

CREL

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A black and white photograph of a large pile of tangled, braided rope, likely used in maritime or industrial contexts. The rope is the central visual element of the poster.

NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVES

***16th and 17th
June
2022***

Director of CREL

Professor Maria Arche

Conference Organising Committee

Justine Baillie, Anna Costantino, Emily Critchley, Katarina Stenke (University of Greenwich)
Madelyn Walsh (University of Liverpool)

Programme

Thursday 16th June, University of Greenwich, King William Building, Room 002

- 9:00-09:45 Registration
9:45-10:00 Welcome (Justine Baillie and Professor Mark O’Thomas, Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Greenwich)
- 10:00-11:00 **Opening Keynote by Lucienne Loh** (University of Liverpool)
Representing a Gendered Economy of Transatlantic Slavery in Black British Writing
- 11:00-11:15 Coffee break
- 11:15-11:45 **Marta Frątczak-Dąbrowska** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)
The Em-bodi-ment of Wealth: Slave Bodies and Their Material Value As Seen Through the Example of Neo-slave Narratives
- 11:45-12:15 **Feyisitan Ijimakinwa** (University of Ibadan)
Unpacking the Politics of (Non)Restitution of Benin Bronze Artefacts as Another Neo-slave Narrative
- 12:15-12:45 **Maiko Mine** (Chuogakuin University)
Literacy and Neo-slave Narratives
- 12:45-13:15 **Nikky Suárez** (University of Central Florida)
Re-imagining Neo-Slave Narratives’ “Autobiographical ‘I’” in Douglass and Jacobs
- 13:15-14:45 Lunch
- 14:45-15:15 **Laura Blunsden** (University of Liverpool)
The Exhibition and Inhibition of Mary Prince in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionist Discourse
- 15:15-15:45 **Angela Mann Leeds** (University of Central Florida)
Genealogy-Informed Texts as Neo-Slave Narratives
- 15:45-16:15 **Jee H. An** (Seoul National University)
The How and Why of Remembering the Past
- 16:15-16:30 Break
- 16:30-17:30 **Closing Keynote by Leila Kamali** (Independent Scholar)
John Edgar Wideman and the Neo-Slave Narrative
- 18:15 Conference BBQ dinner at Queen Anne Court, University of Greenwich

Friday 17th June, University of Greenwich, King William Building, Room 002

- 9:30-10:30 **Opening Keynote** by **Alan Rice** (University of Central Lancashire)
Neo Slave Narratives beyond in Literature and Beyond from Lubaina Himid to Ellen Gallagher and Jade Montserrat
- 10:30-11:00 **Sienna Brown** (Author) and **Ben Etherington** (Western Sydney University)
From Slaves to Convicts: Telling the Story of Unfree West Indian Labour in Australia
- 11:00-11:15 Break
- 11:15-11:45 **Louise Kane** (University of Central Florida)
“Frey Bartolomo Fetched me from the Congo”’: Neo-Slave Narratives in Caribbean Poetry
- 11:45-12:15 **Lucia Llana Puertas** (University of Westminster)
Transatlantic Slavery and the Question of the Human: Archives and Neo-Archives in the Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean
- 12:15-12:45 **Liani Lochner** (Université Laval)
“We’ve had enough of being trapped in this derelict pondok of history”’: Zoë Wicomb’s Still Life and the Neo-slave Narrative
- 12:45-13:15 **Emily Miller** (The College of New Jersey)
The impossibility of Female Enlightenment in Charles Johnson’s Oxherding Tale
- 13:15-14:00 Lunch
- 14:00-14:30 **Luana de Souza Suttter** (University of Erfurt)
Testimony, Materiality, and the Slave Narrative in Fred D’Aguiar’s Feeding the Ghosts (1997)
- 14:30-15:00 **Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka** (University of Debrecen)
Challenging the Lenticular Logic of Representation in Sherley Anne Williams’s Dessa Rose
- 15:00-15:30 **Josiane Ranguin** (University of Paris XIII-Sorbonne))
Navigating Antebellum Maryland as a Black Feminist in Kindred by Octavia Estelle Butler
- 15:30-16:00 **Mohammad Shahidul Islam Chowdhury** (East Delta University)
Phillis Wheatley and the Enigma of Manumission
- 16:00-16:15 Break
- 16:15-17:15 **Alan Rice in Conversation with Novelist, Yvonne Battle Felton**
- 17:15 Closing Remarks

Abstracts

Thursday 16th June

10:00-11:00 **Opening Keynote by Lucienne Loh** (University of Liverpool)
Representing a Gendered Economy of Transatlantic Slavery in Black British Writing l.loh@liverpool.ac.uk

11:15-11:45 **Marta Frątczak-Dąbrowska** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)
The Em-bodi-ment of Wealth: Slave Bodies and Their Material Value As Seen Through the Example of Neo-slave Narrative

Neo-slave narratives assume the form of historical slave-narratives, but they write back to the past as much as they do to the present day. They contextualise the history of slavery, highlight its systemic nature, and thus reveal the sins of capitalist economy; in short, they encourage readers to critically reflect on the reality of today's global world.

As Achille Mbembe states in his *Necropolitics*, the history of slavery is the history of suffering, which was so constructed as to solicit no response or empathy from the ruling majority. It was based on a symbolic and cognitive dehumanization of the Other, namely one's ability to see some people as non-human and treat their bodies as goods. In other words, slave economy required the existence of a non-human body, which served as an allegory of wealth and which was deprived of any human rights.

The present paper, hence, will look at selected neo-slave narratives by Afro-Caribbean authors such as David Dabydeen, Andrea Levy or Caryl Phillips, and investigate how they depict the link between the enslaved body and wealth within a dominant capitalist narrative. It will not only examine how the Europeans perceive the enslaved, but also what the African slaves themselves make of the material value ascribed to them; after all, it could be used as both: a means of one's deprivation and empowerment. The paper, hence, will scrutinize mental and economic formations that once equalled human bodies to material goods as well as try to show how such ideas reverberate in the corporate and state policies of today.

Biography: Marta Frątczak-Dąbrowska is an assistant professor at the Department of English Literature and Literary Linguistics, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. She gained her PhD in postcolonial studies with a thesis on the Anglo Guyanese novel (2015). Her articles have been published in *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Nordic Journal of English Studies* and her latest chapter on neo-slave narratives is part of *The Economics of Empire: Genealogies of Capital and the Colonial Encounter* (Routledge 2021). She is currently working on a grant project devoted to (post)colonial wealth funded by The National Science Centre in Cracow. mfratczak@amu.edu.pl ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4739-559>

11:45-12:15 **Feyisitan Ijimakinwa** (University of Ibadan)
Unpacking the Politics of (Non)Restitution of Benin Bronze Artefacts as Another Neo-slave Narrative

Vestiges of slavery are symbolised in different aspects of human lives, especially among Africans who often view Christianity, colonialism, democracy and capitalism, among others, through the prisms of slavery, particularly the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The global call for racial balance and equality, headlined by the Black Lives Matter movement, did not only impact the slavery discourse, but also invigorated the campaign for the repatriation of thousands of artefacts removed from their ancestral homes in Africa, but the restitution has

been mired in politics, including state and non-state actors. The continued retention and display of these treasures, in private and public collections, outside Africa are viewed as an enduring vestige of slavery and colonialism. Also, the campaign and advocacy for the return of these artworks have failed to record any significant repatriation, nor engender necessary political will to facilitate it. The Bini of Benin Kingdom, southern Nigeria are widely famed for their production of bronze works. These objects hold spiritual and cultural significance but thousands of them were looted and illegally removed from Benin by slavers, slave merchants and colonialists. The Bini have been in the vanguard of the campaign for the return of illegally removed artefacts to Nigeria. This is an ethnography and an exploratory study among the Bini of Benin kingdom. It involved interviews with the Oba of Benin, the paramount monarch of Benin and 23 other people including custodians of Benin culture and history. The study establishes that the reluctance of Europeans to return Benin bronze works is read as continued projection and perpetuation of slavery, albeit without chains and slave ships. The study concludes that there is a critical need for the West, especially Europe, to ensure that its position and processes concerning the repatriation of African artefacts do not echo legacy slave accounts and experiences

Biography: Feyisitan Ijimakinwa is a PhD student in Diaspora and Transnational Studies in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He is also a Research Fellow of the *Institut Francais de Recherche en Afrique* (IFRA-Nigeria) domiciled in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan with research interests in thematic areas of Migration, Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Diaspora, Urban Studies, Gender Studies, Media Anthropology as well as African Aesthetics Continuum. He has been published in *African Studies*, *Routed* and *The Conversation Africa* where his article won the prize for the most read scientific article for 2021. feyiji@gmail.com

12:15-12:45 **Maiko Mine** (Chuogakuin University [online delegate])
Literacy and Neo-slave Narratives

Historically, as ex-slaves as authors/protagonists acquired literacy despite the anti-literacy laws, writing was a symbol of freedom from slavery, which was highlighted in many slave narratives. This presentation will explore how literacy and illiteracy, which have haunted African-Americans, are portrayed and function in neo-slave narratives. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), for example, illiteracy is the underlying trauma as the ghost provokes the ex-slaves to convey their unspoken memories; the ghost's literate baby sister belongs to the following generation and is seen as a potential memory keeper who can write their stories as history.

When it comes to discussing the relation between literacy/illiteracy and neo-slave narratives, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) by Ernest J. Gaines, a first-person narrated story of an illiterate 110-year-old ex-slave, is a good example. When writing the book, Gaines studied how ex-slaves spoke in the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), another form of slave narratives, in which the FWP collected more than two thousand interviews with ex-slaves under the banner of the New Deal Projects in the 1930s. They were written down verbatim to retain the ex-slaves' words and pronunciations. This study will examine how and why Gaines's protagonist narrated her story almost throughout the work in a spoken form (imitating the FWP slave narratives) and the contentious issues that arise from *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967) by William Styron. The findings clarify Gaines's strategies of confronting illiteracy related problems that go back to slavery and antebellum slave narratives, many of which were dictated.

Biography: Maiko MINE, currently working as a Lecturer at Chuogakuin University, has been studying African-American literature, alongside her work in music. She has published

ten books as an author/a co-author, nine of which are based on the themes drawn from African American literature. She is the author of *A Literary History of Slave Testimonies: The Tradition of Orality and Literacy in African-American Literature*. Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2018 (in Japanese), which summarizes the findings of her analysis of more than 2,000 interviews of ex-slaves collected by the Federal Writers' Project. The book received the Japan Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations Award in 2018. She became a member of the Japan Writers' Association in 2019. minemai@fla.cgu.ac.jp

12:45-13:15 **Nikky Suárez** (University of Central Florida)
Re-imagining Neo-Slave Narratives' "Autobiographical 'I'" in Douglass and Jacobs

The slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs are incredibly powerful and create a new interpretation within the genre of autobiography. The authorial voice captures a distinctive and yet collective experience in these slave narratives. The "autobiographical 'I'" traverses a journey of new constructions in identity through geopolitical spaces and cultural experiences. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define identity as the 'I' representing the collective experience at "powerful moments of social change" (46). In this sense, a narrative can speak for the voiceless in telling the stories of these marginalized people while keeping their anonymity and protecting their identity.

The "autobiographical 'I'" will remain throughout these narratives and will embed itself in the geopolitical spaces and cultural experiences. Geopolitical spaces are defined by Smith and Watson as that concept signifying the citizenship or the multiplicity of cultures "across nations with histories of conflict, [...] negotiation of borders" (46). Douglass and Jacobs, in a sense, dialogue together in agreement that keeping the anonymity is crucial for those who are working towards their freedom and in protecting their stories. To achieve freedom, both had to go through the greatest growth, take the highest risk, and lose their initial identities. The autobiographers are telling their stories with the autobiographical truth denoting the crucial necessity of the experiences of others. In what they saw and the relationships that were built along the way, it was not possible for them to find their freedom and in turn construct their own identities.

Works Cited

Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia. "Autobiographical Subjects". *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed., University of Minnesota Press, 2010. pp. 46.

Biography: Nikky Suárez is a Master's student in the English: Literary, Cultural, and Textual Studies program at the University of Central Florida. She is a Colombian-American woman who was raised in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Before the global pandemic, she worked abroad in Abu Dhabi as an English professor to bilingual Arab students. Her research focus lies in bridging cultures of underrepresented languages and civilizations through library archival research and historical analysis, uniting critical theory with contemporary texts. She is currently pursuing her Master's Thesis in a postcolonial and transnational focus in presenting decoloniality and the identity of Latin-American and Middle-Eastern cultures with Dr. Louise Kane Bishop as her chair. Her current project includes an independent directed study in the United Kingdom uncovering archival unpublished documents of women's writings through prints, letters and journals at the British Library and the Bodleian Library. The global impact that I plan to make incorporates awareness on the beauty that each language and cultural customs infuse.

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14:45-15:15 **Laura Blunsden** (University of Liverpool)
The Exhibition and Inhibition of Mary Prince in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionist Discourse

It is unlikely that Mary Prince knew, when she arrived at Aldermanbury Anti-Slavery Society and related her story to its secretary, what a powerful impact her story would have on the abolitionist cause, as the first autobiography by a black woman to be published in England. The importance of her original slave narrative, *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831), within nineteenth-century abolitionist discourse and the Black Atlantic literary canon is indisputable, but scholars have raised questions about the authenticity of Prince's narrative voice and the extent to which her account really was '*Related by Herself*'. The editorial interventions of Thomas Pringle and Susanna Strickland (née Moodie) were necessary to bring Prince's experience of enslavement to press and to win the sympathy of the nineteenth-century British public at this crucial stage in the anti-slavery movement. But Pringle's preface and supplement, which bookend the narrative, declare that Prince's 'repetitions and prolixities' have been 'pruned' into a publishable state. Furthermore, evidence that Prince gave in court two years later reveals that she attributes a number of omissions from the narrative to Strickland. The extent to which Prince's voice is *inhibited* by this editorial presence, even whilst her trauma is *exhibited* for a public readership, is unclear. I argue that the editorial inhibition and exhibition of Prince are not dichotomous within the abolitionist agenda, and that acknowledging the inherently composite and multi-authored nature of *The History* is essential to understanding of the 'truth' of her experience.

Biography: Laura Blunsden is a second-year PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool, researching the significance of mentoring relationships, both as represented in, and between authors of, eighteenth-century literature. In September 2020 she completed her MRes on Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude* volume and continues to work closely with the Shelley200 committee ahead of their July conference celebrating the bicentennial of his death. Laura is an active member of British Association of Romanticism and the British Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies, and convenor of the reading group for Liverpool's Eighteenth-Century Worlds interdisciplinary research centre.
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15:15-15:45 **Angela Mann Leeds** (University of Central Florida)
Genealogy-Informed Texts as Neo-Slave Narratives

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that neo-slave narratives such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) force readers to return to a reimagined site of slavery, acknowledge the deep and lasting effects of slavery on society, and facilitate moves towards racial reconciliation. The brutality of enslavement, often veiled in original slave narratives, returns in what this paper calls "genealogy-informed neo-slave narratives," imaginative texts that provide semi-autobiographical re-memories of enslavement, open a space for the reconstruction of cultural memory, and promote continued revisions of racial identity.

Slave owners were aware of the power of memory and purposely disrupted generational lines of the enslaved in such a way that many children did not know their parents and mothers did not recognize their own children (Price 2017). With the advent of direct-to-consumer DNA testing, the proliferation of ancestry-tracking websites, and programs such as Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Finding Your Roots*, Black Americans have unprecedented access to family histories; genealogy-informed, semi-autobiographical neo-slave narratives harness the power of these historical records to reconstruct and return what enslavement stole from ancestors—these unique texts release their legacies from the bonds of obscurity, returning what bell hooks calls "the specific history and experience of African-Americans and the unique sensibilities and culture that arise from that experience."

I argue that genealogy-informed, semi-autobiographical texts such as Tiya Miles' *All That She Carried*, Imani Perry's *South to America*, and Michael Twitty's *The Cooking Gene* reimagine the neo-slave narrative in a unique way by rewriting the experiences of ancestors, much like Spiegelman's *Maus* does for Holocaust memory; these texts create re-memories of enslavement, reconstruct cultural memory, and facilitate the ongoing revision of racial identities; they indeed, in the words of Toni Morrison, "pass on the story."

Biography: Angela Mann Leeds is a Master's student in English: Literary, Cultural, and Textual Studies at the University of Central Florida. Her research interests include Victorian literature and culture, food history and cultural foodways, American neo-slave narratives, and the unpublished writings of 19th-century Irish-American women.
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15:45-16:15 **Jee H. An** (Seoul National University)

The How and Why of Remembering the Past

In the 2017 special edition of *American Literary History*, Stephanie Li's introductory article "What is Twenty-First Century African American Literature?" argues that African American literature must be political, and specifically draws a connection between BLM and the racial politics of contemporary African American literature. Neo-slave narratives which began pouring out in the late 20th century, perhaps represent the most distinctive genre within African American literature that self-consciously invokes the past legacy of slavery. In this regard, I would argue that the interpretative and critical work surrounding this genre lies at the heart of the racial politics of African American literature in the 21st-century. Therefore, the how and the why of the way in which the past is remembered in this genre becomes important political work. My paper first tests out the extreme spectrums of the ongoing theoretical debate surrounding the significance of the legacy of slavery in contemporary African American literature. I start out with an analysis of the theoretical stance that avows "hauntology" such as works by Jesse Goldberg who argues that the past always haunts the present. Scholars who abide by this belief argues that historical continuity must be held onto for eradicating the injustices of the past. On the other hand, scholars on the other extreme, such as scholars like Stephen Best, argue that the unknowable past cannot be conveniently remembered to invoke racial solidarity, but rather that, "radical alterity" of history offers a more ethical knowledge of the present. After drawing out my theoretical position in between these two extreme ends, I will attempt a brief analysis of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), one of the first neo-slave narratives, and the ethics of remembering the legacy of slavery through vexed sexual politics.

Biography: Jee H. An is Professor of English Language and Literature at Seoul National University (SNU) in South Korea. She grew up in Seoul, Korea, and received her BA and MA in English Literature at SNU and her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 2003. Her research has been supported by the Harvard-Yenching Institute, Fulbright Research Fund and the James Weldon Johnson Institute of Race and Difference at Emory University. Her research interests center on African American literature and critical theory, feminist and postcolonial theory, and cultural studies. jan@snu.ac.kr

16:30-17:30 **Closing Keynote** by **Leila Kamali** (Independent Scholar)

John Edgar Wideman and the Neo-Slave Narrative

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Friday 17th June

9:30-10:30 **Opening Keynote** by **Alan Rice** (University of Central Lancashire)
Neo Slave Narratives beyond in Literature and Beyond from Lubaina Himid to Ellen Gallagher and Jade Montserrat
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10:30-11:00 **Sienna Brown** (Author [online delegate]) and **Ben Etherington** (Western Sydney University [online delegate])
From Slaves to Convicts: Telling the Story of Unfree West Indian Labour in Australia

While working as a guide at Hyde Park Barracks, a site in central Sydney built for newly arrived convicts, the writer Sienna Brown stumbled on the fact that a surprising number of West Indians had been interned in the barracks in the first half of the nineteenth century. This sent her on a decade-long journey to recover their stories. She came to focus on a cohort who arrived on the convict ship the *Moffatt* in 1836. Most had formerly been enslaved, including William Buchanan, a Jamaican man transported for participating in the Christmas Day uprising in Jamaica in 1831-32. Her research led her to write a novel about Buchanan's life, *Master of My Fate* (Penguin Random House, 2019) and to make a documentary podcast about the West Indians aboard the *Moffatt*, *Caribbean Convicts in Australia* (ABC Radio National, 2021). In this presentation, Brown and her co-producer Ben Etherington, will talk about the making of the documentary, which synthesised archival materials and excerpts from *Master of my Fate*. They will discuss how they approached integrating fact with fiction, as well as contrasting the story of unfree West Indian labour in Australia with other recent examples of neo-slave narratives.

Biographies: **Sienna Brown** is a Sydney-based novelist born in Kingston, Jamaica who has worked as professional dancer and documentary director and editor. Her debut novel *Master of My Fate*, which was published by Penguin Random House in 2019, won the MUD Literary Prize at Adelaide Writers Week for the best debut novel by an Australian writer and was shortlisted for the ARA Historical Novel Prize. She is currently writing her second novel set against the backdrop of the 1938 workers riots in Jamaica, which were a direct result of the draconian laws set in place by the British after the abolition of slavery.

Ben Etherington is a Senior Lecturer and member of the Writing and Society Research Centre. He has previously produced features for ABC Radio National on dancehall in Kingston (with Matthew Baker) and the Gangalidda activist Clarence Walden (with Alexis Wright). Recent publications include *Literary Primitivism* (Stanford UP, 2018) and a chapter on poetry and colonial print culture in *Caribbean Literature in Transition* (Cambridge UP, 2021). He is a past president of the Australian Association for Caribbean Studies, and is currently writing a book on the poetics of Anglophone Caribbean creole verse in the period between the abolition of slavery and decolonisation. b.etherington@westernsydney.edu.au; psfilms@tpg.com.au

11:15-11:45 **Louise Kane** (University of Central Florida)
"Frey Bartolomo Fetched me from the Congo": Neo-Slave Narratives in Caribbean Poetry

This paper explores how Caribbean strivings for independence in the twentieth-century saw writers including Claude McKay, Eric Roach, and Una Marson refer increasingly in their poetry to tropes and images grounded in the diction of the slave narrative. From McKay's 1921 publication of "Enslaved" in *The Liberator* to Roach's assertion in "Fugue for Federation" (1958) that "Frey Bartolomo Fetched me from the Congo," plenty of Caribbean

writers drew upon the narratives of slavery to express their feelings about, and draw parallels with, the repressive nature of colonial power in the Caribbean and Africa, or racism in countries like America and Britain.

Focusing on work by writers like Marson and McKay, who were born in Jamaica and migrated to Britain and America respectively, along with Eric Roach, Derek Walcott, and Merle Collins, the paper argues that neo-slave narratives offer implicit, and sometimes explicit, methods of critiquing not only slavery itself, but also of highlighting its context within a wider global framework of unjust social, political, and legal systems.

The paper aims to show how, for these writers, neo-slave narratives are transformative tools through which they called for progression and forged social and cultural revolution (the Harlem Renaissance, the Grenada Revolution), and concludes by considering how neo-slave narratives continue to be used in this way in the wake of movements such as BLM.

Biography: Dr. Louise Kane, Assistant Professor of Global Modernisms, University of Central Florida louise.kane@ucf.edu

11:45-12:15 **Lucia Llana Puertas** (University of Westminster)
Transatlantic Slavery and the Question of the Human: Archives and Neo-Archives in the Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean

The archives of Transatlantic slavery erase the humanity of the enslaved African and silence their voices. This paper will elucidate what erasures take place and what mechanisms are employed to enable this. However, this paper will also question the silence of the archive and ask how it can be broken. To do this, the neo-archive, as conceptualised by Erica L. Johnson, will be interrogated through the study of two neo-slave narratives from the Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean, *L'esclave vieil homme et le molosse* by Patrick Chamoiseau and *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy.

Biography: Lucia Llano Puertas teaches French at the University of Westminster and is about to submit her PhD thesis looking at connectivity, memory, trauma and the question of the human in Transatlantic slavery and the Shoah. s.llanopuertas1@westminster.ac.uk

12:15-12:45 **Liani Lochner** (Université Laval)
"We've had enough of being trapped in this derelict pondok of history": Zoë Wicomb's Still Life and the Neo-slave Narrative

In Zoë Wicomb's *Still Life*, an unnamed author attempts a biography of the so-called Father of South African Poetry in English, the Scottish abolitionist Thomas Pringle. Embedded within this frame-story are the narratives of two figures whose lives entered the historical record mediated through his literary endeavours: Hinza Marossi, the young Tswana boy adopted by Pringle who is also the subject of his poem, "Bechuana Boy," and Mary Prince, whose slave narrative, *The History of Mary Prince*, he edited. Bringing together in the unidentified amanuensis's "house of fiction" (10) a number of voices "born out of writing" (53), who strain against their historical or literary "eternal life" (8) and the interventions of "so-called clever readers" (55), *Still Life* sharply brings into focus a long-standing concern in Wicomb's literary and critical oeuvre: the remainders produced by dominant notions of narrative authority and the discursive and institutional networks in which narratives circulate. Examining Wicomb's ironic subversions of and inter-generic negotiations with the conventions of the slave narrative and mediated autobiography, this paper argues that *Still*

Life rejects historical fiction's demands for verisimilitude in order to interrogate the literary and discursive personas fixed by colonial history and the literary canon.

Biography: Liani Lochner is Associate Professor of Anglophone Postcolonial Literature at Université Laval, Canada. Educated in South Africa and England, her research interests are in critical theory and the political and ethical possibilities of world literatures, and she has published related essays and book chapters on a range of authors including J.M. Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Zoë Wicomb. liani.lochner@lit.ulaval.ca

12:45-13:15 **Emily Miller** (The College of New Jersey)
The impossibility of Female Enlightenment in Charles Johnson's Oxherding Tale

In *Oxherding Tale*, Charles Johnson creates a fictional world in which Buddhist enlightenment is a physical achievement, slavery is a philosophical construct instead of a violent reality, and the individual's quest for enlightenment is a flex of the ego. In the attempt to write a fictional story about a slave's journey to freedom, Johnson encounters problems of gender and subjugation along the way. Andrew, the protagonist, finds himself encountering people in his life that help him on his journey to Buddhist enlightenment, whether by aiding him, or acting as an obstacle. The women in Andrew's life tend to fall to the side of obstacle, as none are afforded freedom like Andrew is. Andrew uses women to help him, but any form of freedom for them cannot be considered because the protagonist is a man focused on his personal enlightenment experience. Andrew's freedom becomes dependent on the people around him who are not free, meaning the women must be the casualties in this story. I would argue that *Oxherding Tale's* strict gender binary is a side effect of the creation of a man's journey to freedom, and that the characters adhering to this binary are symptoms of a larger message about gender and freedom, namely, the implication of the inability of women to achieve the same freedom as men. Johnson constructs male freedom through the representations of women as the "not free", as the women help to raise Andrew, but not themselves.

Biography: Emily Miller received her BA and MA in English Literature from The College of New Jersey, as well as a graduate certificate in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her areas of study include Holocaust and Genocide studies, life writing, and queer theory in 20th century American literature. emilyrmillerwriting.com

14:00-14:30 **Luana de Souza Suttter** (University of Erfurt)
Testimony, Materiality, and the Slave Narrative in Fred D'Aguiar's Feeding the Ghosts (1997)

This paper analyses Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) and its fictitious account of the historical massacre that took place inside the slaver *Zong* in 1781 as well as the following dispute between the ship's insurers and investors in the court of London. D'Aguiar's neo-slave narrative depicts the traumatic experience of the enslaved protagonist, Mintah, aboard of the *Zong*, which she notes down in a hidden journal. Mintah's written testimony becomes a decisive evidence in court against the justification of the ship captain and part of his crew for the necessity of throwing 131 living Africans into the sea. This paper will focus on the treatment given to Mintah's testimony on trial, its antagonistic stance to the ship captain's ledger, as well as their contrasting language and representation of the slaves on board of the *Zong*. Attending to those aspects, I hope to stake out the novel's poetic and linguistic investments in promoting a critical engagement with the politics of commodification of the late eighteenth century and a resignification of central tropes of the historical genre of the slave narrative. To support my reading, I will draw on Olaudah

Equiano's autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (1789) as well as the critical and theoretical work by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Orlando Patterson.

Biography: Luana de Souza Sutter has a B.A. degree in Literature and Language from the Universidade Federal Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and a M.A. degree in Literary Studies from the University of Erfurt, Germany. Currently, she is a lecturer and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Erfurt with the dissertation project "Agency and Artistic Expression in Contemporary Novels of Slavery of the Black Atlantic Diaspora".

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14:30-15:00 **Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka** (University of Debrecen [online delegate])
Challenging the Lenticular Logic of Representation in Sherley Anne Williams's
Dessa Rose

Using Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* (1986) as case study, the presentation expands on Tara McPherson's notion of the lenticular logic of representation. McPherson argues that portrayals of the American South have tended to privilege the perspective of the white elite at the expense of the stories of Black Americans. This partitioning logic of representation and understanding, much like a 3D lenticular postcard that can only display one of its two images at a time but never both simultaneously, renders it impossible to see and thus think together both versions of history. Williams's neo-slave narrative shows the perspectives of three focalizers—the eponymous enslaved woman who becomes a fugitive, a white man, and a white woman—whose competing narratives seemingly carry equal weight. The characters' accounts remain partitioned until the last section, the epilogue, in which an older Dessa recounts her story to a group of loving listeners. This section not only serves to privilege Dessa's point of view, version of events, and voice, but it also demonstrates her ability to truly transcend the lenticular logic that earlier characterizes both her cognitive schema and the structure of the novel. The fact that the novel eventually foregrounds Dessa's version of events challenges historiography and reveals a political impetus that, instead of suggesting that each focalizer's version is of equal value, privileges the narrative of a previously silenced, fragmented character. I trace the ubiquitous motif of lenticularity in the novel and argue that the structure, especially the narration's initial reliance on the fragmenting white gaze and the subsequent disruption of the representational logic described by McPherson, ultimately allows Dessa to give a comprehensive account of her Southern environment and enables her to emerge as the only reliable narrator, thus amplifying—what is more, enabling—the eventual catharsis.

Keywords: neo-slave narrative, logic of lenticularity, representations of the South, narratology

Biography: Dr. Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka is an instructor at the North American Department of the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen. She earned her MA degree in American Studies in 2012 at the University of Debrecen, and her MA in teacher training in 2017. She received her doctorate from the University of Debrecen (2021); the title of her dissertation is *Mothers in the Wake of Slavery: The Im/possibility of Motherhood in Post-1980 African American Women's Prose*. Her research interests include the portrayals of maternal bodies and subjectivities in contemporary American literature and visual culture, Black feminism, girlhood studies, Afropessimism lenartmuszkasz@arts.unideb.hu

15:00-15:30 **Josiane Ranguin** (University of Paris XIII-Sorbonne))
Navigating Antebellum Maryland as a Black Feminist in Kindred by Octavia
Estelle Butler

The novel *Kindred* (1979) was written as a way to atone for the impatience Octavia Estelle Butler felt with the submissiveness of her mother's generation. In the 1960s she had felt shame when observing her mother, a housemaid, enter houses through the back door and live the life of a non-person. Octavia Butler later decided to investigate the root cause of the lingering spite she could still see fixed in interracial interactions and decided to "take a person from today and send that person back to slavery." (1991) The resulting neo-slave narrative becomes a tribute to the strong black women in her family but also to the countless and unknown survivors who helped those around them to live on. As time travel enables Dana, the main protagonist, to go back in time intermittently and observe slavery from up close, the neo-slave narrative becomes a meticulous study of the relentless psychological warfare and the ultra-violence of the totalitarian slaveholding society. Yet, what Octavia E. Butler realised is that such a narrative would never approach the reality of the horror: "I was going to have to do a somewhat cleaned-up version of slavery, or no one would be willing to read it. I think that's what most fiction writers do. They almost have to." (1991) Octavia Butler nevertheless documents how marooned in an antebellum enclave, Dana will progressively unlearn freedom, understand the necessity of compromise, and accept submission. Fighting for her own life, she will come to understand how minds warped by centuries of absolute power over black lives become inhuman and irrevocably alien.

Biography: Dr Josiane Ranguin's first monograph *Mediating the Caribbean: Caryl Phillips and Horace Ové* was published by Peter Lang in 2020. Chapters on Caryl Phillips's works, the Windrush generation, and James Baldwin have appeared in publications by Routledge and Palgrave. As a part-time lecturer she taught Octavia Estelle Butler's *Parable of the Sower* at Sorbonne Université, France, in 2021. She is currently working on book projects on film and literature. See her website at <https://josianeranguin.academia.edu>.
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15:30-16:00 **Mohammad Shahidul Islam Chowdhury** (East Delta University)
Phillis Wheatley and the Enigma of Manumission

This paper focuses on the concept of manumission as sketched in the poems of Phillis Wheatley (1753 – 1784). The history of America owes much to the history of the slaves, brought from Africa. Before and after its independence from Britain, the United States of America witnessed slavery for the sake of its social and economic system. Not all the black people remained slaves; many of them were made free and granted manumission, which came after much scrutiny. These free Black people faced hardship for their survival in a hostile world. This freedom was a challenge for them. These manumitted people experienced the enigma of their existence because they were transplanted through chain, and being free, they found themselves within the loosened circle of that chain. Wheatley is an example of this inner crisis. Being uprooted, she suffers separation but finds herself united with a caring family that educates her to such an extent that she becomes a pioneer in Black Women's literature. Yet, the new place of the White people cannot accept her as a poet; she has to undergo judgment for this. The first renowned Black female poet to be published in the 1770s, Wheatley writes about her past and present, compares them, and visions the future in a world that is authentically free. She expresses her concern and desire about what freedom really means in a person's life. This paper aims to find how Wheatley finds herself in a paradoxical situation about her social position and how she becomes a voice for the Black people to be free in a country founded on the very concept of freedom yet maintaining the legacy of slavery.

Biography: Mohammad Shahidul Islam Chowdhury is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, East Delta University, Chattogram, Bangladesh. An English graduate

from the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh, he did his second MA in English Studies from the University of Sussex, UK. He published a number of articles in a few national peer-reviewed university journals, and presented papers at a number of local and international conferences including the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. His research interest lies in modernist studies, short stories, gender studies, and women's writings. He occasionally writes poems.

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16:15-17:15 **Alan Rice in Conversation with Novelist, Yvonne Battle Felton**
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17:15 Closing Remarks