quixote* and *Robinson Crusoe*. However it has had a particularly Scottish existence in the last two centuries due to the influence of James Hogg’s 1824 *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Particularly influential in the Scottish tradition is the structure Hogg employs, whereby an extended commentary by an authoritative “Editor” opens and closes the novel, framing the first-person memoir of Robert Wringhim, the eponymous sinner. The “authenticity” of the unearthed manuscript is both insisted upon and undermined by the fictional editor, while details given by the editor complement and contradict the first-person found narrative. As a literary device, this structure plays with ideas of authority, authenticity, and truth, making it an apt frame for the story of Hogg’s novel, which follows an antinomian Calvinist who believes his actions are justified by the fact of being one of the saved Elect. This structure has been taken up by several Scottish novelists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but I will focus on two examples: Alasdair Gray’s *Poor Things* (1992), which tells the story of a woman created (perhaps) by the technique invented by Frankenstein, and Graeme Macrae Burnet’s Booker-shortlisted *His Bloody Project* (2015), in which a young man accused of a brutal murder writes his own account of events. Hogg’s explorations of truth and predestination cast a shadow over these re-writings, even if the novels’ plots have little, on the surface, in common with the psychologically oppressive Presbyterian society of the *Justified Sinner*. I explore the ways in which the opposition between authenticity and uncertainty in the novels’ structures is integrally connected to the first-person narrators’ struggles to discover and/or express some truth about their own identities.

Caitlin Smith (University of Notre Dame)

“Not Warranted”: Literary Games of Social Trust in Melville’s Late Fiction

Panned by literary critics from the nineteenth century until very recently, Herman Melville’s experimental novel *The Confidence-Man* (1857) and his epic-length poem *Clarel* (1876) explore shared themes of intellectual skepticism, social distrust, and the problem of apprehending personhood as opposed to mere personas. Melville started *Clarel* before *The Confidence Man*, and revised both manuscripts in parallel. Both texts are concerned with the same problem. To form a genuine connection with another person, one must trust that person’s accounting of themselves. Yet, the characters in both texts are keenly aware that con-men, cult leaders, and other untrustworthy individuals are in their midst. How, then, do they evaluate competing narratives of self and extend trust to others? In both texts, Melville encourages the reader to treat this dilemma as an allegory for individuals extending trust to the American nation, and the stories that the United States tells about its origins and character.

The Confidence-Man, His Masquerade mixes novel realism, allegory, and metafiction in a series of interlocking stories. The plot follows a group of characters on the steamboat *Fidèle* (faith), traveling down the Mississippi River. The titular Confidence Man boards, ringed by both devilish and apocalyptic Messiah imagery, and quickly shape-shifts through multiple personas. His goal: inspire other characters to “have confidence” in him, by telling persuasive stories and performing various identities. The novel’s prose also plays a game of trust and expectation with the reader,

constantly highlighting and disrupting readerly assumptions about who may be the Confidence Man. Melville perfects the focus on reader response in *Clarel, a Poem in the Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876). This autofictional text follows an American seminary student hoping to resolve his crisis of faith on a pilgrimage. The poem uses literary genre to play with readerly expectation, invoking and subverting familiar plot forms.

2.a) J. M. Coetzee's *Jesus* Trilogy

Friday, 15:30-17:00

Chair: Sangam MacDuff

Room: MIS 10 01.13

Simon Swift (University of Geneva)

***Jesus* Discomposed**

Coetzee's *Jesus* trilogy heightens a sense endemic to fiction, noted by a whole range of recent scholars, that the worlds that fiction creates are believable precisely because of the impossibility of the terms on which readers access them. No-one within those worlds knows that they are looked in upon by an invisible audience, or that their communications (in the case of Coetzee's trilogy) are continually redirected towards interpretive purposes that mirror the questions about meaning that arise within the fiction itself. Erich Auerbach said of Emma Bovary that if "the light which illuminates the picture proceeds from her, she is yet herself part of the picture, she is situated within it." Like Emma Bovary, David seems impervious to the fictional boundary that shapes and accounts for the believability of himself and of any other character; "[y]ou can't burn a book if you are inside it, if you are a character in it" as Simon says to him in exasperation early on in *The Death of Jesus*. Yet how do we know, after all, that fictional events are different from real events and happenings? In fiction, we permit the representation of patterns of occurrence and repetition that seem both intentional and unwilling, or even willed by the world, taking pleasure in forms of non-agentic design that we might code "uncanny" in everyday life. Fiction therefore highlights our refusal to believe in the intentional meaning of events in reality as anything other than either miraculous or routine, by making the question of the believability of its world a routine part of aesthetic judgement. Yet David also draws attention to the terrifying prospect that events don't form into sequences, that we may not be able to count between episodes. In this paper, I will understand Coetzee's *Jesus* trilogy as, in Stanley Cavell's terms, fiction which is "discomposed," that is as art which brings into question its own aesthetic criteria as the event of its being. I'll focus especially on Coetzee's account of a philosophy of composition in *The Schooldays of Jesus* which relies on "the linking word *now*" in my effort to show how in fiction, as in life, the idea that each event follows sequentially from discretely different predecessors is rendered problematic, as patterns of repetition, reduplication and accident keep coagulating into scenes of fictional, yet believable truth.

Maria Peters (University of Geneva)

Learning through uncertainty in J.M. Coetzee's *Jesus* trilogy

Educational thought is central to J.M. Coetzee's fiction and non-fiction, and of particular resonance in the *Jesus* trilogy (2013, 2016, 2019). These three books trace the child prodigy David as he challenges his guardian-teacher Simòn – and thereby resists the state education system that strives to shape him into conformity.

Coetzee's theory of education, as expressed in his fiction and non-fiction, has been subject to contradictory interpretations; for instance, it has been suggested that he contrasts education which intends to form citizens with education through symbolic play. I here argue that Coetzee is

too slippery for such simple polarities. Extending Gayatri Spivak’s work upon Coetzee, which suggests that the trilogy teaches us “how to read”, in this paper I explore, through Coetzee, how aesthetic experiences – such as fiction – train us to think through contradictions. Now more than ever, we need to be comfortable with living and learning through uncertainty. Examining Coetzee’s depiction of education, I suggest, may teach us how.

**Sangam Macduff (University of Lausanne)
Coetzee’s Cryptic Triptych**

This paper explores questions of trust and uncertainty in J. M. Coetzee’s *Jesus* trilogy (*The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016) and *The Death of Jesus* (2020)). The titles themselves are cryptic, inviting readers to seek hidden connections between the protagonist, David, and Christ. Coetzee’s narrative is far from a straightforward allegory, yet its lack of temporal specificity, combined with its fictional setting in “Novilla” and “Estrella,” encourages allegorical interpretations, ranging from refugee narratives to a new world, or even the afterlife (Bellin 2013). Likewise, the institutions of Coetzee’s fiction feel oddly familiar, yet the co-existence of quasi-socialist, bureaucratic, and repressive regimes is puzzling. These structural uncertainties concerning the titles, time, place, and significance of the novels are also manifest in Coetzee’s language. First published in Spanish, then in Afrikaans and English, the *Jesus* trilogy challenges the idea of an original tongue. Even in the English edition there is ambiguity, as Coetzee’s characters speak Spanish (usually rendered in English), and the accent changes from David in the first book to David in the last. More fundamentally, David’s pretence that he cannot read raises important questions about representation and reading, as well as issues of trust. These uncertainties are in play again when David professes not to understand the most elementary concepts of mathematics: is he feigning ignorance, or does his dyscalculia challenge fundamental concepts of number, order, and reason? David’s refusal to accept numerical classification can be seen as wilfulness or as an act of resistance; as the trilogy progresses, it becomes a central problematic, with philosophical and political implications. David never explains his reasoning, yet the logic that guides him is associated with the discourses of religion, philosophy and metaphysics. Expressed through music and dance, as well as language and mathematics, the epistemological and allegorical questions he poses are central to the *Jesus* trilogy, yet with no clear answers, it is up to readers to decide whether they point to vague mysticism or a deeper logic in Coetzee’s cryptic triptych.

2.b) Trust and Identity

Friday, 15:30-17:00

Chair: Erzsi Kukorelly

Room: MIS 10 1.16

**Enit K. Steiner (University of Lausanne)
Trustors’ Vulnerabilities in the Transatlantic Slavery**

If we agree that Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688) is among the earliest texts of the first texts to infuse quotidian scenes from the Transatlantic slavery into the genre of autobiography and life-writing, then we must prioritize the notion of trust. *Oroonoko* bequeaths to the genre of the slave narrative the figure of the “confidence trickster” embodied by white slave-traders who lure the African Oroonoko onto the slave-ship and reduce him to merchandise in chattel slavery (Baier 1986). Since *Oroonoko*, breaches of trust abound in both abolitionist and pro-slavery Transatlantic literature. This paper delineates instances of crisis of trust in black abolitionist narratives such as Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* (1789) and Frederic Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life* (1845), and in Cynic

R. Williams' white pro-slavery novel *Hamel, or the Obea Man* (1827). While *Oroonoko* exposes individual moral bankruptcy in enslaving economies, Equiano extends this indictment to a specifically Christian Britishness, unexpectedly coinciding – despite the notable differences elucidated in this paper – with Williams' pro-planter, pro-slavery agenda. For Frederic Douglass, the morally corrosive alliance of Western Christianity with slavery becomes a systemic ill engrained in the infrastructure of distrust: “Trust no man!”, coloured or white, is Douglass' adage. Breaches of trust reveal physical and psychological vulnerabilities that have the double effect of humanizing betrayed trustors and dehumanizing transgressing trustee on both sides of the slavery question. The paper concludes by suggesting that the centrality of trust in the Transatlantic slavery marks a departure from even the Stoic tradition, the most sympathetic Western Classical approach to the institution of slavery.

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Stella Castelli (University of Zurich)

“It was that smile that maddened Irene.”

Ambiguous Antics and the Power of Uncertainty in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

Nella Larsen's 1929 seminal novella *Passing* is a text deeply riddled with ambiguity. Written into the fabric of seemingly every line is an element of uncertainty which ultimately peaks in and concludes with the ambivalent fall and demise of Clare Kendry, the protagonist's – Irene Redfield's – friend and the object of her secret homosexual desire. Upon having observed her beloved's fatal plunge from a window during a festive soiree, Irene reflects on the agency of Clare's death in an attempt to find certainty when she raises the following questions: “What would the others think? That Clare had fallen? That she had deliberately leaned backward? Certainly one or the other. Not –“ (239). Irene's final struggle for words, which culminates in a desperate speechlessness, designates a dynamic which is deeply inscribed in the novella's ambiguous stance. It is not simply a case of unreliable narration, rather, it is the text itself which presents as subtly fragmented and traumatized, continually voicing and silencing itself in an attempt to perform an impossible decisiveness. This systemic undecideability becomes a marker of a transgressive liminality which, in turn, offers the potential to question given societal norms. It is thus, that the text already opens with the transgressive act of passing, foreshadowing the stubborn ambiguity which runs through its entirety only to culminate in an ending that becomes instrumental in hardening uncertainty rather than providing answers, highlighting fluidity instead of stability. This paper seeks to theorize the way in which *Passing* is structured along these poetics of uncertainty which are ultimately anchored in and negotiated through identity politics. In other words: deploying undecideability and doubt as a systemic dynamism, allows *Passing* to explore complex themes such as race, sexuality and gender as well as class mobility within 1920s America through a secure prism of indecision.

2.c) Narrative and Crisis

Friday, 15:30-17:00

Chair: Niklas Fischer

Room: MIS 10 01.04

Matthew Scully (University of Lausanne)

“Cherish Your Fantasy”: Paranoid Meanings, Entropic Dissolutions, and American Life

Drawing on psychoanalytic and philosophical theories of paranoia and citing a range of recent conspiracy theories in the United States, this talk considers the prevalence of paranoia in American socio-political life. Rather than focus on empirical examples, however, I turn to Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) as one of the most profound articulations of the structure of paranoid thinking as that which mobilizes tautological fantasies to protect the subject from uncertainty. Paranoid fantasies promise order and meaning against the threat of disorder and meaninglessness. Yet trust and certainty in a paranoid plot can only uneasily subdue that plot’s various gaps and fissures. *The Crying of Lot 49* figures such threats of disorder—the inherent antagonist of paranoid meaning—as entropy.

Entropy figures a principle of chaos and arbitrariness. Etymologically linked to trope, entropy in fact refers to “transformation” or “turning,” and the prefix, “en,” suggests “within” (OED). Entropy, as that which “turns” within a system, such as the system of signs constituting a narrative plot, points to both the ground and the limit of paranoid knowledge production. In an obsessive series of figurations, Pynchon’s novel contrasts the meaning-making processes of paranoia, in which nothing can be read as accidental, with the meaninglessness of entropic contingency: “something blind, soulless,” “a brute automatism.”

In other words, any certainty produced as an effect of a paranoid narrative finds itself undermined by entropic contingency. I ultimately argue that entropy names the uncanny return of contingency, of the meaningless entanglements that we struggle to accept and that we cannot help but convert into intelligible relations, whether in Pynchon’s novel or in socio-political movements. An acknowledgment of this uncanny force returns us to the anxious and anarchic drives that get suppressed in the name of social coherence and a desire for stable meanings.

Samir Dayal (Bentley University, Boston)

Pandemic Literature and Risk Communication in a Time of Contagion

My presentation takes a dual approach. I explore both collection and dissemination of “objective” information/data about the COVID pandemic *and* subjective (“literary”/psychological) representations—pandemic literature. This doubled exploration enables an investigation mediated by categories of trust and uncertainty, particularly in a time of crisis, to argue that subjective or literary representation is a necessary supplement to putatively objective or scientific presentation of information. Although my focus is *representation* of information about the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, I reflect on key *issues of crisis communication*: truth and fiction, authority, information distribution, misinformation and disinformation, and media manipulation in the public sphere. Though I briefly discuss several works of “pandemic literature,” including Laura Kipnis’ essays in *Love in a Time of Contagion*, Gary Shteyngart’s novel *Our Country Friends*, and even Kirsten Radtke’s graphic novel *Seek You*, I discuss primarily Amitava Kumar’s hybridization of transnational and comparative journalistic reportage and “auto-fiction” in *A Time Outside This Time: A Novel*. Kumar’s hybrid autofiction allows me situate my literary exploration against the backdrop of the hyped big data collection in India (the *Aadhaar* initiative) but more specifically India’s *Aarogya Setu* contact tracing app, and Co-Win, the country’s COVID vaccination-registration app.) The problematic of information, including “big data,” is the crucial analytic category—with the qualification that

information and data are meaningless if they cannot capture or represent the human, subjective experience, as a novel or autobiographical account can. A crucial question is what makes for effective, trustworthy, scientifically and culturally meaningful communication in a time of crisis; and how information, including big data as well as fictional and non-fictional narratives, proves critical to the representation of the human experience of that crisis. As the record of COVID responses in India and the U.S. shows, we need *both* “data” *and* “narrative,” including literary narratives, as I demonstrate.

3.a) Dystopian Visions

Saturday, 14:00-15:30

Chair: Julia Straub

Room: MIS 03 3115

Rareș-Mihai Grozea (Humboldt Universität Berlin)

“Terrifying vistas of reality.”

Madness, Evidence, and Reality in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft

Madness or insanity (terms I will use interchangeably) has been a prevalent element in gothic and horror narratives since the genres’ inception. This paper analyzes the specific use of insanity as a literary motif (not as a real-life diagnosis) in the works of H.P. Lovecraft, where madness has a twofold aspect: firstly, it is the disruptive effect on the characters’ psyche as they encounter the radically inhuman other, and, secondly, it is a comforting explanation of these encounters. The latter is a form of denial, as for the Lovecraftian character the fact that one might be mad is easier to bear than the implications of the objective reality of the horrors witnessed. Lovecraft’s innovation is his consistent naturalization of the supernatural, by setting it into the realm of the physically explainable and provable. The supernatural in Lovecraft is not transcendental (originating in an immaterial plane of existence) but immanent. The consequence of this is that the world itself becomes a source of horror, as the human perspective is forced to confront what Eugene Thacker calls the “world-without-us,” the universe that is indifferent to, alien from, and incomprehensible in its totality by the human perspective. It is this implication that Lovecraft’s characters seek to avoid but must inevitably accept when confronted with evidence of the supernatural, besides their senses. In closely reading and examining the stylistic use of the motif of madness and its relation to evidence in Lovecraft’s brand of “weird realism” (Graham Harman), in a selection of his stories, using current scholarship on literary madness as well as philosophical horror, I aim to show how Lovecraft makes human knowledge and its limitations into the essential underpinning of his conception of literary (and existential) horror.

Dennis Hennebühl (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Creating Uncertainty and Distrust in Science: Conspiracy Theories, Anti- and Pseudoscientific Attitudes in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Land of Mist*

Looking at discourses from COVID-deniers and vaccine sceptics, it becomes apparent how strong uncertainty about scientific evidence or even a general lack of trust in science can stem from the close interconnection between conspiratorial thinking, anti-scientific sentiments, and pseudoscientific views. This is not a new development but can be observed long before the recent pandemic. While the Victorian and Edwardian eras for instance are often regarded as a time of major scientific progress, there was also a considerable number of people who were sceptical of science. A prominent example is the author Arthur Conan Doyle, who, especially in his later years,

turned towards spiritualism and tried to defend his belief in ghosts, fairies, or other supernatural phenomena. In my paper, I will analyse *The Land of Mist*, one of Doyle's final and lesser known stories, which is heavily influenced by his spiritualist worldview and rejection of what he regards as purely 'materialist' science. More specifically, Doyle here reuses the character Prof. Challenger first introduced in his earlier novel *The Lost World* and turns him into the caricature of a narrow minded and arrogant scientist. Additionally, the novel propagates pseudoscientific methods that seek to validate spiritualist practices like mediumships or séances and ultimately even put Challenger, the rational and authoritative scientist, into doubt. Moreover, similar to the present-day conspiracy theories of COVID-deniers, Doyle portrays the media and representatives of the state as actively seeking to undermine and suppress spiritualists like himself, in this case by ridiculing them and their beliefs or persecuting them through dubious laws. At first, I will highlight the interconnectedness of conspiracy theories, pseudo- and antiscientific attitudes within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This then serves as the basis for the paper's investigation of *The Land of Mist* as historical precedent for such discourses.

**Jole Fontanesi (University of Fribourg)
Peter Reading's Poetic Ecology of Catastrophe**

English poet Peter Reading (1946-2011) was one of the most innovative and controversial voices in the contemporary poetic scene. He is known for his keen interest in the issues of global warming and mass-species extinction: two catastrophic phenomena cardinal throughout his literary production. Marked by an acute pessimism, Reading's work is, above all, focused on representing anthropogenic climate change in its awful, matter-of-fact actuality. This interest in the multi-faceted nature of the current ecological crisis is foregrounded in his poetry through the fusion of different narratives and stylistically through changing registers, the use of different poetic forms, textual fragments and heterogeneous voices. Although much has been written on Reading's thematic concerns, little scholarly attention has been paid to the formal and linguistic qualities and the innovative aspects of his poetry. In this paper, I offer a critical review of Peter Reading's experimental poetics by examining his better-known booklength poem on global warming -273.15 [absolute zero] (2005) as a case study. In particular, my analysis will focus on the interplay between textual ecology and the real-world ecologies described in the poem. I will also argue that Reading's use of particular stylistic techniques allows him to negotiate the extreme complexity and vast metanarrative scope of the current environmental crisis.

3.b) Navigating Uncertainty in Digital Humanities

Saturday, 14:00-15:30

Chair: Kilian Schindler

Room: MIS 03 3117

**Anita Auer and Mark Iten (University of Lausanne)
Creating a Corpus of Late Modern English Pauper Letters:
Uncertainties, Challenges, and Solutions**

The creation of searchable corpora and digital databases based on historical data can be challenging for various reasons, e.g. the lack of meta-data including the origin of a text or information about the writer, hardly legible handwriting, and variant spelling. Couched within this context, this presentation will discuss the challenges and uncertainties met, solutions found, and decisions taken for the creation of a corpus of pauper letters that were written under the Old Poor Law and cover

the period 1795 to 1834. As the labouring poor received variable education (if any at all) before the introduction of compulsory elementary schooling in 1880, the pauper letters may have been written by the petitioners themselves or somebody else who was able to write (cp. Sokoll 2001; King 2019). We will therefore discuss the uncertainties related to the writers of the letters and the effect that this has on the determination of sociolinguistic metadata, and as a result, on the interpretation of the findings from a historical sociolinguistic perspective. Other challenges that will be discussed in this presentation are dates of the letters, the determination/verification of a pauper's geographical origin based on phonetic spelling, and the orthographic normalisation of the data. We will show that despite the existence of other Late Modern English letter corpora (e.g. *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension*, *Corpus of Late 18c Prose*, *The Bluestocking Corpus*) ongoing corpus projects (e.g. *The Mary Hamilton Papers*), and a good amount of existing expertise in the field, every new text type, and letter type in this case, comes with new challenges.

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Rory Critten (University of Lausanne) The *Seven Sages of Rome* in Late-Medieval Europe

This paper reports on a mini project whose purpose was to create a new database of manuscript and early print copies of the *Seven Sages of Rome* and to experiment with visualizations of that database. The work was funded by the Arts Faculty at UNIL and conducted in spring 2022 by a team comprising Rory Critten, Davide Picca, and Amélie Mc Cormick. Digital methods were employed in this instance due to the vastness of the corpus analyzed, which includes several hundred items: after its appearance in French in the twelfth century, the *Seven Sages* quickly spread across western Europe and was translated into all the major vernaculars.


Our database combines records of copies of the *Seven Sages of Rome* at www.arlima.net with our own bibliographic research; together with the visualizations it has been compiled with a view to demonstrating afresh the sharing of literary texts across the western continent. The project thus contributes to a broader reaction against nationalizing literary histories of medieval literature. At the same time, difficulties that its programming component encountered re-illuminate the complexity of the data. For example, language is a reliable means of locating the Welsh and English texts quite precisely, but for the French and Latin copies of the *Seven Sages*, other methods of

localization and/or visualization must be employed. In this case, the methodological considerations involved in the design of the project are of interest as much as its necessarily provisional outcomes.

Devani Singh (University of Geneva)
EEBO-TCP at scale: Some possibilities and pitfalls

This talk will highlight work undertaken in the context of my SNSF project ‘To the Reader’, whose aim is to study the emergence of prefaces in early English print. As part of our work towards a database of printed prefaces, the project team have compiled a corpus based on titles transcribed in the widely-used online resource known as Early English Books Online-Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP). To create our corpus, we have relied upon the XML markup within EEBO-TCP, which offers an almost entirely untapped seam of descriptive metadata—one which is little known but which offers users the possibility of automating the selection of bibliographical features of the early printed book (such as ‘errata’, ‘title page’, or ‘preface’) and making them available for further analysis.

This presentation will focus on some of the fundamental uncertainties which need to be investigated and overcome in any computational research which uses EEBO-TCP as its starting point. These include the methods of transcription and markup used, their reliability, consistency of application, and the coverage of EEBO-TCP itself as a representative corpus of early English print.

Emily Smith (University of Geneva)
Corpora, from A to 

Corpus analysis is rapidly becoming more accessible – and subsequently more popular – in many disciplines. Analytical methods pioneered by English linguistics, and aided by technological advances, are consequently becoming ever more influential. Yet quantitative approaches, paradoxically, both increase and jeopardise the trustworthiness of literary and linguistic studies. This short talk will point towards the possibilities, difficulties, and sticking points to be aware of when reading studies which rely on corpus methodologies, or when conducting one yourself. We will examine several interfaces which render corpus analysis more accessible (including AntConc, Voyant, Cqpweb, Google ngrams, and englishcorpora.org) in order to examine their relative merits and weaknesses, and discuss how to apply similar assessments to other resources.

Regula Hohl Trillini (University of Basel)
Uncertainties in the theory and practice of corpus-based literary research

HyperHamlet www.hyperhamlet.unibas.ch and *WordWeb-IDEM* <https://wordweb-idem.ch> are hand-crafted digital corpora which have been created to investigate intertextuality. *HyperHamlet* is a hypertext of Shakespeare's tragedy which links to 12'000 text extracts that quote lines from the play while *WordWeb-IDEM* contains 5000 extracts from early modern plays which are not linked to a central text but to each other, for lines or phrases that they share. In both databases, the material can be browsed by the lines which are quoted or borrowed and searched by bibliographical and formal metadata. These two features are the unique selling points of these databases but also the main sources of uncertainty which confront their editors:

- 1 Data selection: What is a quotation? i.e. which kind of verbal overlap should be documented in the database at all? Obviously in Shakespeare's afterlife and surprisingly often in other early modern plays, shared text may *not* constitute a conscious "reference",

let alone a meaningful one. How can database users trust a database to provide truly relevant material?

2 Corpus annotation: What search parameters beyond the usual metadata are useful for researchers and students, and what should those search menus look like? Complex and interesting search options in *HyperHamlet* and *WordWeb-IDEM* include the relationship between "quoted" and "quoting" text, the marking of quotations and the changes which a quoted phrase may undergo.

This talk will explore ways of handling these uncertainties, which are specifically digital: they include the possibilities to continuously edit and add categories, to assign multiple categories and to store large amounts of uncertain material because space is not limited. So, like psychoanalysis, digital corpora offer solutions to problems that we would not have without them.

4.a) Communicating (Un-)certainty

Saturday, 16:00-17:30

Chair: Steve Oswald

Room: MIS 03 Auditoire C

Andreas H. Jucker (University of Zurich)

“Is that a compliment? It sounds like an insult”:

Pragmatic ambiguity and speech act theory

Semantic ambiguity is a concept that is relatively well understood, but so far little is known about the concept of pragmatic ambiguity, i.e. ambiguities and fuzziness at the level of pragmatics and in particular at the level of illocutionary force. Since the early days of speech act theory, speech acts have been defined in terms of felicity conditions which decide whether an utterance should be analysed as, for instance, a question, a request or an apology. Indirect speech acts – e.g. requests that on the surface look like questions – were seen as special cases which do not seriously impair the theoretical underpinnings of felicity conditions as diagnostic tools. However, there is an increasing amount of evidence that speech act values are regularly fuzzy, underspecified and ambiguous. Utterances can be laminated, i.e. perform several speech acts simultaneously, they can be indeterminate by leaving a range of different interpretations, and they can be equivocal by avoiding committing the speaker to a specific interpretation. In actual interactions, people often negotiate speech act values (“I want a real apology”; “Is that a compliment?”), which can be seen as problematic failures on the speaker’s side to signal the intended speech act value, or, alternatively, as strategic – and often effective – attempts to leave the precise speech act value underspecified. In this contribution, I want to re-examine and critique some of the basic assumptions of traditional speech act theory and argue for a discursive approach that recognises the inherent fuzziness and ambiguity of speech acts.

Mélinda Pozzi (University of Neuchâtel)

Speaker reliability: calibrating confidence with evidence

Overconfidence is typically damaging for one’s reputation as a reliable source of information. Research in psychology shows that, when deciding whether to trust a speaker, addressees do not exclusively rely on the speaker’s confidence (“confidence heuristics”), but consider, whenever possible, whether the speaker’s degree of confidence matches with the accuracy of their claim. As a result, a confident speaker whose messages turn out to be false will typically lose their credibility (Tenney et al., 2007; 2008; 2011; Vullioud et al., 2017). Crucially, though, preliminary findings from Tenney et al. (2008) indicate that an overconfident speaker does not suffer any reputational costs

if their mistake is taken to be *justified*. This suggests that the speaker's perceived reliability as a source of information depends on whether their confidence matches with the quality of the evidence at their disposal ("confidence-evidence calibration"). If this is the case, then, even an accurate informant should lose their credibility if the evidence available to them does not warrant the degree of confidence expressed (bad confidence-evidence calibration). In the present study, we replicated Tenney et al. (2008) results showing that overconfidence does not backfire if inaccuracy is justified by strong evidence: an inaccurate confident speaker who communicates false information that is justified by strong evidence does not lose their credibility. Moreover, we showed that confidence can backfire if accuracy is not justified by enough evidence (the speaker is accurate "by chance"): an accurate confident speaker who makes a claim that is not supported by enough evidence loses their credibility. This study shows that reputation management in communication depends on how well the speaker's confidence is calibrated to their evidential basis.

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Hannah Hedegard (University of Bern)
Language Analysis in the Swiss Asylum System:
Towards Collaboration, Transparency and Best Practice

Prompted by the administrative and financial pressures of the European migrant crisis in the early 2000s, certain EU countries began utilising language evidence in asylum decisions. This took the form of reports that corroborate or contradict the claimed regional origins of refugees based on the linguistic comparison of their speech with the languages/dialects of their asserted background - a procedure known as *Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin* (LADO). Today, LADO is a common element of asylum protocol in unclear cases across Europe and beyond. Its persistence is controversial, often described as peppered with conceptual and methodological questions.

Currently, LADO is undertaken by either independent commercial entities or government agencies. Unlike knowledge transfer between scholars and practitioners in other applied linguistic areas, there is relatively little dialogue between academic sociolinguists (whose theoretical principles inform LADO) and the caseworkers producing these high-stakes reports. A security-related necessity to redact methods and analysts' identities only adds to the resulting impression of LADO as scientifically ambiguous and morally dubious amongst academic linguists, legal officials, and the public. This, in turn, discourages productive communication and much-needed research advances in the field.

In this paper, I present an overview of recent work to counteract this situation in Switzerland, the start of a collaborative research project at Universität Bern with Lingua (the unit responsible for LADO in the State Secretariat for Migration). Recounting the organisation and output of a

round table connecting Lingua analysts, academic experts, and other forensic specialists in 2022, as well as in-house research assignments, I set out how these kinds of activities can further best practise, and ultimately contribute to strengthening public and scholarly faith in language evidence in the asylum system in Switzerland.

4.b) Fashioning Early Modern Identities

Saturday, 16:00-17:30

Room: MIS 03 3115

Chair: Kilian Schindler

Erzsi Kukorelly (University of Geneva)

Marie Leprince de Beaumont:

National Uncertainty and European Integration in Female Education

Marie Leprince de Beaumont was an eighteenth-century French writer, who was active in many genres, (periodicals, novels, pedagogical texts, conduct manuals, etc.). Throughout her career, she was eager to improve her readers, but she was also an astute literary entrepreneur, constructing a recognizable authorial persona that was pious and traditional, yet invested in the educational betterment of women. Recent work on Leprince has focused on the seeming contradictions of her life and her writings: Was she a polygamous adventuress, or was she a sedate governess for the upper ranks of British society? Was she a proponent of Enlightenment thought or did she promote traditional adherence to Catholic precepts? The answers to such questions are usually inconclusive; indeed, uncertainty as to her slippery status and convoluted allegiances are viewed as central to her commercial success throughout Europe.

This paper builds on these uncertainties, examining one of the ways in which she rendered her writings attractive to readers throughout Europe. I will look at her most popular texts, the *Magasins* series, a set of three four-volume titles, *Magasin pour les enfants*, *Magasins pour les adolescentes*, and *Instructions pour les jeunes dames*, which lay the pedagogical scene in an English school for young ladies, presenting a series of instructive dialogues between a female teacher and her pupils. My attention will be drawn by the national uncertainty that these texts present. Indeed, they were written in French, but the protagonists are English, with the exception of the French governess. Leprince navigates these national differences in such a way as to maintain them whilst minimizing their importance. In so doing, she builds an atmosphere of European integration and harmony that increases her trustworthiness as a pedagogue as well as her commercial viability as a European writer.

Shawna Guenther (independent scholar)

Uncertainty in Early Modern English Vernacular Medical Discourses about Lactation

In my interdisciplinary doctoral research, I analyzed sixteenth and seventeenth century English vernacular medical texts: a new form of disseminating information about medical theory, anatomy, obstetrics, and simple first aid to the literate public. Frequently, these texts were addressed to women, several writers stressing the importance of distributing basic medical knowledge to those who practiced self- and family care. The texts also provided midwives with the education they needed to effectively perform their duties despite being barred from university. However, the texts reveal numerous difficulties for writers as they developed this new mode of medical discourse, particularly as they anticipated a female readership. Further, dissemination of medical knowledge advanced slowly because texts about anatomical discoveries and scientific experiments about the functioning of the body were mingled with older texts in the marketplace -- sometimes within the

same book. Thus the information provided within the texts contradicted each other in many important aspects. I have focussed on representations of women's breasts -- the singularly female body part -- and lactation -- the sole purview of women. Or one would believe. Given the strength of humoralism, Christianity, classical metaphysics, and a society based on patrilineal succession, many medical writers presented men's breasts as being superior to women's, even to the point of suggesting male lactation. Yet many medical writers contested such claims associating breastmilk with nature's plan and the Christian redemption of women. Further, the single midwifery manual written by a woman in this period -- Jane Sharp's 1671 *The Midwives Book* -- defied medical authority claiming that no man who had examined a woman or aided in delivery would believe the claims made in many of the medical texts. I posit that the discord and contradictions in the vernacular discourse regarding lactation undermined the authority of early modern medical writers.

**Olena Marina (University of Teacher Education Lucerne)
Manipulation strategies in the dramatic discourse of the English Restoration**

Theater is a powerful medium able to produce and disseminate new ideas, to strengthen the belief in their necessity, and to build trust in the offered ideas in the audience. Restoration theatre transmitted the knowledge of a range of phenomena typical of the English society in transition. After eighteen years of the Puritan regime that fostered the ideas of a highly religious and austere way of life, the English people were confronted with liberties and new values and experimented with social roles. Lukić & Maslov (2014) argue, that during the time of transition, the elites play the central role in determining the course for the society to follow. During the English Restoration, Charles II was trying to resume his royal authority and impose a new worldview on his subjects through theatre production (Arena, 2017; Walkling 2001).

This talk aims to take a view of the discourse of Restoration drama as a means of persuasion and manipulation. To reach this aim, I use cognitive-pragmatic analytical tools. I side with van Dijk (2006: 369), who argues, that "manipulation is a discursive practice", and in my talk, I look into the strategies of manipulation in the dramatic discourse of the English Restoration Comedy.

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4.c) Producing Knowledge in Medieval Literature

Saturday, 16:00-17:30

Chair: Devani Singh

Room: MIS 03 3117

**Hannah Piercy (University of Bern)
Embodied Experience and Fantasies of Objectivity:
(Mis)Trusting the Senses in *Partonope of Blois***

The Middle English *Partonope of Blois* (based on the Old French *Partonopeus de Blois*) tells a version of the Cupid and Psyche myth: Partonope, delivered to a mysterious land, falls in love with a

woman whom he is permitted to touch but not to see (later revealed to be the Empress of Byzantium, Melior). When Partonope's suspicions are awakened by his mother, he is persuaded to try and steal a glance at Melior, causing a breakdown in their relationship and personal disaster and shame for both partners. This paper explores the role sensory experience plays in creating knowledge and uncertainty in *Partonope of Blois*. Bringing this romance into dialogue with medieval understandings of the hierarchy of the senses inherited from classical antiquity, in which sight was the revered, more objective sense and touch the basest, I argue that *Partonope of Blois* challenges this hierarchy and instead values tactility and embodied experiences as avenues to truth and certainty. While Partonope and his family subscribe to the fantasy of sight as a more objective marker of truth, this is exposed as a fallacy that ruins the pleasure and love he shared with Melior. His mistrust in the evidence of his own embodied experience is the cause of his temporary downfall, and the romance ultimately values this embodied truth over the more distant knowledge offered by vision. While this is potentially morally dubious when considered in terms of medieval Christian ethics (with many writers arguing that the senses, and touch in particular, needed to be carefully guarded), romance writing like *Partonope* makes space for embodied experiences and sensory pleasures to be valued and even considered essential to forming a true and trusting bond with another person, opening up different perspectives on medieval understandings of the relationship between trust, (un)certainty, knowledge, and the senses.

William Brockbank (University of Bern)

**Untrustworthy Scribes and Uncertain Editors? The Case of Old English *her(-)heard* in
*The Wife's Lament***

On folio 115r of the tenth-century Exeter Cathedral Library, MS 3501, a line of verse from the Old English poem *The Wife's Lament* reads *het mec blaford min her(-)heard niman*, 'my lord ordered me to take up a *her(-)heard*'. A line-break occurs between the elements *her* and *heard*, and so it is hard to know whether the scribe understood these elements as one word or two. The single scribe of the Exeter Book made numerous scribal errors over the course of copying out the poems in this manuscript, and whilst many of these were subsequently corrected, no medieval emendations of *her(-)heard* were ever made. Editors and commentators, however, have propounded an impressive number of ingenious solutions to this crux over the course of the critical history of *The Wife's Lament*, few of them satisfactory. If the original scribe's trustworthiness can be called into question, then the collective uncertainty of modern critics is cause for still greater concern.

Whilst many editorial decisions in the criticism of medieval texts are open to doubt and further discussion, some of the solutions proposed for *her(-)heard* have problematically coloured subsequent interpretations of the text as a whole. Nowhere are the effects of this reality more keenly felt than in student-oriented editions, whose necessarily terse and authoritative commentaries tend to make definitive pronouncements on the meanings of difficult words. The potentially far-reaching consequences of such statements demand increased scrutiny of the reliability of medieval scribes and modern critics alike. This paper will give an overview of the critical tradition surrounding this crux, challenging in particular the overly bold opinions of student-minded editors. In so doing, it will ask to what extent we can trust medieval scribes and their modern editorial heirs, and what the effects of this textual uncertainty on both scholars and students may be.