

Thursday 18 August

1pm Milgate Room, AD Hope Bldg, SLLL



Sidney Nolan, *Mrs Fraser and Convict* (1962-4).

Anouk Lang

Under a cloud of narrative: Topic modelling Patrick White

Topic modelling is a method from computer science that is increasingly attracting interest from scholars in the humanities. Within literary studies, its applications have so far been concentrated in areas such as the history of literary criticism (Goldstone and Underwood), print culture (McGregor and van Orden), and the thematic preoccupations of nineteenth century novels (Jockers), in which questions of history, genre and methodology are more prominent than those around discourse, style and meaning. In this paper, I use topic modelling to examine something that is not habitually topic modelled – the oeuvre of a single author, Patrick White – in order to explore the extent to which this method is capable of generating insights of use in literary analysis that might go beyond supplying information about topical and lexical patterning across a corpus. White's work offers an interesting challenge to topic model, given that his modernist style often foregrounds ambiguity and raises multiple semantic possibilities rather than offering a straightforward realist window onto the world, but the fact that critics have identified prevailing themes that persist over the decades of his career makes him a useful test case.

Anouk Lang is a lecturer in Digital Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, where she teaches C20th and C21st literature and digital humanities, and is the academic lead for the Digital Scholarship Initiative within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. She works on Anglophone modernist literature, postcolonial writing, contemporary reading cultures and computational approaches to the study of literature and cultural reception. She is the editor of From Codex to Hypertext: Reading at the Turn of the Twentieth Century and, with Ian Henderson, co-editor of Patrick White Beyond the Grave: New Critical Perspectives.



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