

# Herstory Re-Imagined

A Conference on Women's Lives in Biographical Fiction and Film

16-17 December 2019, Bush House, King's College London

[www.herstory-reimagined.net](http://www.herstory-reimagined.net)

MONDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2019	9 – 9.30 am	<b>Registration</b>	
	9.30 – 9.45 am	<b>Conference opening</b>	
		PANEL A: Lecture Theatre 1	PANEL B: Room 2.30
	9.45 – 11.30 am	<b>1A: Entering 'male' professions</b> Schönberger-Stepien Pomiès-Maréchal Müller	<b>1B: Cross-cultural appropriation</b> González Cuerva Gardiner & Padmore Maher
	11.30 – 12 am	<b>Coffee</b>	
	12 – 1 pm	<b>Plenary lecture</b> Diana Wallace, University of South Wales	
	1 – 2 pm	<b>Lunch</b>	
	2 – 3.40 pm	<b>2A: Queering biofiction and film</b> Alden Gillespie Korzeniewska	<b>2B: Rethinking the consort</b> Archer Offe-Gorlier Arribas & Valle
	3.40 – 4 pm	<b>Coffee</b>	
	4 – 5.40 pm	<b>3A: In the shadow of male writers</b> Bergmann Layne Cernat	<b>3B: (Re-)positioning black women</b> Sutherland Kooijman Galpin
	5.40 – 6.30 pm	<b>Reading and Q&amp;A</b> Patricia Duncker, novelist, University of Manchester	
	6.30 – 8.00 pm	<b>Wine reception</b>	
	8.00 pm	<b>Conference dinner (pre-booked)</b> Côte Brasserie Covent Garden	
TUESDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2019		PANEL A: Lecture Theatre 1	PANEL B: Room 2.30
	9.00 – 10.50 am	<b>4A: Agency and re-marginalization</b> Beller & O'Callaghan Shmydkaya Frühwirth & Güner	<b>4B: Figuring (inter)national politics</b> Fătu-Tutoveanu Warnapala Salino
	10.50 – 11.15 am	<b>Coffee</b>	
	11.15 – 12.15 am	<b>Plenary lecture</b> Belén Vidal, King's College London	
	12.15 – 1.15 pm	<b>Lunch</b>	
	1.15 – 3 pm	<b>5A: Transgressive women in early 20c</b> Gehmacher & Prager Wieckiewicz Bibby	<b>5B: Self-reflexivity &amp; making-ofs</b> Read Antic Hinterkörner
	3 – 3.20 pm	<b>Coffee</b>	
	3.20 – 5 pm	<b>6A: Gendering creativity</b> Deveault & Izza Nieberle Dabbs	<b>6B: Women on the move</b> Dinter Lusin Varalda
	5 pm	<b>End of conference</b>	

# Monday, 16 December 2019

**9.45 – 11.30 am**

## 1A Entering 'male' professions

*Chair: Mary Luckhurst (University of Bristol)*

- Christina Schönberger-Stepien (University of Augsburg)  
Making her case: the dramatised life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the biopic *On the Basis of Sex*
- Sylvie Pomiès-Maréchal (University of Orléans)  
The enduring influence of female *Special Operations Executive* agent biopics on cultural memory and representations in France and Great Britain
- Christine Müller (University of Bremen)  
Between feminist historiography and patriarchal stereotypes: biofictional rewritings of the lives of female scientists

## 1B Cross-cultural appropriation

*Chair: Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu (Babeş-Bolyai University)*

- Rubén González Cuerva (Spanish National Research Council CSIC)  
Early modern royal Spanish women in media: alternative images of power
- Kelly Gardiner and Catherine Padmore (La Trobe University)  
Tudor women from Australia and New Zealand: on Antipodean biofictions
- LJ Maher (Monash University)  
BURN IT ALL: imagining women's rage through the bane of the Roman Empire

**12 – 1 pm**

### Plenary lecture:

*Chair: Julia Lajta-Novak (University of Vienna)*

- Diana Wallace (University of South Wales)  
'Everything is out of place': women and (meta-)historical biofiction

**2 – 3.40 pm**

## 2A Queering biographical fiction and film

*Chair: Elisabetta Varalda (Sapienza University of Rome)*

- Natasha Alden (Aberystwyth University)  
My coal-mining exploits bring all the girls to the yard: what do we do with Anne Lister?
- Iseult Gillespie (University of Wisconsin–Madison)  
Disinterring the subject: towards a necropolitical biography
- Paulina Korzeniewska (University of Zielona Góra)  
American poverty and social rejection in Craig Gillespie's *I, Tonya*

## 2B Rethinking the consort

Chair: Catherine Padmore (La Trobe University)

- Bethan Archer (Lancaster University)  
Adapting *The Betrayed Wife*: can Philippa Gregory's Catherine of Aragon be screened?
- Alison Offe-Gorlier (Liverpool Hope University/Lille Catholic University)  
Jean Plaidy and Philippa Gregory fighting for gender equality through Katherine Parr's narrative
- Sonia Arribas (Pompeu Fabra University) and Irene Valle (University of Granada)  
Chronicle of a German woman

## 4 – 5.40 pm

### 3A In the shadow of male writers

Chair: Sandra Mayer (University of Vienna)

- Ina Bergmann (University of Würzburg)  
In Poe's shadow: Frances Sargent Osgood
- Bethany Layne (De Montfort University)  
'To be a James and a girl was a contradiction in terms' (Jean Strouse): *The Sister* (2014), the brother, and *The Master* (2004)
- Laura Cernat (KU Leuven)  
Fictional futures for a buried past: Lucia Joyce in Annabel Abbs's *The Joyce Girl* and Alex Pheby's *Lucia*

### 3B (Re-)positioning Black women

Chair: Caroline Lusin (University of Mannheim)

- Kate Sutherland (Osgoode Hall Law School)  
Giving voice to a portrait: the intersection of gender, race, and law in *Belle*
- Jaap Kooijman (University of Amsterdam)  
'She be Tina Turner and he be Ike': black female tragedy in Angela Bassett's *Whitney*
- Shelley Anne Galpin (University of York)  
*Belle* and the Subversive Potential of Period Drama

## 5.40 – 6.30 pm

### Fictionalising Lives: Reading and Q&A

Chair: Caitríona Ní Dhúill (Durham University)

- Patricia Duncker (novelist, University of Manchester)

...followed by a **wine reception**.

# Tuesday, 17 December 2019

## 9 – 10.50 am

### 4A Agency and re-marginalisation

*Chair: Jaap Kooijman (University of Amsterdam)*

- Anne-Marie Beller and Claire O'Callaghan (Loughborough University)  
'And thou art like the poisonous tree / that stole my life away': the afterlives of Elizabeth Siddal
- Ksenia Shmydkaya (Tallinn University)  
Stanisława Przybyszewska: a case of posthumous victimization
- Timo Frühwirth & Elisabeth Güner (University of Vienna)  
'For better or for worse, there is history, there is the book and then there's the movie': strategies of visibility and affect in *Hidden Figures* (2016)

### 4B Figuring (inter)national politics

*Chair: LJ Maher (Monash University)*

- Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu (Babeş-Bolyai University)  
A star is born. *Darclée* (1960): political discourse and appropriation of famous females in the Cold War Romanian cinema
- Kanchanakesi Warnapala (University of Sri Jayewardenepura)  
The reluctant wife: *Ginnen Upan Seethala* and gendering revolution
- Silvia Salino (University of Vienna)  
Inter-cultural biography: negotiating femininity and victimhood between China and the West in Anchee Min's *Becoming Madame Mao*

## 11.15 – 12.15 am

### Plenary lecture:

*Chair: Julia Lajta-Novak (University of Vienna)*

- Belén Vidal (King's College London)  
Queering herstor/ies? On projection, performance and creativity in recent women's biopics

## 1.15 – 3 pm

### 5A Transgressive women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

*Chair: Natasha Alden (Aberystwyth University)*

- Johanna Gehmacher (University of Vienna) and Katharina Prager (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute)  
Ida Bauer's *Atout*: a novel of a difficult woman

- Agnieszka Wieckiewicz (University of Warsaw/Sorbonne University)  
Sabina Spielrein — rewriting her-story: the mechanism(s) of projection and identification in David Cronenberg's film *Dangerous Method* (2011)
- Leanne Bibby (Teesside University)  
Juries of her peers: Edith Thompson and a century of (her) stories

## 5B Self-reflexivity and making-ofs

*Chair: Kelly Gardiner (La Trobe University)*

- Sara Read (Loughborough University)  
*The Gossips' Choice*: drawing on the case notes of midwife Sarah Stone in historical fiction
- Marija Antic (Monash University)  
Reclaiming women's histories: the feminine (self-) representation and female authorship in Shirin Neshat's *Looking for Oum Kulthum* (2017)
- Maria Hinterkoerner (Vienna)  
Taking dramatic liberties: a screenwriter's perspective on the female biopic and its challenges in the American Film Industry

## 3.20 – 5 pm

### 6A Gendering creativity

*Chair: Claire O'Callaghan (Loughborough University)*

- Audrey Deveault (Université du Québec à Montréal) and Missila Izza (École des hautes études en sciences sociales - Paris)  
The fictionalisation of Ilse Koch
- Sigrid Nieberle (Dortmund University)  
Every now and then: a gender-sensitive approach to creativity on screen
- Julia Dabbs (University of Minnesota, Morris)  
Writing the early modern woman artist, past and present

### 6B Women on the move

*Chair: Lucia Boldrini (Goldsmiths, University of London)*

- Sandra Dinter (FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg)  
The Brontë sisters on foot: the pedestrian motif in Sally Wainwright's *To Walk Invisible* (2016)
- Caroline Lusin (University of Mannheim)  
'Up the country' with Emily Eden: imperial female subjectivities in Susanna Moore's *One Last Look* (2003) and Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* (1995)
- Elisabetta Varalda (Sapienza University of Rome)  
Virginia Woolf resurrected in America

# Abstracts

NATASHA ALDEN · Aberystwyth University

## **My coal-mining exploits bring all the girls to the yard: what do we do with Anne Lister?**

This paper explores three BBC dramas, *A Skirt Through History* (1994), *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (2010) and *Gentleman Jack* (2019), which offer often sharply different representations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century landowner, industrialist, lesbian and 20/21<sup>st</sup> century cultural phenomenon, Anne Lister.

From the rediscovery and decoding of her diaries by the historian Helena Whitebread in the 1980s, Lister has had the same impact on lesbian history and culture that she seems to have on Halifax and Huddersfield in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; unsettling established paradigms and exerting a (sometimes exasperating) charm on her audience. But what does the way that we respond to Anne Lister now tells us about the use we make of lesbian history in the current day? How does Lister's reinvention for TV drama repackage the 19<sup>th</sup> century individual for 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities, and why?

Focussing on the BBC's three reimaginings of Lister, and the responses to them, this paper will place our contemporary usage of Lister's life and words in a number of contexts. Firstly, that of the changing public acceptance of lesbianism and gender-non-conforming women (and the limits of that acceptance); secondly, our reading of Lister as "the first modern lesbian", and finally, alternate readings of Lister as lesbian paradigm, Yorkshirewoman and member of the gentry, industrialist and rake.

MARIJA ANTIC · Monash University

## **Reclaiming women's histories: the feminine (self-) representation and female authorship in Shirin Neshat's *Looking for Oum Kulthum* (2017)**

Drawing upon postcolonial feminist discourse, this paper will discuss the ways in which the intersection between history, biography and self-narrative functions as a site of struggle against patriarchal ideologies in Shirin Neshat's feature *Looking for Oum Kulthum* (2017). The film focuses on the process of turning the extraordinary life and career of the legendary Egyptian female singer, Oum Kulthum, into a filmic subject. Neshat deliberately inscribes her artistic self into the role of an Iranian exilic female filmmaker engaging with Kulthum's charismatic persona and her powerful voice in trying to make a biopic about the singer, whose life demonstrates a refusal to conform to socio-cultural constraints of her gender and class in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian society. Moreover, this paper aims to show the significance of hybridizing the biopic format, as well as the role of artistic self-inscription and the film's self-reflexive aesthetics for opening up a discourse of the contemporary female authorship and cinematic portrayals of female subjectivity in the Middle East. Furthermore, fusing the stories of the present-day woman filmmaker and the historical figure of the Egyptian singer positions the film in discursive dialogue with the country's past and present, its cultural memories and feminist rewritings of history. Formally situated at the crossroads of historical, fiction and art film, *Looking for Oum Kulthum* not only deifies conventions of classical biopic genre, but also recollects the intimate female histories through biographical and fictional instances of two women whose stories become intertwined in the filmmaking process.

**BETHAN ARCHER · Lancaster University**

**Adapting *The Betrayed Wife*: can Philippa Gregory's Catherine of Aragon be screened?**

In Philippa Gregory's *The Constant Princess* (2005), Gregory refutes the popular contemporary depiction of Catherine of Aragon as 'The Betrayed Wife' (Fraser, 1992: 1) by turning her into The Betraying Wife. When on his deathbed, Gregory's Arthur makes Catherine promise to become Queen; to deny that their marriage was consummated and help to make their second Arthurian England by marrying his brother. Decades later, it is the accusation of this event that is used to dissolve Catherine and Henry's marriage – an event that Catherine denies. 'The King's Great Matter' - their divorce – is typically approached through a focus on Catherine's piety and a dismissal of the accusation. While others allude to or briefly consider the frequent accusations of incest levelled during the Tudor period, Gregory revels in them. Refusing to condemn Catherine's place in history as a mere example of Henry VIII's power, she embraces her heroine's incestuous activities and prompts questions of what incest has to offer.

This paper examines the potentiality and flexibility of Catherine's incestuous relationship within the novel, and in the Starz adaptation, *The Spanish Princess* (2019). Where Gregory's novel privileges the love story between Catherine and Arthur, so far, the TV adaptation has focused on the burgeoning romance between Catherine and Henry. This paper examines why the focus of the romance and betrayal has shifted for TV, and uses it to discuss which types of women are allowed a place in history – and in which medium.

**SONIA ARRIBAS · Pompeu Fabra University**

**IRENE VALLE · University of Granada**

**Chronicle of a German woman**

*The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* by Straub and Huillet is a film about Anna Magdalena, Bach's second wife. It is famous as the filmmakers recorded the music live, without a soundtrack, using only instruments from Bach's era. *Chronicle* is the first of a wave of films which, against the backdrop of the social conflicts that took place at the end of the sixties, overhauled the filmmaking strategies for the genre of biographies of historical women by questioning the frontiers between everyday life and history, documentary and fiction, the political and the affective, past and present.

Straub and Huillet drew inspiration from the novel *The Little Chronicle of Magdalena Bach* by Esther Meynell: the first-person tale of the events in the marital life of Anna Magdalena and Bach. The story is structured by the self-reflective principle of the fictionalization of life, and by the capturing of her body in the social space assigned to her.

In our presentation we will lay out the most notable filmic motifs for representing this woman, in the way they question gendered subject positions: mainly, the way the film employs the Brechtian distancing effect; the interaction between image, text and music; the use of the protagonist's voice; resorting to significant moments or fragments of life instead of a linear narrative. Paying heed to Straub and Huillet's own words, we will ask ourselves about the setting of this 18th century love story within the socio-political context in which the film was made.

**ANNE-MARIE BELLER · Loughborough University**  
**CLAIRE O'CALLAGHAN · Loughborough University**

**'And thou art like the poisonous tree / that stole my life away': the afterlives of Elizabeth Siddal**

Elizabeth Siddal is variously represented in popular culture as the Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel, as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's muse, and as a beautiful tragic victim. Her early death from a laudanum overdose tends to be conflated with her iconic poses in Millais's *Ophelia* and Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* – that is, as a woman most perfect in death. As Elizabeth Bronfen has argued: 'the interstice between death, femininity and aesthetics is negotiated over the representation of a dead feminine body clearly marked as being other'.

Serena Trowbridge has recently suggested that Siddal's life "has come to be represented purely by her face". Despite recent scholarship which makes a convincing case for recovering Siddal as both an artist and a poet in her own right, Neo-Victorian drama and literature continue to deny her agency.

This paper discusses a range of texts (literary, dramatic, and visual) that represent 'Lizzie' in ways which perpetuate traditional passive feminine tropes. The fetishization and mythologizing of Siddal arguably contribute to the habitual tendency to reduce female artistic production to their biography, remembered for what they did and who they loved, while male artists are celebrated for their creative outputs.

Through the specific case-study of Siddal's afterlives, with a particular focus on the 2009 BBC drama *Desperate Romantics*, our paper addresses wider questions about the ethics of appropriation and about gendered mythologizing in biofiction and neo-Victorian adaptation.

**INA BERGMANN · University of Würzburg**

**In Poe's shadow: Frances Sargent Osgood**

In the history of biofiction as a genre, the close relationship between biographical narrative and historical subjects has been central, yet with a male-centered focus. Historical biofiction of eminent men has long dominated the field. Only relatively recently, women have begun to step out of the shadow of these men and into their own biofiction. But, as Stephanie Bird points out in *Recasting Historical Women* (1998), often it is still "the relation of the woman to the male subject" that is "of central concern" in these texts.

Frances Sargent Osgood (1811-1850) was one of the most popular and acclaimed nineteenth-century American female poets. Yet, she was soon after her early death relegated to oblivion and her literary achievements were eclipsed by her personal relationship with one of the most prominent American poets, Edgar Allan Poe. To date, no book-length biography of Osgood exists; there is no collected edition of her works; and the handful of scholarly articles published about her mostly revolve around the uncertain nature of her connection to Poe. Remarkably, it is two contemporary biographical novels which self-declaredly reclaim for Osgood her place in American literary history: John May's *Poe & Fanny* (2004) and Lynn Cullen's *Mrs. Poe* (2014).

My paper will discuss whether these narratives can be read as sources of knowledge about Osgood's life and work; whether their purpose is recovery and revision or nostalgia and voyeurism; and whether they are representative or symptomatic of contemporary herstorical biofiction in the USA. In short: I will discuss whether they really tell herstory instead of his.

LEANNE BIBBY · Teesside University

**Juries of her peers: Edith Thompson and a century of (her) stories**

The 1923 execution of Edith Jessie Thompson, convicted with Frederick Bywaters of the murder of her husband Percy, is seen as a tragic miscarriage of justice, and this correct yet narrow characterisation of the case has dominated a century of its representations. Whereas Bywaters alone killed Percy Thompson, Edith's conviction rested on the contents of letters to Bywaters apparently documenting their affair. This paper argues, with reference to Jill Dawson's biographical novel *Fred and Edie* (2000), Sarah Waters's *The Paying Guests* (2014) and other cultural texts representing or inspired by the case, that Thompson's life and death should be seen in the context of other constructions of traumatic twentieth-century history which negotiate rapidly changing gender and sexual politics in the form of horrific, raw imagery, genres and forms, rupturing biographies and histories at the level of narrative itself. Dawson's novel in particular archives real historical evidence of the misogynistic time and place in which Thompson was condemned alongside fictionalised versions of her letters, drawing the gaze back to her skill in writing her own life rather than her ultimately fatal lack of agency as an author. The paper consults studies of women, crime, representation and cultural memory (including Bland 2008; Burfoot and Lord 2006; Johnsen 2006) to propose that certain fictions allow for a reading of the case refocused away from the prurient gallows scene and towards the complexities of women's biographies, as well as towards topical, renewed discussions of women, sexuality and violence.

LAURA CERNAT · KU Leuven

**Fictional futures for a buried past: Lucia Joyce in Annabel Abbs's *The Joyce Girl* and Alex Pheby's *Lucia***

The recent boom of biofictions points out to the interest of contemporary audiences in understanding the present through the lens of the past. Once great narratives started being seen as unreliable, the individual life has become a gate of access to a relatable version of history, from which one can still learn personal lessons. But the fictional rendering of these lives also projects present categories unto past realities. Infused with our current awareness of the relativity and fluidity of gender norms, biofictional stories of women's lives from centuries past gain a visionary aura, foreshadowing contemporary developments in social mentalities and prefiguring the evolution of feminist thought. Likewise, our present understanding of the workings of non-neurotypical brains and the recent evolution of mental health advocacy have allowed authors to reevaluate the life stories of exceptional individuals like John Nash or Alan Turing, who became protagonists of biopics and biofictions.

At the intersection of these two categories – feminist unearthing and destigmatizing of non-neurotypical manifestations – biofictions of Lucia Joyce stage a life story massively erased from documents. In her biography of Lucia (*Lucia Joyce: To Dance in the Wake*, 2003), Carol Loeb Shloss points out the thin line between sanity and insanity, emphasizing the role of circumstances in deciding the fate of Joyce's daughter. Taking her cue from Shloss's insistence on thinking of Lucia's story as open-ended, Annabel Abbs reconstructs the female artist's voice in a vibrant memoir of her young hopes and aspirations (*The Joyce Girl*, 2016). Without leaving out the traumas that led to the young woman's breakdown, Abbs offers her readers a vision of Lucia Joyce as a full-fledged artistic promise, thus allowing them to envisage an alternative future

for her. Following Lucia a step further into the Odyssey of her hospitalization, Alex Pheby ventures to metaphorically befriend her in her afterlife, piecing together imagined fragments of her existence which could shed light on the injustice she suffered (*Lucia*, 2018). Ending symbolically with Lucia's birth, Pheby's elegiac prose hints to the trope of reincarnation. Thus, his more experimental formula equally challenges the erasure of Lucia's story and opens up her narrative to another potential future. Building on Pheby's observation that "speculation is infinite in a way that the truth is not", this paper argues that stories like Lucia Joyce's are best preserved in the form of biofiction and that through biofiction our own age can still shed light on modernism's blind spots.

**JULIA DABBS • University of Minnesota, Morris**

### **Writing the early modern woman artist, past and present**

The recent surge of bio-fiction publishing has somewhat surprisingly (but happily) included women artists who lived between 1500-1800 as protagonists, even though historians have generally overlooked their accomplishments. Renaissance portraitist Sofonisba Anguissola (c.1532-1625) is being introduced to the reading public through two works of bio-fiction, Donna DiGiuseppe's *The Lady in Ermine* (Bagwyn, 2019) and Chiara Montani's *Portraits of the Soul* (independently published, 2019). Meanwhile, an artist of a very different time, place, and subject matter, seventeenth-century Dutch genre specialist Judith Leyster (1609-1660), is receiving renewed interest thanks to Carrie Callaghan's *A Light of Her Own* (Amberjack Publishing, 2018). But why? Why were these little-known women from the distant past chosen as subjects of bio-fiction, and how do the authors weave their life stories such that they speak to a modern audience? In this paper I will explore these questions, and also consider whether the women artists are characterized and made relatable through the use of *topoi* or other stereotypical norms. As Fredrika Jacobs, myself, and other scholars have shown, *topoi* were a standard element of early modern biographical writing on artists; the female subject was thus often generically described by her male biographer as being youthful, beautiful, and an astonishing marvel (among women), since it was then assumed that women did not have the intellective capacity to create significant art. Have such stereotypes changed with the times in recreating the historical woman artist's life story? And what role(s) do they play in the telling of that story?

**AUDREY DEVEAULT • Université du Québec à Montréal**

**MISSILA IZZA • École des hautes études en sciences sociales - Paris**

### **The fictionalisation of Ilse Koch**

« This is the first one [film] where they had a female villain. She was the leader of the feminists if you will... » In 1974, the nazisploitation movie *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* makes its appearance on the big screen and almost instantly marked the imagination of the public. The story centres a fictionalized Ilse Koch, renamed Ilsa, a Nazi camp commander who brutally rapes, tortures, and experiments on male and female prisoners in a concentration camp. The real life Ilse Koch, also known as The Bitch (or Witch) of Buchenwald, was married to Karl-Otto Koch, commandant of Buchenwald. She was said to be particularly cruel and is infamously credited with the idea of making objects, such as gloves or lampshades out of human skin.

In this presentation we intend to explore what the choice of making a exploitation movie, rather than a documentary or biopic about this controversial female historical figure, reveals about the West's relationship to Nazism. We contend that this choice further blurs the limits between reality and fiction in the context of a history (Ilse Koch's) that is already imbued with legend and myth. We also propose that the movie serves to reaffirm a narrative of exceptional violence in which Nazism is extracted, ex-centred from modernity and the Western world. Further, what does this movie reveal about our collective incapacity to deal with and comprehend cruel women or women who commit unspeakable acts? Finally, what does this movie reveal about collective fears when it comes to feminism and, more broadly, women in positions of power? The concept of the body genres (Williams, ) in film and affect theory will allow us to look at what the movie produces in the viewer and how this functions to reassert or subvert our collective notions surrounding the Holocaust as well as cruel women.

**SANDRA DINTER · FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg**

**The Brontë sisters on foot: the pedestrian motif in Sally Wainwright's *To Walk Invisible* (2016)**

This paper begins by suggesting that numerous recent biopics about nineteenth-century female artists – among them *Becoming Jane* (2007), *Colette* (2018), and *Woman Walks Ahead* (2018) – portray their heroines walking in cities or in the countryside. Using Sally Wainwright's 2016 BBC film *To Walk Invisible*, which centres on three years in the lives of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, as its main case study, this paper takes a closer look at this pedestrian motif and attempts to examine its different layers and functions within the female biopic. I will argue that *To Walk Invisible* foregrounds the concept of walking as a gendered spatial practice as prominently theorised by critics such as Rebecca Solnit, Elizabeth Wilson, Lauren Elkin, and Deborah Parsons. In this way, Wainwright's film provides an insight into and at times undermines dominant ideologies of mobility and authorship in the nineteenth century. At the same time, I attempt to illustrate how the sisters' walks along the Yorkshire Moors fuel the myth of their exceptional authorship. Scenes of walking serve as intertextual vehicles; they are reminiscent of the Brontës' novels and poems, where female walking similarly occurs as a metaphor for female emancipation and reflection. Moreover, Wainwright's representations of female walking also perpetuate an iconography that contemporary viewers know from the recent film adaptations *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* (both 2011), and various rewritings of the Brontës' works. In other words, I propose that Wainwright's depiction of walking also invoke the 'Brontë brand'.

**ANDRADA FĂTU-TUTOVEANU · Babeş-Bolyai University**

**A star is born. *Darclée* (1960): political discourse and appropriation of famous females in the Cold War Romanian cinema**

Obsessively interested in life-writing from the periods of 20<sup>th</sup> century dictatorships, the Romanian Post-Communist book market has revealed a massive presence of male authors, with very few exceptions, especially in the 1990s. However, shyly, yet steadily, in this large-scale attempt to retrace and understand the traumatic past, there has been an opening in recent years towards women authors. Although few by comparison, these personal narratives are memorable. Sometimes interviews and even a documentary completed the picture, but in terms of biographical novels and biopics, the most striking feature is the absence of such female representations. Departing from this context of gender oblivion and inequality, and considering

the specificities of the life-writing genre and its filmic representations, the current paper focuses on a case study, one of the very few biopics and a rare exception in terms of famous females on screen, *Darclée* (1960). The film (also in relation to a biography published around the same date and printed thereafter in several editions, revealing success) is extremely politicised and therefore interesting to discuss in relation to the political context, the totalitarian regime present at the time in Romania and its cultural discourse. Despite dealing with a turn of the century figure, with aristocratic and bourgeois origins, the film (with the wife of a Communist leader in the leading role) is politically appropriated. The political discourse employed in the film, with an unexpected nationalist emphasis, as well as the strategies of representation are worth analysing and moreover as it covers, in a rare occasion, a female figure.

**TIMO FRÜHWIRTH** · University of Vienna

**ELISABETH GÜNER** · University of Vienna

**'For better or for worse, there is history, there is the book and then there's the movie':  
strategies of visibility and affect in *Hidden Figures* (2016)**

*Hidden Figures* is Margot Lee Shetterly's best-selling 2016 nonfiction book, which spotlights previously hidden figures in US history: the black female mathematicians (such as Katherine Johnson, born 1918) who worked as "human computers" at NASA from the 1930s through the 1960s. While these African-American women have been subject to the specific marginalization that Kimberlé Crenshaw has described in terms of 'intersectionality' (of sexism and racism), Shetterly's life writing renders them visible, foregrounding meanings of 'nation' and the national narratives of the American Dream and the 'Space Race.'

*Hidden Figures* was adapted as a biographical drama film, directed by Theodore Melfi. It was released in 2016 to critical acclaim and has been discussed in media studies as exemplifying a new type of movie heroine: the female troubleshooter undeterred by (rather than fighting) misogynist opposition (Beck 2017). Other critics have pointed out the cinematic trope of the 'white savior' (that is, white *male* savior): following a dramatic appearance of a distressed Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), the white boss (Kevin Costner), in a highly effective scene, smashes the 'Colored Ladies Room' sign and denounces racial segregation.

There is no such scene in the book, which is based on the author's interviews with Johnson: while Johnson first "didn't even realize the bathrooms were segregated," she later "refused to so much as enter the Colored bathrooms" (129-130). Using tools from film studies, this paper will argue that by means of the cinematic *mise en scène*, these previously hidden figures are once more, literally, marginalized. Considering the critical voices and the responses to this criticism, this paper will spotlight the intersection of nation, race, gender, and genre in terms of both narrative economy and 'affective economies' (Sara Ahmed).

**SHELLEY ANNE GALPIN** · University of York

***Belle* and the Subversive Potential of Period Drama**

This paper considers Amma Asante's *Belle* (2014), a fictionalised biopic of Dido Belle, a biracial woman raised within the aristocratic Mansfield family during the eighteenth century. The film appropriates the narrative conventions of Jane Austen novels, which for many represent the

archetypal British period drama (Cardwell, 2002), and *Belle* in many respects seems a highly generic film.

The period drama genre is associated with representations of female subjectivity and is consequently marginalised within discussions of historical representation, seen as embodying a superficial approach to recreating history that fails to engage with social and political issues (Hughes-Warrington, 2009). Berghahn (2016) argues that this fascination with surfaces over accuracy can be read into *Belle* itself. In this paper I will argue that, far from representing a superficial approach to the past that fails to engage with political or social issues, it is the very adherence of *Belle* to classic period drama conventions that allow it to engage with issues of race and gender in an overt manner. By imposing a fictionalised narrative onto the life of a historical figure, the film invites questions about the validity of constructing stories based on women who are largely historically invisible. However, I will argue that in presenting the story of a biracial woman in a highly generic period drama narrative, Asante challenges the generic whiteness of the genre (Bourne, 2002), our conception of the history of racial diversity in Britain and, by extension, British national identity itself.

**KELLY GARDINER** • La Trobe University

**CATHERINE PADMORE** • La Trobe University

#### **Tudor women from Australia and New Zealand: on Antipodean biofictions**

While much Tudor biofiction emerges from the UK, writers from elsewhere on the globe choose this time and place to set their fictions. Our paper examines recent novels from Australia and New Zealand that resurrect historical women from the Tudor period. The women represented are both notable and lesser-known, including Kate Carey, Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and the Flemish artist Susannah Horenbout. Several questions drive our analysis: What compels authors from this region to recreate these particular women's lives in fiction? What challenges arise in so doing? What genealogies of influence are cited for their portrayals, and how do these representations write with and back to British models? What 'adjustments of the genre' (Meyer 2014: 51) are made by these writers when rendering past lives as fiction? What needs do these representations fulfil in contemporary Australia and New Zealand, as both countries struggle to come to terms with the (post)colonial relationship to Britain? What links are forged between the fictionalised Tudor women and the material present? Is this relationship characterised by a sense of 'double othering' in time and space (de Groot 2009: 94), or do perceived similarities bring remote worlds into closer proximity? These Antipodean portrayals of Tudor women are read alongside author interviews and other paratexts to determine how the region's novelists conceptualise and articulate their relationships to female characters who are distant, in time, culture, and geography.

**JOHANNA GEHMACHER** • University of Vienna

**KATHARINA PRAGER** • Ludwig Boltzmann Institute

#### **Ida Bauer's *Atout*: a novel of a difficult woman**

In June 2018 Katharina Adler (\*1980) published a quite well-received novel on her grandmother Ida Bauer (1882–1945), titled "Ida". Ida is the real name of one of the twentieth century's most famous patients treated and studied by Sigmund Freud under the name of "Dora" in "Fragment

of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905). Breaking off her treatment at age 18, she robbed Freud, as he later complained, "of the satisfaction of more thoroughly freeing her of her ailment".

Adler set out to engage with the tensions of Ida Bauer's representations throughout a century, re-imagining her story oscillating between victimization and idealization: "Slowly, my wish grew to complete this picture of her, yet also to counter it. I wanted to show a woman who couldn't be dismissed as a life-long hysterical or exploited in a superficial way as a heroine. I wanted to show a woman with strengths and a few weaknesses who struggled to the last to live a self-determined life, despite all the adversities."

"Ida" depicts no likeable heroine, but a disgruntled woman arriving in her American exile, angry at her family, a bridge master obsessed with numerology, and still deeply agitated when she hears the name of Freud.

This paper – structured as a conversation – wants to explore what this new novel contributes or subtracts from previous representations of Ida Bauer by organizing biographical time in interesting ways, and how this troubles or confirms the sex-gender systems within and against which it operates.

**ISEULT GILLESPIE · University of Wisconsin–Madison**

### **Disinterring the subject: towards a necropolitical biography**

Bringing the critical framework of necropolitics to bear on the broadly construed genre of life writing, this paper theorizes the role of the deathly, the contaminated and the fragmented in biography: a genre which has commonly been associated with the (re)construction of subjectivity and memory. Through a reading of Aaron Apps' prose poetry collection *Dear Herculine* (2015), which functions as a eulogy for a recently departed friend as well as an experimental biography of Herculine Barbin (the 19th century French hermaphrodite whose memoirs were rediscovered by Michel Foucault and published in 1978), I question what biography can do when brought to bear on lives that appear in fragments, traumatic histories, and institutional narratives.

Barbin is a particularly interesting case study for pursuing this question, given their prominence in nineteenth century medical discourses of gender and sexuality, their resurgence in Foucault's work, and their own partial record of events that survives in their memoirs. Apps, who is also intersex, harnesses biography as a visceral cultural form to narrate Barbin's life on the level of genitals, gonads, guts and "animal pores." By attending to the viscera, Apps draws our attention to the body, but not as the source of biologically deterministic truths about the biographical subject. Rather Apps delves deep into the Barbin's body to rework essentialist assumptions and construct a complex cellular biography, which fundamentally questions how we come to "know" the subject.

**RUBÉN GONZÁLEZ CUERVA · Spanish National Research Council CSIC**

### **Early modern royal Spanish women in media: alternative images of power**

In the last twenty years, an explosion of historical films and popular TV series has reframed the image of early modern royal women in Spain. Broadly speaking, we have witnessed the transition

from a passive and gallant image to another of powerful –and plotting– political agents. This shift went in line with international broadcasting novelties, especially from British historical series. In contrast with the previous decades, gender questions have been overemphasized, but a romantic and affective approach still dominates, in which love plots are reconstructed in a rather presentist way. Political issues are currently better introduced, but two main questions arise: at what extent it has been possible to recreate positive and active female models without the burdens of the Spanish Black Legend, characterised by bigotry and intolerance? Secondly, departing from the last studies on queenship and power, how far has the research novelties (in terms of cultures of decision and intercession roles) permeated in popular media? A corpus of around twenty Spanish productions since the 1990s will be taken into account, compared with contemporary British films and series depicting Spanish royal women.

**MARIA HINTERKOERNER** • Vienna

**Taking dramatic liberties: a screenwriter's perspective on the female biopic and its challenges in the American Film Industry**

The biopic doesn't share the aspirations of a documentary, nor does it wish to fictionalise its heroines and forge their life events into sequences of made-up fantasies. The biopic as a genre treads a thin line between fact and fiction and is vulnerable to criticism by disappointed viewers who would have loved to see either more accuracy on a factual level, or more liberties on a fictional level. Using the theory and methods of (visual) storytelling and screenwriting, I will lay open the thought process and the tools of the craft that are used to bundle the essence of a human life into a 120-minute movie. Furthermore, I will sketch as a case study the industry's response and requirements in order to attract talent to a screenplay and be ultimately greenlit and produced – a process that may compromise not only the screenwriter's vision, but also the subject's integrity. As visual medium and huge financial investment, the biopic underlies, probably more so than the written biography, trends, marketability, and the cultural heartbeat of the hour. I will illustrate my arguments using two of my own screenplays: *The Giant's Architect*, which narrates the collaboration of America's first female independent architect Julia Morgan and William Randolph Hearst on what will later be known as Hearst Castle in California; and *As An Actress*, which follows young French actress Maria Schneider and her unfortunate rise to fame through her involvement in Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*.

**JAAP KOOIJMAN** • University of Amsterdam

**'She be Tina Turner and he be Ike': black female tragedy in Angela Bassett's *Whitney***

In the documentary *Whitney: Can I Be Me* (Nick Broomfield & Rudi Dolezal, 2017), Tina Brown jokingly recalls how her brother Bobby Brown and Whitney Houston would reenact scenes from Hollywood movies: "She be Tina Turner and he be Ike." In reference to the same film, *Tina: What's Love Got To Do With It* (Brian Gibson, 1993), bell hooks once questioned the emphasis on "black female tragedy" rather than "black female triumph" in US American popular culture: "It's so interesting how the film stops with Ike's brutality, as though it is Tina Turner's life ending. Why is it that her success is less interesting than the period of her life when she's a victim?" (hooks 1996: 112). Two decades later, a similar argument can be made about the cinematic representation of Whitney Houston's life story. Both the documentaries *Whitney: Can I Be Me* and *Whitney* (Kevin Macdonald, 2018), as well as the fictional Lifetime TV biopic *Whitney* (Angela

Bassett, 2015), emphasize Houston's tragic drug-ridden downfall rather than her triumphant success.

In this presentation, I will focus on the fictional biopic rather than the documentaries. Not only have the latter two received much more critical attention, they both are also directed by white men, while *Whitney* is directed by Angela Bassett, who starred as Tina Turner in *Tina: What's Love Got To Do With It*. Moreover, Bassett's *Whitney* was produced and aired by the Lifetime network, which states on its website that its "mission" is "to celebrate and entertain women." Connecting Richard Dyer's notion of the star image to Nicole Fleetwood's work on black celebrity icons, I will explore whether (and, if so, how) *Whitney* is able to present a more nuanced portrayal of Whitney Houston that goes beyond black female tragedy and the genre restrictions of the Hollywood biopic.

**PAULINA KORZENIEWSKA • University of Zielona Góra**

**American poverty and social rejection in Craig Gillespie's *I, Tonya***

This paper's contribution is to present the image of American poverty, rejection and social engagement as portrayed in Craig Gillespie's *I, Tonya* (2017) – a biopic telling the story of an infamous skater, Tonya Harding. Combing the terrains of social struggles, film and sports gives a rich and complex image of the American realm. I would like to draw research data from current poverty studies to determine the scope of the issue and give attention to its cultural and social implications in the United States. Secondly, I would like to briefly outline the presence and significance of sports in American cinematic expression, and, finally, to closely analyze Gillespie's movie in the light of the aforementioned optics.

*I, Tonya* epitomizes this image – through exposing an equivocal heroine, the film presents a social and economic background for her sporting endeavors, this background being a crucial element for the audience to grasp the nature of the sporting and social realms in which she exists. Gillespie creates the figure of Tonya as a reflection of her dysfunctional family, malevolent skating community and her controversial media image. He does, most emphatically, focus on the athlete's identity and characteristics, conditioning them solely by her familial and social background and presenting her as vulgar, loud, demanding and boorish. The film constantly poses a question of fitting in – physically, economically, socially, and most importantly, in terms of keeping up appearances.

**BETHANY LAYNE • De Montfort University**

**'To be a James and a girl was a contradiction in terms' (Jean Strouse): *The Sister* (2014), the brother, and *The Master* (2004)**

In Lynne Alexander's *The Sister*, Alice James imagines the patrilineal biography that will be handed down to her brother Henry's future readers: 'his father was a prominent theologian, and his elder brother William was a famous philosopher. There will be no mention of a sister, however, or if there is, she will be described as a useless invalid'. Using this passage as a springboard, the paper will place Alexander's Alice-focussed biofiction in dialogue with its unacknowledged intertext, *A Room of One's Own*, in which Woolf invites readers to imagine 'what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister'. Doing so enables

a reading of Alice's *herstory* as Henry James's alternative *history*, one which emphasises the gendered nature of his achievement.

In Alexander's rendering, Henry prefers Alice as a subject than as an author; his appropriation of aspects of her life and destruction of her literary remains is a clear analogue for James's creative use of his sister and attempted suppression of her *Diary*. By exploring the emotional repercussions of Henry's biographical 'borrowings', Alexander writes against the grain of other Jamesian biofictions, particularly her cited inspiration, Colm Tóibín's *The Master*. Specifically, she shows how Tóibín's representation of this process as redemptive and transformative neglects to consider the figures in the hinterland of James's texts as feeling subjects in their own rights. In the final reckoning, Alice becomes a stand-in for Alexander, whose championing of her subject's literary credentials asserts her own work's value in the wake of Tóibín's success.

**CAROLINE LUSIN · University of Mannheim**

**'Up the country' with Emily Eden: imperial female subjectivities in Susanna Moore's *One Last Look* (2003) and Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* (1995)**

"I sometimes wonder they do not cut all our heads off, and say nothing more about it", writes Emily Eden, a sister and First Lady to the Governor-General of India, about British-Indian relations on 25 May 1839. Accompanying her brother on a governmental tour through India from 1837 to 1840, she was uniquely positioned to give intimate insights into the workings of imperial rule. Her long diary-letters to her sister collected in *Up the Country* (1866) are among the most famous autobiographical accounts of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British India. While her view of India was profoundly determined by her own class, gender, ethnicity, and social status as the most high-ranking woman in India, Emily Eden – the author of two published novels – approaches her subject with a strikingly critical mind that reveals the absurdity of British imperial rule.

Emily Eden's popularity is such that her letters have not just inspired historians; they were also adapted into a biographical novel and a meta-biographical play, Susanna Moore's *One Last Look* (2003) and Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* (1995). Both texts offer rich ground to explore a variety of questions related to biographical fiction and gender identity. How do they position the female subject in relation to British imperial rule? What techniques are available to the novelist and the dramatist respectively to set in scene female subjectivities? How do they functionalise the striking emphasis on visuality and display inherent in Emily Eden's letters? And finally, what broader cultural functions do these colonial narratives fulfil in the present?

**LJ MAHER · Monash University**

**BURN IT ALL: imagining women's rage through the bane of the Roman Empire**

In *What Would Boudicca Do?* Elizabeth Foley and Beth Coates offer the modern woman a problem-solving guide inspired by the actions of women from ages past. A self-help book in the tongue-in-cheek style of lean-in feminism, *What Would Boudicca Do?* is light hearted and irreverent, but this belies the historical accounts of a woman who purportedly showed Roman occupiers of Celtic lands that "they are hares and foxes trying to rule over dogs and wolves" (Cassius Deo). I want to consider 21<sup>st</sup> century reimaginings of the story of Boudicca, across film, literature and merchandise to understand how this figure is used to explore women's rage, violence and their assertions of agency. Can a woman from a culture so romanticised and yet so

alterior be claimed by women and colonised peoples as a figurehead of resistance and resilience in a post-Brexit age?

### **CHRISTINE MÜLLER · University of Bremen**

#### **Between feminist historiography and patriarchal stereotypes: biofictional rewritings of the lives of female scientists**

While names like Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, or Stephen Hawking definitely have a familiar ring to us, when asked about women in the history of science, too often Marie Curie is where the conversation begins and ends. The general public's unawareness of women's scientific contributions is not only problematic because it is historically inaccurate and unfair, but because it preserves a masculine image of the scientist, which, to this day, constitutes one of the most persistent barriers to female participation in science. Motivated by the need to counteract gender stereotypes and to provide future generations with positive female role models, feminist historians of science have begun to rewrite the male-dominated and male-authored history of science some fifty years ago. Their ceaseless efforts to reveal women's historical engagements with the sciences have, most recently, inspired women writers to reimagine the lives of female scientists within the genre of biographical fiction. Using novels such as Marie Benedict's *The Other Einstein* (2016), Tracy Chevalier's *Remarkable Creatures* (2009), and Jennifer Chiaverini's *Enchantress of Numbers* (2017) as examples, my paper seeks to discuss these narratives' potential for changing the societal perception of the history of science as a list of 'great men'. Analyzing the novels' representation of the lives and achievements of women scientists from a feminist perspective, I argue that some of the narrative choices authors make in telling these stories reiterate rather than challenge gender stereotypes about women (scientists) and thus undermine the feminist idea behind their biofictional returns to the history of women in science.

### **SIGRID NIEBERLE · Dortmund University**

#### **Every now and then: a gender-sensitive approach to creativity on screen**

Since the 1930ies we find an intermittent production series of biographical movies on Woman musicians, painters, and writers. Apparently, there are different types of authorship in the arts, depending on the respective art itself and its techniques, but also on aspects of gender, race, class, age and so on. Nevertheless, the narrative form and their cinematic codes are significantly defined by male ingenuity. My paper will undertake a gender-sensitive approach to those idiosyncratic biographical elements, which are connected with female creativity on screen. Furthermore, these biographemes (Roland Barthes) are supposed to symbolise the work and aesthetics of their artistic carriers. One may think of Clara Schumann with her piano, Virginia Woolf with the tea tablet on her knees, or Florence Foster Jenkins, dressed in a fancy costume. I'd like to argue that the biographeme is connected not only with the historical personality but also with the biographical narration itself. It helps to organise the aesthetics of presence and absence on screen: for example, the singer's single stunning moment, the framing of a painter's artwork, or the writer's canonical endure of her work. Given, that absence and presence is connected with Western ideas of ingenuity and authorship, my comparative approach seeks to describe the possible biographical narratives of female creativity on screen for almost the last century of film history.

## ALISON OFFE-GORLIER · Liverpool Hope University / Lille Catholic University

### Jean Plaidy and Philippa Gregory fighting for gender equality through Katherine Parr's narrative

Katherine Parr, sixth wife of Henry VIII, was one of the prominent figures in English Reformation. As Queen, she used her power to bring about lasting change in England. She published her work under her own name, influenced the future Elizabeth I regarding female leadership and promoted the reading of the Bible in vernacular English. Her story, however, is rarely depicted in popular culture. Two well-known female authors have nevertheless related Parr's life in their historical novels which reflect their time periods in a number of ways. *The Sixth Wife* by Jean Plaidy denounces the mistreatment of women in the past to promote fairer consideration of women. It was published in 1953, at the eve of second-wave feminism, when several laws were being passed to improve gender equality (e.g. Sexual Offences Act, 1956). Fifty years later, Philippa Gregory, who can be defined as a postfeminist, published *The Taming of the Queen* (2015). It relates Parr's queenship as the last wife of a Bluebeard King Henry and coincides with the rising anger about women being sexually harassed, which led to the #MeToo movement in 2017. In this novel, Katernyn, who has, however, little credibility historically, shows determination to use her new notoriety to advance Protestantism and Reform and yet she is terrified of her husband who displays tyrannical behaviour. The two novels, written half a century apart but focusing on the same historical Tudor figure, reflect the evolution of feminism, gender identity and gender equality from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## SYLVIE POMIÈS-MARÉCHAL · University of Orléans

### The enduring influence of female *Special Operations* Executive agent biopics on cultural memory and representations in France and Great Britain

The Second World War holds a special place in both British and French cultural memories. The popularity of the "Keep calm and Carry on" slogan or the recurring reference to the "Blitz spirit" whenever Great Britain is confronted to hard times bear testimony to this prevalence and constant resurgence in collective memory. Alongside the sustained interest for World War II, women's contribution to the war effort has become increasingly visible in all fields of popular culture and in cultural industries.

From its revelation to the public at large in the immediate post-war period, the existence of female SOE agents (carefully concealed by the War cabinet) soon became a prominent topic of World War II cultural memory, exerting a certain fascination that resulted in many works of fiction where female clichés were quite prevalent. These became as many "vectors" of memory (cf. Henry Rousso) which contributed to shaping cultural representations and perceptions.

This paper would not focus on a single portrayal but rather on the "generic" or the archetypal figure of the female SOE agent as generated by the post-war cultural industry. It would then focus on more recent biopics, concentrating on *Charlotte Gray* (2001) and *Les Femmes de l'Ombre* (2008 - known as *Female Agents* in Britain).

How did the fictional construction of the female spy come to influence the social and cultural perception of the SOE agent? Are the tropes developed in such post-war films as *Odette* or *Carve her name with pride* still vivid or have they evolved with time? The purpose would be to

underline their permanence or evolution. The analysis of these two fictional representations would also allow us to approach different perspectives on the cultural representation of the female agent on both sides of the Channel.

### **SARA READ · Loughborough University**

#### ***The Gossips' Choice: drawing on the case notes of midwife Sarah Stone in historical fiction***

This paper presents the development of a 'practice-as-research' creative writing project, in which I have written a full-length novel using some of the case notes of Sarah Stone, whose *A Complete Practice of Midwifery*, was published in 1737, as material for some of the birth stories within. Stone's text suggests she was an assertive and competent midwife, often called upon in difficult cases to remedy the poor treatment of less experienced birth attendants. In the course of the research and writing I identified a number of different questions, such as how to depict a character based on Stone's practice, who was also married to an apothecary, but who was not the same woman. While Stone is a fascinating, inspirational figure, I wanted my midwife protagonist to have her own voice and character and explain my thinking within the paper.

This novel is an example of biofiction only in a broad sense, then, which has the benefits of referring curious readers back to the case notes in instances where the events depicted seem implausible. It takes an historical figure as the inspiration, and uses her words and phrases taken from her case notes in the dramatized episodes within. Further, it uses the occupations and circumstances of the women in the cases in the fiction. In doing this it simultaneously makes the important case that historical fiction need not be based on major figures to be significant.

*The Gossips' Choice* will be published by Wild Pressed Books in Spring 2020.

### **SILVIA SALINO · University of Vienna**

#### ***Inter-cultural biography: negotiating femininity and victimhood between China and the West in Anchee Min's *Becoming Madame Mao****

The life of Jiang Qing (1914-1991), wife of Mao Zedong and leader of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, has been represented in many biographical works, in China and in the West. Known as "the white-boned demon", Jiang Qing's story has mostly been one of unrestrained ambition: a former actress who has found her way into the Communist Party (also) by deceiving its leader Mao and who, at the peak of her career, obsessed with power and revenge, has caused the death of millions of Chinese. Chinese American writer Anchee Min, in *Becoming Madame Mao*, turns things around and makes Jiang Qing's life a story about victimization, describing a woman who has endured pain and who is in desperate need for love. Min writes this biographical novel from the perspective of a Chinese woman emigrated to the United States, who publishes in English for a non-Chinese audience and re-interprets Chinese history for them. The construction of the character of Jiang Qing is related to a concept of victimized Chinese women which is widely represented in the West, but it also emerges from a Chinese revolutionary discourse that places emphasis on national heroines and on their contribution to strengthen the country. This paper explores *Becoming Madame Mao* in the context of inter-cultural literature, considering the way in which the Chinese and the American dimensions interact and penetrate each other to produce a kind of identity that recodes previously prescribed roles, revealing the importance of looking at biography as an inter-cultural genre.

## CHRISTINA SCHÖNBERGER-STEPIEN · University of Augsburg

### **Making her case: the dramatised life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the biopic *On the Basis of Sex***

The portrayal of women in film (as in literature) has experienced a remarkable increase in recent years (see e.g. *Frida*, *The Queen*, *The Iron Lady*, or *Jackie*). Female biography becomes particularly powerful when its entire theme and content is centred around the politics of gender and sex. Mimi Leder's biopic *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) is based on the life of U.S. Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "a symbol of justice, resistance and hope" (Guardian), whose (celebrity) status as a role model has just recently been honoured with an MTV Award for "best real-life hero". The gender-conscious film portrays the life of a strong and determined woman who, despite the struggles and discriminations gender imposes on her, transforms the justice system in terms of gender equality and the protection of women's rights. While the documentary *RBG* (also 2018) emphasises Ginsburg's achievements on the Supreme Court, *On the Basis of Sex* serves as its narrative counterpart and is concerned with the woman behind the public persona. This paper argues that by negotiating the intersection of personal life and public achievement, the film covers pivotal issues of feminist biography. It is a film about the "Notorious RBG" as a justice and the inequalities regarding male and female success and power, but even more so about the woman, the mother, the wife, the individual. The dramatisation of Ginsburg's life thus aims for a celebration of the public persona via a strong affective focus, an aesthetics of symbolism, and a juxtaposition of private and public, personal and professional.

## KSEНИЯ ШМЫДКАЯ · Tallinn University

### **Stanisława Przybyszewska: a case of posthumous victimization**

Polish playwright Stanisława Przybyszewska (1901-1935) is one of those authors whose creative genius has only been recognised after their death; she is also one of those authors whose life story overshadows their work, prompting scholars - but more importantly, other writers - to construct a dramatic narrative out of it. Following the "rediscovery" of Przybyszewska in the 1960s, her biography inspired at least two plays, a novel, a comic book, and an opera. What is striking, is a choice made by their respective creators to focus on the very particular aspects of Przybyszewska's life: her complicated (and allegedly incestuous) relationship with her father, her obsession with the French revolution and Robespierre (presented as bordering on insanity), her health problems aggravated by drug addiction. A tortured artist who became a character in her own existential tragedy: such is the legend of Stanisława Przybyszewska.

In this paper I propose to analyse how these fictional representations contribute to the "posthumous victimization" and marginalisation of the person they supposedly pay tribute to. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in women's biofiction, in which the narratives of sickness and/or trauma are used to explain or undermine their creative achievements. By highlighting the discrepancies between Przybyszewska's own interpretation of her situation and those proposed in the analysed works, I seek to uncover the processes by which a woman's biography gets distorted to fit into the rigid narrative models stripped of any individual agency or control over one's own life.

**KATE SUTHERLAND · Osgoode Hall Law School****Giving voice to a portrait: the intersection of gender, race, and law in *Belle***

The 2013 feature film *Belle* presents an account of the life of Dido Elizabeth Belle (1761-1804). Belle, the daughter of British naval officer Sir John Lindsay and an enslaved African woman, was raised in the home of her great uncle Lord Mansfield during his tenure as Chief Justice of England. The record of Belle's life is thin, and her story may have been altogether forgotten had it not been for a 1779 portrait of her in which she was painted alongside her white cousin Lady Elizabeth Murray. The film was inspired by the portrait. The paucity of available facts left the filmmakers much latitude for fictionalizing, but even so the film makes significant departures from the historical record, for example, in its representations of Belle's father and her husband, and in its insertion of Belle into the unfolding of the *Zong* case which was decided by Lord Mansfield in 1783 with important ramifications for the slave trade. The film is very much preoccupied with giving voice to the voiceless, to Belle herself as a woman of mixed race in eighteenth century Britain, and also, once Belle's story intersects with the *Zong* case, to enslaved people in the courts and in British society prior to abolition. In my paper, through close attention to the choices the filmmakers made in representing the facts of, and inserting fiction into, the life of Dido Elizabeth Belle, I consider the film's effectiveness in giving voice to the voiceless.

**ELISABETTA VARALDA · Sapienza University of Rome****Virginia Woolf resurrected in America**

The fictional rewriting of the lives of canonical authors, known as biofiction, has often focused on Virginia Woolf's life and fiction, which in recent years have become a major source of inspiration for contemporary writers. Virginia Woolf's frequent "resurrection" as a character in contemporary literary space demonstrates the great interest that postmodern readers have shown in her fascinating life and tragic death. Thus, the decision to write about her speaks to contemporary tastes and makes a significant contribution to bringing her closer to writers and readers alike.

This paper investigates the novel *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* written by Maggie Gee, which draws heavily on Woolf's life. Gee ironically makes Virginia resurrect in the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library and successfully makes Woolf a believable character, first in New York, where she enjoys shopping at Bloomingdale's, eating hamburgers, and visiting the Statue of Liberty, and then in Istanbul where Virginia even takes part in an international conference dedicated to her.

Gee's recreates a life by borrowing facts, details and events from Woolf's real life, but she reshapes her narrative into something that she can claim as her own and poetic licence allows her to offer the reader a different image of Woolf from the one given in standard biographies. Her novel not only stands as an act of explicit homage, as the writer openly asserts in her acknowledgements, but also shows that Gee is willing to engage with Woolf's stylistic innovations and share with her the experience of using biography creatively.

**The reluctant wife: *Ginnen Upan Seethala* and gendering revolution**

The JVP (*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna*) or the *People's Liberation Front* launched two youth insurrections in post-independence Sri Lanka, the first in 1971, an abortive attempt which was poorly planned and executed, yet nevertheless costly, killing many, which was followed by the insurrection of 1987-1989, with greater human cost and societal consequences. Though the latter was better organized and executed than the first, it too failed in arresting state power from the United National Party led government of the time, and thus was destroyed, with the elimination of the top leadership, including its founder and Chairman Rohana Wijeweera who had gone underground since 1983. Arrested and allegedly killed by the Government, Wijeweera's death resulted in the JVP being decimated, subsequently having to enter into mainstream politics in 1994. Chitrangani Wijeweera, Wijeweera's wife, along with her six children, received scant media attention following their surrender to the military, which was followed by a carefully constructed media campaign to suggest the legitimacy of the actions of the Government. Thus, she disappeared into obscurity and reemerged in only 2010 to give her first ever press interview in which she detailed her predicament of marginalization and deprivation by the JVP and Government. In 2015, she, yet again, in another interview, presents herself as victim of her husband and his party, a reluctant participant who was forced into marriage and having lived a life of a prisoner, isolated and rendered voiceless.

Against such a backdrop, *Ginnen Upan Seethala*, (*The Frozen Fire*) a 2018 cinematic political biography of Wijeweera (1983-89) is interesting. While it depicts Wijeweera and his cadres at revolution against a hostile government, it does not hesitate to create a significant space for the persona of Chitranganee Wijeweera. Though historically marginalized from the larger--masculinized and fraternal--narrative of the JVP, she nevertheless is intriguingly granted visibility on screen, and provided an expansive role, a more melancholic but empathetic reimagining of a revolutionary's wife. While she seems to provide an innocuous means of expressing sympathy for the movement, whereby the revolutionary male is brought into a domestic space, and thereby any potential threat is muted, the film also unravels contemporary sociocultural anxieties which surround Sri Lankan womanhood. While such a filmic narration reveals the extent to which stereotypical images of a Sri Lankan womanhood underpin the film's attempt at political and cultural legitimization of the JVP, the film, I argue, helps make visible the gendered politics of the cinematic construction of the Sri Lankan woman.

**Sabina Spielrein — rewriting her-story: the mechanism(s) of projection and identification in David Cronenberg's film *Dangerous Method* (2011)**

This paper aims to examine the strategies of re-imagining the life and work of Sabina Spielrein in popular culture in the light of "projection-identification" mechanisms. The 1993 book by John Kerr entitled "A Most Dangerous Method. The Story of Jung, Freud, and Sabina Spielrein" was the first attempt to construct a linear narrative about the psychoanalyst's life, however, seen only through her relationship with Freud and Jung. Kerr's work was followed by the 2011 German-Canadian historical film "Dangerous Method" directed by David Cronenberg, which aimed to popularize the image of Sabina Spielrein as a psychoanalytic pioneer. I will argue, that although the film, as well as the other biographical works devoted to Spielrein, were closely

related to the idea of introducing forgotten women to mainstream culture and had a gender-sensitive approach, they did not challenge the popular image of a patient (female) as a passive object of physician's (male) power. Furthermore, Cronenberg's film reinforced a narrative about Spielrein as a "seed of discord" between Freud and Jung, which resulted in the creation of Spielrein's image as a victim of their affects and conflicted ambitions. As a result, not Spielrein's revelatory theoretical ideas became a matter of interest but her affair with the Swiss doctor. Instead of interpreting Cronenberg's film as a herstorical narrative, I would like to analyze it as a product of contemporary phantasies projected onto psychoanalysis, as well as onto the history of women within the psychoanalytic movement.