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Hosted by the School of English at the University of Nottingham

The PGR Symposium

FRIDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2024

SENATE CHAMBER (TRENT BUILDING)

9.15 – 4.45PM

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Programme

9.15 - 9.35am: Arrivals and Coffee

9.35- 9.45am: Opening Comments: Director and Deputy Director of PGR

9.45-11am: Session One
Chair: Karen Packwood

Shuyu Liu- Making theatre specifically for screen: a case study on NT Live's Romeo and Juliet (2021)

Ellen Schaffert – Institutional Diversity: Representing Disability in the Contemporary Shakespeare Industry

Victoria Greenwood – Visual and anti-visual geographies in the deep, dark woods

Sarah Lancaster – Somatic Experience in Three Towneley Plays

11-11.15: Break

11.15-12.15: Session Two
Chair: Abigail Lloyd

William Hayward – Exploring the Behaviour and Situational Interests of Individuals in Absurd, Surreal, and Fantastical Societies Through Short Fiction

Michele Roncarati – The dilemma of categorising dogs and wolves in Old Norse law

Budur Alanazi – Technical Vocabulary in Saudi Students' Masters Dissertations in Engineering: A Corpus-Based Study

Yiheng Zhang – The attentional aspect of blending: a case study of William Gibson's Fragments of a Hologram Rose

12.15-1pm: Lunch

1-2pm: Session Three
Chair: Natalia Radziwillowicz

Joseph Rodgers – I'm A Closed Book: a novel and critical thesis

Xinyue Wang – Reading English with Chinese in Mind: Modulation of Cross-linguistic Similarity on Loanword Effects

Abigail Greaves – Adapting Grief in Early Medieval England

Emily Smith – 'The Witches are Back': Reframing the Witch and Abjection from *Hocus Pocus* (1993) to *Hocus Pocus 2*

Marianne Fish – 'There are all sorts of lives': A study of internal dialogicity within first-person narration in Jean Rhys's Voyage in the Dark

2-2.15pm: Break

2:15-3:15pm: Session Four
Chair: Lauren Colley

Duncan Armitage – Using a Follettian approach to analyse leadership in medically themed fiction

Diana Zaitseva – Exploring hearing loss and conversation behaviour through the microphone of hearing aids

Jessica Padilla-Sanchez – Flâneurs in love: Writing psychogeography into LGBTQ+ YA Historical Fiction

Hayley Rowe – The shackles of expectation: Examining how reader motivation can hinder authorial freedom

3.15-3.45pm: Break

3.45-4.45pm: Session Five
Chair: Molly Watson

Eleanor Johnson – Unveiling the Fantasy-Laden Discourses of Gambling Advertising: A Social Semiotic Approach

Lauren Colley – Plodging, Dodging and Perambulating: What the Dictionary Reveals About Nineteenth-Century Pedestrianism

Shatha Alsaif – The Role of Apps on Saudi EFL Learners' Vocabulary Development

Nicola Valentine – 'Psychos' and the Neoliberal Workplace

4.45: Closing Remarks – Deputy Director of PGR

Abstracts

Session One

Shuyu Liu - Making theatre specifically for screen: a case study on NT Live's Romeo and Juliet (2021)

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the character of theatre-making. Many forms of theatre productions in the UK were performed in various ways. They were primarily presented in three types – the online streaming of previous filmed productions from the archive, the live transformation of socially distanced performances on stage via Zoom in split screens. The third type was theatre productions made explicitly for releasing on screen for viewers to watch at home. This paper will focus on the National Theatre's productions specifically made for screen by taking Romeo and Juliet as a case study. The paper will discuss this production's cinematic and theatrical elements and explore what elements make the production still a play specifically designed for screen rather than film. It will also explain why the National Theatre chose to transform Romeo and Juliet for screen, and analyse production in detail, focusing on how they use cameras to transform the story between the Lyttelton stage and a more realistic and cinematic setting. In addition, the paper will further discuss what making theatre specifically for the small screen means for future productions in the post-pandemic time. Romeo and Juliet has opened up new possibilities for making theatre that crosses boundaries between theatrical and cinematic space. However, whether future productions will follow this trend or whether it was just a temporary experiment that only remains during the pandemic is still being determined.

Ellen Schaffert - Institutional Diversity: Representing Disability in the Contemporary Shakespeare Industry

Recently, the UK theatre industry has been criticised for its lack of diversity: onstage and within creative and administrative spheres. Responding to movements like #MeToo, #GiveArtistsAChance and #TheatresPullUpOrShutUp, institutions have worked to increase representation of communities marginalized by race, gender, sexuality, and disability, on and off-stage. The Shakespeare industry is a core part of this, and central institutions, like the RSC and Shakespeare's Globe, as well as many more fringe companies, have worked to improve their institutional diversity.

However, Shakespeare performance scholarship has raised concerns about the strategies of the Shakespeare industry to improve diversity. Julian and Solga (2021) and Williams (2019) point to the harm that 'performative' diversity can cause to implicated communities. Williams's model of 'incomplete dramaturgy' offers tools for exploring how productions hailed as 'progressive' often fail to anticipate the implications of their choices, resulting in reinforcing harmful views.

As part of a wider thesis that interrogates the place of disability within the Shakespeare industry, this paper will outline the hurdles that come with attempting to cast more diverse productions, the pressures that large Shakespearean institutions face when attempting to include more disabled creatives into its dramaturgy, and offer frameworks for analysing 'diverse' performances.

Victoria Greenwood - Visual and anti-visual geographies in the deep, dark woods

Taking my starting point as Bertrand Westphal's model for a geocritical understanding of place (2007), this paper will examine two Gothic horror narratives set within the deep, dark woods, each negotiating the hierarchical (and untenable) binary between culture and nature. In The Blair Witch Project (1999) and Adam Nevill's The Ritual (2011), characters enter the forest armed with a map, a tool of visual geography that is quickly rendered powerless. The map is potent symbol of both the hegemonic status of the visual sense over more tangible and interactive senses, and humankind's separation from their environment, adopting a point of view literally and figuratively above the natural world. As such, it signifies humankind's estrangement both from nature and from our own bodies. In these texts, the forest refuses the cartographic enterprise as a living, growing, dynamic space, and destabilises the sensory order by forcing reliance on atrophied senses. Vision is shown to be particularly fallible: the woods are not scenery to be viewed, but demand a complex sensuous experience.

Sarah Lancaster - Somatic Experience in Three Towneley Plays

The Towneley Plays are a collection of late medieval dramatic works associated with West Yorkshire, England. This paper places these texts in a context of real-world communal feasting, exploring their use of language related to food, appetite and eating. Through investigating alimentary language in 'The Murder of Abel' and both 'Shepherds' plays, it provides a new appreciation of the ways in which these plays were interpreted with the body as well as with the mind.

Whilst the affective and participatory dimensions of medieval plays are well researched, few discussions have explored their relationships with more basic bodily responses, such as hunger, appetite, pleasure and surfeit. This discussion demonstrates how these three Towneley Plays actively integrated the experiences of fasting, feasting and inebriation which tended to accompany performances. In doing so, it contributes towards scholarly awareness of the understandings of food and the body that underlay late medieval Biblical drama.

This presentation reflects work undertaken during postdoctoral research into devotional texts from late medieval Yorkshire, focusing on the relationships between didactic writing and subjective experience.

Session Two

William Hayward - **Exploring the Behaviour and Situational Interests of Individuals in Absurd, Surreal, and Fantastical Societies Through Short Fiction**

This thesis, through a collection of short fiction from a variety of perspectives, explores how the obsessions of individuals in societies where aspects of reality are off kilter and out of norm mutate into absurd or surreal situations or pursuits. Mainly through a focal point of my home city of Birmingham or in realms out of touch with contemporary life and detailing a variety of individuals who are usually estranged or have interests that set them apart from mainstream society, I am writing a series of interrelated, yet standalone narratives inspired by known and invented German idioms. For example, the story in the collection based around the existing idiom, das ist mir wurst, draws from its literal translation of, this is sausage to me, and details a protagonist who undergoes a startling transformation into a sausage, a reversal of roles thus initiating the breakdown of their familial society.

Alongside the thematic aspect of the project, there is also a distinctive formal agenda which is satirical and comic, predicated on disrupted, even convoluted sentences, extreme metaphors and idioms which I employ throughout the narratives whilst delving into the peculiar translations of the idioms to structure each piece around. Critically, I am writing an essay which discusses an array of writers, such as Jim Dodge, Will Self, Helen DeWitt, Joy Williams, Yoko Ogawa, and Camilia Grudova, exploring how their stories inform the evolution of my own and namely – following T S Eliot's lead in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' – quite consciously creating and exploring a canon with which my own work is in dialogue.

Michele Roncarati - **The dilemma of categorising dogs and wolves in Old Norse law**

As species descending from a common ancestor, dogs (Canis Lupus Familiaris) and wolves (Canis Lupus) share various similarities, and Old Norse culture demonstrated a certain awareness of some of them. These animals appear in a variety of sources and genres and are occasionally represented interchangeably. This paper focuses on the representation of both species in a selection of laws from Grágás and the Older Gulathing Law. While dogs and wolves have frequently been analysed in relation to the supernatural setting, Old Norse laws may provide a more mundane and reliable medium to scrutinise the manner medieval Scandinavians perceived and understood these animals. Specifically, I consider how humans categorised these animals based on their impact on human society. In Old Norse culture, wolves are iconically associated with disruption and violence, and while the general outlook towards dogs is more positive, they can also pose a threat to social stability if kept unchecked and may even resemble wolves. Therefore, this paper explores how medieval Scandinavian meticulously regulated their interactions with both these species.

Budur Alanazi - Technical Vocabulary in the Engineering Masters Dissertations: A Corpus-Based Study

Having a good knowledge of technical vocabulary is essential in the specialized disciplines, especially for professionals in the disciplinary discourses. Engineering discipline is one of the fields that has a specialised vocabulary and is rich in technical terms that are challenging for second language learners to understand. This study employing various approaches to the data to identify the technical vocabulary used in Saudi engineering dissertations, in order to generate engineering wordlists for pedagogical purposes. To this end, the researchers compiled a corpus containing 1,323,601 words from 113 Masters Dissertations written by Saudi engineering students in seven sub-disciplines, including aeronautical engineering, chemical engineering, civil engineering, electrical engineering, industrial engineering, mechanical engineering, and nuclear engineering. Initially, Nation's (2012) BNC/COCA and supplementary word lists were adopted to create the potential technical words using AntwordProfiler programme. Then four selection criteria were adopted, including, keywords comparison analysis, frequency principle, consulting dictionary and concordance lines, and using Chung and Nation's (2003) semantic rating scales. Using Wordsmith Tool, the results found 2470 positive keywords through comparison between Engineering Masters' Dissertations Corpus (EMDC) and BNC written as reference corpus. Adopting 60 times cut-off point as a frequency principle, 536 positive keywords (e.g., circuits, antenna) are found in the Engineering Dictionary and 614 positive keywords (e.g., Model, process) are potential technical vocabulary of engineering out of BNC/COCA 1-25000 wordlists levels. The potential technical engineering was sent to three experts for their judgements using the semantic rating scales. The final generated wordlists will be used in the next phase of the study to test the EFL students' receptive knowledge of technical engineering words. These wordlists will be served as essential for engineering students and used for pedagogical purposes.

Yiheng Zhang - The Attentional Aspect of Blending: A Case Study of William Gibson's 'Fragments of a Hologram Rose'

The aim of this study is to specify the functional mechanisms of conceptual integration networks by applying the attentional characteristics of mental processing to the theory of blending (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Although the theory of blending is commonly preferred in the stylistic analysis of the cognitive processing of metaphor, it was first proposed as a comprehensive model of cognition accounting for the basic mental operation of meaning, which reflects the imaginative capacity of mind. A blending network has a special theoretical characteristic, the mechanisms for building up a blending network can run simultaneously at any time (Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 44) for achieving a certain status of 'equilibrium'. In other words, the blending mechanisms introduced by Fauconnier and Turner do not represent actual stages of mental processes in cognition, but should be considered as a descriptive account of the essential aspects of the goal-directed feature integration (Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 46). Despite this frequently ignored theoretical position of blending theory, it is argued in this study that the functional mechanism for achieving the equilibrium of an integration network can be specified as the mental operation of specific attentional processes in the cognition of language. This is because feature integration is recognized in psychology as a crucial aspect of attentional functioning. The functional reframing of blending theory will be elucidated through a case study of William Gibson's short story 'The Fragments of a Hologram Rose', where comprehending the main theme necessitates the reader's continuous development of integration networks.

Session Three

Joseph Rodgers - **I'm A Closed Book: A Novel and Critical Thesis**

I will be presenting my Creative Writing PhD project, which consists of a novel, titled 'I'm A Closed Book,' and an accompanying critical thesis. My novel tracks the final year at University for its protagonist, Jay, and the ups and downs of his long-distance relationship with Alice, who has just moved to America. The story predominantly takes place in Autumn 2016, jumping to December 2019 for its conclusion, with several historical events from these periods weaved into the narrative as the characters progress from University into professional work. My presentation will delve into several of the novel's prevalent themes, such as post-digitised relationships, post-millennial masculinity and male friendship, and will then explain how the novel situates itself within the coming-of-age and campus genres while adapting them for a contemporary context. The novel draws influence from the novels of Ben Lerner, Zadie Smith and Sally Rooney, as well as modernist writers including Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett. In my project's critical thesis, I reflect on these literary influences in relation to the critical and aesthetic mode of metamodernism. My project explores the potential of metamodernism for the contemporary novel, and whether it is a viable concept for connoting a "structure of feeling" amongst a contemporary milieu. My presentation will briefly outline how metamodernism interacts with both postmodernism and modernism, concluding with how it serves as a theoretical framework through which to consider the thematic concerns and stylistic choices of my project.

Xinyue Wang - **Reading English with Chinese in Mind: Modulation of Cross-linguistic Similarity on Loanword Effects**

Bilingual lexical access during word recognition is a heated topic in psycholinguistics. Compared to the other translation pairs, cognates/loanwords have a distinct feature of cross-linguistic form similarity and therefore have been used to explore the bilingual access to the two languages during the recognition of visually presented words. Considerable evidence has supported the co-activation of bilinguals' two languages and a facilitation effect of cognates in both same-script and different-script alphabetic languages, and an inhibition effect has also been found in studies using non-identical cognates.

The present study aimed to investigate the direction of loanword effect in different-script Chinese-English bilinguals whose native language is non-alphabetic. 58 participants were involved in an English lexical decision task which consisted of 90 Chinese-English loanwords (e.g., coffee /kɒfi/- 咖啡 /kafeɪ/), 90 control words, and 180 pseudowords. The reaction times of bilinguals were co-determined by translation word frequency and cross-linguistic phonological and semantic similarities, but not by a dichotomous factor of loanword status. Additionally, it was observed that increasing amounts of phonological and semantic similarity led to bilinguals' slower responses. This counterintuitive finding suggests a complex interaction between bilinguals' languages even in a monolingual language context.

Abigail Greaves - Adapting Grief in Early Medieval England

This paper examines how pre-existing narratives of grief and loss have been shaped within the literary environment of Early Medieval England. In the Old English Orosius, the Amazons are transformed into grief-stricken widows, experiencing sadness reminiscent of The Wife's Lament and driven by a desire for vengeance parallel in Beowulf avenging the murder of Hrothgar's beloved thegn Æschere. Orpheus withdraws into the wilderness in grief in an addition to the Old English Boethius, which calls to mind The Wanderer's lonely exile. Guthlac B presents an impassioned and much-expanded account of Beccel's sorrow at the death of his mentor. By fabricating new additions and reimagining earlier narratives, authors and translators have created texts that blend and interact with Old English literary traditions and tropes. These reframings present these tales in a manner relevant and familiar to their contemporary audience, tackling feelings such as withdrawal, longing, and the desire for revenge.

Emily Smith - 'The Witches are Back': Reframing the Witch and Abjection from Hocus Pocus (1993) to Hocus Pocus 2 (2022)

This paper explores the changing relationship between the Witch and abjection through a case study of Hocus Pocus (1993) and Hocus Pocus 2 (2022). Utilising Julia Kristeva's work on the abject and Barbara Creed's work on the Monstrous-Feminine my presentation looks at the changes in characterisation of the Sanderson sisters from the original film to its sequel and how this reflects changes to representations of witches in popular culture. The Witch is often portrayed as an abject character in horror due to their status as outsiders, as possessors of potentially devastating power, and their transgression of patriarchal order and gender norms. However, Creed's Return of the Monstrous-Feminism (2022) reframes female monsters, such as witches, as characters forced to endure abjection as opposed to simply being abject. I argue that Hocus Pocus portrays the Sanderson sisters as stereotypical abject crones who fulfil many stereotypes such as riding brooms, conjuring with a cauldron, seeking unholy powers, and of course murdering children. However, Hocus Pocus 2, with the addition of a sympathetic backstory introduced in flashback form at the beginning of the film, changes the way that the Sanderson sisters are framed. Instead of being ruthless crones murdering children to remain youthful, they become proto feminists resisting patriarchy in puritanical 1600s Salem. The reframing of the Sanderson sisters reflects the amelioration of the Witch in popular culture through their realignment from cannibalistic monsters to feminist heroes fighting against patriarchy.

Marianne Fish - 'There are all sorts of lives': Internal dialogicity within first-person narration in Jean Rhys's Voyage in the Dark

This paper gives insight into the relatively unexplored representations of speech and thought encapsulated within first-person narration. Studies examining the multitude of voices and viewpoints encapsulated in fictional consciousness within novels have tended to predominantly focus on third-person narratives. Fewer studies have engaged with first person narration as such narratives are often considered to be confined to one viewpoint. Jean Rhys' Voyage in the Dark is predominantly related through the protagonist's, Anna Morgan's, first-person narration, however, Rhys interweaves a multitude of other voices within this mode, creating a dialogic tension with the external viewpoints expressed. Through the representation of differing perspectives in conversation with one another, Rhys demonstrates how individual consciousness is not isolated but shaped and constructed through interaction with the ideological viewpoints of others. The cacophony of voices engaging in dialogic discourse within the protagonist's consciousness destabilises the boundaries between self and other, between public and private discourses. By investigating how Rhys has employed linguistic devices and effectively utilised the Interior Monologue to present differing worldviews through one consciousness, this study also exemplifies the relevance of Bakhtin's concept of dialogicity to first-person narratives.

Session Four

Duncan Armitage - **Using a Follettian approach to analyse leadership in medically themed fiction.**

If you asked someone to recommend a book in order to improve your understanding of leadership, the likelihood is you will be directed towards the business section of a bookshop and be inundated with a variety of offerings. In this presentation, I provide a short overview of my interdisciplinary research into representations of leadership, where I explore the the possibilities for examining leaders and leadership processes through fictional works. I provide an overview of my research companion, Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933), a thought leader in management and leadership in the early 20th century. Using a few concepts from Follett's body of works, I explore one of literature's most famous nurses, the much maligned Nurse Ratched from Ken Kesey's 1962 novel, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. By using a Follettian lens, I argue that Nurse Ratched is more of a leader than a monster. Although this is focused on one case study from Kesey's novel, I share a few observations about the potential role of English literature in leadership discourse and the potential role of fictional literature in leadership assessment, development and communications.

Diana Zaitseva - Exploring hearing loss and conversation behaviour through the microphone of hearing aids

"The velocity and displacement of air molecules, pressure levels and propagation speeds are fundamental concepts in acoustics but rarely encountered in the literature on conversation behaviour. Perhaps unjustly so, as the production and perception of sounds constitute the basis of spoken communication. That is not to say that social phenomena can or should be explained through distributions of sound pressure levels and pitch contours. However, if the goal is to explore communication patterns without intruding upon private conversations, hence minimising influence on people's behaviour, reducing speech to its acoustic components might be the way of getting an objective account of interpersonal exchanges. Hearing aids are arguably one of the few commercially available devices that can offer comfort and discreteness for participants and a continuous stream of timestamped acoustical information for researchers. The question is whether hearing aids can accurately pick up and register speech from the environment, and if they do, is the available temporal resolution for logging and transmitting data to the external storage sufficient for capturing conversations?

Jessica Padilla-Sanchez - Flâneurs in Love: Writing Psychogeography into LGBTQ+ YA Historical Fiction

In response to the need for interdisciplinary research connecting geography with the arts, a new genre of fiction known as 'psychogeographical fiction' has emerged. These works, "characterized by the expression of the influence of geographical spaces upon the minds of the characters" challenge researchers to rethink how they interpret culture, power, identity, and place (Eva M. Pérez-Rodríguez, 2020). Viewing these texts through a queer lens, however, has yet to be studied in depth. This practice-based project aims to fill this research gap through an original queer young adult alternate historical romance novel and comprehensive exegesis. Because psychogeography "offers routes of encounter into how the local can articulate the universal" and "lends itself to negotiate multiple spatial and temporal frames" (Sidaway, 2022), I suggest that the influence the novel's urban setting has on how each protagonist views and performs their own individual sexualities mimics aspects of today's queer experience, therein by strengthening reader identification.

Hayley Rowe - The shackles of expectation: Examining how reader motivation can hinder authorial freedom

When examining how an author can express their stories, we must consider their counterpart, the readership. No man is an island, and no author exists without an audience, even if that intended audience is simply themselves. Taking into account why the audience are reading their work and the expectations that readers arrive with can influence authorial choices within the story. One of the most prominent ways we can see this is in how authors choose to comply with, or flout, genre conventions. Readers choose specific genres with an almost subconscious expectation of the kind of tropes that text will include. A rom-com where everyone dies at the end will chance alienating a large chunk of the audience in the pursuit of achieving cult-classic status. A psychological thriller that has no twists will leave an audience deflated and dissatisfied. Genre compliance or subversion dictates the scope of what an author may achieve, as attempting to convey a story that doesn't follow at least some conventions, runs the risk of being perceived as a confused and muddled text.

Session Five

Eleanor Johnson - Unveiling the Fantasy-Laden Discourses of Gambling Advertising: A Social Semiotic Approach

Technological advancements have had a profound impact on our daily lives, but this is especially true where the world of gambling is concerned. Fuelled by the rise of social media, online gambling industries and social gaming, which replicate gambling activities within the confines of social platforms, have shown a growing interest in each other, establishing what has been termed a "dubious romance" (Cassidy et al. 2013, p.74). Despite the existing body of research pertaining to this questionable coalition (Mills et al. 2023; Hing et al, 2023; Gainsbury et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2015), the precise ways by which influence is exerted remain unclear. Therefore, this paper investigates gambling advertising from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. Employing a social semiotic framework drawn from visual semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Ledin and Machin, 2022), it explores how designers in the advertising realm of social casino gaming and online gambling employ an array of semiotic tools to communicate specific discourses. By analysing the complexities of semiotic choices, I uncover how these types of advertisements, whether endorsing 'free to play' games or conventional online gambling, aim to legitimise gambling. As van Leeuwen (2018) states: "in studying legitimation, attention must ... be paid, not only to language, but also to the other forms of expression that combine with language ... in short, to multimodality" (p.18). The discursive themes that I identify as running across the adverts, namely (1) fantasy and fortune, (2) power and authority, and (3) destigmatisation, encompass a myriad of subtle yet insidious multi-semiotic techniques. These techniques manipulate discourse and emotions, obscuring the harsh reality of potential monetary losses, and instead recontextualise gambling into something exotic and alluring.

Lauren Colley - Plodging, Dodging and Perambulating: What the Dictionary Reveals About Nineteenth-Century Pedestrianism

From the 1750s the dictionary saw a massive influx of walking-related vocabulary. Surveying the introduction of 'plodging', 'roaming', 'lounging' or 'trudging', this paper showcases some of the delightfully onomatopoeic terminology of the period. These ever finer discriminations of walking 'types' provide an insight into an increasingly nuanced walking etiquette in the early 1800s. Not only does this reflect the peripatetic influence of the Romantics, but the proliferating tourist guides, walkers' compendiums, travelogues and conduct manuals suggest that how a person walked was of equal, if not more interest to where, when or why.

As even the wealthy stepped down from their carriages to 'perambulate' and 'promenade' the inner city parks, walking had arguably uncoupled itself from its squalid working class associations.Moreover, a new preoccupation with gait and posture position walking as a signifier of more complex social information from wealth, class and temperament to moral and ethical character.
This paper demonstrates how language evolves to reflect the concerns of our age. The cultural shift in attitude towards walking is routinely overshadowed by the tangible demonstrations of industry and urbanisation, however the lexical diversity this paper celebrates reveals there was a quieter revolution taking place at pavement level.

Shatha Alsaif - The Role of Apps on Saudi EFL Learners' Vocabulary Development

This research project explores the impact of vocabulary apps on the vocabulary development of Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Specifically, it investigates the effectiveness of an academic vocabulary learning app designed for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia. The study employs pre and post-tests to assess participants' vocabulary knowledge before and after their interaction with the app. The app, developed using R Shiny, offers a wide array of learning resources for each vocabulary item, including definitions, translations, example sentences, and audio pronunciations. The study also tracks user behaviours within the app, such as word consultations, time spent on learning, and resource utilization. The main objective of this study is to provide valuable insights into the role of vocabulary apps in enhancing EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition. By combining quantitative data from tests with qualitative observations from app usage, this research aims to inform the design and implementation of effective vocabulary learning tools for EFL learners in Saudi Arabia and beyond. Ultimately, the expected outcome is the improvement of language learning strategies and resources, contributing to the overall enhancement of EFL learners' vocabulary development.

Nicola Valentine - 'Psychos' and the Neoliberal Workplace

My PhD is a creative and critical exploration of the neoliberal workplace. The larger element is a novel 'Psychos', which is set in a university. This story and its characters are partly drawn from personal experience working in this environment. The novel also deliberately looks at the ways ideology affects the working life of individuals. Alongside the novel, I'm also writing a critical essay investigating the ways other authors and scriptwriters have critiqued neoliberalism and the workplace in their writing.

My presentation will include a short reading from the novel in progress and a summary of the planned book. I will also talk about some of the research for the essay, giving a broad overview and then focusing on a specific source that has been pivotal to this part of the project. The Consultant (Tony Basgallop, Prime 2023) is a black comedy/thriller adaptation of a book of the same name that develops the themes and ideas I'm interested in incredibly vividly.

I came across this TV show accidentally and, subsequently, read the book. The story starts with Regus Patoff (Christophe Waltz) arriving at a small cap tech company with his briefcase ready to save it from itself. Waltz plays the titular consultant with characteristic sinister charm. The story itself starts as a grim, super real representation of the 21st century workplace then slips, all too easily, into horror. I will discuss the affect that this depiction had for me personally, but also on my research.