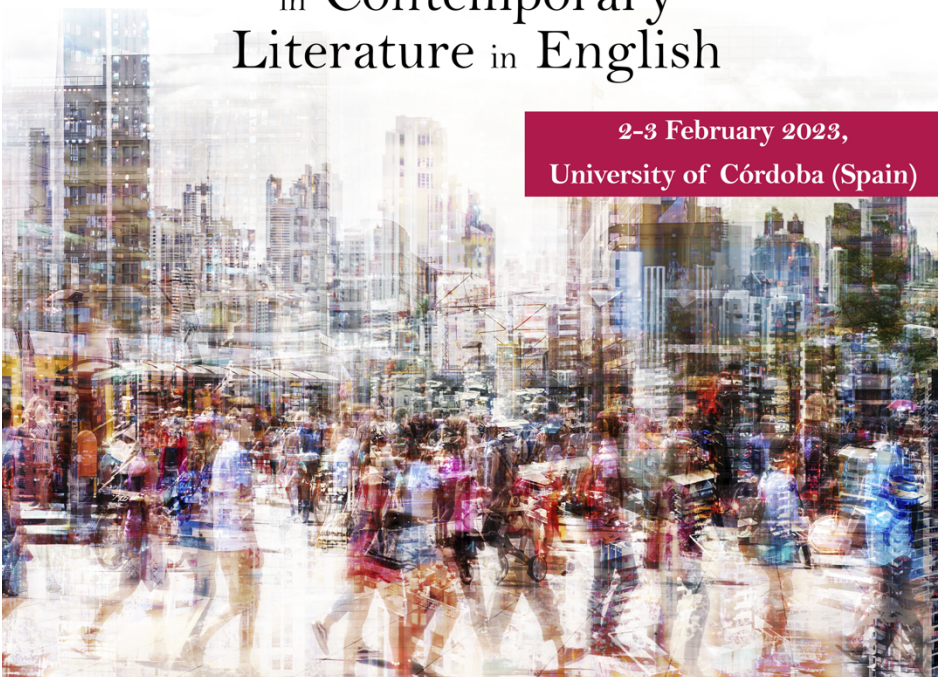# Democracy, & Secrecy & Dissidence

in Contemporary Literature in English

2-3 February 2023,
University of Córdoba (Spain)

DESEDI
Democracy, Secrecy and Dissidence
in Contemporary Literature in English

UNIVERSIDAD Đ CÓRDOBA

FACULTAD Đ FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE CIENCIA E INNOVACIÓN

Departamento de Filologías Inglesa y Alemana de la Universidad de Córdoba

English and Related Literatures HUM-682

DEMOCRACY, SECRECY AND DISSIDENCE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

2-3 February 2023
University of Córdoba (Spain)

PROGRAM

Thursday, February 2nd	
9:00-9:30	Registration / Welcome
9:30-11:00 Session 1 (3 papers)	- **Jelena Sesnic** (U. Zagreb): Literary Imagination at the Digital Frontier: Dave Eggers's Recent Technological Dystopian Novels (*The Circle*, *The Every*)
	- **Esther Muñoz González** (U. Zaragoza): Secret Writing and Truth: Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Novels
	- **Ángela Rivera Izquierdo** (U. Granada): Surveillance technology, identity construction and anthropogenic catastrophe in Martin MacInnes's *Gathering Evidence*
	Chair: María Luisa Pascual
11:00-11:30	Coffee break
11:30-12:45	Plenary Session: **Prof. Clare Birchall** (King's College London): Critique and/as Conspiracy Theory Chair: María Jesús López
12:45-13:00	Break

13:00-14:00 Session 2 (2 papers)	- **Mercedes Diaz Dueñas** (U. Granada): The Survivor in Madeleine Thien's Fiction **- Aristi Trendel** (LeMans University): The Reluctant Dissident: Freedom and Secrecy in Ha Jin's *A Song Everlasting* Chair: Gerardo Rodríguez
14:00-16:00	Lunch break
16:00-17:30 Session 3 (3 papers)	- **Christopher Griffin** (U. Warwick): Lost Afrofutures: Anthony Joseph's *The African Origins of UFOs* as Aperture Fiction **- Jim Barloon** (U. St. Thomas): 'Silence, Exile, and Cunning' in Ellison's *Invisible Man* - **Luna Chung** (U. of Arizona): Silence, Secrecy and (in)Sanity: Uncovering Methods for Reading Chinese American Epistemology in *The Woman Warrior* Chair: Jesús Blanco
17:30-18:00	Coffee break
18:00-19:30	**Roundtable**: Retrotopia, Democracy and Secrecy in Literature Maria J. López, Gerardo Rodríguez Salas, Pilar Villar-Argaiz.
21:00	**Conference dinner**

Friday, February 3rd	
9:00-10:30 Session 4 (3 papers)	- **Kai Wiegandt** (Barenboim-Said Akademie Berlin): Teju Cole's Poetics of Secrecy and Revelation - **Miriam Fernández Santiago** (U. Granada): The Secret as a Formal Dimension of the Literary Text. Digital Transparency vs Literary Negativity in Tao Lin's *Taipei* (2014) - **Manu Joshi** (IIT-Delhi): Restoring the Subject: Political secrecy and literary betrayal in J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* Chair: Mercedes Díaz
10:30-11:00	Coffee break
11:00-12:15	Plenary Session: **Prof. Sascha Pöhlmann** (U. of Innsbruck): Walt Whitman's Poetry of Intimacy Chair: Paula Martín
12:15-12:30	Break
12:30-14:00 Session 5 (3 papers)	- **Sonia Baelo Allué** (U. Zaragoza): Secrecy, Transparency and Transhumanism in a Changing Context: From "Black Box" to "Lulu the Spy, 2032" in Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House* (2022)

	- **Felicity Smith** (U. Granada): The Political is the Psychological: The Construction and Fragmentation of Secrets in Anna Burns' *Little Constructions* - **Maria Luisa Pascual Garrido** (U. Córdoba): 'The mist hangs heavily across my past': Secrecy, Myth and Truth in *The Buried Giant* Chair: Pilar Villar
14:00-16:00	Lunch break
16:00-16:30	Tour around the Faculty building.
16:30-17:30 Session 6 (2 papers)	- **Auxiliadora Pérez Vides** (U. Huelva): The Noir Fiction Rhetorics of Ireland's Subterfuges in Benjamin Black's *Elegy for April* and *April in Spain* - **Jorge Diego Sánchez** (U. Salamanca): "Go and Do the Thing You Shouldn't": Transformative Hope in Riz Ahmed's *The Long Goodbye* (2020) Chair: Ángela Rivera
17:30-18:00	Coffee break
18:00-19:00 Session 7 (2 papers)	- **Edward Smith** (independent scholar): Revealing Open Secrets: Wittgenstein, Dissidence, and Clown Logic - **Manuel Herrero-Puertas** (National Taiwan U.): Unreliable Deliberators: Neurodiverse Democracy in *Mr. Robot* Chair: Juan Luis Pérez

19:00-20:30	**Roundtable and closing remarks**:
	Secrecy, Conspiracy and Totality in the Systems Novel
	Jesús Blanco Hidalga, Paula Martín-Salván, Juan L. Pérez-de-Luque.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Critique and/as Conspiracy

Prof. Clare Birchall
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In this lecture, I revisit debates about postcritique by focusing on the relationship between critique and conspiracy theory in light of recent political, technological and epistemic developments. I am particularly interested in the way that conspiracy theory comes to serve as a straw man in certain arguments against the hermeneutics of suspicion. Pausing on these metaphorical mobilisations of conspiracy theory, I ask what difference it makes to the discussion about critique if we take on board the manifestation, mediation and meaning of conspiracy theories in circulation today. Such an enquiry also presents questions from the other side: what do we miss about contemporary conspiracy theories when we read them only as a poor version of critique rather than as a form of world-building tied to identity and belonging?

Intimacy in Walt Whitman's Poetry and Prose

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In this lecture, I seek to look beyond the presentist focus of contemporary considerations of transparency and secrecy while at the same time remaining sufficiently faithful to the conditions and paradigms they describe, in the interest of exploring historical beginnings and early stages of a continuous process rather than a qualitatively different situation that would mark a genuine contrast.

Walt Whitman's career as a journalist, poet, and prose writer from the mid-1840s to 1892 largely coincides with this development and responds to its intensification, and his writing recurrently engages with issues of transparency and secrecy in ways that connect the private and personal with the political. His peculiar self-help series "Manly Health and Training" (1858), his early poetry on universal connectedness in 1855, his Calamus poems about the utopian love of comrades, his postwar jeremiad *Democratic Vistas* (1871), and numerous individual poems address the relation between individual and society in contexts of nationality, the state, ethics, democracy, sexuality, and freedom, and they do so in a way that can best be described as a third option that balances transparency and secrecy: intimacy.

In this lecture, and in reference to the exemplary works I just mentioned, I will argue that Whitman's poetics and politics of intimacy already prefigure the

two extremes that will become dominant in the 20th century. I argue that Whitman evokes both tropes of transparency and secrecy as ways of imagining how individuals relate to each other in society, and that he constructs intimacy as a viable interpersonal relation that is neither entirely private nor entirely public. This is also a relation of how individuals relate to each other in *poetry*, and I will show how Whitman, fusing the aesthetic with the political, uses the media of text and book to create (and indeed withhold) a readerly intimacy that creates a common sphere of secrecy while at the same time transparently opening it up toward potentially any individual across time.

ROUNDTABLES

Democracy, Secrecy and Dissidence in Contemporary Literature in English

Roundtable I
Retrotopia, Democracy and Secrecy in Literature

Pilar Villar-Argáiz, Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas, María J. López
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This roundtable deals with the interconnections between the contemporary crisis of ideals of 'democracy' and dis/utopian political models envisioned in contemporary literary works and their interconnection with secrecy and dissidence.

Pilar Villar-Argáiz will begin by focusing on the widespread disenchantment with the idea of 'democracy'. For some commentators, social democracy and liberalism in the West hides a strong, powerful ethnic nationalism, which exhibits at times regressive and backward looking tendencies. *The new backlash phenomenon observed in the current political climate is analyzed conspicuously in* Zygmunt Bauman's last work *Retrotopia*, published posthumously just months after his death. In his 2017 study, Bauman paints a very bleak picture, identifying a return to regressive, backward looking ideologies. This contribution focuses on the writings of some prominent cultural voices in Ireland, which seem to adjust to what Bauman identifies as the

advent of some forms of 'retrotopian' sentiments and practices. This contribution will particularly focus on some recent writings, produced in the context of the centenary celebrations of the 1916 Easter Rising when the Proclamation of the Republic was signed: the newspaper columns by Finan O'Toole (Ireland's most respected political and cultural commentator), the essays and poems of Theo Dorgan (a highly consolidated, respected literary voice in the country's artistic landscape), and finally, the spirited and energetic performances of artists such as Stephen James Smith. The texts analyzed illustrate the need to rearticulate political principles, and rethink the possibility of a liberating 'retrotopia', evincing the powerful role of the arts when providing socio-political alternatives and "visions located in the lost/ stolen/ abandoned but undead past" (Baum 2017: 5).

Drawing also on Bauman's concept of *retrotopia*, Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas will take Witi Ihimaera's early novel *The Matriarch* (1986) and its sequel *The Dream Swimmer* (1997) as case studies to explore as a controversial model associated with warrior-matriarchs in Māori communities. Reconsidering the role of tribalism and Māori utopian and cyclical land narratives— which might suggest the clan being trapped in inaction— it will be argued that the confessional male narrator of both novels, Tamatea Mahana, learns to embrace a matrilineal genealogy of powerful Māori chieftainesses. Beyond Pākehā imperial democracy and Māori male utopias of domination, Tamatea and the exceptional gallery of warrior-matriarchs implement a peculiar and controversial retrotopia — or return to the prematurely buried grand ideas of the past — which, even when dangerously

resonating with nostalgia, aims at an open-ended model of democracy. This democratic alternative will be studied as closely aligned with secrecy as it restores the *status quo* in the family clan, which unjustly blamed women for the *mate*, or family curse. A predominantly decolonizing theory and methodology will be used, drawing on Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories.

María López will also pay attention to the concept of democracy, focusing on Damon Galgut's *The Promise*, awarded with the 2021 Booker Prize. Galgut's novel depicts the decline of a white South African family, together with the South African political development from the apartheid era in the 1980s to the contemporary moment, revolving around the farm as a site of family tragedy, violence and death. The origin of the narrative's main conflict lies in the promise that Rachel Swart extracts from her husband Manie just before passing away: to give a small house on the family's farm to their maid Salome. The only witness to this promise, however, is their youngest daughter, Amor, who spends the subsequent decades struggling to see this promise being fulfilled and fighting against her father's and her siblings' rejection to do so. López intends to explore the interrelatedness between secrecy and democracy in this novel, arguing that it is precisely the idea of the promise – with its future-oriented dimension – that works as the link between the two concepts. She suggests a Derridean reading of the novel, according to which both Manie's promise to Rachel and Amor's act of witnessing work as performative acts characterized by "non-knowing" (Derrida, *Points*, 1995: 201) and non-verifiability. As such they entail the inevitability of uncertainty and the possibility of betrayal. At the same time, since their meaning and

effects cannot be exhausted by any closed, determinable context, they keep open the possibility of transformation and the promise of a 'democracy to come' – borrowing Derrida's term – in which full justice and equality will finally reign.

Roundtable II
Secrecy, Conspiracy and Totality in the Systems Novel

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This roundtable aims to explore how the notions of secrecy and transparency operate in fictions in which the complexity of social and political systems is thematized and, often, critically articulated.

Jesús Blanco Hidalga will examine how conspiracies may perform, perhaps counterintuitively, a distinctive analytical role in narratives that aim at offering a comprehensive social view. Whether you call it the system, totality or just late capitalism, conceiving of it as transparent or not has profound political implications. For example, as Toscano and Kinkle (2015) have pointed out, citing Perry Anderson, the capacity for social planning, which is a cornerstone of socialism,

rests on the ability to see through the social fabric. Likewise, the calling to penetrate the layers of social reality to attain some ultimate truth about it is also a central feature of classical realism. Although conspiracies tend to be regarded as failed, allegorical attempts at mapping a hopelessly elusive totality, examples such as David Simon's series *The Wire*, show how conspiracy narratives can become penetrating analytical tools. In fact, as *The Wire* shows, conspiracies may become particularly adequate instruments to acquire knowledge of a social body that Laclau and Mouffe (2001) saw as made up of antagonisms and ultimately opaque. In addition, conspiracies may harbour strong emancipatory potential—indeed Utopian in Jameson's sense of the term—concerning both the gain of much-needed social knowledge, and the offering of stimulating communitarian—and thence political—models.

Paula Martín-Salván will focus on Don DeLillo's work as illustrative of the way in which American fiction has recurrently brought together structural complexity and the representation of totality (Jameson) in what Tom LeClair famously described as "the systems novel". DeLillo's fictions of conspiracy prompt the reconstruction of a sense of totality in the process of reading as one in which partial, fragmentary revelations cohere into a whole. Classical poststructuralist approaches to the idea of secrecy in literature (Calinescu, Brooks, Kermode) in combination with narratological analysis provide the theoretical basis for the analysis of the dialectics between the secret and the

revealed in DeLillo's novels like *Libra, Underworld, Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man*. In all of them, disparate narrative threads move towards a point of revelation of totality, what DeLillo famously described in *Falling Man* as "where everything converges to a point" (174). Yet, DeLillo's work often exposes revelation as illusory, thus challenging the ideal of a totally transparently system, reinstating a Derridean understanding of the secret of literature as resistance to totality.

Juan L. Pérez-de-Luque will argue that one of the constants in cyberpunk literature is the resistance to the established power of mega-corporations, which is carried out by the main characters, usually marginal anti-heroes involved in anti-system conspiracies, in most cyberpunk texts. Secrecy is the central tool on which every cyberpunk conspiracy relies. The management of information is key to being able to access resources and anticipate the movements of the system to be overthrown, a system that on numerous occasions will employ the secretum, arcanum and mysterium as methods for exercising power postulated by Horn (2011). At times, the moral dilemmas derived from the use of information and the revelation or concealment of secrets will have a fundamental bearing on the events that take place, as the apparent David versus Goliath struggle between the anti-hero and the state or the mega-corporation will not always be ethically untainted for the weaker. Thus, the moral theory of secrecy by authors such as Sissela Bok (1982) can help to shed light on this issue.

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

Secrecy, Transparency and Transhumanism in a Changing Context: From "Black Box" to "Lulu the Spy, 2032" in Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House* (2022)

Dr. Sonia Baelo-Allué
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Jennifer Egan's latest novel, *The Candy House* (2022), depicts the ultimate transparent society, a near-future world in which a Consciousness Cube has been invented by a fictional tech company called Mandala that contains the memories of those that have chosen to upload them and which gives them access, in turn, to the memories of others. This open-source database of memories is a literal depiction of the "the transparency society" that Byung-Chul Han (2015) describes. It also allows for the possibility of reliving memories from the eyes of others, finding lost acquaintances or even erasing painful portions of memory. *The Candy House* (2022) develops the lives of many characters that appeared in Egan's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (2011) at different points in time. Both novels share a nonlinear structure that moves backward and forward in time and are made up of chapter-long vignettes written in different styles and displaying a variety of related characters.

This presentation will focus on one of the chapters in *The Candy House*, "Lulu the Spy, 2032". Lulu

is a character that first appeared in *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (2011), first as a 9-year-old and later in her early twenties. Lulu is also the main character of "Black Box", originally published in 2012 as a series of tweets and later as a short story in *The New Yorker*. The story takes place in an unspecified near future and, even though the main character is never named, it becomes obvious that it is Lulu in her thirties. She has become a female spy and a transhumanist dream (Bostrom 20005) since she uses her technologically enhanced body and her sexuality to gather information that will prevent a terrorist attack. Her body literally becomes a "Black Box" that records the information and that needs to be delivered to her superiors dead or alive. In a world of information and encrypted codes incompatible with physical bodies, humans need to be "datafied" and become computable data to integrate with the information that composes the world (Miccoli 2010). *The Candy House* includes "Black Box" as a chapter but with the new title "Lulu the Spy, 2032" and some slight changes in the narrative that integrate Lulu's memories better with the events of the larger book. However, in this new rendering, more context is provided to understand Lulu's predicament. First, this is a society of total transparency where a collective consciousness has been collected and second, there is a follow-up chapter called "See Below" narrated via emails where we learn about Lulu's difficulties to readjust once her mission has finished. The two versions of the story taken in their specific contexts of publication display the contradictions that secrecy and transparency bring: from the secrecy of the black box that accumulates data to feed algorithms we ignore, to the collective consciousness in which not even the mind is preserved

from a world of ubiquitous networked communication (Cheney-Lippold 2017) and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019).

"Silence, Exile, and Cunning" in Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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The unnamed narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) is literally an underground man. He lives hidden and rent-free in an underground room, "a hole in the ground," "in a building rented strictly to whites." And like Dostoevsky's underground man, the narrator of Ellison's work is alienated, isolated, and marginalized. The novel tells the story of one man's struggle for life, liberty, and happiness—but in order to live out his American Dream, he has to fight an underground, subversive war against a racist, segregationist hegemony that simply refuses to acknowledge his full humanity. Like W. E. B. Dubois, the narrator struggles to reconcile his two very distinct identities: "one ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body." After growing up and going to college in the South, the narrator travels to New York, to Harlem, for greater freedom and to discover and forge his own identity; for so long he, and other African-Americans, have carried the burden of historical and imposed identities. Our narrator has to fight to avoid

being appropriated and used by others. For example, one white woman, Sybil, tries to use him to fulfill her fantasy of being raped by a black man. The Brotherhood (the Communist Party) also attempts to mold him according to their own conception. He is told that "The Brotherhood is bigger than all of us. None of us as individuals count when its safety is questioned" (405).

In this paper, I will delineate *how* the narrator manages to discover and develop his own identity in a hostile, unequal society. One strategy is simply to disengage, live off the grid in voluntary exile—hence the "hole" where the narrator hibernates. Another strategy is to employ what Homi Bhabha calls "sly civility." As his grandfather tells him, "Agree 'em to death and destruction" (575). But the invisible man is also a dissident, using words to protest, showing who he is and what he believes. For example, when an elderly couple are evicted from their apartment, with white policemen there to enforce it, he speaks to the assembled crowd: "'Dispossessed! Dispossessed? Eighty-seven years and dispossessed of what? They ain't *got* nothing, they can't *get* nothing, they never *had* nothing. So who was dispossessed?' I growled" (279). At the end of the novel, the narrator is ready to come out of "hibernation," out of his "hole," and face a still-hostile world. He does this, in part, in the hope of making this "a more perfect union": "the hibernation is over. I must shake off the old skin and come up for breath" (580). Although he knows that he'll be no less invisible to whites, he no longer questions his right to exist, or his own courage, and right to live as he chooses in the world. His new self is reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as

I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning."

Silence, Secrecy and (in)Sanity: Uncovering Methods for Reading Chinese American Epistemology in *The Woman Warrior*

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Maxine Hong Kingston's (1989) *The Woman Warrior* constitutes one of the foundational texts that forms and shapes the Asian American literary canon. Kingston utilizes themes of silence, secrecy, and (in)sanity to complicate 20th century Asian American representation through storytelling. Lisa Lowe (1996) indicates that "Asian American works themselves precisely underscore the tensions between unifying American cultural narratives and the heterogenous, intersecting formations of racialized immigrant subjects that are antagonistic to those narratives" (44-45). The last chapter in *The Woman Warrior*, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," is a prime example of how Kingston speaks to the tensions between the racialization of Chinese American immigrant subjects in the unifying cultural narrative of America and how Chinese American epistemology is formed to subvert said expectations. By analyzing "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," I illuminate how Kingston wields silence, secrecy, and (in)sanity as tools of Chinese American epistemology to

subvert U.S. immigration laws without allowing the same community knowledge to be captured by the American institutions through employing illegibility, or the blurring of fact from fiction in her writing.

Silence has been weaponized as a stereotypical essentializing trait of Asian American women. Rather than accepting the oppressive stereotype as an essentializing trait of Chinese American women, *The Woman Warrior* complicates silence as an epistemology of Chinese American girls, of knowing when to speak and when to wield silence as a tool to refuse speech. As Shruti Swamy (2020) indicates, in order to maintain secrecy, silence must be practiced. Yet, silence is a burden; silence is heavy, and it holds weight (66). Thus, how does one release the burden of maintaining community silence without telling all? By blurring fact from fiction in her last chapter, Kingston's narrator utilizes (in)sanity as a tool to perform voice without asserting truth of narrative in her performance. As a self-appointed "crazy woman," it is unclear whether the stories the narrator tells in the last chapter are real experiences, imagined experiences, or both (Kingston 189). The unreliability of narrative in Kingston's last chapter allows her narrator to release the burden of community secrecy without claiming what she reveals as truth—thus speaking without telling all. This paper argues that Kingston's use of silence, secrecy, and (in)sanity in *The Woman Warrior* is Chinese American epistemology that exposes exclusionary U.S. immigration policies while allowing the immigrant subject and their ways of knowing to evade capture by the state.

The Survivor in Madeleine Thien's Fiction

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Madeleine Thien's three novels (*Certainty*, 2006; *Dogs at the Perimeter*, 2011; *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, 2016) have in common, among other aspects, their emphasis on the relationship between the past and the present as well as exposing how the dismantling of the self takes place under communist regimes. As a Canadian writer, Thien seems to be quintessentially representative of what Atwood described in her early critical work as the trope that best represents Canadian literature: "The central symbol for Canada … is undoubtedly Survival" (*Survival* 1972, 32). Moving beyond purely thematic approaches and trauma studies, this paper attempts to analyse the complex interplay between the figure of the survivor and the possibility and convenience, or lack thereof, of telling each individual's story. What aspects need to be kept secret and for which reasons? Examples from her three novels will show that there are no general rules, because memoirs, confessions or life stories can serve both the purpose of redeeming the survivors or make them lose their individuality altogether, depending on the circumstances under which their stories are narrated. Her work is permeated by a great anxiety about authoritarian regimes, which often raise questions about self-censorship and repeatedly reveal the fragility of the moment of communication.

Although various researchers (among them Birchall, 2011 and Neocleus, 2002) have advocated in favour of nuancing the dichotomy and parallelism by which the less secretive a state, the better, and the more room for secrecy in the private sphere, the better, most of the examples related to survivors in Thien's novels seem to still follow this logic. However, literature, because of its creative force, its fictional nature, and consequent lack of accountability, seems to provide an excellent ground for resistance and dissidence, particularly in the stories of her survivors.

"Go and Do the Thing You Shouldn't": Transformative Hope in Riz Ahmed's *The Long Goodbye* (2020)

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Riz Ahmed screamed the line "go and do the thing you shouldn't [sic]" (Ahmed 2022) when he and the creative behind the short film "The Long Goodbye" (Ahmed 2020b) won the Oscar for best short in 2022. The videoclip was the visual rendition of the title to his last album, *The Long Goodbye* (2020a). The concept album narrates the metaphorical break-up that England and himself experience through different songs that take the audience to different parts of the globe as well as Ahmed as a British citizen of many transnational diasporas (Bhat, Massey, Brah) and planetary existences (Suárez Lafuente, Moreno Álvarez, Spivak).

This paper focuses on the cultural and ethical particularities that urge Ahmed to rap about representation rather than diversity (Ahmed 2017), in the contesting trend started by other British rappers and MCs like M.I.A, Santigold or Stormzy. Accordingly, I will study the symbols of transformative hope (Giroux, Chatterjee) and reparative histories (Gopal 2016, 2020) with which Riz Ahmed recognises that "Britain has broken up with [him]" (2020). I claim that elements of British colonialism, daily life in the UK and existential angst are images used by Ahmed to articulate a subversive resilience (Bracke, Darías-Beautell) that interpelates the listener to acknowledge, resist and subvert the interlocking systems of contemporary British capitalism, colonialism, and gender discrimination. Transformative hope emerges here as a concept that helps understand the possibility of subversion held in future so that dissent, and not only adaptative survival, is articulated. As a result, *The Long Goodbye* will be explained as a narrative that interweaves new transnational ontologies through which accountability (Parmar et al, Langballe et al.) and transformation (Lopéz Mondejar, Ahmed 2016) are validated. And it is there we should all try what globalisation urges us not to do.

The Secret as a Formal Dimension of the Literary Text: Digital Transparency vs Literary Negativity in Tao Lin's *Taipei* (2014)

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Transhumanist advocates of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4th IR) such as Floridi (2014), Kurtzweil (2005), or Schwab (2017) typically establish a Cartesian body-mind hierarchy in human ontology premising a definition of humanity in terms of data. Under this frame, the social and individual happiness promised by the digital developments implemented to have anything connected to anything (a2a) include the complete and free access to data previously withheld by agencies controlling institutional power, which should grant individuals full participation in radically transparent democracy. Opponents to the implementation of globalized transparency such as Han (2015), however, warn that a society organized around transparency would be closer to a surveillance dystopia and that the positivity of human singularity prevents both the development of human subjectivity and intersubjective communication (encounter), which can only take place in the face of subjective negativity (understood as individual secrecy). To this argument, Han would recently add the symbolic opacity lying in the materiality of things (2021)—which would include not only the human body, but (echoing McLuhan 1964), also the very material infrastructure of the digital media that communicates the message.

Allegiance to transparency in the most technologically mediated moment in human history is a biased naiveté. If, as McLuhan famously claimed, the medium is the message, the only thing that becomes transparent in the 4th IR must be technology itself. That human beings interact conditioned by digital technology need not mean they are themselves transparent; only that technology is, while humanity remains intrinsically negative. In fiction, an intrinsic negativity is premised by indirection; a form of defamiliarization that targets a "new" though not necessarily "true" image of the allegedly real. The fact that fiction is inherently opaque, or that it does not claim to apprehend the real, but only the plausible, makes it particularly apt to voice both the negativity of human subjectivity and the transparency of the technological medium.

In his 2013 pseudo-autobiographical novel *Taipei*, Tao Lin reflects on the fact that in the 4th IR, visibility, transparency, and truth are far from being the same. Pressing on metafictional ambiguity between the fictional and the real in this novel, Lin constructs a projection of himself (named Paul) who is totally opaque (to other characters, readers and himself) while being absolutely transparent, exposed and continuously mediated by technology. While at moments, one is tempted to interpret Paul as a human being totally "primed" by digital technologies, devoid of emotions, interests or purpose (Dieguez Lucena 2017), the literary medium employed by Lin in his pseudo-biographical novel allows to see a will to stay secret and safely hiding in his subjective negativity.

The will to make his own subjectivity transparent to himself makes Paul compulsively expose,

record, and visualize himself through digital devices in the hope of accessing an objective image of who he actually is. But instead of rendering a true, unmediated image of Paul's character, his subjectivity (in terms of thoughts, intentions and emotions) remains intrinsically negative, while the procedures, formats and conventions, the social and artistic expectations of the digital media he accommodates to when recording himself become the main object of exposure.

The effect, therefore, is immensely poetical as it relies on indirectly expressing Paul's restrained emotion, his existential anxiety, and his self-reflexive rational obsession, as well as the will to surrender to abandonment to non-consciousness so as to take relief from continuous, paranoid, self-monitoring. The negativity that Lin's narrative manages to voice in *Taipei* through the motif of digital transparency allows him to recreate the conditions for the intersubjective encounter of a literary aesthetics framed by the 4th IR.

Lost Afrofutures: Anthony Joseph's The African Origins of UFOs as Aperture Fiction

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"The secret" and "the novel" have been considered to have an essential kinship by several philosophers (Rancière 2011, 2013, 2020; Barbour 2017; Derrida 1991, 2000, 2001; Foucault 1979, 2003). Deleuze (1977), in particular, has regarded "the secret" as a defining

obstacle for creating "the new" in and through literature. In different but tonally similar discourses, some literary critics have regarded the 21C novel as a form bereft of critical capacity, in part due to its emphasis on identity politics (IdPol) over and above the economy (Michaels 2011, Fisher 2009, Huehls and Smith 2017). My paper seeks to unite the above, seemingly critical discourses—that is, about (1) "the secret" and the novel, and (2) the novel and IdPol—by considering the relationship between "the secret" and Afrofuturism.

The term "Afrofuturism" is regarded as a coinage by cultural critic Mark Dery (Eshun 1996: 11; Womack 2013: 16; Gaskins 2016: 27; Jenkins 2021: 124; Aleem 2016: 11). In his essay "Black to the Future", Dery (1994) defined Afrofuturism as "[s]peculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture" (180). During the twenty-first century, Afrofuturism remains concerned with science fiction, magical realist, and fantasy engagements with blackness across culture (Puba 2016; Akomfrah 1996; Eshun 1998; Gallagher 2006; Coogler 2018). Despite Afrofuturism becoming an ostensibly transnational phenomena, Afrofuturist discourses continues to centre America and the experiences, concerns, and history of African-Americans as the defining parameters for Afrofuturism (Aleem 2016: 32; Anderson and Jones 2016: ix; Jenkins 2021; Lindsay 2019: 2; Womack 2013).

My paper argues that Americentric Afrofuturism *and* its inertia after the 1990s relies on a relationship between race, transparency, and secrecy; that is, a particular dynamic of dissimulation and disclosure regarding "blackness". To evidence this, I examine the

debut novel of Trinidadian writer Anthony Joseph: *The African Origins of UFOs* (2006). I argue, through Joseph's postmodern and avant-garde experiment with the novel form, that *Origins* relationship with "the secret" acts as an aperture *back* to a different, perhaps "lost", Afrofuturism during the 1990s. This otherwise "lost" Afrofuture is primarily expressed through the novel's contested relationship with "the secret"—*contra* Americentric Afrofuturism—that resonates with contemporary work by Paul Gilroy (2000, 2002) and Kodwo Eshun (1996, 1998) on visualising, concealing, and revealing blackness. Summatively, I consider *Origins* to be what I call an "aperture fiction"—a gap into the lost Afrofuturism of the 1990s, in which "the secret" and race were technologies rooted in a postmodern avant-garde fundamental to the secret's politically liberatory potential.

Unreliable Deliberators: Neurodiverse Democracy in *Mr. Robot*

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"What is it about society that disappoints you so much?" Elliot Alderson, the hacktivist narrator-protagonist of acclaimed techno-thriller *Mr. Robot* (2015-19), answers his therapist with a rant against the evils of our time: corporate overreach, global inequalities, environmental destruction and, above all, a social media-fueled public sphere in which self-serving

posturing replaces genuine connection. Only that, as it turns out, Elliot never answers the question. A camera cut returns us to the immediate aftermath of its utterance. Elliot, the series' creators imply, has thought about this answer, but ultimately reconsidered.

What work do this and similar anticlimactic moments of internal deliberation perform in a historical present that glorifies whistleblowers and subordinates social change to spectacular instances of disclosure (e.g. Wikileaks, *Citizenfour*)? In this paper, I argue that *Mr. Robot*'s slippery, dubitative, often unreliable, narrative form instills a deliberate pace that challenges the bombastic oversharing and increased polarization of 21st-century U.S. politics. Throughout its four seasons, *Mr. Robot* conducts several narrative experiments rooted in Elliot's neurodiverse condition—he is diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder. Although chaotic and unpredictable, Eliot's fragmented psyche offers a blueprint for a culture of deliberative democracy where important debates become "*accessible* to all the citizens to whom they are addressed" (Gutmann and Thompson 4). *Mr. Robot*, I argue, enacts a double quest for a self and nation whose constituent elements are not organized hierarchically, rather subjected to a constant process of depersonalization and togetherness. As viewers, we witness social justice achieved not by the revelation of state secrets but by neurotypical and neurodiverse characters coming to terms with each other's needs and peculiarities. Whereas classic narratology urges us to beware of unreliable narrators, I make a case for the unreliable deliberator (Eliot) as a valuable interlocutor in our current media and political landscape. Eliot thus exemplifies Christopher Castiglia's notion of "*interior state*": "a micro-version of the social,

not simply as an individual's private 'realm' of desires, affects, and appetites, but as a realm of disruption and attempted order" (3). Countering the promise of a transparent society made of transparent subjects, Eliot's elusive model of neurodiverse deliberation recasts intellectual disability as a productive force for reimagining democratic life.

Restoring the Subject: Political Secrecy and Literary Betrayal in J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*

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I propose a study of the author and Nobel laureate J.M Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) as an instance where fiction is shown to intervene in late 19th century Russian political turmoil defined by the crumbling totalitarian control of Tsarist monarchy and revolutionary student politics underpinned by militant nihilism. In his representation of Dostoevsky and his late step-son Pavel, Coetzee stages fiction as a space for the ineffability at the heart of the individual that is flattened out by forces wrangling for political dominance. In the novel, the culminating act of fiction writing restores the anteriority of the decision to the subject, thus dismantling the simplistic identity between the subject and its drive, passion, that underpins the assumptions of both the revolutionary forces and the

secret police: The policeman Maximov as well as the nihilist revolutionary Nechaev espouse unitary definitions of texts and of people's intentions; Maximov views Pavel's stories as seditious whereas Nechaev insists on Pavel being a martyr.

As opposed to this, the notion of betrayal that Dostoevsky uses to characterize his act of writing short fictional pieces of his step-son restores complexity to the human subject by retrospectively re-inserting the subject—in this case Pavel—into the economy of transgression, secret, confession, revelation and renewal. And therefore, within the dialectic of displacement of subject and subject's self-projection. I extrapolate on Coetzee's own critical work questioning notions of truth, secret of the self and confession in literature, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky". *Comparative Literature* 37.3 (1985): 193-232, where Coetzee also engages with Paul de Man's work on *Autobiography as De-facement* (1979). The notion of betrayal also brings in a tension with the notion of "responsibility" that Derek Attridge has developed to characterize the ethical encounter with singularity of a work in his work *The Singularity of Literature* (2004).

However, in his *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, this responsibility to the literary work takes on the broader dimension of responsibility to the other more decisively. This leap beyond literature suggested by the responsibility of reading raises interesting questions for the notion of betrayal in writing and in literary representation. More specifically, I want to compare and elaborate this to the notion of secret and of witnessing found in Derrida (in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (1998) and *The Politics of Friendship* (1994)) in

order to develop the notion of literary witnessing as something that reserves the residual claims of a singularity. In this case, this singularity is the self of Pavel which has been overdetermined in conflicted frameworks as conspirator/martyr.

Beyond the theoretical perspectives that betrayal engages, I would also take account of the role of the secret in structuring the narrative. I take my cue from Alexandra Effe's work *JM Coetzee and the Ethics of Narrative Transgression* (2017) that develops the idea of metalepsis in Coetzee and introduces the question of "ontology of and within the work in terms of the various and hierarchical levels of narration and about the existence of storyworlds and characters, places and events in them"(p. ix). I argue that, by writing the "lie" that is fiction as compared to the "truth" about Pavel that Dostoevsky—and the reader along with him—has discovered about Pavel's generosity, his commitments, the love and care he bore for Matryona, his naive but well intentioned short pieces, the work stages within fiction, the gap between the real and its representation, between the referent and its symbol, and in doing so it gives us intimations via a metaleptic leap to a level of experience that escapes language and the bounds of this narrative.

Secret Writing and Truth: Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Novels

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A dystopia is a negative representation of the future with the didactic aim of warning about certain conditions regarding the author's contemporary society. In a dystopia, the author portrays the defects observable in her specific society from her subjective point of view. Skeptical about the possible historical development of her society, the author of dystopias is then critical with the rules and "dogmas" prevalent in her present: in a metaphorical sense, she is a heretic. "Heresy", then, is understood "as divergence within a doctrine … with reference to an officially and publicly stated doctrine and the institutional community that is governed by it" (Derrida 2008, 28). Nevertheless, as Attridge affirms: "It is not just that the literary author is allowed not to answer for his statements and his characters' statements; it is that he cannot answer for them. A writer who attempts to justify what he has said in the literary mode is treating his work as something other than literature" (2010). Regarding literary works, and broadly speaking, Atwood's dystopian novels to date—*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), *MaddAddam* (2013), *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), and *The Testaments* (2019)—render the stories of dystopian societies, born from "utopian" projects that are eventually destroyed from within, by "heretics" to the doctrine which build "secret" narratives to expose

the working of totalitarian regimes to appeal to what still counts as justice. The critique against totalitarianism, in reality, and the loss of individual freedom is always present in Atwood's dystopian novels. Nevertheless, if *The Handmaid's Tale* explored the power of censorship, information and the use of the media as a tool for population control, its epilogue, *The Testaments*, shows a strong—unrealistic?—belief in the power of information/truth to overthrow tyranny, as if information/truth endangered totalitarianism (Goldberg 2019). *The Testaments* renders the story of three different "secret" writings, but only one, Aunt Lydia's account, is specifically aimed to disclose and destroy a totalitarian state from within, resorting to unveiling years of secrets, aligning herself with the ideal of "transparency." However, as the novel shows, and even if the modern democracy's ideal is one of transparency (Horn 2011), not all the "secrets" are ever disclosed, there are always zones of secrecy, since all the narrators in Atwood's dystopias choose what to tell and how to do it. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to approach Atwood's dystopias through the perspective given by the construction of ideological state apparatuses together with the construction of [women's] "secret" storytelling.

'The mist hangs heavily across my past': secrecy, myth and truth in *The Buried Giant*

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Taking into account the prominent role personal recollections, secrecy and self-deception have played in Ishiguro's fiction, one of the aims of this paper is to explore the tension that emerges between private and collective memory in *The Buried Giant* (2015), a text that will be framed within the larger context of the author's work. This novel has been mostly interpreted as a tale of enduring love, aging and forgiveness, but here I would like to underscore its historical dimension, which begs a careful meditation on the need/convenience of revealing what has remained out of sight and hidden from public view in accounts of the recent and distant past.

     The Buried Giant seems an instance of Ishiguro's exploration in genre fiction, having been categorised as fantasy, and apparently moving away from the realistic historical mode characterising much of his earlier fiction, where historical events provide an essential backdrop against which the narrative must be read. Despite the pervasive presence of the fantastic –ogres, dragons, magic spells– and of mythical elements directly drawn from Arthurian legend, it will be argued that *The Buried Giant* is also deeply imbued with a sense of historical contingency, where the concealment of mass slaughter is a significant factor. The narrative follows the hazardous journey of an ageing couple, Axl

and Beatrice, in search of their mysteriously long-absent son, a quest that thrusts them into the midst of ethnic plots at a moment when the Saxons have not yet become the dominant racial group in England. Far from providing a comforting narrative of national origins, the tale is pregnant with images of violence and horror. As a result, the novel somehow questions the construction of a mythical national past based on chivalric honour and virtue as it intertwines with the recollections of the personal.

Employing a method of close reading, attention will be drawn to the significance attributed to the suppression of the past and concealment of the truth in *The Buried Giant* as well as to the mechanisms employed to reconstruct past personal experience and historical facts, which Ishiguro deftly foregrounds in his novels. In doing so, the author fosters a highly suspicious attitude on his readers, who constantly question the reliability of the enacted private accounts of the past his novels provide, but also of public or official narratives. The structural and political significance of secrecy in the reconstruction of past events will be remarked then by focusing on Kazuo Ishiguro's seventh novel.

The Noir Fiction Rhetorics of Ireland's Subterfuges
in Benjamin Black's *Elegy for April* and *April in Spain*

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Elegy for April (2010) and *April in Spain* (2021) are, respectively, the first and the latest title in the so-called "Quirke series" written by John Banville under his penname, Benjamin Black. Both crime fiction novels delve into the multilayered conspiracies that characterized Ireland's social order in the 1950s, where the actions are set, and they delineate crimes committed under the auspices of the web of power, secrecy and influence sustained by high rank political and religious figures of the times. As formulaic in crime fiction narratives, the protagonist, a consultant pathologist simply known as Quirke, figures as the ethical axis in the story, which in these two texts focuses on the disappearance of a young woman doctor from a notorious family after her concealed attempt at self-abortion. In this paper, I contend that the particularities of the noir genre enable Black to render manifest the subterfuges that existed in that period in Ireland and to break the long-term rule of silence that has persisted since then. Particularly, the author raises troubling questions about the victimization suffered by women and the many artifices that have been set up in order to conceal it. These implicate not only the artifacts of power and control in a quasi totalitarian socio-political

scene, but also the wider society, that remained uninvolved and indifferent to the many atrocities committed against women and other abjected individuals. To counteract such complacence, Quirke and his own daughter get progressively enmeshed, both physically and also morally, in the net of atrocities and criminality that stemmed from the submerged network of dominance and perversion. Similarly, I will attempt to demonstrate that by revisiting the plot in the second title, which is set both in Dublin and in the Basque Country, Black cross-examines the contemporary reader into the continuum of violence and abuse that the gender-polarised social ethos has provoked upon women, as the effects upon the victims are still ongoing and the Irish milieu does not fully guarantee accountability and redress.

Surveillance Technology, Identity Construction and Anthropogenic Catastrophe in Martin MacInnes's *Gathering Evidence*

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Martin MacInnes's second novel *Gathering Evidence* (2020) begins with a technological dystopia essay about the development of a mobile app called Nest. The app tracks the movements of a phone to present a dynamic pattern in the form of a looping line, said to reflect the mood of the phone's owner. This graphical record is soon taken as an indicator of a person's thoughts and emotions and used by companies and the healthcare

system to measure productivity, manage recruitment and provide diet and exercise recommendations.

Gathering Evidence prompts the reader to consider the use of Big Data by large corporations and institutions in power to exercise control over the citizenry, bringing forth economic panoptica. Already in the opening pages, the novel points to the effects of digitalisation and what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) calls "surveillance capitalism" on identity formation, as Nest patterns are held to represent and encoded version of an individual's 'essence'. The novel, this paper proposes, illustrates Simon Gottschalk's (2018) notion of the "terminal self" and what David Lyon (2014, 2016) calls the "human-algorithm", interrogating our more or less conscious, more or less voluntary participation in what Byung-Chul Han calls the "transparency society" (2015).

The interplay between secrecy and transparency plays a key role in the character-driven parallel narratives that make up the core of the novel. These follow Shel and John, primatologist and coder respectively, whose professions are based on observation and analysis and who, paradoxically, believe themselves to be continually observed and controlled. Their spiralling into paranoia reflects the upsurge of suspicion and distrust brought about by digital advancement and the proliferation of means to monitor and direct behaviour (Frosh 2016; Richards, 2018).

Zooming in and out between the individual and the global, the macroscopic and microscopic, and devoting special attention to encounters between humans and technology and humans and more-than-human beings, MacInnes's text offers insights into entangled systems of knowledge and power, as well as

of *being.* Our fundamental interconnectedness and the impossibility of full disclosure of secrets (whether of individuals, corporations or Nature itself) are highlighted by the novel's narrative structure. The text displays features of a conspiracy thriller, but ultimately leaves all mysteries unresolved. This lack of resolution and its narratological and ethical implications will be read through Derek Attridge's (2004) notion of the "singularity of literature" and Matei Calinescu's (2013) understanding of "critical rereading".

In its preference for fractality over fragmentation and its focus on affect and the materiality of bodies, this paper concludes by deeming *Gathering Evidence* as paradigmatically metamodern (e.g. van den Akker et al., 2017; Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010). Despite its use of characteristically postmodern themes (e. g. the idea of reality as simulation or the conception of the self under neoliberal capitalism as essentially paranoid [Baudrillard, 1981, Jameson, 1991]), the parallels drawn in MacInnes's work between the colonisation of data and that of nature and the work's ability to raise awareness of the anthropogenic destruction of ecosystems ultimately indicate a metamodern *aesth-ethics.*

Literary Imagination at the Digital Frontier: Dave Eggers's Recent Technological Dystopian Novels (*The Circle*, *The Every*)

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After two years of the planetary pandemic regime, now succeeded by a horrendous war in Europe and its increasingly toxic economic and political fallout, Western societies are facing a profound crisis of their founding principles. Democracy, one of the key words in the conference prospectus, is more often than not seen as a problem rather than a solution, and with ever greater insistence alternative socio-political dispensations are being proposed and contemplated.

Based on the articulated interrelation of secrecy and transparency, which can be expanded to include other contemporary phenomena, such as privacy vs. unlimited access, authenticity vs. profiling and customization, mediated vs. unmediated social relations, to name a few, my presentation will address the body of contemporary U.S. literature which examines the ongoing and continuous transformation of our biological, psychological, and social habitus embroiled in the rising and ever more sophisticated networks of social media, machine learning, society of control, and the information/knowledge economy. The novelists such as Dave Eggers are at the forefront of documenting and assessing the impact of the new digital society in which we as yet have to find our bearings as human beings, to paraphrase Zuboff in her

Surveillance Capitalism. The conclusions, let alone answers, are not forthcoming but these novels pose vital questions for our future as humans at the digital frontier.

Recent technological dystopian novels by Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (2013) and its sequel *The Every* (2021), provide a literary take on the growing concerns raised by the reality of computer and internet surveillance. It seems that the fictional mode is particularly apt for handling the complexities inherent in our embrace of new technologies of connectivity, transparency, and networking that therefore, as scholars suggest, align with our deepest social instincts. On the other hand, if technology as such is neutral, its use and purposes are rarely so, which obliges us to examine the paradoxes inherent in the assault on human nature posed by the asymmetries of knowledge and the power of unilateral surveillance as a backdrop to our digital footprint. Eggers's imaginary—or not-so-imaginary—take on the near future of the technology-saturated society in which human beings seem to cede more and more control of their lives to learning machine systems, evolves from the early novel to the later one into a darker, more dystopian vision of a society of control. Simultaneously, the novels examine why and how the messages of transparency, sharing, eco-friendliness, connectivity, order, and perfectibility seem to offset the bleaker prospects of control and surveillance, and effectively paralyze the urge to act, dissent, and exercise your free will.

Revealing Open Secrets: Wittgenstein, Dissidence, and Clown Logic

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In Hans Christian Anderson's telling of the Emperor's New Clothes, a group of sketchy dressmakers convince a self-serving ruler to fund them in the production of clothing so fine that only those who can fulfil their social roles adequately are able to view the fabric's splendour. Those surrounding the ruler are sent to view and report back on the production process, but when they view the tailors at work, they see that there is nothing there. Fearing that this observation reveals their own, rather than the fabric's, insubstantiality each decides to "pretend" that the clothing is extant, perceivable, and beautiful. The emperor undertakes this process themselves, donning regal clothing that they must pretend to see. The ruler then reveals themselves, and their fine dress, to their awaiting subjects in a state procession. It is only when a child speaks aloud their observation that the ruler is naked, that the subjects recognise this (presumably obvious) fact, and recognise that the emperor is, indeed, naked. The dressmakers, one assumes, escape with the loot.

This fable can be read as outlining the role of ideology as an "open secret" that is maintained by the socialised in accepting it—the crowd playing their role in the stately parade—and those privy to the "truth" ignoring it for the sake of maintaining their social standing. The fable also indicates one avenue of political

dissent: the voice of a marginalised outsider speaks aloud this open secret, reminding us of what we have always already known.

Historically, the clown undertook this marginalised role; reminding those triumphant of their mortality, upturning social roles, and—for a contemporary example—convincing Rudy Giuliani to take off his trousers before the public. However, I argue that Wittgenstein's later philosophical method can be understood in the light of this "Clown Logic". I shall utilise Jon Davidson's analysis of Clown practice ("what do clowns do?") as an object of comparison with which to illuminate the manner in which Wittgenstein addresses "Philosophy" (metaphysics) through his method ("What we do…"). Metaphysics mirrors totalitarian transparency in that anything and everything falls to its interpretation. Wittgenstein characterises his work as assembling "reminders" to break the hold of a philosophical picture on our thinking—revealing to us the open secret of those things that have become hidden from us because of their familiarity. These reminders, in turn, can be seen to reflect the certain aspects of Clown practice; they take some things too seriously, others not seriously enough; taking ideas out if context, or changing the context of ideas; they fracture the traditional philosophical text, and wear their arguments wrong.

In their later writing, Wittgenstein repeatedly suggests that perhaps the best form philosophical argument could take would be performance on a stage. In this vein, I argue that literature can similarly be utilised as a tool by the Wittgensteinian philosopher to break the hold metaphysical universalising can have upon our thinking. Indeed, some texts—I further

contend—internalise this clownish-Wittgensteinian methodology in their structure. One such text—that usefully addresses itself to some of Wittgenstein's own concerns—is *Whatever Happened to Harold Absalon?* by Simon Okotie that destabilises the detective genre by taking deductive reasoning far, far, too seriously.

The Political is the Psychological: The Construction and Fragmentation of Secrets in Anna Burns' *Little Constructions*

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According to Derrida, the logic of the secret closely resembles the logic or structure of narrative. Like a letter, both involve the double process of veiling and unveiling. The novel is understood as a unique discourse in that it refuses to be fully penetrated, allowing for "unconditional" or "absolute" secrets—those that are never to be resolved—as well as an inexhaustible reserve of expanding meanings. We may conclude that the readability of a novel is structured by the unreadability of the secret. This paper explores the dialectic between secret sharing and secret holding in literature, both in terms of form and content. We may observe how power structures work to keep what's secret, secret, by means of both physical and psychological violence. Within power structures, secrets are not considered dangerous so long as they remain private. Indeed, a secret is only so because the power

structure excludes it. What breaks down the coherence of the power structure is thus the revelation of such secrets. This observation echoes Derrida's insistence that it is those things in the margins which maintain the power to rupture any sense of certainty. The paper also explores the notion that the role of secrecy in the political is mirrored in the psychological. Whilst in the political, what makes a secret, secret, is ideology, in the psychological, it's the superego.

That the political is mirrored in the psychological is an idea constantly at play in Northern Irish writer Anna Burns' novels. This paper provides an analysis of Burns' surreal second novel, *Little Constructions,* which deals with a fantasia of love, fear, secrets and retribution in a close-knit family of criminals, known as the Does; "a family of neurosis, psychoses and Edgar Allan Poe horror stories." The novel is set in a fictional town named Tiptoe—known by the residents as "Tiptoe Floorboard". As is clearly indicated by the name of this town, the role of secrecy both within this community and within the text itself is key to understanding the philosophical significance of the novel. All the narrative threads throughout the novel are structured around secrets—from not being able to acknowledge dead bodies in kitchens, or where the blood on one's hands has come from, to family secrets of incest and abuse. The narrative voice, however, who calls herself a "bystander", seems to have access to all of the community's secrets—even those that would appear hidden from the characters themselves. The narrator moves between revealing secrets— followed by such expressions as "I shouldn't have said that"—to intentionally concealing secrets from the reader, with constant reminders that we are not

receiving the whole truth. Not only does this dialectic between revealing and concealing echo Derrida's description of literature as being like the structure of a letter—both open and closed—but equally, it reflects both the outward interactions of the characters, who reveal stories, deny having revealed then, deny them having taken place, and then twist and fragment them, but also the inner construction and fragmentation of secrets in the characters, resulting from the persistent presence of inherited traumas and violence. Finally, I propose that, very much connected with the idea that the personal reflects the political, we may receive the message that psychoanalysis, which involves the process of deciphering encoded secrets, could itself act as a model for social change.

The Reluctant Dissident: Freedom and Secrecy in Ha Jin's *A Song Everlasting*

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Ha Yin's novel *A Song Everlasting* (2021) seems to promote American democracy and can be read as a severe critique of China's social and political system. Yin's character claims transparency in political life condemning secrecy as a totalitarian trait, and freedom in personal life claiming privacy which involves secrecy. The novel traces the development of an artist's political consciousness as he is taking roots in his new country and language though he initially declared himself

apolitical. Both personal life and artistic career seem to be sacrificed on the altar of the above claims that shape the narrative. Though the presentation of the two systems of political organization and society seems to be rather Manichean, which could make the novel appear as clever propaganda for the US, the development of a transcultural mode of being also seems to be taking shape, which offers a more balanced view. In fact, though the narrative is very conventional and Yin's style plain, the emergence of transculturality in a narrative that treasures the tension between transparency and secrecy bestows a subtle dimension to the novel that points to textual secrecy.

Teju Cole's Poetics of Secrecy and Revelation

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Secrets are at the heart of the Teju Cole's books, thematically and regarding their poetics. The Nigerian-American writer and photographer has written two novels, *Everyday is for the Thief* (2007) and *Open City* (2011). Both investigate what the topographies of Nigeria's capital Lagos, New York and Brussels reveal and hide about the colonialist past and racist present of American, African and European democracies, and how blind spots and projections of the characters hide uncomfortable truths—and give them away. In his recent book *Blind Spot* (2017), consisting of photographs taken by Cole accompanied by brief texts, Cole

continues this exploration and shows how photography, often taken to document reality and to be a medium of transparency, can hide truths, particularly about the past, "in plain sight"; a process of hide-and-reveal that is complicated by the accompanying texts. Drawing on Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, Cole's essay "Blind Spot" in his essay collection *Known and Strange Things* (2016) and Cole's lectures "Coming to Our Senses" in his essay collection *Black Paper* (2021), I chart Cole's poetics of secrecy and revelation and contextualize it via reference to the field of contemporary (social) media in which Cole is highly visible as he frequently posts texts and images. I read the poetics of Cole's books as a response to the cult of transparency and self-revelation into whose service writing and photography have been drawn in the age of social media (cf. Han, *The Transparency Society*). Cole's writing and photography prompt the reader to search for layers that, if read at face-value, stay secret. They consistently address the political nature of that which is hidden and repressed and highlight the ethical demands implicit in acts of seeing and reading.