

short story cycle
fantasy horror
supernaturalism
flash fiction
metafiction
minimalism
microfiction a
novel in stories
twitterature
transmedia
storytelling
digital fiction
networks
storytelling and

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Mainz, July 10–12, 2024

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz,
Germany

Conference Venue:

Helmholtz Institute Mainz
Staudingerweg 18,
55128 Mainz, Germany

The Persistence of the Short Story: Traditions and Futures

International Symposium

Co-Hosted by

Obama Institute for
Transnational American
Studies

Society for the Study of
the American Short Story

American Literature
Association

European Network for Short
Fiction Research

DFG Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft

JOHANNES GUTENBERG
UNIVERSITÄT MAINZ



**OBAMA
INSTITUTE**

WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2024

3:00 pm

Registration

4:00 pm

Conference Opening

Fakultätssaal,
Philosophicum I

Prof. Dr. Alfred Hornung
Director, Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies

Jakob-Welder-
Weg 18,
Room 01-185,
55128 Mainz

Prof. Dr. Oliver Scheiding & Prof. Dr. Jochen Achilles
Conference Organizers

4:30 pm

Roundtable: Short Fiction Research in a Transnational Context

Chair: **Michael Basseler** | *Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Project Manager Short Forms Beyond Borders-EU Strategic Partnerships*

American Literature Association (ALA):

Olivia Carr Edenfield | *Director, Georgia Southern University,*
Alfred Bendixen | *Executive Director, Princeton University*

Society for the Study of the American Short Story (SSASS):

James Nagel | *President, University of Georgia; online*

European Network for Short Fiction Research (ENSFR):

Michelle Ryan | *Director, Université d'Angers*
Ailsa Cox | *Associate Director, Edge Hill University*
Elke D'hoker | *Communications Coordinator, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*

Studies in the American Short Story:

James Nagel | *Editor, University of Georgia,*
Kirk Curnutt | *Associate Editor, Troy University*

Journal of the Short Story in English:

Gérald Préher | *Editor, Université d'Artois*

Short Fiction in Theory and Practice:

Ailsa Cox | *Principal Editor, Edge Hill University*

6:00 pm

Welcome Reception

THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2024

Conference Venue:
Helmholtz Institute Mainz

9:00–
10:20 am

Session 1: Aesthetic Dimensions

Chair: **Jochen Achilles** | *Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg*

Ailsa Cox | *Edge Hill University*
Beyond the Collection

Elke D'hoker | *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*
Serializing the Short Story

Michelle Ryan | *Université d'Angers*
The Ethics of Short Forms in Rikki Ducornet's Late Career Writing

10:20–
10:40 am

Coffee Break

10:40–
12:00 am

Session 2: Historical Dimensions

Chair: **Oliver Scheiding** | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

Alfred Bendixen | *Princeton University*
New Voices Confronting the Silence: The Emergence of Feminist Traditions in the American Short Story

Monika Elbert | *Montclair State University*
**Wealth, Handicaps, and Poverty:
Women's Gothic Tales of Dis-Possession**

Philipp Reisner | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*
American Short Fiction in Light of the Chinese Exclusion Act

Program

12:00 am
-1:00 pm

Lunch

1:00-
2:20 pm

Session 3: Current Trends

Chair: Laura Dietz | *University College London*

Michael Basseler | *Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen*

Is there a Postsocialist North American Short Story?

Gudrun M. Grabher | *Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck*

**Every Patient has Their Unique Story:
The Significance of the Short Story for Medical Humanities**

Patricia MacCormack | *Anglia Ruskin University*

Weird Madness: Brief Encounters Against the Anthropocene

2:30-
3:50 pm

Session 4: Region

Chair: Caroline Jesussek | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

Alessandra Boller | *Universität Siegen*

**The Politics of Encounter: B/Order Crossings in Transnational
(Irish) Short Fiction**

Olivia Carr Edenfield | *Georgia Southern University*

The Poetic Landscape of Breece D’J Pancake

Gérald Préher | *Université d’Artois*

**The Past in the Present; or the Enduring South in Elizabeth
Spencer’s *Starting Over* (2014)**

3:50-
4:10 pm

Coffee Break

4:10-
5:30 pm

Postgraduate Roundtable on Short Fiction Research

Chair: Alessandra Boller | *Universität Siegen*

Maegan Bishop | *Georgia Southern University*

**Re-imagining the American Landscape: Visual Rhetoric and
the Influence of Image on the 21st-Century American Short-
Story Cycle**

Verónica Frejo | *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*

Short Stories as Videogames: A Transmedia Analysis

Carolin Jesussek | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

**Disability Gothic in William Alexander’s Short Story
“The House on the Moon”**

7:00 pm

*Stadthaus
Große
Bleiche 46*

*55116
Mainz*

Mainz City Hall

Reception by the City Authorities

City Hall-Lecture

James Nagel | *University of Georgia*

The American Short Story in Academia: A Personal Report (online)

FRIDAY, JULY 12, 2024

*Conference Venue:
Helmholtz Institute Mainz*

9:00-
10:00 am

Session 5: Diversity

Chair: Michelle Ryan | *Université d’Angers*

Erik Redling | *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*

**Modernist Politics of Race: Allegorical Readings of Zora Neale
Hurstons’s Early Short Fiction**

Hertha Dawn Sweet Wong | *University of California, Berkeley*

**The Future of the Indigenous Short Story; or Indigenous Short
Story and Futurity**

10:10–
11:10 am**Session 6: Horror and Crime**Chair: Olivia Carr Edenfield | *Georgia Southern University*Will Norman | *University of Kent***Paul Linebarger, Cordwainer Smith and the Affordances of Mid-Century Science Fiction Tales**Whit Frazier Peterson | *Universität Stuttgart***The Sunken and the Ascending: Black Horror Short Fiction**11:10–
11:30 am**Coffee Break**11:30 am
–12:50 pm**Session 7: Media and New Approaches**Chair: Oliver Scheiding | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*Kirk Curnutt | *Troy University***Prophecies of Extinction, Prospects for Evolution: Whither the Future of the Short Story?**Bernardo Manzoni Palmeirim | *Universidade de Lisboa***Paying Attention in Lydia Davis and Short Forms**Ines Maria Gstrein | *Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck***The Affordances of the Short Story Collection: Ali Smith's *Free Love and Other Stories* as a Case Study**1:00–
2:00 pm**Lunch**2:00–
3:20 pm**Session 8: Digitization**Chair: Verónica Frejo | *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*Laura Dietz | *University College London***Digitization and Short Story Authorship: Authorial Careers on Emerging Platforms**3:20–
3:40 pm**Coffee Break**3:40–
5:30 pm**Session 9: Science Fiction**Chair: Sabina Fazli | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*Anna McFarlane | *University of Leeds***Science Fiction and the Fix-Up**Andrew M. Butler | *Canterbury Christchurch University***“The Flimsiest of Tissues“: Pamela Zoline’s “The Holland of the Mind“**Sarah Lohmann | *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich***“Like Children Dying in a Forest“: The Science Fiction Short Story and the Morality of Machine Cognition in E.M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops“ and Ray Bradbury’s “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains“**Gary Westfahl | *University of La Verne***Confronting the Alien in the Science Fiction Short Story (online)**

7:00 pm

Conference Dinner**Weingut Peter Dhom**

Jakob Braunwart Weg 3, 55129 Mainz-Hechtsheim

<http://winzerfamilie-peter-dhom.de/kontakt/>

Program

Conference Organizers

Oliver Scheiding is Professor of North American Literatures and Early American Studies in the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. His research focuses on print culture and print criticism, magazine and short fiction studies. He edited the journal *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, the quarterly of the German Association of American Studies, from 2010 to 2019. He is currently conducting two research projects in the field of magazine studies funded by the German Research Foundation. He edited the volume *Worlding America: A Transnational Anthology of Short Narratives before 1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015) and co-edited *The Handbook of the American Short Story* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022). Most recently he has contributed book chapters to the *Cambridge Companion to the American Short Story* (2023) and the *Routledge Companion to the British and North American Literary Magazine* (2022). His new book *Print Technologies and the Making of American Literatures* is forthcoming with Wiley-Blackwell. He organized the international symposium “The American Short Story: New Horizons” in Mainz, Germany, in 2017.

Jochen Achilles is Emeritus Professor of American Studies at the University of Würzburg and Adjunct Professor at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. His authored book publications include studies on the development of Sean O’Casey’s plays and on the interface between the gothic tradition and psychological fiction, focusing on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. He co-edited volumes on Irish drama, global challenges and regional responses in modern drama, representations of evil in fiction and film, and on liminality and the short story. His research interests and numerous articles focus on cultural identities, Irish and American (short) fiction and drama. He is a member of the European Network for Short Fiction Research (ENSFR) and of the Society for the Study of the American Short Story (SSASS).

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Michael Basseler | *Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen*

Is there a Postsocialist North American Short Story?

The end of the Cold War has had significant repercussions affecting the production of literature in the US as well as the transnational reorientation of American Studies (see Benatov 2019). While literary scholars have recently begun to map and analyze the transformation of post-Cold War American literary culture and its underlying geopolitical coordinates, the short story has been largely ignored in these debates. In my paper, I want to turn to a specific body of short story writing by authors like Lara Vapnyar, Sana Krasikov, David Bezmozgis and Ellen Litman, whose work perhaps epitomizes this transformation most saliently. Taking up Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Ioanna Luca's (2019) suggestion to call the work of post-1989 US immigrant authors from the former Eastern Bloc "postsocialist," I want to ask whether and to what extent we can (already) speak of a postsocialist North American Short Story characterized by distinct thematic and formal aspects. This paper will also expound on the cultural work of these stories regarding a (post-)Cold War cultural imaginary in general as well as the transnational entanglements and effects of "global Russian cultures" (Platt 2019) in particular.

Michael Basseler is Academic Manager at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC), Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany. He has published widely on the (American) short story and short story theory, including his monograph *An Organon of Life Knowledge: Genres and Functions of the Short Story in North America* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), *A History of the American Short Story* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2011, ed. with Ansgar Nünning) as well as a book chapter on "Current Approaches to the American Short Story" (in *Handbook of the American Short Story*, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2022, eds. Erik Redling and Oliver Scheiding). Michael is a founding steering committee member of the European Network for Short Fiction Research.

Alfred Bendixen | *Princeton University*

New Voices Confronting the Silence: The Emergence of Feminist Traditions in the American Short Story

My presentation focuses on the emergence of feminist traditions in the American short story during the nineteenth century, detailing the ways in which an emerging realism empowered women to fashion a new kind of short fiction that both emphasized the value of female experience and ultimately rejected the trappings of romantic modes. This tradition originated in the early work of Harriet Prescott Spofford, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Rose Terry Cooke, but found its greatest strength in later New England writers, most notably Mary Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This fiction emphasized complex characterization over extravagant plot, found the home to be as exciting a source of adventure as the wilderness, and preferred the domestic, sometimes mundane present to the heroic past or a setting outside of time and space. Rejecting the artificial and hyper-literary language of many of the romantics, this new realism insisted on capturing and revealing the underlying power of the everyday language of ordinary men and women, dramatizing the ways individuals communicated or failed to communicate, and sometimes portraying the devastating consequences of silence. It is in this artistically rendered depiction of voice and silence that these writers achieve their most powerful explorations of the aspirations and frustrations of women in American culture.

Alfred Bendixen is best known as the founder of the American Literature Association, for which he continues to serve as Executive Director. Much of his scholarship has been devoted to the recovery of 19th-century texts, particularly by women writers, and to the exploration of neglected genres, including the ghost story, detective fiction, science fiction, and travel writing. His most recent works include *A Companion to the American Novel* (Blackwell

2012); *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, co-edited with Stephen Burt (2015); *The Centrality of Crime Fiction in American Literary Culture* (Routledge 2017), co-edited with Olivia Carr Edenfield; and the Library of America edition of *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Novels, Stories and Poems* (2022).

Maegan Bishop | *Georgia Southern University*

Re-imagining the American Landscape: Visual Rhetoric and the Influence of Image on the 21st Century American Short-Story Cycle

The combination of the graphic form and the short-story cycle, fittingly labeled as the graphic short-story cycle, is a new area within American short stories in which little research has been published. This form, as a vehicle for 21st-century American short stories, transforms traditional depictions of American landscape. A few graphic short-story cycles, such as Adrian Tomine's *Killing and Dying* (2015), have received critical attention and praise, while others, such as Chris Ware's *Building Stories* (2012), are mislabeled as graphic novels for marketing purposes. Such inconsistencies with labels and the lack of critical attention concerning this hybrid form introduce challenges for research in the field, from the very act of locating these works to conducting meaningful research. This project aims to explore the form and use of visual rhetoric in Adrian Tomine's *Killing and Dying* and Chris Ware's *Building Stories* to both qualify them as graphic short-story cycles and to discuss the complications with current research. The relationship between text and image presented in these works transforms the use of motif, narration, and space into a valuable and innovative hybrid form that combines the traditional short-story cycle format with characteristics of the graphic form to create something that is unique to 21st-century American literature while maintaining the characteristics of short-story cycles of the previous century.

Maegan Bishop is a Master's Candidate at Georgia Southern University. Her research focuses on the American Short Story and Ecocriticism in American literature. She serves as the Executive Assistant for the American Literature Association and has been published in the Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Research Journal.

Alessandra Boller | *Universität Siegen*

The Politics of Encounter: B/Order Crossings in Transnational (Irish) Short Fiction

This presentation will proceed from Tucker and Casey's argument that Irish transnational literature places "Irish identity in dialogue with other cultural, national, or ethnic affiliations" (2) as well as from Jay's idea that transnationalism focuses attention on forms of "cultural production that take place in the liminal space between real and imagined borders" (1). Globalization plays an essential role here: Implying the entanglement of local and global levels, it encompasses what Morales Ladrón and Elices Agudo describe as the "dynamics of the search for one's identity and the cross-current need to open up new boundaries" (2). This talk hence explores, firstly, how migration as movement across various borders, and the systems of order they relate to, figures as a theme in contemporary short fiction. Secondly, and more importantly, it considers how such short fiction engages with encounters, movements and b/orders with regard to intertextuality and formal experimentation.

On this basis, my talk briefly draws connections between Rancière's work on political aesthetics and Ahmed's theory of strangers in order to create a framework for discussing how encounters with notions of self and/as Other in transnational short fiction invite dialogues and polylogues on different levels. I argue that Canadian-Irish Emma Donoghue's *Astray* (2012) and Nigerian-Irish Melatu Uche Okorie's *This Hostel Life* (2018), among other innovative texts,

use the malleability and openness of short fiction to push beyond established forms and national borders, including the boundaries of national literature.

Alessandra Boller is a post-doctoral researcher and lecturer at the University of Siegen, Germany, where she is also acting as the coordinator of an EFACIS Centre for Irish Studies. She is the author of one monograph and the co-editor of two collective volumes. Besides, she has published widely on her different research interests, which include feminist and new materialist approaches to speculative fiction, questions of (non-)knowledge, and Irish literature since 1900. She is especially interested in Irish short fiction, with a particular focus on identity (re-)negotiations in/through narratives of community.

Andrew M. Butler | *Canterbury Christchurch University*

"The Flimsiest of Tissues": Pamela Zoline's "The Holland of the Mind"

Science fiction went through an experimental phase in the late 1960s, in particular in the pages of *New Worlds* under the editorship of Michel Moorcock. One of the key examples of this was Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe", which has received some critical attention, often questioning its generic status. The same doubts may be directed at her second story, "The Holland of the Mind" (1969), which appeared in Langdon Jones's *The New S.F.: An original anthology of modern speculative fiction*, also an experimental work. Thomas M. Disch reprinted the story in *Strangeness: A Collection of Curious Tales*, co-edited with Charles Naylor, and discusses the work of Edgar Allan Poe in his introduction. He argues that Poe's protagonists may appear to be struggling with uncanny antagonists or with their environment, but "that environment is really but the flimsiest of tissues, a screen on which the protagonist [...] projects his inner conflicts." "The Holland of the Mind" offers such tissues, redefining what science fiction can do and ways it can demonstrate human psychology whilst deploying modernist and gothic motifs.

Andrew M. Butler has written about China Miéville's "The Tain" and the chapter on the British science fiction short story for *The Cambridge Companion to the English Short Story*. He is Managing Editor of the journal *Extrapolation* and chair of judges for the Arthur C. Clarke Award. In his spare time, he collects shiny trousers.

Ailsa Cox | *Edge Hill University*

Beyond the Collection

Most short stories are conceived as stand-alone texts, and first published in ephemeral media such as magazines, or sometimes on the radio. Only later on might they be yoked together in the single-author collection that confirms the writer's status and bestows at least an illusion of permanence on their text. In recent years there has been a marked preference amongst publishers for themed collections or cycles. This predilection has produced some accomplished and innovative hybrids, such as David Szalay's *Turbulence* (2018), where the formal links between stories are integral to their original design. But in other collections it sometimes seems that individual stories have been packaged retrospectively as a single entity, albeit one composed out of fragments.

Perhaps this tendency is an unconscious acknowledgment that, after all, the book-length collection is not the short story's natural home. In this paper, I shall discuss print alternatives to the conventional collection, with reference to my own practice. My story, "Cocky Watchman" was published as a signed, limited-edition chapbook by Nightjar Press in 2021. *Heavy Showers and Thunder*, a mini-collection, of less than 17,000 words, is forthcoming as part of a series from Confinigo Press. Both publishers have a particular interest in the connection between prose fiction and the visual arts; *Heavy Showers and Thunder* is a collaboration with the artist and poet Patricia Farrell. In my paper I shall explore the diversification of print outlets, and explain why these particular outlets are so compatible with my own poetics of short fiction.

Ailsa Cox is Professor Emerita of Short Fiction at Edge Hill University, UK. Her books include *Alice Munro* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004); *Writing Short Stories* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005, 2nd edition 2016, 3rd edition forthcoming) and,

as editor, *Teaching the Short Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011). "The Institution of Creative Writing" is included in *The Cambridge History of the English Short Story*, ed. Dominic Head (Cambridge: CUP 2016); "Writers on the Short Story: 1950-present" appears in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English* ed. Paul Delaney and Adrian Hunter (Edinburgh: EUP 2019). She has published many other essays on short-story writers including Alice Munro, Katherine Mansfield, Helen Simpson, Daisy Johnson, Malcolm Lowry and Jon McGregor. Her own short fiction is widely published; "How Loud The Birds" appears in *Katherine Mansfield and The Garden Party and Other Stories* ed. Gerri Kimber and Todd Martin (Edinburgh: EUP 2022). She is the editor of the journal *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* (Intellect Press), and Deputy Chair of the European Network for Short Fiction Research (ENSFR).

Kirk Curnutt | *Troy University*

Prophecies of Extinction, Prospects for Evolution: Whither the Future of the Short Story?

This talk will explore the possible futures of the short story as a literary genre in an age of shrinking print sustainability. It will begin by noting that the short story has always faced the challenge of extinction simply because it does not exist in an autonomous textual form and has always relied upon a parasitic relationship with some larger vehicle of dissemination, whether a commercial periodical or a smaller-circulation literary journal funded by donors or by an institution. In surveying this history, this paper will explore subsidiary forms that have at various points promised the short story alternate media for expanding its reach and viability, whether adaptations in film, radio, or online venues.

I am particularly interested, for example, in how in the early 1950s NBC University Theater produced the series *NBC Presents: Short Story*, which featured adaptations of Hemingway, Conrad, Ray Bradbury, and many others as a form of public edification: while entertaining, the series promoted itself as a kind of informal course designed to teach listeners the value of short

fiction. I compare these types of adaptations to more contemporary ones like the short-lived print/podcast program *The Chronicles of Now*, which debuted to great fanfare and petered out after only a dozen episodes. In looking at these efforts to pivot to some new medium to sustain the short story, I am also interested in how evolutionary metaphors that dramatize permutating genres influence our conception of a literary form's future. My basic argument is that even in an age when literary journals, which have been the host body of the short story since the collapse of the commercial periodical fiction market in the 1950s, are going out of business – witness the recent shuttering of *The Gettysburg Review* at Gettysburg College – the short story's future is in effect its past: a genre that cannot exist independently on its own must always face an evolutionary scramble to mutate, adapt, and endure. As such, I explore what options the short story has for the future by examining how it survived various periods of crisis in the past.

Kirk Curnutt is Professor of English at Troy University, where he teaches American literature, creative writing, and popular music. His first book was *Wise Economics: Storytelling and Brevity in the American Short Story* (1997), and he has since published broadly on the short fiction of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and others. He currently serves as executive director of the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society, and in addition to managing its annual, *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, he works with James Nagel in editing the Society for the Study of the American Short Story's journal, *Studies in the American Short Story*.

Elke D'hoker | *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*

Serializing the Short Story

Publishing short stories in serial form was “invented” in the late nineteenth century, as part of the sudden boom of magazine short fiction. The publication format of the short story series – self-contained stories that yet have recurring characters – was considered by publishers the ideal compromise between the traditional serialized novel and the self-contained short story: readers would want to read the next instalment, but would not necessarily lose interest if they had missed a story. The most famous of the short story series are Arthur

Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, but very popular series were also written by writers like L.T. Meade, Annie Swan, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross, and many others. As publication in book form overtook magazine publication for short fiction in the course of the twentieth century, the short story series morphed into the short story cycle or short story sequence, with a larger array of strategies for linking stories within a larger whole. In recent years, the advent of new media has led to yet other forms of serializing short stories: the twitter stories of Jennifer Egan and David Mitchell compose stories out of a series of tweets, while the new popularity of podcasts explains BBC Radio 4's investment in the storytellers program which asks authors – e.g. Jan Carson, Cynan Jones, Daisy Johnson, and Jon McGregor – to write a series of 15-minute stories to be read by different actors. In my paper, I will trace these developments, focusing especially on how the characteristics of the publication context are met by specific formal properties of the (serialized or linked) stories. For instance, while the short story series demanded a formula of repetition and variation, the short story cycle depends on a tension between unity and diversity. My analysis of the aesthetics of serialized short stories in different formats will be informed by recent theories on serialization, in both literature and other media.

Elke D'hoker is Professor of English literature at the University of Leuven, Belgium. She is the author of a critical study on John Banville (Rodopi, 2004), *Irish Women Writers and the Modern Short Story* (Palgrave, 2016), and *Ethel Colburn Mayne. Selected Stories* (EER, 2021). She has also co-edited several essay collections, including *Unreliable Narration* (De Gruyter, 2008), *Irish Women Writers* (Lang, 2011), *Mary Lavin* (IAP, 2013), *The Irish Short Story* (Lang, 2015), *The Modern Short Story and Magazine Culture* (EUP, 2021), *Sarah Hall. Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2022), and *The Writer's Torch. Reading Stories from The Bell* (Stinging Fly, 2023). She is a founding member and communications director of ENSFR, the European Network of Short Fiction Research.

Laura Dietz | *University College London*

Digitization and Short Story Authorship: Authorial Careers on Emerging Platforms

This presentation will consider short stories through the lens of career, examining how writers apportion their time and creative resources in a shifting professional environment. It is now generations since dwindling opportunities for well-paid commercial magazine publication, and the rise of university creative writing programs changed the economics and aesthetics of short story writing, shifting the emphasis from per-word rates to prestige as measured by hiring and tenure committees (Kasia Boddy, *The American Short Story since 1950* [2010]). The trajectory in the late 20th and early 21st centuries appeared at times to be a one-way journey to an ever-more 'high art', small-audience form shaped by institutional priorities. However, emerging digital platforms have reopened commercial pathways: even poetry, which, according to Mark McGurl, "(as a paying profession at least) has been all but entirely absorbed by institutions of higher education" (*The Program Era* 2009, 29), has proven possible to remonetize through Instagram. Despite the false dawn of single-story digital sales as a revenue stream (Laura Dietz in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English* 2018), new self-publishing and subscription options offer chances to experiment, even as the 'published' status and prestige value of nontraditional publication remains perilously uncertain (James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige* 2005). This paper will focus on two platforms, Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) and Patreon, and how authors are experimenting with short stories as 'loss leaders' – free samples, bridges between novels, rewards for supporters, etc. – and paths to income outside the higher education establishment, suggesting an alternative role for the short story in authorial careers.

Laura Dietz is Lecturer in Publishing at UCL. She researches reading, digital publishing, and contemporary authorship, with a particular focus on how reputation and legitimacy (including the book-status of digital books) affect

reading experiences. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) and the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing*. Her next monograph, *E-books and 'Real Books': Digital Reading and the Experience of Bookness*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2024.

Olivia Carr Edenfield | *Georgia Southern University*

The Poetic Landscape of Breece D'J Pancake

The short story has been a record of the varying landscapes of the American home, its focus a way to suggest a character's potential for negotiating within frameworks of social codes and behaviors. Breece D'J Pancake fits into this tradition, as domestic themes are played out in various ways throughout *Collected Stories* (1983). His protagonists struggle to overcome the limitations of their Appalachian poverty, their lack of options. Though they typically have the imagination and drive to want more, many are place-bound, hamstrung by family responsibilities, real or imagined. Drawn home or never gone, they measure their worth by their roots. The poetic descriptions of the surrounding hills and fields of West Virginia work metaphorically to suggest this conflict as the pull of the land and home divides many of the characters who feel both guilty for wanting to leave and frustrated by their inability to do so. Pancake's landscape is often dry and blighted, yet his protagonists express a tenderness toward home ultimately responsible for their unwillingness to leave, though they sense they should get away, take a degree, move to a new job. As Kirsten Shands states, "If one were to make a single binary reduction about literature, one could say that there are works which stress the existence of, and need for, [an individual's] boundaries" as well as those that "concentrate on everything within the individual that conspires to negate or transcend boundaries" (71). Pancake's stories, though regional in focus, express these universal extremes as well as myriad possibilities in between.

Olivia Carr Edenfield is Professor of English at Georgia Southern University. Her research focuses on the American short story – in particular Adrian Tomine, Ernest Hemingway, Breece Pancake, and Andre Dubus – as well as the novels of Cormac McCarthy and Andre Dubus, III. She is currently under contract with the University of South Carolina Press for a volume on Andre Dubus, III, for their Understanding Contemporary American Literature series. Edenfield serves as Director of the American Literature Association and as a member of the Editorial Board for *Studies in the American Short Story*.

Monika Elbert | *Montclair State University*

Wealth, Handicaps, and Poverty: Women's Gothic Tales of Dis- Possession

Many mid- to late-nineteenth-century American women writers found refuge in the Gothic mode to show women's (or their own) sense of financial instability or alienation. In many of her 1860s thrillers, Louisa May Alcott reveals the horrors of the decade – from the oppression of the working class and the atrocities associated with the privileged classes to the nightmares associated with the Civil War, e.g., wounded soldiers, abused slaves, and the general insensitivity toward physically disabled bodies.

The three Gothic Alcott stories I examine, "Lost in a Pyramid, or the Mummy's Curse," "The Mysterious Key, and What it Opened," and "The Skeleton in the Closet," show abuses by the empowered classes as they ride roughshod over the feelings of the disempowered and seize upon bodies or possessions not rightfully theirs. In these Gothic tales, Alcott employs the symbol of a woman's jewels or treasures as a means of showing her "possession" by males who would tamper with her sense of self-ownership or justice. Similarly, in Gothic stories by Realist author Sarah Orne Jewett, specifically "In Dark New England Days" and "The Foreigner," Gothic alienation for the women characters follows from the loss of imagined wealth or the loss of an established home. And Alice Cary, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, focused on the dynamics of poverty in her rural Gothic stories about Ohio and asked her readers not to expect the

typical Romantic plots but to witness the "manners and experiences" of the "humbler classes" "in their customary lights and shadows."

Monika Elbert is Professor of English and Distinguished University Scholar at Montclair State University, and editor of the *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*. She has published widely on nineteenth-century writers, including Louisa May Alcott, Fuller, Hawthorne, Jewett, and Freeman, and on the Gothic. Her recent work includes *Hawthorne in Context* (Cambridge UP, 2018) and the co-edited *American Women's Regionalist Fiction: Mapping the Gothic* (Palgrave Gothic series, 2021). She has a forthcoming co-edited collection on *Gothic Melville* (2024).

Sabina Fazli | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

Chair, Session 9

Sabina Fazli is a postdoctoral research associate at the collaborative research center "Human Differentiation" at Mainz University. Her current work in magazine studies is part of a subproject titled "Curated Bodies: Aesthetic Human Categorization and Bodily Differentiation in Magazines." She is particularly interested in the representation of difference in the British style press of the 1980s and 1990s as well as the visual and material strategies of contemporary independent and artists' magazines. Based on this project, she has recently co-edited a German-language handbook on magazine studies. Her PhD thesis on Victorian fiction and material culture has been published as *Sensational Things: Souvenirs, Keepsakes, and Mementoes in Wilkie Collins's Fiction* (2019). She has also published and presented on Neo-victorian and Steampunk fiction as well as science fiction.

Verónica Frejo | *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*

Short Stories as Videogames: A Transmedia Analysis

Videogames are highly liminal, sitting at the interface of many other media and being able to fluctuate both in appearance and content while maintaining their unique medium identity. Due to this position, text transitions from other media are possible but complex. This essay focuses on this process, more specifically on how the written short story translates to videogames, if at all. In order to do so, it is necessary to pinpoint the most crucial differences between the two media first, that is, how each medium establishes a link between itself and the reader or player. Written short stories are exclusively projective, they present their content in a unidirectional way, while videogames are interactive, they depend on players' agency in order to showcase theirs. Furthermore, playing and reading being very different actions also obfuscates the established time constraints that determine what can be considered a short story. Even if these time limitations do not generally agree between the two media, short stories should be contextualized under the lens of the medium they shift to, not that of their classic demarcations. It can be argued, then, that this kind of narrative can retain its core identity, condensation, while adapting some of its features to fit the new context. Despite this, however, the increasingly massive market value of videogames exerts pressure on creativity, and, as product prices rise, so does the notion that their content must bloat accordingly, threatening the short story's capability of crossover into this medium.

Verónica Frejo is a PhD candidate registered in the doctorate program of Artistic, Literary and Cultural Studies in the Autonomous University of Madrid. She is also a member of the LIMEN Research Group (Liminalist Investigations into Modern English Narrative) and an editor of *The TRELIS Papers*. Her research focuses on liminality, transmediality, and videogame narrativity.

Gudrun M. Grabher | *Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck*

Every Patient has Their Unique Story: The Significance of the Short Story for Medical Humanities

From the start, narratives have played a key role in the field of Medical Humanities. Rather than concentrating solely on a patient's wound, pain, or disease in the medical context, it was argued that the focus needed to shift to the patient's story. Listening to their narratives would help analyze, diagnose, and ultimately / hopefully, heal their problem. It was soon discovered that literary narratives worked in a similar way. Only in the context of a plot can the reader gain insight into a character's dilemma. In the course of history, some medical doctors have taken to writing literary texts themselves about their encounters with patients. Among them, the short story has clearly been favored. William Carlos Williams was known and celebrated as a poet long before his medical stories were discovered to offer profound insights into the domains of a physician. Richard Selzer, one of the most prolific medical writers of the past decades, has even compared the writing of a short story to a "diagnostic act" and a "surgical operation." A surgeon himself, he found that this was the most adequate literary form to express the experiences, experiments, procedures, challenges, failures, as well as triumphs of a medical doctor. The pen and the scalpel had much in common for this gifted writer-surgeon.

With references to theoretical reflections on the genre of the short story, among others by Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James, I intend to demonstrate how the short story functions as a supreme narrative form to unfold the concerns of medical writers. By means of analyzing one of Selzer's short stories, I wish to illustrate my arguments.

Gudrun M. Grabher was full professor and long-time chair of the American Studies Department at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, before she retired in 2021. Her main fields of research are American poetry, literature and philosophy, literature and the arts, law and the humanities, and medical

narratives. Her most recent publications in the latter field are the monograph *Levinas and the Other in Narratives of Facial Disfigurement: Singing through the Mask*, and a collection of essays, co-edited with Cornelia Klecker, on *The Disfigured Face in American Literature, Film, and Television*. She was a Research Fellow at Harvard University and taught as a guest professor at the University of Vienna, Austria, and at the University of Notre Dame, USA. Together with her husband, a psychiatrist, she is currently working on "The *Unknowable* in Autobiographies, Philosophy, Literature, and the Arts."

Ines Maria Gstrein | *Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck*

The Affordances of the Short Story Collection: Ali Smith's *Free Love and Other Stories* as a Case Study

Recent short story criticism has started to adopt new formalist thought in order to investigate the potentials latent in short story collections. A case in point is the 2018 volume *Constructing Coherence in the British Short Story Cycle* (Gill and Kläger 2-4). Caroline Levine's concept of affordance has generated widespread interest as it brings into focus the manifold creative uses forms may be put to (*Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* 6-7). I maintain that short story collections bring the arrangement of the component texts and their relationships to each other into sharp relief. On the one hand, the form of the short story collection affords different ways of connecting stand-alone texts. For instance, the component texts may share the same topic, setting or narrative situation. On the other hand, this literary form allows for compilations of texts which are dissimilar from each other. Thus, short story collections present authors with the opportunity to explore diverse writing techniques, themes, and character constellations within a single book. This paper will connect the structure of the short story collection to the notion of discomfort, which it is particularly suited to address.

Ali Smith's debut short story collection *Free Love and Other Stories* (1995) is a case in point, as it displays both structural heterogeneity and recurring patterns. The twelve component stories of *Free Love and Other Stories* show great variety in topics, style, and character, while also sharing some characteristics. In her first published book, the author experiments with both unity and diversity, fragmentary and naturalistic writing. Reading loosely integrated short story collections, readers are never entirely able to unify the component texts because a narrative or thematic arc connecting all texts is notably absent. This circumstance mirrors the discomfort many of Smith's characters experience in the story worlds of *Free Love and Other Stories* as they explore lesbian love in homophobic environments. In short, by taking Ali Smith's debut collection as an example, my paper intends to offer reflections on structural heterogeneity, recurring patterns, and discomfort as affordances of the short story collection.

Ines Maria Gstrein is a third-year doctoral student and university assistant in the Department of English of the University of Innsbruck. Her doctoral dissertation project, jointly supervised by Professors Dorothee Birke, Elke D'hoker, and Sebastian Donat, focuses on short story collections by contemporary Scottish women authors Janice Galloway, A. L. Kennedy, and Ali Smith. Ines Gstrein graduated in Comparative Literature from the University of Innsbruck and obtained a joint Master's degree in German and Comparative Literature from the Universities of Bonn and St Andrews. Within the European Network for Short Fiction Research (ENSFR), she co-coordinates the doctoral student reading group (with Maddie Sinclair and Paul Knowles).

Carolin Jesussek | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

Disability Gothic in William Alexander's Short Story "The House on the Moon"

While traditional gothic tales often portray disabled individuals as monstrous or "other," contemporary gothic stories increasingly criticize and rewrite these portrayals, for example Riva Lehrer's memoir *Golem Girl*, which draws parallels to Frankenstein's monster and emphasizes inclusivity and disability accommodation. William Alexander's story "The House on the Moon" aligns with this evolving approach. It presents a gothic narrative from a disability perspective. Regarding accessibility and mobility, the speculative, futuristic lunar environment the story employs is better suited to disabled individuals than Earth. Interwoven with gothic tropes, Alexander's story challenges traditional portrayals of disability. Further aspects to explore include criticism of eugenics, colonialism, and the way the past is remembered in the Jordan Castle museum a group of children tours in the story. The castle has been transported to the moon brick by brick by its owner, a white eugenics enthusiast. Eugenics and colonialism have recently been critically discussed in Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*.

I examine the short story through a lens of disability studies' social model and the concept of gothic materialism that I am developing for my dissertation. Alexander's story assumes that, to marginalized people, the world is inherently gothic in that it is not built for them and their needs, making structural discrimination and exclusion visible in the material world. I will further consider neurodivergent perspectives presented in *Uncanny Magazine's* "Disabled People Destroy Science Fiction," in which Alexander's story is featured. Neurodivergence has recently been portrayed in science fiction but remains largely absent from gothic literature.

Carolin Jesussek is a Ph.D. candidate at the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, where she is also a full member of the Graduate School of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Her

dissertation focuses on the material and spatial dimensions of marginalization in contemporary North American gothic literature. She has recently published an article on Machado's reworkings of the "Bluebeard" tale in *MDPI Literature*. Her chapter "Archive of the Unspeakable: Unsilencing Violence in Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* (2019)" is forthcoming in *Rethinking Gothic Transgressions of Gender and Sexuality: New Directions in Gothic Studies*.

Jana Keck | *Universität Stuttgart* | *GHI Washington*

Fact or Fiction? Computational Analysis of Short Stories in Nineteenth-Century German-American Newspapers

Before the implementation and enforcement of copyright laws in the nineteenth century, newspaper editors had the freedom to reprint material sourced from various origins. This practice extended beyond just hard and soft news; it also encompassed the dissemination of short fiction across different regions. With the advent of mass digitization of newspapers and the development of advanced computational methods ranging from text mining to machine learning, new opportunities have emerged to quantify the extent of this phenomenon and to trace the paths these texts took. This paper is centered on the computational identification and classification of short stories that went "viral" in the industrial age, using digitized German-American newspapers as a case study. Such an approach offers several advantages, including the ability to conduct scalable analyses that combine both close and distant reading techniques. Through this, we can assess the relationship between short stories and other genres featured in these newspapers, discerning both their commonalities and distinctions. The ascent of short fiction and the historical trajectory of the German immigrant press during the nineteenth century were profoundly intertwined. Serial storytelling consistently emerged as a potent vehicle for propagating nascent media and expanding its viewership, offering a promising avenue for perpetual evolution and advancement. Newspapers,

with their adaptable layout structures, served as an ideal medium for publishing short fiction. Furthermore, as these short stories were juxtaposed with news articles, advertisements, or novels, they provided ample space for contemplating textual forms themselves. While scholars have recognized the significant presence of fiction in the immigrant press, few have delved into the implications of this intimate connection between text types, publication layout, and the very essence of the short story itself.

Jana Keck is a research fellow at the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI). She coordinates the GHI's research area Digital History and the institute's project "Migrant Connections," a digital research infrastructure for German-American History. Her doctoral project "The German-American Press Network and Gender: A Scalable Reading of Transtextuality in Digitized Newspapers, 1830-1914" examined reprinting practices and genre conventions in the German immigrant press. The project received the first Peter Haber Prize for Digital History at the "53. Deutscher Historikertag" (German Historians' Conference) in 2021.

Sarah Lohmann | *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich*

**“Like Children Dying in a Forest”:
The Science Fiction Short Story
and the Morality of Machine
Cognition in E.M. Forster’s
“The Machine Stops” and Ray
Bradbury’s “August 2026:
There Will Come Soft Rains”**

As an instrument of science-fictional cognitive estrangement (Darko Suvin), there is no better imaginative tool than the science fiction short story. In

this paper, I will give evidence for this claim on an integrated recursive level by engaging with the SF short stories “The Machine Stops” by E.M. Forster (1909) and “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury (1950) to specifically explore the medium’s potential as moral laboratory with regard to the development of machine cognition. In particular, I will employ Andy Clark and David Chalmers’s concept of the ‘extended mind’ to explore the ethical implications of the integration of people and machine into a connected system of cognition in the two texts, adding an essential moral dimension to what Kevin LaGrandeur terms the “dangerously unstable dialectic [of] a relationship where master and slave comprise a virtual, corporeal network.” In doing so, I will demonstrate how SF as a genre, understood as the “inheritor as well as the renovator of the bourgeois realist tradition” (Michael Stern on John Brunner), through the rigor of the extrapolative process paradoxically possesses the unique capacity to critique a ‘hard science’ worldview, using cognitive estrangement to challenge the perceived boundaries of our selfhood, cognition, and moral obligation. Ultimately, I will thus suggest that it is the very ‘didactic’ nature of SF, which, according to Joanna Russ, requires an entirely different form of literary criticism that presents the genre’s greatest critical strength, particularly in the barest possible form of the SF short story.

Sarah Lohmann is a postdoctoral fellow at the ETH Zürich in Switzerland, where she is writing a second book (*Habilitation*) on the history of climate fiction and introducing science fiction studies to the department. She previously worked as a postdoc at the University of Tübingen in Germany, teaching courses on the history of feminist utopian literature, climate fiction, and Gothic literature after completing a PhD on feminist utopias and systems theory at Durham University in the UK. Sarah is also currently active as Secretary on the executive committee of the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA).

Patricia MacCormack | *Anglia Ruskin University*

— **Weird Madness: Brief Encounters Against the Anthropocene**

Short fiction, from feminist thought experiments with madness to fantasy fiction horrified by the inconsequentiality of humans, is a way to encounter experiments against the transcendental myths of the sovereign anthropocene. The flashes of amorphous meaning unique to short fiction, especially in the genre of the weird, make madness attractive when compared to late-stage capital majoritarian subjectivity. Our minds, ourselves, our cosmos, fracture into myriad crystals of virtual potential of meaning and thought. Thinking, writing, and reading thus becomes an ethos of the weird, while the great dead god Anthropos is the hill of dreams upon which we play, resigned to a geostatum of deep time extinction.

Patricia MacCormack is Professor of Continental Philosophy at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. She has published extensively on philosophy, feminism, queer and monster theory, animal abolitionist activism, ethics, art, occultism, and horror cinema. She is the author of *Cinesexuality* (Routledge 2008) and *Posthuman Ethics* (Routledge 2012) and the editor of *The Animal Catalyst* (Bloomsbury 2014), *Deleuze and the Animal* (EUP 2017), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema* (Continuum 2008), and *Ecosophical Aesthetics* (Bloomsbury 2018). Her newest book is *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activisms for the End of the Anthropocene* (2020). She recently completed a Leverhulme Fellowship researching and developing queer Death studies and necro Activism for her forthcoming book *Death Activism*.

Anna McFarlane | *University of Leeds*

Science Fiction and the Fix-Up

The 'fix-up' refers to the practice of creating a novel from a number of short stories, a style that became popular in mid-twentieth century science fiction

when authors sought to maximize profits by 'fixing up' short stories they had published in science fiction magazines into novels for the paperback market. The science fiction author and scholar Adam Roberts has speculated that the fix-up is a core creative practice in science fiction, and describes his own novel *The Thing Itself* (2015) as a kind of intentional fix-up. This paper takes these ideas further to argue that the relationship between the short story and the novel in science fiction is unique and important. The paper will focus on the qntm short story collection *Valuable Humans in Transit and Other Stories* (2022) to argue that the contemporary science fiction fix-up can be presented as a short story collection while drawing on cultural practices (such as the proliferation of the 'cinematic universe') to convey the coherence of a story world.

Anna McFarlane is a Lecturer in Medical Humanities at the University of Leeds and author of the monograph *Cyberpunk Culture and Psychology: Seeing Through the Mirrorshades* (2021). Her research on traumatic pregnancy and its expression in fantastika was awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, and she is a Visiting Collaborator on the Wellcome-Trust funded Future of Human Reproduction project at the University of Lancaster. She is the co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Fifty Key Figures in Cyberpunk Culture*, and the forthcoming *Edinburgh Companion to Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities*.

James Nagel | *University of Georgia*

(online)

The American Short Story in Academia: A Personal Report

James Nagel's informal talk will deal with his distinguished career in American Studies and the research of the short story, which is at the same time the story of the growth of short fiction in America. Over his career Professor Nagel published 24 books and more than 80 articles, among them *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle*, *The American Short Story*, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories*, and *Hemingway in Love and War*, which sold over 100,000 copies and was made into a Hollywood movie. He also lectured in 17 countries. Beyond his scholarly work, Professor Nagel both founded and organized the

Society for the Study of the American Short Story, which has more than 300 members from 27 countries, and two journals, *Studies in American Fiction* and *Studies in the American Short Story*. His stupendous lifetime achievement perfectly illuminates the development of short fiction and its research in the United States.

James Nagel received his Ph.D. at Pennsylvania State University in 1971. That year he joined the English Department at Northeastern University where he rose to become a University Professor and the first Davis Distinguished Professor in the department. In 1991 he accepted the position of Eidson Distinguished Professor at the University of Georgia. He was a Fulbright Professor in New Zealand and studied in Italy under a Rockefeller Foundation grant.

Will Norman | *University of Kent*

Paul Linebarger, Cordwainer Smith and the Affordances of Mid-Century Science Fiction Tales

This paper presents research on the extraordinary career of Paul M. A. Linebarger (1913-1966), American political scientist, theorist of psychological warfare, CIA black ops specialist and – in the guise of Cordwainer Smith – prolific author of science fiction short stories. Drawing on new research in his personal papers, I explain the remarkable affinities between the work of pulp authorship and psychological warfare strategy in the 1950s and 60s, showing how Linebarger used the science-fiction short-story form and its print culture to explore ideologies and technologies of psychological warfare that were put into practice by the US intelligence apparatus. In particular, I will discuss the use of all-fiction magazines like *Galaxy* to fulfill both the propaganda function of his stories and his freedom to experiment with literary form; his exploitation of the conventions of the science-fiction tale to imagine and articulate techniques of mind control under development by the security apparatus;

and the temporality of the science-fiction tale in relation to the imaginative projection of the US empire.

Will Norman is a Reader in American Literature and Culture at the University of Kent. He is the author of *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time* (2012), *Transatlantic Aliens: Modernism, Exile and Culture in Midcentury America* and many articles on the history of crime fiction. He has recently completed a book on the literary and intellectual history of complicity with racial domination in the post-war United States, entitled *Writing Complicity: Race, Liberalism and Post-War American Literature*. He is a Co-Editor-in-Chief at the *Journal of American Studies*. His research has been funded by the Leverhulme Trust, the Fulbright Commission, and the TERRA Foundation for American Art.

Bernardo Manzoni Palmeirim | *Universidade de Lisboa*

Paying Attention in Lydia Davis and Short Forms

Lydia Davis, who was awarded the International Man Booker prize in 2013, has been on the cusp of exploring new directions in short fiction. Ali Smith has claimed that “Lydia Davis reminds you, in a world that likes to bandy its words about, what words such as economy, precision, and originality really mean.” Resorting to a series of examples from *Can't and Won't* (2014), I will start by suggesting how Davis's writing may be clarified through Sianne Ngai's aesthetic category of the ‘Interesting.’ I will discuss how this category may allow us to explore overlaps between contemporary short-form literature and conceptual art. I will then strive to demonstrate that an essential key characteristic of Davis is how she stylizes specific uses of attention. I will conclude with a forward-looking gesture, proposing a different way of theorizing ‘short forms’ that might move beyond quantifications of ‘long’ vs. ‘short’: the concept of affordances of attention.

Bernardo Palmeirim is an Assistant Professor in American Studies at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon. He is a researcher in American Studies at ULICES (University of Lisbon Center for English Studies). He holds a

PhD in Theory of Literature (ULisbon) titled “What is Poetic Attention” (2014). His research interests include American short forms (poetry, short story, song, flash fiction), US cultural history, theory of literature, and philosophy of religion. He is also a songwriter with a number of releases and extensive music collaborations, including an awarded art-based research project on the spoken word. His latest publications were “Stylizations of Being: Attention as an Existential Hub in Heidegger and Christian Mysticism” in *Open Theology* (De Gruyter, 2020) and “The Spoken-word Song and Literary Attachment: An Interarts-based Reading Pedagogy” in *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* (SAGE, 2023).

Whit Frazier Peterson | *Universität Stuttgart*

The Sunken and the Ascending: Black Horror Short Fiction

With a few occasional exceptions, the African American horror short story has not had as rich a tradition as one might expect from people whose history on the American continent has often paralleled that of the deeply horrific. The recent publication of Jordan Peele’s collection of Black horror short fiction, *Out There Screaming* (2023), makes a strong step towards correcting that, and in his introduction, Peele suggests that the nineteen stories that make up his collection are something like the “sunken places” of the various characters portrayed in these stories, or those places where you are “stripped of all agency and left alone with your struggle.” My paper analyzes this collection comparatively, reading stories that range from the Afropessimistic to the naturalistic to the Afrofuturistic within the framework of this “sunken place” which all the stories explore. Specifically, I argue that, for African American writers, short horror fiction has the ability to combine fears of loss of Black agency with hopes of the attainment of Black agency that appear in Afropessimism and Afrofuturism, respectively, and which capture perfectly this moment of hope and despair which we currently find ourselves in. I contend that the reason Black horror is having a moment (not only in short fiction, but in long form fiction and film

and television as well) is that this emergence of the fields of Afropessimism and Afrofuturism lends itself to a re-examination of the Black psyche, how past trauma affects Black agency and ways of moving beyond that. In conclusion, this project, by connecting Black horror short fiction to new concepts in Black psychology, explores new possibilities for Black horror short fiction going forward.

Whit Frazier Peterson is a lecturer and research associate at the University of Stuttgart, Germany, with interests in African American literature, modernism, Black Speculative Fiction, the Black esoteric tradition, and the American counterculture. He has published scholarly articles in *Callaloo*, *The Polish Journal of American Studies*, *Black Perspectives*, *Siècles*, and *The Black Scholar*.

Gérald Préher | *Université d'Artois*

The Past in the Present; or the Enduring South in Elizabeth Spencer’s *Starting Over* (2014)

Elizabeth Spencer published her first novel in 1948 and was soon regarded as one of the most promising voices of the South – something that was confirmed with the success of her 2014 collection of stories entitled *Starting Over*. In it, she presents nine stories set in her native region and suggests that, even if many things have changed, the South is still a distinctive region. If, at the end of the last story, the characters are on their way to “a whole new world,” it is because they are planning a trip to Washington – how different it will be from the world they know is left for the readers to decide but it reinforces the idea that the South is a singular place. In the first story, “Return Trip,” two cousins visit the remains of Thomas Wolfe’s house in Asheville feeling that it is always possible to “learn something from other people’s bad times.” Reflections such as this lead the cousins into conversations about the past and most especially about family matters that have not been sorted out. “Sightings” is another story in which the past makes its way into the present: Mason Everett reunites with

his daughter he has not seen in a long time. Her visit brings back memories of an accident that she caused and that left him almost blind. However, the story does not only revolve around this past; it is the ties that bind a family together that are at stake. Many of the stories in *Starting Over* center on unexpected visits that lead the characters to envision the present in its relation to the past. Although such events more often than not pave the way for a return of the repressed, they nonetheless help the future take a brighter shape that enables the characters to start over.

Gérald Préher is a Professor of American Literature at the Université d'Artois, where he is a member of the Texts and Cultures research group. He defended a doctoral dissertation on Southern literature and has written essays on various 19th- and 20th-century writers. He co-edited several collections of essays on American literature and culture, is the editor of the *Journal of the Short Story in English* and the general editor of the review *Résonances*. His most recent publications include a study of Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as part of a book on *Solitude and Community in the Novel* (Atlande), as well as articles on Elizabeth Spencer, Ron Rash, Jamaica Kincaid, and Joyce Carol Oates.

Erik Redling | *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*

Modernist Politics of Race: Allegorical Readings of Zora Neale Hurston's Early Short Fiction

Critics usually view Zora Neale Hurston's writings through the double lens of gender and race and highlight her portrayals of strong Black women, who confront and overcome several obstructions, such as patriarchal female oppression, male violence, and white exploitation, on their journey toward self-discovery and independence. The two subsequently published short stories I selected for the presentation, however, deviate from the prevailing

narrative pattern and demonstrate that Hurston participates in contemporary discourses on race, gender, and race relations – allegorically.

Drawing on Quintilian's definition of "allegory" as a *continua metaphora* (Engl. "extended metaphor"), I connect the plot of "John Redding Goes to Sea" (1921), in which a young Black male protagonist's dream of traveling to the horizon divides the family along gender lines and leads to his tragic death, with Lincoln's often-quoted statement "A house divided against itself cannot stand" and interpret the story as a political allegory that, Cassandra-like, prophesies the death of the next generation if contemporary American society continues to keep the divisions based on race, gender, and class that rivet the United States of America. By contrast, my allegorical reading of "Drenched in Light" (1924), in which a young Black female protagonist's dream of traveling to a nearby city is fulfilled with the aid of a middle-aged White lady, emphasizes the mutual benefits of a collaboration between races: the promising young Black generation receives a chance to succeed, while the affluent but ailing White society receives much needed healing rays of light that revitalize and enlighten its members.

Erik Redling is Professor of American Literature at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. He is the author of *"Speaking of Dialect": Translating Charles W. Chesnutt's Conjure Tales into Postmodern Systems of Signification* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2006) and *Translating Jazz into Poetry: From Mimesis to Metaphor* (De Gruyter, 2017). He has (co-)edited several books, including *The Handbook of the American Short Story* (with O. Scheiding, De Gruyter, 2022) and *Protestantism on Screen: Religion, Politics, and Aesthetics in European and American Movies* (with G. Espinosa and J. Stevens, Oxford UP, 2023), and published in the fields of visual culture, cognitive theories, and intermedial translations. He is currently working on a book project that traces the history of American dialect writing with a special focus on Zora Neale Hurston's Modernist dialect work.

Philipp Reisner | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

American Short Fiction in Light of the Chinese Exclusion Act

The impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 on American short fiction is still not fully understood. Different American and Chinese cultural conceptions of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, race, ethnicity, and class developed out of the dual presence of working-class and commercial-elite Chinese on the American West Coast since the 1840s. The ambivalence of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred race but allowed “merchant class” Chinese to enter (thus allowing class to override race), explains the apologetic and ambivalent role of early Chinese American literature written in English. Short fiction, such as author Wong Chin Foo’s (1847–98) 1888 story “Poh Yuin Ko, The Serpent-Princess,” attempted to level these differences, ultimately serving an apologetic function and rewriting elements of Chinese culture, such as mythological stories, so as to ensure their accessibility to Western Anglo-American audiences. Wong tries to reduce the strangeness of the Chinese cultural heritage by pointing to its overlap with Western cultural traditions and science. Wong’s claim to translation of the original Chinese story “Madame White Snake” (Bainiangzi 白娘子, aka, Baishe Niangniang 白蛇娘娘) shows that short fiction in this case played a role of cultural negotiation, appropriation, and mediation. In this process, the dream of Wong and other writers of Chinese descent aimed at improving migration opportunities for elites, rather than making more universal claims or speaking more generally against the Chinese Exclusion Act. The story also served as Wong’s allegory of the Chinese Exclusion Act. In the atmosphere of mutual cultural and political skepticism fostered by the Act, “The Serpent-Princess” and other stories written in English by Americans of Chinese descent emphasized the commonalities between Chinese and Americans. Politically, they aimed at improving the situation of, and reducing pressure on, the nascent Chinese population of the US.

Philipp Reisner teaches as a *Privatdozent* at the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at Johannes-Gutenberg University Mainz. His multidisciplinary research focuses on early modern Anglo-America, religion in

America, the histories of childhood, education and music, and contemporary American literature. His dissertation on the New English theologian Cotton Mather (1663–1728), in which he examines Mather’s theological role in the context of early modern society, appeared in 2012. He completed his *Habilitation* thesis entitled *Faith in Verse: Biblical Presence in Contemporary American Poetry* at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and was awarded the *venia legendi* for American Studies in 2021.

Michelle Ryan | *Université d’Angers*

The Ethics of Short Forms in Rikki Ducornet’s Late Career Writing

Rikki Ducornet is an American writer of experimental poetry, short stories, essays, and novels, who explores the power of the imagination to question our perception of society. Her influences include the surrealist movement, as well as other writers of experimental fiction, ranging from Harry Mathews to Robert Coover, William Gass, Angela Carter, Italo Calvino, and Jorge Luis Borges. Grounded in a tradition of word play reminiscent of Lewis Carroll, Ducornet’s aesthetics celebrate the potential for the dreaming mind to open up new forms of conceptualization regarding world issues, with a particular focus on abusive authority. Ducornet is also a visual artist; she paints and produces prints, and her fiction teems with vivid imagery.

In her late career writing, Ducornet has turned to shorter forms, playing with discontinuous fragments of short fiction within the structure of hybrid texts. *Trafik* (2021) appears in novella form, mixing surrealism and science fiction to depict a nonsensical voyage through space after the disappearance of the earth, thus proposing a reflection about the environment and our place as humans in this universe. Ducornet’s most recent work, *The Plotinus* (2023), hovers on the boundary of the novella and the short story. It depicts the curious plight of a man who has been imprisoned by a robot and survives by seeking out beauty in the tiny details of a single hornet. In this talk, I will explore the

various manners in which Ducornet fuses surrealism with nonsense writing to produce startling, short hybrid forms in these ethically saturated late career texts.

Michelle Ryan is *Maître de Conférences* (Associate Professor) at the Université d'Angers, France, and is the current director of the European Network for Short Fiction Research. Her research focus is the short stories of contemporary women writers (Angela Carter, Rikki Ducornet, Ali Smith, Sarah Hall), with a special emphasis on intermediality, authorship, reading pragmatics and gender. Her research has been published in various collections and journals such as *Marvels and Tales*, *Journal of the Short Story in English*, *Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines*, and *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice*. Her current interests include research-creation approaches to women's autobiographical fiction as well as the interconnection of short forms, digital media, and ethical issues.

Damien B. Schlarb | *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

Short Stories, Longplay: Formal Influences of the Short Story on Digital Games and the Integration of Narrative and Play

This talk contributes to the conference's survey of new directions for the short story genre by contemplating its formal and modal presence in new media, specifically in digital games (also "video games" or "computer games"). Literary scholars simultaneously tout the short story's resilience and mourn its seemingly declining popularity in the face of fundamental media sea changes wrought by computerization, digitalization, and platformization (Web3). In this context, I describe and seek to come to terms with the presence of the short story as both a narrative form that bears family resemblances to many digital game genres and as a narrative mode within the video game medium. I discuss how narrative and ludic elements in digital games interact to convey short stories. My talk first provides examples for how short stories get embedded formally in

games and how they shape play. I then attempt to theorize that embeddedness and to contemplate, on the flipside, the formal implications of the videogame medium for the short story: How do games convey formally short story tropes such as the unity of effect, the relation between form and content (a topic of renewed controversy in the wake of new materialist studies), the modern short story's focus on psychological phenomena, and the contemporary short story's penchant for formal experimentation? Many game genres, for instance the currently popular and procedurally generated action-role playing games ("Rogue-likes"), share some of the short story's key characteristics: limited narrative parameters (setting, characters, etc.), portability, and the affordance of structural unity, that is, the ability to experience a game in one short sitting. These games dish up incremental story bits that are tied to short gameplay loops. Other narrative-driven games even privilege storytelling over simulation and mimesis, while yet others figure play as a task players must complete to receive the next narrative morsel. Recently, games increasingly strive to integrate meaningfully play and story, making them mutually constitutive and reinforcing: the story provides a telos for play, while play grants stories as prize to be won. This integration will interest me most because its successful implementation produces what social-media influencers call "longplay," a playstyle that aims at experiencing fully every overt and covert aspect of a game's story and ludic systems.

Damien B. Schlarb, Ph.D., works as Assistant Professor of American Studies (limited term) at Johannes Gutenberg-University, Mainz, Germany, where he teaches courses in American literature and culture. He earned his Ph.D. from Georgia State University (USA). His research interests include American literary romanticism, the short story, literary postsecularism, Afrofuturism, and video games. He has served as layout editor for *South Atlantic Review* and managing editor for *Amerikastudien / American Studies*. His first book, *Melville's Wisdom: Religion, Skepticism, and Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, has appeared with Oxford University Press in 2021. He currently works on a project in digital Game Studies for his *Habilitation*.

Gary Westfahl | University of La Verne

(online)

Confronting the Alien in the Science Fiction Short Story

A short story is said to deal with a single idea or theme, while a novel deals with several ideas and themes, suggesting novels are more complex and variegated narratives better suited to scholarly analysis. Yet science fiction has been celebrated as a “literature of ideas,” and the genre has repeatedly demonstrated the special power of short works entirely devoted to a single idea, explaining why the form remains prominent and popular to this day. The significance of the science fiction story can be illustrated by stories about encounters with aliens. We cannot expect aliens to be humanoids who closely resemble us, as seen in films and television programs; rather, we must anticipate aliens who we find to be fundamentally incomprehensible, and, to prepare us for the future, science fiction should be presenting such aliens. Yet the authors of novels, driven to expand their stories to make them long enough, almost inevitably feel obliged to eventually explain initially mysterious aliens in a satisfactory manner. In contrast, short stories have more of an impact due to their brevity, because authors can convey the challenging aspects of dealing with bizarre aliens without needing to explain them. This paper examines stories by H. G. Wells, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Terry Carr, and Ted Chiang, among others, to demonstrate the unique value of such stories, while later extensions of the stories by Weinbaum, Clarke, and Chiang show how their concepts are diminished in texts of greater length.

Gary Westfahl, Professor Emeritus at the University of La Verne, is the author, editor, or co-editor of thirty-four books, all but one of them about science fiction and fantasy; his most recent work is the edited collection *Jules Verne Lives: Essays about His Works and Legacy* (2023). His numerous shorter works include three contributions to the *Das Science Fiction Jahr* series. In 2003 he received the Science Fiction Research Association’s Pilgrim Award for his lifetime contributions to science fiction and fantasy scholarship.

Hertha Dawn Sweet Wong | University of California, Berkeley

The Future of the Indigenous Short Story; or Indigenous Short Story and Futurity

In the early 21st century, Indigenous short stories began to expand primarily from modes of historical realism, often infused with oral narratives and myths and thematizing language, land, interrelationality, and the sacred to fantasy, horror, speculative fiction, and graphic narratives, suffused with popular culture and featuring worlds where the borders of the known world and fiction blur, and Indigenous graphic short stories in the form of comic books (some of them speculative), examining their contributions to short story form as well as to critiques of settler colonialism and visions of Indigenous futures.

Hertha Dawn Sweet Wong is Professor of the Graduate School in the Department of English at the University of California, Berkeley. She teaches and writes about autobiography, visual culture, and American literature, particularly Indigenous literatures. She is author of *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation in Native American Autobiography* (Oxford UP, 1992) as well as numerous articles on Native American literature, autobiography, and environmental non-fiction. She is editor of *Louise Erdrich’s “Love Medicine”: A Casebook* (Oxford UP, 2000) and co-editor of *Reckonings: Contemporary Short Fiction by Native American Women* (Oxford UP, 2008) and *Family of Earth and Sky: Indigenous Tales of Nature from Around the World* (Beacon, 1994). Her most recent book is *Picturing Identity: Contemporary American Autobiography in Image and Text* (2018).

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The Persistence of the Short Story: Traditions and Futures

Conference Theme and Goal

Over the past decade several fresh approaches to the study of the short story in English have appeared illustrating both the durability and portability of the genre. This seems to be rather surprising in the context of digitization's impact on consuming, producing, and publishing short stories. Analog publication outlets still exist in the shape of reputable literary magazines or short story collections, but outside these traditional venues often short-lived short story websites and digital self-publishing platforms seem to prevail. While there are countless creative writing programs, it appears that there is little market for the short story. And yet, while repeatedly praised by academics for its innovative nature and experimental quality, the question is: What is the future of the short story? Given its historical legacy and its embeddedness in popular genres as well as its capability to frame diverse human experiences, it will certainly not vanish. And yet, it is an open question whether the short story can find an audience, and where it is going in the context of hybrid publishing environments (i.e., print and electronic) and algorithmic social dynamics? How does it use its ephemerality and speculative imagination to make sense of the past and the present in times of global transformations?

In this context of manifold uncertainties in the transition from the past to the present and the future, the conference will address a wide range of trends and developments, issues and problems pertaining to short story writing, reading, publication, and dissemination. Janus-faced, it will look both into the past and the future in an effort to reveal constants, continuities, border crossings, transitions, tensions, ruptures, and prospects.

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The Obama Institute fosters synergies in research and teaching related to the Americas in a global context. It is an integral part of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and underlines the traditionally strong relationship between Mainz and the United States.

About the fonts used in this brochure:

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The font abril fatface has been designed by TypeTogether, an indie type foundry committed to excellence in type design with a focus on editorial use. Additionally, TypeTogether creates custom type design for corporate use.

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Noto is the „Hausschrift“ of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. It is a family of open-source fonts that will one day include all the writing systems contained in the Unicode standard. Its aim is to achieve visual harmony in typeface design between the various languages and their writing systems. Noto is a global font collection for writing in all modern and ancient languages.

Cover design & brochure design

Tanja Labs studied fine arts at the Academy of Fine Arts at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) with her master project on using computer fonts in fine art and also on fine art approaches to type design. Since 1999, she has been running an agency for design and events with a focus on science and culture. On the cover, the JGU alumna presents a typeface graphic with the font Abril Fatface, which is also used for visual accentuation in the text. The artist takes keywords related to the conference and layers them in different font sizes and colors. Several layers interplay in various ways resulting in a visual short story, as it were, which combines dynamism and architectural design.

Imprint

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Frank Newton (M.Ed.) | Frank Newton is a research associate at the Obama Institute. He received his M.Ed. in 2017 and is now working on his dissertation on Native American periodicals from 1890 to 1930. He has published articles in handbooks and his most recent publication, co-published with Oliver Scheiding, has appeared in *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 68.2 (2024).

Anette Vollrath | Anette Vollrath has been Assistant to the Chair since 2005. Her administrative experience includes conference organization, financial management, and student counseling.

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