



THE IRISH ASSOCIATION FOR  
AMERICAN STUDIES



# ANNUAL CONFERENCE "In/Security"

Hybrid Event  
Virtual and In-Person



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28-29 APRIL 2023



HOSTED BY  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

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Irish Association  
for American  
Studies



UNIVERSITY OF  
LIMERICK  
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Arts, Humanities  
and Social Sciences



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English, Irish,  
and Communication

## WELCOME

The **Irish Association for American Studies (IAAS)** is an all-island scholarly association founded in 1970 by Alan Graham, Denis Donoghue, Peggy O'Brien, and Tony Emmerson to promote American Studies in Ireland. The current Chair is Catherine Gander of Maynooth University. Promoting the interdisciplinary and integrated study of American cultures, the members of the IAAS include faculty and postgraduates interested in history, film, literature, music, art, media, politics, and more. The IAAS is also a constituent member of the European Association for American Studies (EAAS).

Over the decades, the IAAS has supported successive generations of students and scholars in the universities and colleges across the island in their postgraduate and postdoctoral work and as they set out on their academic careers in American studies. The Association has its own journal, the *Irish Journal of American Studies* **IJAS Online**, and supports its members through providing funding for conferences, travel, and research. The **WTM Riches Essay Prize** was established in 2004 to recognise and reward high-quality work being done by junior scholars, and the **IAAS Peggy O'Brien Book Prize** has been awarded biennially since 2013 to the best monograph by an IAAS member from the previous 2 years.

The **IAAS Annual Conference 2023** is on the theme of "In/Security" and is hosted by University of Limerick. The conference will take place in the Kemmy Business School (KBS) in rooms **KBG13** and **KBG14** on the ground floor. Please note that **KBG15** is available to delegates as a **quiet room**. The award ceremony for the **IAAS Peggy O'Brien Book Prize** and the **Conference Dinner** will take place on Friday evening in the Pavilion, on UL's North Campus, across the River Shannon.

IAAS2023 is **organised by** Tim Groenland, David Coughlan, and Clair Sheehan, School of English, Irish, and Communication, **and** Ilhem Bellal, Salma Bouacha, Aicha Daoudi, Meryem Hana Karouche, Roufaida Mina, Fausto Samuel Rodríguez Colodrón **with the support of** Niamh O'Sullivan Walsh and Michelle Mortell, School of English, Irish, and Communication.

The conference is **funded by** International Structured PhD in Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences **and** School of English, Irish, and Communication, UL.

**With thanks to** the IAAS Committee, especially Catherine Gander (Chair), Sarah McCreedy (Secretary), and Nerys Young (Treasurer) **and** Yvonne Cleary, Head of School of English, Irish, and Communication.

Our **poster is designed by** Roufaida Mina.



Irish Association  
for American  
Studies



## PROGRAMME

### FRIDAY 28 APRIL

**08:45-09:15 (Kemmy Business School lobby):** Registration

**09:15-09:30 (KBG13):** Welcome from Catherine Gander, IAAS Chair

### **09:30-11:00: PARALLEL PANELS**

#### **PANEL 1A (KBG13): Narratives, Records, and Programmes of In/Security**

##### **Chair:**

- May this to all a Warning Be: The Execution of Matthew Cushing and Early Boston Print Culture

**Michael Griffin, University of Limerick**

- Planter Class Women and Securing the Family Property

**R. Nicholas Nelson, Texas A&M University–Commerce**

- A “Children’s Crusade for Peace”?: U.S. Soft Diplomacy and the Politics of Childhood Innocence, 1926-1929

**Nicole De Silva, University of California, Santa Barbara**

#### **PANEL 1B (KBG14): Law Enforcement and Bodily Restraint**

##### **Chair:**

- Conspiracy Theory, Race, and Police Brutality in Contemporary American Fiction

**Daniah Khayat, University of Limerick**

- Creating Our Spaces of Sanctuary: Loss, Vulnerability, and Resistance in African American Young Adult Literature

**Ilhem Bellal, University of Limerick**

- Insecure Identities: The Threat to Corporeal Fixity in *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Her* (2013)

**Dylan Phelan, University College Cork**

### **11:00-11:30: COFFEE BREAK**

### **11:30-12:30: ROUNDTABLE (KBG13)**

- **Braiding the Classroom: Teaching Reciprocity**

Margaret Mills Harper, University of Limerick; Clair Sheehan, University of Limerick; Tim Groenland, University of Limerick

### **12:30-13:30: LUNCH BREAK**

### **13:30-15:00: PARALLEL PANELS**

#### **PANEL 2A (KBG13): Crashes, Crises, Capitalism, and Consumption**

##### **Chair:**

- Securities, Bonds, Debts, Futures, Trusts

**Adam Kelly, University College Dublin**

- “These Are the Rooms We’re Not Supposed To Go In. But Let’s Go Anyway!”: Fun and Mischief Amongst the Perpetual Crisis of Precarity in *The Florida Project*

**Ciara Moloney, Mary Immaculate College**

- Cannibal Capitalism, False Meritocracy, and the Star Persona of Armie Hammer

**Máiréad Casey, NUI Galway and Trinity College Dublin**

**PANEL 2B (KBG14): Stories and Archives of Survival and Preservation**

**Chair:**

- Beyond Superfund Sites and Strange Fruit: Mapping, Naming and Reframing Unequal Exposure as “Environmental Lynching” in Memphis, Tennessee  
**Leanna First-Arai, University College Dublin**
- Can He See the Forest for the Trees?: *The Eagle Tree*  
**Brianna Riggio, Trinity College Dublin**
- “Far from their original homeland”: Secure Communities as Indigenous Futurism in Waubgeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018)  
**Beth Aherne, University College Cork**

**15:00-15:30: COFFEE BREAK**

**15:30-17:00: PARALLEL PANELS**

**PANEL 3A (ONLINE and KBG13): Cross-Border Security**

**Chair: Caleb Smith, Tulane University**

- The Security in Othering  
**Grace Miller, Binghamton University**
- Securing Whiteness: The Irish in the Americas  
**Mary Burke, University of Connecticut**
- Welsh Miners with Irish Names Migrate to Canada  
**Barbara Watts, University of Limerick**

**PANEL 3B (KBG14): Figures of Political Poetry**

**Chair: Adam Kelly, UCD**

- Rethinking Internal Security with Jane Hirshfield  
**Mark Silverberg, Cape Breton University**
- “Committed Poetry/*Poesía Comprometida*”: Reading Lola Ridge’s and Julia de Burgos’s Political Poetry as a Threat to American Security  
**Hope Noonan Stoner, University College Cork**
- Allegories of In/security in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*  
**Rosannah Gosser, Maynooth University**

**17:00-17:30: BREAK**

**17:30-19:00 (KBG13): ALAN GRAHAM MEMORIAL LECTURE**

- The Security Fix: Literature, the State, and the Problem of Governance  
**Dr David Watson, Uppsala University**

**Chaired by**

**19:30 (THE PAVILION, UL):**

**IAAS PEGGY O’BRIEN BOOK AWARD CEREMONY & CONFERENCE DINNER**

## SATURDAY 29 APRIL

### 09:15-11:00: PANEL 4A (ONLINE and KBG13)

#### **Complex Relations: Stories of the Queer and Black Everyday**

**Chair: Caleb Smith, Tulane University**

- "My Vulnerability Is My Power": Queerness, Diaspora, and Survival in Ocean Vuong's Writing  
**Sara Soler i Arjona, University of Barcelona**
- Racial (In)Security in Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah's fiction  
**Carla Abella Rodríguez, University of Salamanca**
- Playless Urban Landscapes and Narrative Safe Spaces in Toni Cade Bambara's Work  
**Marika Ceschia, University of Leeds**
- The Cognitive Science of Challenging Literature: Claudia Rankine's *Just Us: An American Conversation*  
**Jaime Harrison, Queen's University Belfast**

### 11:00-11:30: COFFEE BREAK

### 11:30-13:00: PARALLEL PANELS

#### **PANEL 5A (ONLINE and KBG13): The Nature of the Present**

**Chair:**

- The Norms and Forms of Vulnerability and Safety in Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* as an Epitome of Post-War Disintegration  
**Esin Korkut Savul, Middle East Technical University**
- The *Pharmakon* as a "Gift of Death" or the Mexican Medea's Decolonial Preventive Cure in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*  
**Eirini Bouraki, Kapodistrian University of Athens**
- Risking the Present, Risking the Future, Risking Our Souls: An Eco-Critical Approach to Two Flannery O'Connor Stories  
**José Manuel Correoso-Rodenas, Complutense University of Madrid**

#### **PANEL 5B (KBG14): Black and White and Gothic**

**Chair:**

- The Call Is Coming from Inside the House: White Anxiety and Narratives of Racial Insecurity in Contemporary Gothic American Fiction  
**Audrey Deveault, Goldsmiths, University of London**
- Tamed Arms of Flesh and Bone: The Return of the Monstrous Feminine as a Powerful Weapon and a Controlled Ally  
**Aicha Daoudi, University of Limerick**

### 13:00-14:00: PIZZA BREAK

### 14:00-15:30: PARALLEL PANELS

#### **PANEL 6A (KBG13): Violent Contradictions**

**Chair:**

- When Violent Delights Have Violent Ends: Investigating Ideas of Wealth and Security in the TV Series *Westworld*  
**Ginevra Bianchini, Trinity College Dublin**
- "It's time to talk about how to pay for it": American Hegemony, Debt, and Waste in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*

**Jacob Miller, University College Dublin**

- Failing Democracy: Jacques Derrida, Ben Lerner, and *Leaving the Atocha Station*  
**David Coughlan, University of Limerick**

**PANEL 6B (KBG14): Social Constructs and Social Ghosts**

**Chair:**

- From Silencing to Selling: How Native American Spirituality has been Abused by Non-Natives  
**Nicola Brooks, Queen's University Belfast**
- "no woman beareth the axe in Babylon": Questioning the Inherent Errantry and (In)Security of Black Feminism in the Harlem of the Great Migration, a study of recovered Zora Neale Hurston short stories  
**Mariane Gallet, University of Edinburgh**
- Social Haunting and the Legacy of Racial Subordination in Toni Morrison's *Sula*  
**Roufaida Mina, University of Limerick**

**15:30-16:00: COFFEE BREAK**

**16:00-17:00: PARALLEL PANELS**

**PANEL 7A (KBG13): Abject and Unwanted**

**Chair:**

- Open Bodies and Abject Aesthetics in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*  
**Kelsie Donnelly, Queen's University Belfast**
- "It Looks Good. It's Strong": Storytelling, Security, and "A Nation Reborn" in the *Purge* Franchise  
**Janice Lynne Deitner, Trinity College Dublin**

**Panel 7B (KBG14): Mother/Daughter, Refugee/Refuge**

**Chair:**

- Mothers, Trauma and Memory in Vietnamese American Refugee Literature  
**Clodagh Guerin, University of Limerick**
- The Journey to Self-Discovery: An Exploration of Insecurity and Security in *The Joy Luck Club*  
**Meryem Hana Karouche, University of Limerick**

**17:00-18:00 (KBG13): IAAS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & CONFERENCE CLOSE**

All are welcome to attend the IAAS AGM

## ABSTRACTS

### PANEL 1A: Narratives, Records, and Programmes of In/Security

- **Michael Griffin, University of Limerick**, May this to all a Warning Be: The Execution of Matthew Cushing and Early Boston Print Culture

The case of Matthew Cushing links Limerick to Boston in a compelling, if not entirely edifying way. Cushing was executed at the age of 23 at Boston Neck for burglary. He was executed with one John Ormsby, who had been sentenced to death for the greater crime of beating a man to death with a pot. A bad poem printed on a single sheet titled *A Few Lines upon the Awful Execution of John Ormesby & Matthew Cushing* gave other Irish newcomers to Boston a warning about the dreadful consequences of crime in the young city. Cushing's burglary and trial created a local sensation. It was fodder for a popular taste in reading material, and stimulating to a polite readership insecure about their holdings and domestic safety. Like Jack Sheppard or Jonathan Wild had been in England the decade before, whose cases were documented by authors like Daniel Defoe, John Gay, and others, Cushing's case created so much interest that in addition to two poems published about him and Ormsby, his own confession was printed and sold at the time of his execution. In this paper I will give an account of the influence of criminal narratives, and the narrative of this Limerick criminal in particular, on a burgeoning print culture in early eighteenth-century Boston.

- **R. Nicholas Nelson, Texas A&M University–Commerce**, Planter Class Women and Securing the Family Property

This paper examines the role of planter class women in the maintenance of inter-generational family property (and thus class and status), a form of generational security. Planter class families in the antebellum U.S. South viewed continued membership in the ruling class by the next generation as a form of security in their oligarchic society. Recent work, such as Stephanie Jones-Rogers's *They Were Her Property*, have expanded our understanding of women as slave owners, but we still primarily understand women's role in that patriarchal society as secondary and separate, rather than as a vital part of securing the family property and status as members of the ruling class. Explaining the intricacies of this require a great deal of study of inheritances, marriage practices, and genealogy. Because of the detail needed, this paper will focus on one or two individual case studies of families. The cases I am studying are all families who move to Texas before 1860, placing this work in the fields of Southern history, Texas history, and Borderlands history, local records history, and migration history.

- **Nicole De Silva, University of California, Santa Barbara**, A "Children's Crusade for Peace"?: U.S. Soft Diplomacy and the Politics of Childhood Innocence, 1926-1929

During early twentieth century, U.S. public schools and church programmes instructed students in strategies for making peace and building "friendship" with other young people across the globe. The Federal Council of Churches orchestrated some of the most visible of these campaigns through its Committee on World Friendship Among Children (CWFC), which designed sets of gift exchanges between U.S. children and counterparts in Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, and China. At the same time, The Junior Red Cross facilitated correspondence between over 10 million young "friends" across 48 nations who shared goods, crafts, and letters. While this programming allowed children to rehearse arguments about U.S. internationalism and liberal multiculturalism that were intended to shape them as adults in the *future*, there was also a more immediate goal in mind. Instructors hoped to encourage students to participate in a child-centered diplomacy by acting as humanitarian agents in the *present*. This paper reads the stories that these curriculums told children about

“the world” to make two points about security in the interwar United States. First, because this programming invited children to help make the world “safe for democracy,” I use these sources to develop insights into the ideologies of international security that shaped U.S. foreign relations. Second, I show that elementary and junior high school children were particularly promising diplomatic actors because of a web of cultural assumptions about their innocence, which theoretically placed their transcultural acts of “friendship” outside of the adult world of politics and into a softer realm of childlike “trust.” Such an assumption made them more able to perform these goodwill exchanges against dominant currents of isolationism in the 1920s. Yet, this conception of “childhood innocence” was also racialised and classed, revealing a sense that *some* children had more right to care, protection—and security—than others.

#### **PANEL 1B: Law Enforcement and Bodily Restraint**

- **Daniah Khayat, University of Limerick, Conspiracy Theory, Race, and Police Brutality in Contemporary American Fiction**

Although police brutality is recently associated with movements such as Black Lives Matter, at the beginning of the 2010s, Right-wing writers also warned about the increasing influence of the police in America. However, they interpreted it differently because they viewed it as a system the government uses to control vulnerable Americans. According to William Murray, the United Nations is trying to subjugate America with a shadow government that will turn it into a dystopia (*Utopian Road*). This conspiracy theory rhetoric is illustrated in Glenn Beck’s fictional novel, *Agenda 21: Into the Shadows* (2015), where a group of Southern protagonists try to escape a militaristic compound guarded by a brutal police force.

Looking at the history of policing in Southern communities, it started as overseers’ patrols that chased runaway slaves from plantations. According to Michelle Alexander, this aspect of pursuing Black citizens continues to be observed throughout modern American history (*New Jim*). This included the Jim Crow Era and the 70s and 80s Wars on Crime. Nevertheless, in the recent two decades, this brutality has intensified to include young Blacks as casualties with the fatal shootings of Michael Brown and Tamir Rice. This behaviour generated an extensive range of literature, producing fictional works, such as the novel, *The Hate U Give* (2017).

With these contrasted interpretations of modern militarised policing, I explore in this paper the representation of police and paranoid security in contemporary American writings. This analysis aims to highlight the different narratives about police brutality and other forms of violence that are considered daily threats to the lives of Americans. According to Arthur Rizer and Radley Balko, with the militarization of the police force, their role in society changes from “protect and serve” to “shoot the enemy,” hurting American liberty (“How the War”; Gregory “Rise of the Warrior”).

- **Ilhem Bellal, University of Limerick, Creating Our Spaces of Sanctuary: Loss, Vulnerability, and Resistance in African American Young Adult Literature**

To put the transformative quality of the African American young adult literature in context with the Black Lives Matter movement, since the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, nearly all of them focalize from the perspective of young Black adults confronting racial injustice. Reflecting the current social circumstances of African Americans, especially during the Obama era, these works feature as well violent and sometimes fatal confrontations of youth with police officers, who often equate blackness with persistent negative stereotypes, such as the longstanding myths of criminality. What this means is that instead of protecting and providing security, police institutions endanger Black bodies in a way that forces them to



grow up early and become responsible for themselves. As Rudine Sims Bishop stresses upon the idea that such literature is rarely written for art's sake, YA authors attempt to respond to racism and address such larger societal, cultural, and racial issues that threaten not only the physical safety of young adults but also challenge their psychological well-being. To answer what African American young adult literature offers, this paper analyzes three contemporary blockbuster young adult novels, which are Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* (2017), Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* (2017), and Brittney Morris's *Slay* (2019). In these novels, I argue that their African American young adult characters, when exposed to racial injustice, create their own safe spaces in order to mourn their losses, voice their vulnerabilities, protect their threatened identity, and in return, these spaces allow them to creatively confront institutionalized racism.

- **Dylan Phelan, University College Cork**, Insecure Identities: The Threat to Corporeal Fixity in *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Her* (2013)

Abound with portrayals of androids, cyborgs and AI, Science fiction cinema has long challenged the security of human identity. With the increasing dependence on technology in daily life, the border between human and technology becomes blurred. In posthuman theory, Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti describe how such subjects possess an inherent ability to disrupt and challenge the hierarchies inherent to anthropocentrism. In film however, these subjects are generally portrayed as the sexualised or racialised Other, thereby conforming to traditional hierarchies and diluting their revolutionary potential. This is generally achieved through the filmic processes of objectification and sexualisation, thus nullifying the threatening liminality of the posthuman by imposing a pre-established hierarchy. By discussing two contrasting depictions of the posthuman in *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982) and *Her* (Jonze 2013), my paper will examine this tendency as an attempt to alleviate the corporeal anxiety which the posthuman inspires.

In *Blade Runner*, Rachel is generally viewed as the film's femme-fatale figure, carrying all the signifiers of the threat to male authority. Moreover, Rachel is also an android with human-level intelligence, posing a threat to humanistic authority. For the film's protagonist, Rick Deckard, this threat to patriarchal and humanistic authority culminates in his attempt to re-establish authority through sexual violence. While deeply problematic, this compulsion highlights an insecurity in anthropocentric, human identity, as the need to reimpose such violent hierarchies displays the necessity of the Other in formulating humanistic understandings of identity. By contrast, *Her* portrays the entirely non-corporeal AI, Samantha. In this film, through the lack of a visibly female subject, the traditional means of Othering are more difficult to impose. As a result, the protagonist, Theodore, is forced to re-evaluate the relationship between human and non-human life, thus altering the basis on which he constructs his human identity.

#### **ROUNDTABLE: Braiding the Classroom - Teaching Reciprocity**

- This roundtable will discuss an experiment several of us conducted last semester: proposing an American indigenous worldview as the framing model for the required undergraduate module in literary theory. More correctly, we assigned sections of Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* as the 'foundational' text for the course. This foundation is not without deep cracks, of course. We are not indigenous people, and Kimmerer's knowledge of her Potawatomi people's ways are mediated by generations of forced loss—of land and relationship with land, of language and culture. Kimmerer values also her own training as a botanist, and we appreciate our own ways as well. Nonetheless, we found that proposing a reciprocal relationship between people and the rest of the natural world had significant if not profound structural and pedagogical effects. It changed how we taught and how the students learned.

The roundtable will focus on questions that this experiment has raised for us, which we invite our panelists and the audience to consider. Some questions might be, for example,

1. If we propose that individual wellbeing is dependent on the wellbeing as a whole, how does that change how we value and evaluate students' contributions and work?
2. How does the academic environment, in which living in the 'head' is valued above physical labour or embodied knowledge, impede learning?
3. Do we have the right as white outsiders to enter a world not our own? Is it even possible?
4. What are the risks to teachers if accumulating and disseminating non-indigenous knowledge turn out not to be our main role? What are we afraid of?
5. Who and what besides us are teachers? (Kimmerer proposes a jump into 'the language of animacy': what changes would come in the wake of such a shift in thinking?)
6. What role does gratitude play in the profession of teaching?
7. What possibilities might there be in such a space for creating a different role for literature in working towards a sustainable environment?

### **PANEL 2A: Crashes, Crises, Capitalism, and Consumption**

- **Adam Kelly, University College Dublin, Securities, Bonds, Debts, Futures, Trusts**

This paper considers the way certain normative categories in ordinary language lead twin lives as financial metaphors. Sketching a history of how this situation came about, the paper reflects on what American literature can contribute to our understanding of its implications. The case study is Hernan Diaz's 2022 novel *Trust*, which employs a four-part metafictional structure – moving from a realist novel called “Bonds” through to a final set of diary entries with the title “Futures” – to tell the story of a financial trader, his marriage, and the ghostwriter of his memoir in the years surrounding the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Portraying and exposing the ideologies of finance, Diaz's novel proves itself equally concerned with the ideologies of the literary work and the institutions that surround it. It highlights the ways in which differentially gendered labour gets obscured both by the financialization of ethical language and by the traditional construction of literary narratives. *Trust* thus aims to think through the co-implication of the financial and literary worlds, and the stories that so often get told about the relationship (and separation) of love and money in liberal capitalist societies.

- **Ciara Moloney, Mary Immaculate College, “These Are the Rooms We're Not Supposed To Go In. But Let's Go Anyway!”: Fun and Mischief Amongst the Perpetual Crisis of Precarity in *The Florida Project***

There are two major tendencies in the portrayal of homelessness and extreme poverty in American cinema: that of silent and early sound comedies, like those of Charlie Chaplin or Laurel and Hardy, and contemporary neorealist-influenced indie dramas, like Kelly Reichard's *Wendy and Lucy*. The former mines humour amongst precarity, sometimes, as in Chaplin's *The Kid*, boiling over into full-blown crisis. The latter is concerned with crisis first and foremost, rooted in the US's systemic punishment of the poor. *The Florida Project* (2018) weaves both these tendencies together into a rich tapestry. Halley, a young mother, and her six-year-old daughter Moonee live week-to-week in a motel on the outskirts of Disney World, and the result is both a devastating drama about homelessness and a funny, delightful childhood adventure influenced by *Little Rascals*, much of it shot at the child's eye-level, *ET*-style.

The audience sees this world as Moonee sees it: a brightly coloured world where every day of summer is a new opportunity for fun. Perpetual crisis is her normal: instability is her only stability. *The Florida Project* captures the normality of crisis for the poor, in a way that feels distinctly American – where many of the social welfare programmes that create a

safety net in other developed countries are lacking – and, in the age of global capitalism, universal. Most states and international bodies responded to the 2008 financial crisis – itself built in large part on the commodification and financialisation of housing – with austerity, gutting social supports, and a decade later, there were and are largely invisible homeless crises across the world. *The Florida Project*, more than any other film, doesn't just tell us that the wealth cannot and does not trickle down – it captures the hardships and joys of the people that society has abandoned.

- **Máiréad Casey, NUI Galway and Trinity College Dublin**, Cannibal Capitalism, False Meritocracy, and the Star Persona of Armie Hammer

Marxist feminist critic Nancy Fraser describes the contemporary moment of cascading economic, social and ecological crises as the result of “cannibal capitalism” noting that the metaphor of the cannibal offers promising avenues for cultural analysis of capitalist society, as “It invites us to see that society as an institutionalized feeding frenzy - in which the main course is us.” This paper explores the idea of cannibal capitalism expressed quite literally in news stories surrounding actor Armie Hammer’s speculated cannibalism kink followed by later, more dark and serious reports of rape and serial intimate partner violence which prompted a current and ongoing police investigation.

Prior to these reports, Hammer’s status as an heir to extreme wealth from the petroleum industry made him a revealing case study for a Helen Peterson profile examining the intersections of gender, race, class privilege, and false meritocracies that permitted Hammer’s career to stay afloat despite multiple box office failures. In the news media narration, and the Discovery+ docuseries *House of Hammer*, examination of Hammer’s privilege and class identity became prominent elements of the story. These descriptions conform to pre-existing tropes of the parasitic and decadent aristocrat, for whom sex is an inexhaustible resource, and who preys on the financially vulnerable (e.g., Mr B in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*).

I argue that the story of Hammer as a sexual predator represents a popular engagement with structural critiques of capitalism as well as gendered and racialised privilege in a post-metoo news media landscape.

## **PANEL 2B: Stories and Archives of Survival and Preservation**

- **Leanna First-Arai, University College Dublin**, Beyond Superfund Sites and Strange Fruit: Mapping, Naming and Reframing Unequal Exposure as “Environmental Lynching” in Memphis, Tennessee

In spite of tendencies to historicise race-based lynching in the United States as a trademark of the Reconstruction-era South, the public killing of African-descended people has been a constant, defining feature of U.S. history. The continuity of anti-black violence has been brought to popular public attention by the Black Lives Matter movement, which emerged in 2013. Amid recognition of the ubiquity of anti-black violence, environmental activists in Memphis, Tennessee have re-framed their struggle, which has resulted in a rising public understanding of the disproportionate exposure to toxins, higher incidence of related illness and overall bodily insecurity for black Americans that has been built into the pipes, roads and power plants of U.S. cities and towns.

This presentation will examine a series of fatal encounters with environmental racism in Memphis, Tennessee, using archival research and interviews to trace three generations of policies that displaced, sited, and displaced again, a middle-class Black family near a military superfund site, resulting in terminal illnesses emblematic of those experienced by numerous other residents living in a certain South Memphis neighbourhood. In doing so, the paper will also highlight how embedding archival maps with digital maps can

elevate the connections between redlining and present day health impacts. It will ultimately build on social movement and environmental health literature to argue that activists' naming and reframing the city's environmental issues as "racial violence" and "environmental lynching" built intersectional cross-class, cross-race solidarity in pursuit of ecological, environmental and social justice — effectively expanding organizers' reach.

- **Brianna Riggio, Trinity College Dublin, Can He See the Forest for the Trees?: *The Eagle Tree***

In Ned Hayes' *The Eagle Tree* (2016), teenage protagonist March Wong finds himself in a difficult position: after a lifetime of resisting the straightjacket of neurotypical social scripts, his voice is needed to advocate for the preservation of his favorite tree. March is on the autism spectrum, and the only thing that brings him joy, out of seemingly endless pressures to sit still and blend in, is being high in a tree—and his quest to climb the historic Eagle Tree. However, land developers are planning to tear this tree down if he cannot convince his town that it should be preserved. Hayes cuts an intriguing figure in March by resisting tired, minimizing tropes in disability writing, including the tendency to avoid depicting less palatable features of the condition like March's marked distaste for socializing, as well as by making explicit that March wants to save the tree out of selfish motives rather than being a romanticized disabled hero. At the same time, March's plight to save the Eagle Tree is demonstrative of the heightened difficulties of advocating for yourself and your community while having a disability. For many, speaking at town hall meetings is somewhat intimidating or at least an inconvenience; for March, it is perhaps the most difficult thing he's ever attempted. He is particularly vulnerable within his community as a disabled individual, especially because reports of him screaming or running away have led to frequent Child Protective Services run-ins, jeopardizing his mother's position as his legal guardian. March is willing to risk everything to save the tree, including his mental health and his right to live with his mother—but it is increasingly clear that environmental advocacy would not have such high stakes if not for the vulnerability of his status as a disabled individual.

- **Beth Aherne, University College Cork, "Far from their original homeland": Secure Communities as Indigenous Futurism in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018)**

Waubgeshig Rice's 2018 novel *Moon of the Crusted Snow* has been studied as a narrative of survivance. According to Gerald Vizenor, survivance is "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name" (2008). However, the theme of security in Rice's text which is entangled in the concept of survivance has yet to be explored in scholarly literature. I argue that through the portrayal of an Anishinaabe community's struggle for security, Rice decolonizes the concept of family and in doing so in a dystopian setting, constructs an Indigenous futurist text.

In late Autumn, the novel's protagonist, Evan Whitskey and his community, located in the far North of Canada, are cut off from all electricity and outside communication. The Anishinaabe community is infiltrated by people from the South and their supplies slowly begin to dwindle. Rice's text is thus, a story of a community that must struggle for survivance to secure its existence.

Indigenous scholars argue that the colonization of First Nations lands and the subsequent genocide of Indigenous communities in Canada is apocalyptic. And so Indigenous futurism, such as Rice's novel, which portrays Indigenous communities' strengths in apocalyptic circumstances illuminates the continued "active presence" that Indigenous communities must repeatedly secure through storytelling and culture. This presence is made visible in Rice's novel through the community that secures the survival of its members via skills passed down through storytelling.

I employ theories of Indigenous futurism, postcolonialism, and the family to explore how Rice portrays community-as-family through the interconnected themes of security and survivance, and how this portrayal situates the text firmly in the Indigenous futurist canon.

### **PANEL 3A: Cross-Border Security**

- **Grace Miller, Binghamton University, The Security in Othering**

The US has always focused on its own security and the protection of itself both domestically and internationally. One of the key ways the US feeds this sense of security is through narrative control. The US has a long history of national security threats being applied to broad-based cultural ideologies and societal critiques. The general public of the US embodies these security threats as facts which leads to a negative and often politically charged stereotyping which seeps into individual perceptions of their world. Looking at the violent atmosphere in the US after times of perceived insecurity due to “outsider” threats/violence, this paper will show the US ideological grounding in US exceptionalism and white supremacy has allowed violent actions and ideologies towards minority groups to increase feelings of security in times where confusion and chaos reign. This paper will look at accounts of genocide against the Native peoples utilizing *Black Elk Speaks* and Estes’ *Our History is the Future* for example surrounding the Wounded Knee Massacre’s colonial hauntings in connection with post-9/11 violence against Arab-Americans in *A Woman is No Man* while looking at the Black Lives Matter movement as activism against established narrative forming institutions, and the Stop Asian Hate Movement coming in this “post” Covid time. By reading the counter-narratives of US history written by those who have experienced and ascended from these abuses, the narrative voice of the othered minority is amplified. The afterlives of US imperialism in Native American literature surrounding the Wounded Knee Massacre and the US actions in My Lai demonstrate narrative control which results in the perpetuation of unresolved violence against minorities. The US has always looked to gain its own sense of security through violence against non-white and minority group members in order to have a scapegoat for the vulnerability brought on by the unknown. How are these colonial ghosts shown in literature? How are these violent specters preservations of historical actuality?

- **Mary Burke, University of Connecticut, Securing Whiteness: The Irish in the Americas**

My new book argues that figures from the Scots-Irish Andrew Jackson to the Caribbean-Irish Rihanna, as well as literature, film, caricature, and beauty discourse, convey how the Irish racially transformed multiple times: in the slave-holding Caribbean, on America’s frontiers and antebellum plantations, and along its eastern seaboard. The transformations of the forcibly transported Irish, the eighteenth-century Presbyterian Ulster-Scots, and post-1845 Famine immigrants are indicated by the designations they acquired in the Americas: ‘Redlegs,’ ‘Scots-Irish,’ and ‘black Irish’. Although the transported Irish were initially racially marked as ‘red’ in the Caribbean due to skin that was ‘too white,’ by the nineteenth-century, no trace of the sporadic seventeenth-century alliances between Black and marginalized white Irish on Barbados remained and ‘Redlegs’ considered themselves superior to their neighbours of African descent. Ignatiev has outlined the gradual transformation of post-Famine Catholic Irish-Americans from ‘off-whiteness’ to mainstream whiteness. However, it is less often noted that the Scots-Irish underwent a similar process during the previous century before assimilating to the WASP mainstream by differentiating themselves from the Famine Irish. The term ‘black Irish’ (as applied to the marginalized post-Famine Irish) both racialized that cohort and implied a preexistent ‘white Irishness’ (that of Irish Protestant and pre-Famine immigrants). In recent decades, the Catholic Irish have hitched themselves to a ‘whiteness’ that once more readily accommodated the Scots-Irish,

and both Irishnesses are now enfolded within the contemporary white Christian constituency for which Trump claimed to speak. Indeed, many prominent members of his administration stressed their Irish-American roots. It is one of the many ironies of the history of Irishnesses in the Americas that, while still stressing historical victimization in the colonial motherland, Catholic Irish America now converges with the Scots-Irish-inflected conservative Protestant America from which it once strove to distinguish itself.

- **Barbara Watts, University of Limerick, Welsh Miners with Irish Names Migrate to Canada**  
Parliamentary conversation regarding the settlement of Alberta as a new province in 1905 concentrated on agriculture and the building of the railway in the all-important push to unite each province into the Dominion of Canada. Later labour historians produced much literature on workplace struggles and union action focussing on Canada as a whole. Little has been written about the coal industry in Alberta and the people who immigrated to work underground despite their importance to the settlement of the province. Assumptions that the Irish migrated to Alberta specifically to homestead on the freely available, uncultivated, prairie land is only partially true. Among the hundreds of coal miners moving into the area were Irish step-migrants who gained mining experience in the valley pits of Wales. Migration to Alberta in the early settlement years placed migrant families in a position of vulnerability. Many husbands left their wives and children in Wales to secure employment in the coal regions of the new province. This paper seeks to highlight the resilience of Irish families who sought security through migration and accepted the possible insecurity of change and the unknown. Using census returns of the prairie provinces specific family situations are uncovered. I hope to suggest that step migration continued the history of Ireland in North America, via stops in Wales, through the Welsh miners with the Irish names.

### PANEL 3B: Figures of Political Poetry

- **Mark Silverberg, Cape Breton University, Rethinking Internal Security with Jane Hirshfield**  
While the CFP for this year's conference emphasizes a geopolitical understanding of "in/security," this paper will consider the way that American poetry has seen external threats to security as symptoms of an internal malaise. There has been a history of American political poetry, particularly beginning with Vietnam-era protest poems, which refracts and internalizes violent political action, as Robert Bly wrote of the Hanoi bombings: "Our own cities were the ones we wanted to bomb" . . . "We made war/ Like a man anointing himself".  
Much anti-war poetry by writers like Bly, Denise Levertov, Allen Ginsberg and W.S. Merwin not only catalogues the violence that so often springs from insecurity but attempts to articulate a sense of *security* that might provide refuge from or antidote to that violence. Tellingly, one source of such refuge came from the very place Americans were bombing: Vietnam.  
Buddhism, as disseminated in the West by teachers such as Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh or Tibetan Buddhist Chögyam Trungpa would become an important source for American poetry through institutions like Naropa University and the San Francisco Zen Center where Jane Hirshfield, one this generation's best-known, Buddhist-inspired poets lived for 7 years. This paper will look at Hirshfield's poetry and prose to try to catch a glimpse of what this type of non-dualistic, *internal security* might mean. "Most people have had at least a momentary glimpse of what it is to experience the world as undivided," Hirshfield writes in the essay "Justice: Four Windows", "the narrow sense of self drops away . . . The threads of one piece of fabric cannot argue with each other, and what happens to any part happens to the whole."

- **Hope Noonan Stoner, University College Cork, “Committed Poetry/Poesía Comprometida”:** Reading Lola Ridge’s and Julia de Burgos’s Political Poetry as a Threat to American Security

This presentation focuses on the political poetry of modernist writers Lola Ridge (1873-1941) and Julia de Burgos (1914-1953), specifically Ridge’s poem, “Stone Face” about the imprisonment of socialist Tom Mooney, and de Burgos’s poem “Campo” which concerns the role of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Puerto Rican independence. As diasporic, transnational poets, Ridge and de Burgos attempt to “remake” the American nation through literature, consciously using their poems as a form of political activism. Furthermore, the hegemonic response to these works suggests that the American government perceived poems generally as equally politically incendiary to prose writing and these poems specifically as a threat to American domestic security.

Ridge and de Burgos were intimately involved in many political movements, and their political prose writing provides context for my analysis and comparison of these two poems as embodiments of poetic threats to the security of the twentieth-century American government. Ridge engaged primarily in the American anarchist and socialist movements, but also kept abreast of the nationalist developments in her Irish birthplace. Moreover, the subject of “Stone Face,” Tom Mooney, is referenced in the work of several other prominent American poets of the twentieth century including Allen Ginsberg’s ‘America’, from *Howl and Other Poems*, highlighting Ridge’s continuing poetic political relevance. Similarly, de Burgos exhibited a lifelong commitment to the cause of Puerto Rican independence, increasingly advocating a socialist-nationalist approach in the 1930s and 1940s. My presentation explores how De Burgos’s writings for the periodical *Pueblos Hispanos* in support of Puerto Rican independence and Ridge’s personal diary entries and correspondence, detailing her thoughts on the criminalisation of American socialism through events such as the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti and the imprisonment of Mooney, expressed similar sentiments to those found in their political poetry. Thus, my presentation will conclude with a reflection on how Ridge’s and de Burgos’s political poetry posed a threat to American hegemonic political control and the dominant imagined ideal of “America.”

- **Rosannah Gosser, Maynooth University, Allegories of In/security in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter***

Poet-activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s debut collection, *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (2017), explores the roles of cultural, somatic, and intergenerational memory sustained by Marshall Islanders in the face of US imperialist legacies and increasing climate insecurity. *Iep Jāltok*’s poetic sequences satirize links in rhetoric between the discourse of US military imperialism and international discussions on climate change, connecting the ways in which each rely on Pacific obfuscation and obscurity as a means of securing non-Pacific interest and futures. I argue that as Jetñil-Kijiner’s text deploys allegorical, satirical, and affective modes to expose the false claims of these hegemonic narratives and dramatize their consequences on Marshall Islanders, her poems historicize an enduring Marshallese resilience and engage readers in networks of nested responsibility.

*Iep Jāltok* foregrounds the legacies of the United States’ postwar military occupation of the Marshall Islands and its subsequent abuse of the archipelago as a nuclear testing site between 1946 and 1958, which resulted in widespread radioactive contamination of Marshallese bodies, lands, and waters and rendered the northern atolls unlivable to this day. Jetñil-Kijiner’s poems place the corporeal, socioeconomic, and environmental precarities that Marshall Islanders continue to confront – such as cancers, birth defects, migration, and diasporic identities in the U.S. – alongside questions of futurity for low-lying atoll nations in the face of sea-level rise. I consider this layering of themes and temporalities, as Michelle Keown, Rebecca Oh, and others have argued, in terms of Jetñil-Kijiner’s refusal neither to minimize the atrocities that Marshall Islanders have endured nor submit to a victimized

future (Keown 944; Oh 599, 603; Wander 2-3). Furthermore, I borrow from Elizabeth DeLoughrey's research on allegory in order to examine the ways in which Jetñil-Kijiner presents the woven basket – represented by the Marshallese proverb "*Iep Jāltok*", the book's eponymous title – as a visual symbol of matrilineal knowledge and gift-giving from which to inspire empowerment, accountability, and environmental justice (DeLoughrey 32).

#### **PANEL 4A: Complex Relations - Stories of the Queer and Black Everyday**

- **Sara Soler i Arjona, University of Barcelona**, "My Vulnerability Is My Power": Queerness, Diaspora, and Survival in Ocean Vuong's Writing

In his poetry collection *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (2016), Ocean Vuong employs the symbol of the 'exit wound' to explore the material consequences of war and violence, especially drawing on his own experience as a Vietnamese refugee. As an injury inflicted by a bullet, an exit wound serves a double meaning: whilst it is a proof of past violence and vulnerability, it also becomes a source of regeneration and healing. Such a dualistic focus on trauma and survival equally permeates Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019). Featuring a Vietnamese American queer protagonist, Vuong's non-linear narrative excavates the boy's family history, blurring the boundaries between past and present, to trace the multiple histories of displacement informing who he is today. As a formulation of queer time (Muñoz 2009; Freeman 2010), the novel's temporal dislocation serves a twofold purpose: whereas it contests dominant narratives of the war by unearthing effaced voices within Western representation, it also reveals the ongoing histories of violence, precarity, and vulnerability that queer diasporic subjects must face in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America.

Yet, the portrayal of such precarious experiences in Vuong's work does not reduce diasporic subjects to their victimhood or passivity, but rather reinforces their capacity for resilience: "my vulnerability is my power because it is where all care [...] and connection to others comes from," Vuong asserts. It is exactly by reformulating the practices of intimacy, care, and support that constitute kinship relations through a queer lens that Vuong's writing ushers in strategies of survival, both in his novel and his recent poetry collection *Time Is A Mother* (2022). Precisely, by exploring the complexity of kinship ties—simultaneously troubled and nurturing—Vuong imagines possibilities for healing and joy in the face of vulnerability and loss, a paradox encapsulated by the fragmented lives of contemporary queer diasporic subjects.

- **Carla Abella Rodríguez, University of Salamanca**, Racial (In)Security in Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah's fiction

The main aim of this paper is to explore Blackness in relation to politics of (in)security in Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah's short story collection *Friday Black* (2018). Adjei-Brenyah's stories address and reimagine the socio-political climate of twenty-first century America. The ongoing racial violence is present here too, as Adjei-Brenyah's engages with anti-Blackness. These short stories highlight the commodification and disposability of the black body in contemporary American society, where white supremacy continues to be on the rise. Reiterations of past, present and future dispossession remind readers of the unsettling familiarity behind the excessiveness of some of these stories.

This investigation relies on tenets of hospitality theory. The paper resorts to Jacques Derrida's theorisations, especially the intersection between hospitality and hostility, as it is encapsulated in the Derridean neologism "hostipitality". The research seeks to unpack both welcoming and inhospitable gestures towards Blacks in America, who inhabit a liminal position in American society. The Black body appears as disposable and comes to occupy an inbetweenness that simultaneously places it neither inside nor outside the nation-state. This paper also intends to explore how Blacks appear as recipients of processes and protocols of



securitisation and containment. The discourses and apparatuses implemented to Other the Black body are analysed to unveil the mechanisms of control to contain Blackness, which appears as a threat to white-dominant American society. *Friday Black* also suggests Black characters can deploy their own strategies of control as examples of resistance and defiance against national anti-Blackness.

- **Marika Ceschia, University of Leeds**, Playless Urban Landscapes and Narrative Safe Spaces in Toni Cade Bambara's Work

Even when not legally proscribed, playing can result in death or incarceration for African Americans who dare exercise such a right. Black playfulness remains marked as dangerous to enforce a violent denial of play that erases black subjectivities. Riding a bike while black can attract the attention of the police: in the predominantly white neighborhood of Eastpointe in Detroit, between 1995 and 1998, the police stopped hundreds of black kids aged 11 to 18 on their bikes; more recently, in New Jersey the police detained black kids riding a bike. In 2014 Tamir Rice was shot dead by an officer who pictured him as a twenty-year old adult armed with a gun rather than as a twelve-year-old child playing with a toy gun. In an antiblack world black playfulness is constructed as a site of danger in need of regulatory control.

Against this racial terror, Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* seeks to carve out a safe space where playfulness can be safely performed. While the novel's portrayal of the bleak urban landscape constructed through urbicidal-onticidal processes demonstrates the pervasiveness of racial terror, its musical language clings on to a playful creativity. Playing with language, she invites the reader to do the same as they untangle the complexity of the text. The very act of partaking in the reading of the novel, sharing, and enjoying its linguistic jokes enacts playfulness and establishes a community by choice. Even though Bambara never loses sight of the urbicidal and onticidal foundations of the ghetto, she imagines black subjects that, while shaped by, are not totally defined by this racial violence: through their playfulness, they resist the ontological erasure an anti-black society codified in the playless urban landscape.

- **Jaime Harrison, Queen's University Belfast**, The Cognitive Science of Challenging Literature: Claudia Rankine's *Just Us: An American Conversation*

When Claudia Rankine, in the "Evolution" section of *Just Us*, makes the case that "cognition formation is in part influenced by environment" (62), she makes explicit the extent to which signs and signifiers of dominance are ingrained in white minds. By taking conversation as a critical form, Rankine presents a poetic work which seeks to confront and challenge thought processes which diminish the substance of black life. This paper offers a reading of Rankine's "conversation" through the lens of cognitive science in order to consider how a piece of art can inspire cognitive change. In order to do so, it brings together three models from two disciplines: cognitive effort and ideasthesia from neuropsychology, and Roland Barthes's texts of pleasure-tests of bliss dichotomy from semiotics. Throughout *Just Us*, Rankine explores the difficulties white people encounter in acknowledging and addressing privilege. Dominant models of mental effort, and popular opinion, often position cognitive effort as aversive and avoided wherever possible, but this study follows from neuropsychologists Clay et al. that exposure to rewarding cognitive tasks can lead to "the development of effort-related motivation" in other areas. This psychological model goes hand-in-hand with Barthes, for whom texts of pleasure content the reader in how they do not break from the culture, while their blissful counterparts seek to discomfort and disturb the reader's assumptions. Applying Barthes to Rankine reveals the potential for challenging texts to turn a difficult confrontation with deeply ingrained assumptions into rewarding experience. Ideasthesia, which proposes that concepts evoke sensory experience, despite its

limitations gestures towards how signs and signifiers not only create affective responses which reinforce presupposed realities, but also enable poetry, such as Rankine's, to disrupt those realities.

#### PANEL 5A: The Nature of the Present

- **Esin Korkut Savul, Middle East Technical University, The Norms and Forms of Vulnerability and Safety in Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* as an Epitome of Post-War Disintegration**  
*Tender is the Night* (1934) by Fitzgerald presents the disintegration of the original and the collapse of archetypal forms. The disintegration of the "original" gives the reader the clue that what is supposed to be the original is itself a fictionalized form, a make-believe that can easily be converted into a commercialized and contemporary form. *Tender is the Night* does not dwell on an original self, a past that is true to reality but presents, on the contrary, the non-existence of such a core from which "the present" might be supposed to emanate from. Therefore, as one of the most injured characters of the novel, Abe North, suggests the past becomes the past in the present; the original becomes the original in the present. *Tender is the Night* reveals the collapse of the past as an image of safety and the disintegration of the present as an ongoing condition of vulnerability. In this way, the novel builds a discourse of vulnerability and safety that was pervasive in the American post-war novel. In this respect, the novel has the kind of fictional quality that enables the theoretical interplay of a Bakhtinian folkloric tradition based on looking for antecedents by tracing a single historical line and a Foucauldian questioning of the ways in which such "antecedents" are formed and made a regular discourse. The paper, with a focus on Foucauldian principle of power and its strategies, questions the ways in which such a regular and reliable Bakhtinian "chronotope" is formed as an image of safety and also it displays the discursive regularity of disintegration and how this disintegration is transformed into a sense constant vulnerability in the novel.
  
- **Eirini Bouraki, Kapodistrian University of Athens, The *Pharmakon* as a "Gift of Death" or the Mexican Medea's Decolonial Preventive Cure in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea***  
On the topic of Security/Insecurity and precarity of this conference, I would like to make a presentation driven by the question of environmental racism which "communities of color" (Chavis 3) are subjected to in the Americas, and contemplate on the double significance of the *pharmakon* as either a killing tool or a healing recipe. I will read closely from Cherríe Moraga's 1995 play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* as the literary vehicle through which I will study the dichotomy of the poison/cure first from an environmental policy lens and later through a deconstructive lens utilizing French philosopher Jacques Derrida's concepts of "the gift of death" and the *pharmakon*.  
In "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida describes the drug (*pharmakon*), as this "'medicine', this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison" (429), a point of ambivalence "where the opposed terms weave together, much as the *pharmakon* weaves together two entirely incommensurable meanings" (448). In a different work, *The Gift of Death*, the philosopher contemplates and theorizes death and sacrifice as gifts, writing about "the gift that is not a present, the gift of something that remains inaccessible, unrepresentable, and as a consequence secret" (29-30) and continues defining what the implications of the gift are, with a focus on secrecy, a theme also relevant in the handling of sacrifice by Medea in *The Hungry Woman*. He writes: "A gift that could be recognized as such in the light of day, a gift destined for recognition, would immediately annul itself. The gift is the secret itself, if the secret itself can be told. Secrecy is the last word of the gift which is the last word of the secret" (*Gift* 29-30).

Inspired by simultaneously the Greek Medea of Euripides and various Mesoamerican myths, Moraga crafts a new queer Medea that is at the same time a creator and a destroyer, a twofold function that the *pharmakon* she manipulates epitomizes. The undecidability of the *pharmakon* in classical Medea as both a tool inducing creation and birthing futurity or one that prompts destruction becomes even more prominent in Moraga's Medea, as the environmental factor plays a big part in the deciphering of the poison. I argue that by destabilizing the boundary between the poison function and the remedy function of the drug throughout the narrative but mainly at the end of the play, Moraga "introduces [it] into the body of discourse with all its ambivalence" (Derrida "Plato's Pharmacy" 429). The *pharmakon* is the vehicle of the gift of death Medea offers her son, which he in turn offers his mother back in his spectral return as a beneficent living dead in the Epilogue. By interpreting the poison as simultaneously the dangerous material that Medea as an exilic subjectivity on the one hand resides among as a member of a precarious community in-between nations, and as the healing recipe that provides the counter potion, the *alexipharmakon*, and protects her son's innocence from being tainted, I will read Medea as a positive transgressor in exile, or, utilizing George Hartley's words, as a "curandera of conquest".

- **José Manuel Correoso-Rodenas, Complutense University of Madrid**, Risking the Present, Risking the Future, Risking Our Souls: An Eco-Critical Approach to Two Flannery O'Connor Stories

It is undeniable to one of the hottest topics in today's academic debate is that concerning ecocritical issues or related with the different approaches to the preservation/destruction of the environment. It has permeated every single discipline of reflection, analysis, or creation, being Literature, the Arts, and Cultural Studies among the fields in which it has found a better and more fruitful reception. Linking with the postulates of the CFP, understanding how the Anthropocene has modified (and keeps modifying) Nature is crucial to comprehend our own in/security. As several creators and artist (along with scientific reports) have shown, only securing the existence of the natural world, we can ensure our own.

It is also undeniable that Flannery O'Connor's production has remained among the hottest topics among American Literature scholars for the last fifty years. A magnitude of approaches has been offered towards her narrations, novels, letters, essays, etc., covering issues such as Religion Studies, new critical approaches, Gender Studies, Race Studies, Post-Modernism, etc. However, her relation to Nature and to how Nature and the environment appear in her production has remain in a discreet background. A few exceptions can be found, like Mark S. Graybill's (2005), though. O'Connor's peculiar vision of the natural world, etc., have provoked that she has been traditionally compared with more archaic views than with her contemporary context.

However, those assessments need a further discussion. In consequence, the aim of this paper is to offer a re-evaluation her narrations of "A Circle in the Fire" (1954-1955) and "A View of the Woods" (1956-1957) under the lens of Ecocriticism. The concept of risking survival through the (metaphorical and physical) destruction of the environment populates both stories, depicting scenarios for comprehension and reflection about the always problematic relation violence-security.

#### **PANEL 5B: Black and White and Gothic**

- **Audrey Deveault, Goldsmiths, University of London**, The Call Is Coming from Inside the House: White Anxiety and Narratives of Racial Insecurity in Contemporary Gothic American Fiction

Literary studies can offer a singular look at the transformation of racial discourses over time and how the different meanings of whiteness take hold in specific cultural contexts. As Toni Morrison writes, “it may be possible to discover [...] the nature – even the cause – of literary ‘whiteness’” (1993). This paper proposes to look at the ways through which this “literary whiteness” comes alive. To do so, I will analyze American novels which employ the gothic genre to re-examine the history of the colonization and slavery in the United States. These could include, but may not be limited to, the works of Gillian Flynn (2006), Cormac McCarthy (1989), and Thomas Pynchon (1997).

At once omnipresent and invisible because it is the norm (Dyer, 1997), whiteness can be described as ghostly, a presence that torments the protagonists and the readers. Relying on Sara Ahmed’s phenomenology of whiteness (2007) and theory of affect, specifically her definition of shame (2004) as existing in the gaze of others, in the possibility of being *seen* as guilty, I will show how ghosts and hauntings work to make whiteness visible. In other words, they destabilize its normal function: no longer invisible, characters and readers alike are confronted with their own racial specificity. My primary objective is to study the political and aesthetic implications of literary whiteness. In using the supernatural and eerie as manifestations of whiteness, the novels produce a disquieting and strange reading effect. These authors stage a form of whiteness that could be described as “self-conscious”, troubling, or anxious, because it becomes visible to both the characters and readers. While racism is a “gothic discourse” which works to make monstrous certain types of bodies (Halberstam, 1995), I will show that, in these narratives, racial anxieties or insecurities about “others” become anxieties about the visible white self.

- **Aicha Daoudi, University of Limerick**, Tamed Arms of Flesh and Bone: The Return of the Monstrous Feminine as a Powerful Weapon and a Controlled Ally

When the witch first appeared in American cinema, she was an evil ugly crone. She then shifted to become a comedic figure warned against using her magic and a “monstrous feminine” witch whose use of power functions as a cautionary tale in horror films. Most often than not these figures are one-dimensional with polar traits. However, one of the first appearances of the witch as a complex and diverse archetype in American cinema and fiction can be observed with the rise of the Teen Witch. The latter allowed the figure an opportunity to escape the confines of the polar monstrous feminine perception and shift to a new version of the archetype. As the transformation of archetypes usually reflects the time of their appearance, it is only natural that the witch reflects the time and the norms of the society she inhabits. In the modern world, where the threat of a Third World War has been looming and occupying newspaper headlines for quite a while, the witch appears as a political figure: A powerful weapon who has to be tamed to become a controlled ally. This paper explores the transformation of the witch from a revolutionary individual to a powerful missionary and then back to her own revolutionary self. It examines two fictional works: Netflix’s *The Witcher* and Sarah J. Mass’s *Throne of Glass* series. The paper explores the use of the witch on the battlefield and the attempt of keeping her tamed and controlled, leading to her revolt as she embarks on her personal journey of finding a sense of self and an individual voice, one where she chooses her own political stance and allegiances.

#### **PANEL 6A: Violent Contradictions**

- **Ginevra Bianchini, Trinity College Dublin**, When Violent Delights Have Violent Ends: Investigating Ideas of Wealth and Security in the TV Series *Westworld*

*Westworld* (2016-22), an HBO series that retells Michael Crichton’s 1973 film of the same name, explores in depth the relationship between wealth and concepts of safety/security. An amusement park like *Westworld* perfectly fits Marc Augé’s idea of a non-

place, where people pass through and exercise their consumerist potential – in this case by using and abusing androids that populate the park. However, the manner in which the androids eventually revolt against the guests turns Augé’s theory upside down, as people are forced to stay and become victimized by the amusement park itself. Throughout the first season there are constant reiterations uttered regarding the safety of the park, to the point that it seems like the characters are trying to convince themselves. The security afforded the guests due to their wealth is totally annihilated when the androids go on a killing spree against them. Their capitalistic power eats them alive and turns on them in a complete reversal of roles, where those who usually have control are stripped of their privilege and punished for their abuse of it. The quote from Shakespeare, “[t]hese violent delights have violent ends,” used to unleash the androids’ rampage, is not just a hint at intertextuality, but also points to how the violence of capitalism has the potential to backfire and haunt those who have exercised it first. The illusionary sense of security and power that wealth gives proves to be ephemeral and temporary. Through this case study, my paper suggests a reflection on the transitory safety that capitalistic wealth provides to those who have acquired it. By employing Augé’s work on non-places and Mark Fisher’s theories on capitalist realism, this paper frames the amusement park and the androids as physical embodiments of the violent specter of capitalism and of the transiency of consumerist wealth.

- **Jacob Miller, University College Dublin, “It’s time to talk about how to pay for it”: American Hegemony, Debt, and Waste in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest***

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama’s proclamation of the “end of history” encapsulated the widespread perception that the end of the Cold War signalled a new era of economic and political stability. Over thirty years later, amid the consequences of the 2008 crash, the existential threat of the climate emergency, and the conflict in Ukraine, such assertions seem misguided. Published in 1996, David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* expressed scepticism about the optimism articulated by Fukuyama. Adopting a Marxist, world-ecological approach, this paper will argue that *Infinite Jest* illuminates how the seeming security of the 1990s was in fact ephemeral. Wallace’s text mediates the insecurity of 1990s American hegemony, framing such dominance as a temporary deferral of collapse. I will focus on two forms of deferral—the temporal deferral of debt and financialization, and an ecological deferral which sees the occlusion of ecological damage. By examining the imagery of waste and the language of debt which runs throughout the novel, I aim to show that *Infinite Jest* reveals how, despite being temporarily repressed, the contradictions of capitalism will always re-emerge. Specifically, I will focus on the contradiction between capitalism’s drive for exponential growth versus ecological limits. I will take a multi-scalar approach, demonstrating how characters’ experiences of precarity serve as analogies for macro-economic fragility. Through the metaphor of drug addiction *Infinite Jest* encodes the nature of the 90s boom as a temporary high preceding a collapse, as well as re-centring those marginalized groups who did not share in the “prosperity”. By re-examining *Infinite Jest*, I aim to shed light on how contemporary insecurity emerged from the “security” and “prosperity” of the 1990s as well as contextualising present crises within broader world-systemic cycles.
- **David Coughlan, University of Limerick, Failing Democracy: Jacques Derrida, Ben Lerner, and *Leaving the Atocha Station***

On 11 March, 2004, the city of Madrid was hit by a series of devastating train bombings. The attacks and the resulting protests play an important part in Ben Lerner’s *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011), but the novel is not simply about them. Instead, Lerner addresses the relationship between literature and politics. Discussing the influence of Allen Grossman’s work on Lerner, this paper shows how the novel develops an understanding of

literature in terms of the actual poem and the virtual, impossible poem. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's work on democracy to come and the idea of a democracy that threatens itself, the paper then argues that an experience of reading is, for Lerner, an experience of exposure to a literature to come that requires a decisive, improvised response. This response, in turn, requires us to think about the difference between what Derrida describes as "the good of democratic freedom or liberty and the evil of democratic license." Concluding with the novel's recontextualisation of the Spanish government's response to the Madrid bombings, the essay argues that an experience of literature is an experience of deciding the meaning of what is happening here and now, mirroring an experience of democratic politics.

#### **PANEL 6B: Social Constructs and Social Ghosts**

- **Nicola Brooks, Queen's University Belfast**, From Silencing to Selling: How Native American Spirituality has been Abused by Non-Natives

Since the arrival of non-Natives in North America, Native Peoples have been forced to adapt their lifestyles to the meet colonisers' desires. In this paper, I will examine how Native American Spirituality was forcibly fashioned into a religion that colonisers accepted. I will then explore how non-Natives, appropriate and commodify Native Spirituality.

Colonisers by definition, take control of other areas as extensions of their power (Merriam Webster). To take control, one needs either acceptance of their authority or force. For the colonisers arriving in North America, force was the method they used. They striped Native Americans of rights, lands, freedoms, and community. Tribes were no longer able to gather and freely practice their spirituality. As a result of this, many Native Americans attempted to translate their practices into ones that resembled those of the colonisers. Craig Martin's Social Constructivism Theory states that a word's meaning is decided by the community they are in. If the community accepts that the thing, we are arguing is x is actually x and not y, then it is x (33). Meaning, for Native Americans, their spirituality needed to conform to the coloniser's idea of religion in order for it to be recognised as such.

In this paper I will propose that for Native spirituality to survive in North America it had to conform to the coloniser's conception of religion. This drastically altered how Native's presented their spirituality. After adapting to this forced religious assimilation, non-Natives understood Native spirituality as something they had a right to; they began practicing it incorrectly which led to the deaths of multiple people, they began selling items as standalone tokens and they disrespected the society that it came from.

Native spirituality was doomed to be misunderstood if perceived through colonising frameworks and this paper will explore how this transpired.

- **Mariane Gallet, University of Edinburgh**, "no woman beareth the axe in Babylon": Questioning the Inherent Errantry and (In)Security of Black Feminism in the Harlem of the Great Migration, a study of recovered Zora Neale Hurston short stories

Five Zora Neale Hurston short stories recovered in the last decade have profoundly changed academic visions of her corpus. Published for the first time in a single volume in 2020, these stories reveal a concern with political and sociological consequences of the Great Migration. They examine gender relations and gender-based violence in a national and urban context, revealing, and challenging, the enduring state of breach and (in)security of individual subjectivities facing systemic racism and hegemonic patriarchy. Obscured from literary history by the double-strain of racism and sexism, Hurston's marginalisation reflects the mechanisms of invisibilisation of systemic racism and misogyny. By 1960, most of Hurston's works were out of print, until the reappraisal of her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* securing her canonical status as American writer, and Black feminist foremother. Still, manuscripts remain scattered in archives, hardly accessible. These archival

gaps, epitomising canonical (in)security, have shaped approaches to Hurston's corpus and made difficult to comprehensively survey her literary contributions and political thought. Relying on an incomplete corpus to this day, scholarship canonised Hurston as folk heroine of the rural. These urban stories, however, demonstrate a skilful navigation of spaces of intersection (rural/urban, regional/national, gender/class, gender/power), emphasising complex subjectivities. Innovatively investigating the erosion of gender relations and the normalisation of gender-based violence in the context of the Great Migration and modernist urbanisation, Hurston explores themes that seldom are central in discussions of the Harlem Renaissance. In this paper, I discuss patriarchal (in)security and social constructs of feminine and masculine gender identities in the Harlem Renaissance, examining Hurston's approach to New Negro Womanhood and modernist writing. I argue that these stories contribute to a complex understanding of ways society systemically approaches and excuses gender-based violence and masculine hegemony, interrogating the inherent (in)security of Black womanhood.

**Roufaida Mina, University of Limerick, Social Haunting and the Legacy of Racial Subordination in Toni Morrison's *Sula***

This paper will address Toni Morrison's concern with America's abusive systems of power plaguing Afro-American social life through an exploration of the prevalent state of haunting in *Sula*. Chattel slavery in America foreshadowed the lawful nullification of blacks. The experiences of psychological and physical abuse, rape, the cruel separation of black infants from their parents, and forced servitude shaped African American subjectivity. The dislocation of Africans as captives, on the Middle Passage journey from Africa to the New World, created a sense of misplacement in a land that thrived on the terror of the enslaved. The terrors of institutional slavery continue to haunt African American descendants on the land in the form of cultural trauma. At a societal level, abusive institutions of power in northern America subjugate and threaten the social stability of black individuals even after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. In *Sula*, abusive systems of power as a haunting are recognized by Sula and Shadrack who embody the figure of the social ghost in their black community given their experiences of the impact of repressed racial violence. This paper, therefore, will address the state of fragmentation of the black self in *Sula* as a form of haunting by the possibility of historical alternatives to persistent societal and racial subordination. In portraying the creative black self as marginalized and alienated, Toni Morrison foregrounds opposition to the black community's passiveness to mere survival within the traditional order during the period from the two World Wars up to the years nearing the end of the Civil Rights Movement context of the text. The paper will draw upon the work of Avery Gordon on social haunting and the figure of the social ghost in reading the persistence of the legacy of racial subordination as threatening the social security of African Americans.

**PANEL 7A: Abject and Unwanted**

- **Kelsie Donnelly, Queen's University Belfast, Open Bodies and Abject Aesthetics in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist***

Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theorisation of abjection as the subjective experience of the porosity between self and other, and of what is cast out of the symbolic order, this paper examines Don DeLillo's engagement with abject art and the open body of grief in his 2001 novel, *The Body Artist*. In her seminal text, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva defines the abject as "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" that "does not respect borders, positions, rules" and "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (4; 2). In *The Body Artist*, Lauren Hartke encounters the insistent materiality of

death, rather than the knowledge and meaning of death, through the figure of Mr Tuttle in the wake of her husband's suicide. The enigmatic Mr Tuttle is the embodiment of the abject as he is "outside the easy sway of either/or", with "no protective surface" (*Body* 69; 90). The abject is beyond the "scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" and, as such, Tuttle's embodied existence is both a mystery and miracle that defies the laws of time, space, and human reason (Kristeva 1). Though Mr Tuttle's very existence seems to suspend the bounds of reason – and, initially, Lauren's belief – it paradoxically reveals the *reality* of the openness of embodied consciousness while casting doubt on the validity of the laws of language, time, space, and subjectivity. This paper argues that the reality of vulnerability and dispossession is, for Lauren, an epiphany, a revelation, that "recovers" lost souls without resorting to death. Rather than protecting embodied surfaces, and the illusion of security and stability, she comes to welcome the traces of strangeness housed in her abject body of grief, which plays host to a communion of souls. If, as DeLillo portends, the "extraordinary wonder of things is somehow related to the extraordinary dread, to the death fear we try to keep beneath the surface of our perceptions", then *The Body Artist* – and its revelation of the "awful openness" of the abject – is a wonderful work (DeLillo, "Outsider" 63).

- **Janice Lynne Deitner, Trinity College Dublin, "It Looks Good. It's Strong": Storytelling, Security, and "A Nation Reborn" in the *Purge* Franchise**

Since the release of the first *Purge* film in 2013 the franchise has deeply embedded itself in American popular culture, spawning four sequel films and two television seasons in just eight years. A fictional United States, suffering from an economic collapse that mirrors our 2007 crisis, elects to power the ultra-conservative New Founding Fathers of America (NFFA). The NFFA implement a yearly twelve-hour period in which all crime is legal, ostensibly to release innate American aggression and lower crime, bolstering the use of the purge with nationalistic rhetoric of "a nation reborn" through cleansing violence.

However, this rhetoric covers a horrifying reality, revealed moments into the first film when a talk radio caller exclaims that "the poor can't afford to protect themselves." The franchise regularly reveals that the NFFA use the purge to remove unwanted elements of society. This fact is central to *The Purge's* critique of real-life America. Yet, rebellious elements, ranging from such comments to electoral politics to resistance fighters, are constantly erased or disappeared in the next instalment. *The Purge* constantly unsettles its own narrative.

Similarly, from the first film, in which rich young white people invade the home of James Sandin, a security system salesman, the franchise undermines concepts of security. Sandin's assurances to his wife that his security system "looks good" and is "strong" do not cohere: the system *looks* good but proves not to be strong. Like the masks government forces wear to hide their identities, security rests on appearance and ideological smokescreens. Focusing on this intertwining of false security and unreliable storytelling, this paper will explore the franchise's insecure critique of modern-day America.

#### **Panel 7B: Mother/Daughter, Refugee/Refugee**

- **Clodagh Guerin, University of Limerick, Mothers, Trauma and Memory in Vietnamese American Refugee Literature**

For this conference, I wish to present a paper that examines the representation of refugee mothers in two texts written by second generation Vietnamese refugees in America- *The Refugees* by Vietnam Thanh Nguyen and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong. My area of research is concerned with the representation of refugees in contemporary post-colonial literature, with a particular emphasis on the experience and representation of refugee mother figures. Refugee studies is a budding and topical sub-field



of post-colonial studies, but the research of women specifically in this field is small as of yet, and a consideration of the maternal experience is minimal, and this is the lacuna that my research aims to fill, meaning that my presentation at this conference would showcase new and original departures in both the postcolonial and American literary space.

For the purposes of this conference, my paper will address several definitions of security and insecurity- as these are central themes in all narratives pertaining to refugee experience- but will primarily address the idea of intergenerational trauma and post memory in the wake of becoming a refugee and fleeing persecution, thus tackling the themes of this conference head on. The themes of trauma, memory and post memory will be addressed in conversation with issues of vulnerability, and the experience of refugee assimilation in America. This paper will engage with both foundational theory and current discourse in the postcolonial field, conversing with scholars such as Marianne Hirsch and Lauren Berlant, among others.

In sum, my paper will explore how refugee mothers play a pivotal role in the creation of refugee identity and the transmission of memories to their children, after their own fear of persecution and loss of security, taking the Vietnamese American case as an example.

- **Meryem Hana Karouche, University of Limerick, The Journey to Self-Discovery: An Exploration of Insecurity and Security in *The Joy Luck Club***

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) explores the complex relationships between mothers and daughters, as well as their struggles of searching for a sense of security and belonging, whether it be in their relationships, their careers, or their cultural identities, in a world that often sees them as outsiders. Through the use of flashbacks and dream sequences, Tan delves into the past lives of the female characters, revealing the sources of their securities and insecurities and the ways in which they have attempted to overcome them. The novel also highlights the power of the mother-daughter relationship and the importance of understanding and embracing one's past in order to find security in the present. The mothers in the novel, for example, struggle to understand and accept their daughters' Americanized identities, while the daughters struggle to reconcile their American upbringing with their Chinese heritage. Despite these feelings of vulnerability, both mothers and daughters are able to find a sense of belonging in their relationships with each other. The mothers are able to find a sense of refuge in their daughters, who they see as a reflection of themselves and their own cultural heritage. The daughters are able to find a sense of assurance in their mothers, who they see as a connection to their cultural heritage and to their own sense of self. This paper will examine the themes of insecurity and security of the female characters in *The Joy Luck Club*, analysing the ways in which their struggles reflect the larger themes of identity, culture, and belonging. It will also show how these women are able to find a sense of security and belonging through their relationships with each other and the process of understanding and accepting which allows them to fully embrace and understand their identities.