

## ROUNDTABLES – ESSE2024 @UNIL:

- 1. Topic: *Revisiting Central and Eastern Europe: Contemporary Anglophone Writing and the Cold War***  
Participants: Katrin Berndt (MLU Halle-Wittenberg, Germany), Ágnes Györke (Károli Gáspár University, Budapest, Hungary), Robert Kusek (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland)
- 2. Topic: *Transboundary Narratives: Contemporary Women’s Writing in English***  
Participants: Merve Sarıkaya-Şen (Başkent University, Turkey), Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor (Penn State University, United States), Silvia Pellicer-Ortin (Zaragoza University, Spain)
- 3. Topic: *Reading Revisited: Susan Sontag’s “Against Interpretation” at 60***  
Participants: Nell Wasserstrom (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Sofie Behluli (University of Bern, Switzerland), Davida Fernandez-Barkan (Harvard University, United States), Julia Straub (University of Fribourg, Switzerland), Simon Swift (University of Geneva, Switzerland)
- 4. Topic: *Modernism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***  
Participants: Sangam MacDuff (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Fiona Becket (University of Leeds, UK), Jane Goldman (University of Glasgow, UK), Patrick Jones (University of Geneva, Switzerland), Alberto Tondello (University of Edinburgh / University of Bern, Switzerland)
- 5. Topic: *The Future of Metamodernism***  
Participants: Antony Rowland (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), Dennis Kersten (Radboud University, Netherlands), Paula Romero Polo (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain), Timotheus Vermeulen (Oslo University, Norway), Usha Wilbers (Radboud University, Netherlands)
- 6. Topic: *Visions of the Future: Literary Studies and Crisis***  
Participants: Matthew Scully (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Thomas Austenfeld (University of Fribourg, Switzerland), Lola Boorman (University of York, UK), Isis Giraldo (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Simon Swift (University of Geneva, Switzerland)
- 7. Topic: *Meeting of the Gender Studies Network***  
Participants: Işıl Baş (Istanbul Kültür University, Turkey), Florence Binard (Université Paris Cité, France), Renate Haas (University of Kiel, Germany), Nóra Sellei (University of Debrecen, Hungary), María Socorro Suárez Lafuente (University of Oviedo, Spain)
- 8. Topic: *Rewriting mythologies for the blue humanities***  
Participants: Barbara Barrow (Lund University, Sweden), Monika Class (Lund University, Sweden), Julia Boll (University of Konstanz, Germany), Ursula Kluwick (University of Bern, Switzerland), , Elena de Wachter (Lund University, Sweden)
- 9. Topic: *Medieval English In Europe: What Works?***  
Participants: Rory Critten (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Irina Dumitrescu (University of Bonn, Germany), Annette Kern-Stähler (University of Bern, Switzerland), Katherine Zieman (University of Poitiers, France), Giovanni Iamartino (University of Milan, Italy), Laura Esteban-Segura (University of Málaga, Spain)

## ABSTRACTS:

### 1. **Topic: *Revisiting Central and Eastern Europe: Contemporary Anglophone Writing and the Cold War***

Participants: Katrin Berndt (MLU Halle-Wittenberg, Germany)  
Àgnes Györke (Károli Gáspár University, Budapest, Hungary)  
Robert Kusek (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland)

Contemporary literature and media in English have shown a growing fascination with the regions and nations behind what was once dubbed the ‘Iron Curtain’. The roundtable will address various themes and forms of revisiting historical Central and Eastern Europe that include farcical and Kafkaesque portrayals of the failed ideals of socialism; imaginary returns to central European settings, characters, and tropes as sites of personal and national histories; retrotopian conceptualizations of a totalitarian past with the aim to understand more recent authoritarian threats; and literary explorations of traumatic memories that continue to haunt the present.

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### 2. **Topic: *Transboundary Narratives: Contemporary Women’s Writing in English***

Participants: Merve Sarıkaya-Şen (Başkent University, Turkey)  
Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor (Penn State University, United States)  
Silvia Pellicer-Ortin (Zaragoza University, Spain)

This roundtable aims to approach contemporary women’s writing in English from the perspective of what we call “transboundary narratives” that challenge the boundaries of the content and form of traditional narratives. We will discuss issues related to generic boundaries in contemporary women’s life writing narratives and autobiographical practices, including “autotheory”, which blurs/transforms the supposed boundaries of “theory” and “lived experience” in the work of recent academics and artists. We will also elaborate on the ethics and poetics of “border-crossing fiction” by contemporary women writers. We will explore how the selected texts cross and shift formal, thematic and generic boundaries and facilitate our understanding of gender and identity.

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### 3. **Topic: *Reading Revisited: Susan Sontag’s “Against Interpretation” at 60***

Participants: Nell Wasserstrom (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)  
Isabelle Alfandary (Sorbonne Nouvelle, France)  
Davida Fernandez-Barkan (Harvard University, UK)  
Julia Straub (University of Fribourg, Switzerland)  
Simon Swift (University of Geneva, Switzerland)

This roundtable proposes to explore the legacy of Susan Sontag’s manifesto, “Against Interpretation” (1964), on the occasion of its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Our aim in returning to this polemical text is twofold: first, to mine its prescience, as a sort of ur-text, in relation to current debates in the field of literary studies about various kinds of reading and interpretative practices (surface, distant, symptomatic, reparative); and second, to reread it in light of the forthcoming collection of Sontag’s early feminist essays, *On Women* (Picador, May 2023). This roundtable thus broadly seeks to bring together the politics of reading and the politics of gender and sexuality.

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#### **4. Topic: *Modernism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

Participants: Sangam MacDuff (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)  
Fiona Becket (University of Leeds, UK)  
Jane Goldman (University of Glasgow, UK)  
Patrick Jones (University of Geneva, Switzerland)  
Alberto Tondello (University of Edinburgh / University of Bern, Switzerland)

This roundtable aims to explore the relevance of modernist studies to the world we live in. Focusing on recent critical approaches to modernism – especially queer and gender studies, ecocriticism, and posthumanism – we wish to consider how modernist aesthetics, poetics, and sensibilities shed light on key contemporary issues, including the climate crisis, the rise of AI, and the ongoing struggle to obtain equal rights. With a varied selection of participants whose research touches on feminist aesthetics, queer theory, eco-poetics, posthumanism, and philosophy, we hope this roundtable will lead to insightful and constructive discussions about the relevance of modernist studies today.

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#### **5. Topic: *The Future of Metamodernism***

Participants: Antony Rowland (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK)  
Dennis Kersten (Radboud University, Netherlands)  
Paula Romero Polo (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain)  
Timotheus Vermeulen (Oslo University, Norway)  
Usha Wilbers (Radboud University, Netherlands)

Five key members of the pan-European “Metamodernism” network funded twice by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) would like to discuss the implications of the main results of the series of international conferences they helped organise between 2018 and 2023, that focused on the ways in which twenty-first-century literature and culture process the legacies of Modernism and Postmodernism. We will assess where we currently stand with Metamodernism research and address the question of which new directions the field might explore in the future within the larger context of English literature and cultural studies.

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## **6. Topic: *Visions of the Future: Literary Studies and Crisis***

Participants: Matthew Scully (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)  
Thomas Austenfeld (University of Fribourg, Switzerland)  
Lola Boorman (University of York, UK)  
Isis Giraldo (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)  
Simon Swift (University of Geneva, Switzerland)

2024 marks the 20-year anniversary of Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, which polemically challenges heteronormative visions of a future that merely reproduce the present status quo. A parallel critique exists in Black Studies in its argument against white supremacist narratives of a racially exclusive future. More recently, literary scholars have turned to ecology to face the very real threat that neither humanity nor the world may have a future at all. This roundtable provides an opportunity to consider how literature and literary studies respond to these pressing matters of futurity given our ongoing social-political crises.

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## **7. Topic: *Meeting of the Gender Studies Network***

Participants: Işıl Baş (Istanbul Kültür University, Turkey)  
Florence Binard (Université Paris Cité, France)  
Renate Haas (University of Kiel, Germany)  
Nóra Sellei (University of Debrecen, Hungary)  
María Socorro Suárez Lafuente (University of Oviedo, Spain)

As this will be the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the GSN, a brief look at crucial developments of the past decade suggests itself (e.g., the increased populist attacks on Gender Studies, fights about the Istanbul Convention, trans controversies, revival of feminism). A central focus will be the situation of junior staff. To turn the roundtable into a genuine academic community event, colleagues sharing their experience through brief statements are welcome (intentions indicated in advance will be appreciated). Topics may, for instance, include special difficulties, common but not always clear prerequisites for a career, promising initiatives, good practices (like mentorship programmes etc.).

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## **8. Topic: *Rewriting mythologies for the blue humanities***

Participants: Barbara Barrow (Lund University, Sweden)  
Monika Class (Lund University, Sweden)  
Julia Boll (University of Konstanz, Germany)  
Ursula Kluwick (University of Bern, Switzerland)

In *Ocean* (2020), Steve Mentz describes Achilles as a destroyer of nature, while Odysseus is a “sea-hero” who both “loves and fears the Ocean—like so many of us today” (26). Mentz illustrates a broader history of engaging with Greek myth as a way of thinking about and with

water. This roundtable will investigate how writers of different literary periods use myth to think about human relationality with the sea under the rubric of the blue humanities. This roundtable is open to all types of literary reworkings of world mythology that investigate the resonances and consequences of human actions in the ocean.

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**9. Topic: *Medieval English In Europe: What Works?***

Participants: Rory Critten (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)  
Irina Dumitrescu (University of Bonn, Germany)  
Annette Kern-Stähler (University of Bern, Switzerland)  
Katherine Zieman (University of Poitiers, France)  
Giovanni Iamartino (University of Milan, Italy)  
Laura Esteban-Segura (University of Málaga, Spain)

Each speaker will be given a maximum of 10 minutes to talk about (1) how research and teaching in medieval English is conducted at their institutions and (2) the approaches to research and/or teaching that they have found to work locally. The goals of the roundtable are to share examples of best practice and to enhance connections between researchers in medieval English across Europe.

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