

New Directions in Literary Studies

Programme

Prof. Serenella Iovino (Turin University)

“Literature and Liberation: Ecological Humanities and a Democracy of Story-Telling”

In a paper entitled “Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature” Italo Calvino wrote: “Literature is one of society’s instruments of self-awareness—certainly not the only one, but nonetheless an essential instrument, because its origins are connected with the origins of various types of knowledge, various codes, various forms of critical thought” (*The Uses of Literature*, 97). Literature is, in other words, capable of imposing patterns of language and imagination, and models of values that are at the same time aesthetic and ethical, essential to any plan of action, especially in political life. In my presentation I will consider how, in the broader framework of an ecological culture, literature provides us with critical and creative instruments necessary to develop “strategies of survival,” which are at once cultural, environmental, and political. Emphasizing the role literature plays in shaping new vocabularies apt to show, interpret, and represent the world in its multiplicity of players and stories, I will argue for its power to act as a privileged means of liberation and of emancipation for both the human and for its "other."

Serenella Iovino is Professor of Ethics at the University of Turin, Research Fellow of the Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation, and a former president of EASLCE (the European

Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and Environment). She is author of four books and of numerous essays on topics connected to ecocriticism, environmental philosophy, and German philosophy and literature of the Age of Goethe.

Dr Chrsitiana Weller (German Studies, Monash University)

“Writing Madness – Exploring the Art of the Prinzhorn Collection”

When Sigmund Freud attempted to delineate psychosis from neurosis he suggested that they are based on two different responses to the oedipal situation, i.e. to castration. In neurosis castration is disavowed, in psychosis it is foreclosed. These two differing responses structure – according to Freud – the subject’s relation with the outside world. Whereas in neurosis reality is repaired through phantasies and daydreaming, in psychosis reality is replaced with a delusional system which in itself appears to be logical and coherent. Jacques Lacan developed this thought further in reference to language. For Lacan the primordial signifier - the name-of-the-father - allows language to function at a symbolic level. However, when this privileged signifier is missing - or foreclosed - the totality of the signifying system is questioned. This is the case in psychosis and the consequence is the extensive modification of all other signifiers. This can be detected in the hybridity of vocabulary, the excessive use of neologisms, the petrification of syntax, and the ambiguity of utterances.

Drawing on Hans Prinzhorn's collection of artworks and writings by psychiatric patients of the late 19th/early 20th century this paper will investigate the particular effects of foreclosure. The Prinzhorn Collection is possibly one of the most comprehensive collections of the works of psychiatric patients, encompassing an array of texts in different media (writing, painting, drawing, sculpture) accompanied by medical notes, diagnoses and short case histories from the various psychiatrists who treated these patients. My main interests are the notebooks, diaries and other written works, or works in which visual and scriptural elements are combined. To do justice to these psychotic texts it is necessary, I would suggest, to combine a clinical with a literary reading. This is what I would like to propose in this paper.

Christiane Weller is a Senior Lecturer in German Studies at Monash University. Her research interests include German travel writing and expedition reports, colonial writing, contemporary German fiction and psychoanalytic theory. She has published on Georg Forster, Christoph Ransmayr, W.G. Sebald, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, Wolfgang Hilbig and others, as well as on topics like trauma, melancholia and psychosis. She is a co-editor of *Limbus: Australisches Jahrbuch für germanistische Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft / Australian Yearbook of German Literary and Cultural Studies*.

Dr Anna Poletti (Literature and Creative Writing, Monash University)

“Genre and Materiality: Autobiography and Zines”

A new direction in literary studies that considers the role of the physical object of the book in literature has been sparked by the rise of the e-reader and e-books. While many people gleefully predicted the imminent death of the book with the rise of digital technologies, instead what we have seen is a flourishing of experimental literature, book art and independent publishing that explore and celebrate what Jessica Pressman has called “bookishness”. This paper will examine the importance of materiality—paper, ink, photocopying, collage—in a recent Australian zine, *Letters to a Sister*. The most common question a researcher working on zines is asked is, aren't zines being killed off by blogs? The answer is no, and this paper seeks to explain why.

Australian zine culture is a vibrant and active site of literary production deeply interested in exploring the role of the material in the reading process. I suggest that attending to the texts of zine culture can further our understanding of the continued role of the analogue in the age of the digital. I situate zines as one of many sites contributing to the cultural prominence of the production and consumption of memoir. Reading zines from this perspective will illuminate how the materiality of the zine form produces specific opportunities for autobiography that are complementary to and diverge from the explosion of life narrative in broadcast media, mainstream publishing, and online. In their hybridity and materiality, zines produce encounters between readers and objects that materialise a number of the textures specific to autobiographical storytelling, and it is this strong overlap between the autobiographical and the material that will be my focus. Through this approach I

invite discussion of how examining the intersections of materiality and genre may be a means of progressing our understanding of the persistence of the material in the age of the digital.

Anna Poletti is a lecturer in English at Monash University, where she teaches subjects in women's writing, Australian literature, and life narrative. She is the author of *Intimate Ephemera: Reading Young Lives in Australian Zine Culture* (Melbourne UP, 2008). Anna has published articles examining the production, circulation and materiality of autobiographical texts in *Continuum*, *Biography*, and *Life Writing*. Her most recent work looks at the phenomenon of PostSecret, and the auto/biographical film *Tarnation*.