



MIDLANDS NETWORK OF POPULAR CULTURE

ANNUAL FORUM

SCHEDULE / PROGRAMME

Thursday 19th August, 12:30-7:00PM (BST)

Sign-up

You can sign up for this free conference on the [Eventbrite page here](#).

Zoom link:

<https://bham-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/86275176105?pwd=dmg4d2VTaDFsSVh3bTJlR1VyalJRdz09>

Meeting ID: 862 7517 6105

Passcode: CulturePop

Welcome!

Welcome to MNPC's second annual forum, a one-day online event designed to showcase the latest research in popular culture from the UK Midlands and beyond.

Join us for a diverse series of talks and panels. This year's forum is organised around a loose theme of 'beginnings'. Given the global state of uncertainty we've all experienced over the past year, we hope the idea of beginning anew has widespread cultural resonance.

Although we're based in the Midlands, we welcome pop culture scholars from all backgrounds. If you wish, you can join the network (for free) and find out more about us on [our website](#).

EVENT SCHEDULE

12.30-1pm BST: Have Lunch with MNPC

Join the Zoom call from 12:30 to chat with other attendees. Lunch is optional!

1-1.15pm BST: Opening Remarks

The MNPC committee will kick off the day by introducing themselves and the forum.

1.15-2.15pm BST: International Keynote – 45-min talk plus questions

Speaker: Prof. Ken Gelder, University of Melbourne: “Transnational Draculas”

Chair: Cassie Brummitt, De Montfort University

Abstract: This paper takes its cue from Georg Simmel’s famous essay ‘The Stranger’ – published in 1908, ten years after Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* – which tells us that the stranger is ‘the man who comes today and stays tomorrow’, someone who does not belong but makes himself at home. It goes on to look at Dracula as a transnational ‘stranger’ who routinely migrates to other places through adaptations and re-presentations of Stoker’s uber vampire narrative. It touches on the *Twilight* films (2005–2008), *Abraham Lincoln*, *Vampire Hunter* (2010) and, unchronologically, Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and Charlaine Harris’s *Dead Until Dark* (2001), tracking the vampire’s relations to histories of slavery in the United States. It then turns to Hideyuki Kikuchi’s *Vampire Hunter D* (1983) and the well-known anime film director Mamoru Oshii’s *Blood: The Last Vampire: Night of the Beasts* (2000), to examine the role of the vampire as a ‘foreigner’ in Japan who may or may not be working in that country’s best interests. The paper then reads John Ajvide Lindqvist’s novel *Let the Right One In* (2004) to think about vampires in Sweden and the predicament of asylum seekers and immigrants in a nation that (much like everywhere else during this global pandemic) has tightened its borders with the aim, precisely, of letting only the ‘right ones’ in.

Bio: Ken Gelder is a Professor of English at the University of Melbourne, Australia. His books on aspects of popular culture include *Reading the Vampire* (Routledge, 1994), *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (Routledge, 2004), *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (Routledge, 2007), *New Vampire Cinema* (British Film Institute, 2012) and *Adapting Bestsellers: Fantasy, Franchise and the Afterlife of Storyworlds* (Cambridge UP, 2019). He has also published widely on Australian literature and culture, including, with Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Melbourne UP, 1998), and most

recently, with Rachael Weaver, *Colonial Australian Fiction: Character Types, Social Formations and the Colonial Economy* (Sydney UP, 2017) and *The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt* (Miegunyah Press/Melbourne UP, 2020).

2.15-2.30pm BST: Break

Chat with other attendees or take a quick break from the conference.

2.30-4pm BST: MNPC Members Panel – 3 x 20-min papers plus questions

Chair: Rhys James Jenkins, University of Birmingham

Speaker 1: Amy Hondsmerk, Nottingham Trent University: “*Smocks and Simulators in Lockdown: A New Beginning at the Intersection of Museums and Digital Games?*”

Abstract: Museums have long considered the opportunities offered through engagement with videogames; a trend that has arguably been accelerated by the pandemic. Among the many difficulties of the pandemic for museums was the question of interpretation, as circumstances challenged museums to undertake the interpretation of objects that were now physically inaccessible to visitors. For many museums, online games provided one possible solution to this issue and, during the course of the pandemic, games became a regular part of many institutions’ online presence, taking the form of game creations, game adaptations, and game-based outreach and learning initiatives.

Through an exploration of some of the game projects developed by museums across the world during the pandemic, we can explore the potential of videogames within the field, especially in regards to interpretation. In particular, examining how these games and playful online interactions allowed museums to engage visitors actively in the process of interpretation, consider their collections in new ways in collaboration with visitors, broaden access and outreach, and raise the profile of visitor voices and contributions; whilst also addressing how museums overcame barriers that may have previously prevented the more widespread use of digital games by the sector.

This paper will also explore the crossover between museum studies, interpretation, and game studies, highlighting the ways in which videogame mechanics and design practices have the ability to respond more widely to the needs of contemporary interpretative practice, and providing a possible direction for the design of future interpretative games for and by museums.

Bio: Amy is a third-year PhD candidate exploring the intersection of museums, videogames, and interpretation, based at Nottingham Trent University. As part of her research, she has recently undertaken a placement building a short game in collaboration with a museum partner, in response to objects from their collection for an upcoming exhibition project.

She has previously gained a BA in History and an MA in Museum and Heritage Development. Amy also currently works freelance with heritage consultancy Culture Syndicates. She enjoys playing videogames in her free time and has been known to dabble in coding.

Speaker 2: Cinzia DuBois, University of Birmingham: “Loki, Latin and Why Classics in Hollywood Matters”

Abstract: Episode 2 of the Disney+ original series Loki sent thousands of Classicists into an excitable frenzy on Twitter in June 2021. In this episode, the protagonist Loki and his fellow Time Variance Authority member, Mobius, travel back to ancient Pompeii in 79 AD, right on the verge of the town’s destruction by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius. While Mobius wants to be cautious so as not to disturb the timeline, Loki incites chaos by launching into a Latin speech in which he informs everyone they will die.

Classicists worldwide were thrilled by the script’s excellent translation of Latin and with former Classicist Tom Hiddleston’s pronunciation and performance. In a world where Classical education is renowned as elitist, intensely academic, and exclusively reserved for dusty university library texts, the inclusion of well-translated and performed Latin within a blockbuster television series was a welcomed and exciting change. The inclusion was celebrated by Classicists who want to see their subject thrive. This paper will argue that mainstream media’s adoption of Classical studies will help dethrone Classical studies from its elitist status and make it more accessible and less exclusionary for academics of all backgrounds.

Today, many Classicists openly credit Dynamation artist Ray Harryhausen’s films as their introduction to ancient classics and history. This paper will examine how Hollywood’s inclusion of ancient Classics, from Latin in Loki to Harryhausen’s Jason and the Argonauts and Disney’s Hercules, has helped shape modern perceptions of ancient Classical studies and influenced its accessibility to those not privy to schoolroom Latin and ancient Greek.

Bio: Cinzia DuBois is a first-year PhD student based at the University of Birmingham. Her research focuses on classical reception within contemporary literature, exploring the socio-political allusions within feminist mythological retellings written by women during the era of President Donald Trump.

Speaker 3: Laura La Beur, University of Edinburgh: “Microplastics everywhere and not a fish to eat?!: Language, social movements and marine debris”

Abstract: Microplastics everywhere and not a fish to eat?! You may have increasingly been hearing, reading, or seeing more and more information about microplastics. Some common articles are listing microplastics in the food we eat, the water we drink, and even in the air we breathe. In recent years the phrase ‘microplastics’ and the ‘plastic free movement’ have entered the popular consciousness. But what are microplastics? What are researchers actually finding in our oceans and seafood? How do we begin to understand this relatively new field of study and how has the language and understanding shifted with that greater understanding? Hear from a marine

debris researcher and science communicator about the growing field of marine microplastics and how it's transforming our language and relationship with the oceans.

Bio: Laura La Beur (she/they) is an innovative marine scientist and marine debris communicator with a special interest in deep-sea habitats and novel monitoring technologies. She is passionate about research dedicated to understanding anthropogenic changes to ocean systems, especially in terms of marine debris. Laura has a masters in marine systems and policy from the University of Edinburgh and has been engaging in marine debris topics for over 5 years. While originally from Florida, USA, they have engaged in marine debris discussion and policy all over the world. Laura specializes in anthropogenic micro-debris which you may have heard called microplastics.

4-4.20pm BST: Break

Chat with other attendees or take a quick break from the conference.

4.20-5.20pm BST: Midlands Keynote - 45-min talk plus questions

Speaker: Will Tattersdill, University of Birmingham: *"Towards (or away from) a Counterfactual Criticism"*

Chair: Jayde Martin, University of Birmingham

Abstract: In this talk, I ask what science fiction (SF) can do for our reading of the Victorian canon. By applying the lessons of Alternate History SF to the serialized nineteenth-century novel, I suggest a way of reading literary texts not exactly new, but perhaps underdiscussed: the optative or counterfactual mode. Is there anything to be gained by imagining non-existent versions of great (or, indeed, of trivial) literature? In this talk, I suggest a greater acknowledgement of the role played by the imagination in critical practice.

Bio: Will Tattersdill is a literary critic who studies and teaches the relationships between science and popular culture. He has written about fin-de-siècle science fiction, the animals of Star Trek, and the history of natural history museums. He is currently writing a book about the social history of dinosaurs for Bloomsbury and editing an edition of H. G. Wells's short stories for Oxford University Press.

5.20-5.30pm BST: Break

Chat with other attendees or take a quick break from the conference.

5.30-7pm BST: Roundtable Discussion: 'Archives and Popular Culture: Researching and Working in Archives'

45-min conversation plus questions

Participants: Jennifer Voss, Kat Pearson, Dr. Rebecca Bowd, Catherine Meades

Chair: Lucy Hargrave, University of Birmingham

Jennifer Voss's bio: Jennifer Voss is a PhD candidate in Drama Studies and Film History at De Montfort University, and is funded by the AHRC in partnership with Midlands 3 Cities. Jennifer's doctoral research offers an interdisciplinary approach to analysing women's performances of emotion during the transition from silent to sound in Britain and America. Drawing on a combination of performance theory and archival research, Jennifer's work is building upon a traditional film studies approach to women's film history, in order to highlight actresses' skill and labour in the film industry. In addition to her academic studies, Jennifer is currently an Archives Assistant at De Montfort University's Special Collections, and has previously worked in the Hammer Script Archive, Peter Whitehead Archive, and the Indian Cinema Archive organising, cataloguing, and digitising collections.

Kat Pearson's bio: Kat Pearson is a PhD student in the Department of Film & Television at the University of Warwick, and a member of the Centre for Television Histories. Her research evaluates the role of television in terms of placemaking and reputational change for the three UK Cities of Culture (Derry/Londonderry, Hull, and Coventry), and considers the role of the television archive in this. Kat's PhD is a Collaborative Doctoral Award, co-supervised by colleagues from the Media Archive for Central England and Illuminations production company, and her wider work uses television archives for community outreach. Examples of collaborations with MACE have included using their collections to run screenings online and in Coventry and co-curating a reel about the city's architecture for a new exhibition, Metropolis (Coventry 2021-22). Kat was also research assistant on Coventry Cathedral: Building for New Britain which was made by Illuminations and broadcast on BBC4 in June 2021.

Catherine Meades' bio: My name is Catherine Anne Meades and Cameo Family History is the result of my love of telling the stories of ordinary people from the past.

I have a degree in Chemistry (University of Nottingham, 1980) and a career of over 35 years in the chemical information and chemical regulations sectors. I have been involved with online data searching since its earliest, pre-internet, days and I have massive experience in research across a range of subjects which I am now bringing to the field of genealogy.

Following attending a five-week family history course at my local library in 2008, I discovered a passion for the subject and the process of finding out about people in the past which grows as I learn more about the subject and which led me to found Cameo Family History.

I also have experience in presenting and training and, as my friends and family will testify, I love nothing more than talking about family history research and the discoveries I have made.

Believing that proper training is the basis of professionalism, I have completed the Correspondence Course in Genealogy of the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (IHGS) and have achieved the Higher Certificate and Diploma in Genealogy from the IHGS.

I am an Associate of AGRA (Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives) and a Member of the Register of Qualified Genealogists.

Rebecca Bowd's bio: I am the University Archivist at Heritage Quay, the archive service of the University of Huddersfield.

I graduated with a PG Diploma in Archives and Records Management from the University of Dundee in June 2019, and then worked as a Project Archivist for the Archives Revealed funded project 'On the Drawing Board' at Explore York (Jul – Nov 2019) prior to taking up a temporary role as the Archivist at the West Yorkshire History Centre in Wakefield in November 2019, a position I held until February 2021. At Wakefield I was responsible for line-managing a team of 7 archive assistants, as well as the archive collections (managing new accessions, undertaking cataloguing work) and had responsibility for managing the West Yorkshire History Centre, the West Yorkshire Archive Service's only stand-alone building housing the Wakefield collections.

My background is predominantly in University Archives and research. While studying for my PG Diploma I worked for Special Collections at the University of Leeds in a variety of roles, as a Collections Assistant, as an Archive Retention and Compliance Officer, and as an Assistant Archivist. I was inspired to become an Archivist after spending endless hours researching in archives during my PhD research into the history of medicine, science, industry, libraries and reading in Georgian Leeds (graduated 2015).

7-7.15pm: Closing Remarks

CONFERENCE ORGANISERS

Rhys James Jenkins – Co-Director

I'm the University of Birmingham's foremost Lovecraftian Scholar, active in fields that bridge Classical Reception and the Gothic tradition. My current project examines the existential horror of H.P. Lovecraft and the Classical references found within his xenophobic expressions and alt-right ideology.

Jayde Martin – Co-Director

My research focuses on the evolution of the 'next human' as represented in science-fiction literature. I focus on three key authors of science-fiction trilogies between 1985-2020: Octavia Butler, Nancy Kress, and Margaret Atwood. The project analyses how the representation of genetic change complicates or changes species identity.

Cassie Brummitt – Events Manager

I'm an early-career researcher in film and media studies. I teach at De Montfort University and Sheffield Hallam University, and my research interests include transmedia franchising, contemporary adaptation, and media industry studies. I'm writing a book on the development of the Harry Potter franchise post-2011, contracted with Bloomsbury Academic. I also work at an independent cinema.

Katherine Parsons – Social Media Manager

My research considers conceptions of memory, with a particular focus on mediation by language, audio/visual media, and digital technologies. My current project sets out an ecological model of memory as a system of interacting media elements, drawing on contemporary fiction as well as work across the social sciences and psychology. I also review publications on 'Fiction: 1945-2000' for the Year's Work in English Studies.

Lucy Hargrave – HR & Website Manager

Despite the proliferation of queer romances in the twenty-first century and growing interest in queer theory and culture, there has been no full-length exploration of how this traditionally heterosexual genre has been queered. My thesis seeks to address this oversight by exploring how queer romance novels portray, produce and engage with queerness both within the texts and as a publishing ecosystem.