

American Literature Research Seminar MT 26

Convenors: Dr Nicholas Gaskill & Dr Antoine Traisnel

Week 1: Thurs, 15th Oct. 16:45

Outside History: Du Bois and the 4th Dimension

Aaron Rosenberg (King's College London)

From the outset of his career, W. E. B. Du Bois experimented with the fourth dimension. That his speculative fiction remains marginal in academic studies reflects a longstanding tendency to discount the aesthetic and political value of popular, pulp genres. However, this talk will show that many of Du Bois's most consequential ideas emerged from his critical encounter with the fourth-dimension narratives of H. G. Wells, C. H. Hinton, and Edwin Abbott, contemporaries alongside and against whom Du Bois fathomed uncharted depths of experience distorted by, and refracted through, the color line.

Week 3: Thurs, 29th Oct. 16:45

Curating Toni Morrison's Random House List

Tessa Roynon (Research Fellow at the Eccles Institute for the Americas and Oceania at the British Library)

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Toni Morrison was a senior trade editor at Random House. During her time there she commissioned around forty-seven titles, many of which were landmark publications in their day: fiction and memoir by African American women; autobiography and other writings by Angela Davis, Muhammad Ali and Huey P. Newton; archival scrapbooks of African American history; literary anthologies of Black writing, landmark works in postcolonial theory and LGBT studies; even a cookbook, a tennis guide, and a medical manual. The significance of Morrison's publishing career is now receiving long overdue attention, for example in Charlotte Terrell's 2024 article in *The Edinburgh Companion to Women in Publishing, 1900-2020* (ed. Wilson et al) and Dana Williams's book, *Toni at Random* (2025). An exhibition of Morrison's Random House archives opens at Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library in January 2027. This paper describes my current research and curatorial project at the British Library, where I am working with the North America curators there to create the first complete collection in the world of these highly significant and beautiful books. I'm also researching the British Library's collecting history of these items; conducting copy-specific research (for example in special collections at Harvard); creating the authoritative scholarly bibliography of the list; exploring the relationship between Morrison's edited books and her own fiction; and lobbying other major libraries in both the US and UK to curate these books as the rare and precious collection that they are. I'm working towards the publication of a short history of these books for a trade audience - the working title is *The Making of Toni Morrison: The Ongoing Story of Her Random House Books*. There's also a strong public engagement dimension to the project - for example through numerous talks

this academic year, blog pieces for the British Library, and my Substack (coming soon!). You can follow the project on Instagram, where I'm posting about one book each week: @tonimorrisonslist.

Week 5: Fri, 13th Nov. 13:00 (lunchtime seminar)

ALRS Book Club - *No One is Talking About This* (2021) by Patricia Lockwood

For this lunchtime seminar, we invite you to read *No One is Talking About This* (2021) by Patricia Lockwood and come along for a book club-style discussion about the novel. A light lunch will be provided.

Week 7: Thurs, 26th Nov. 16:45

Ending in 1975

Elisa Tamarkin (Berkeley)

Elisa Tamarkin will speak about her recent book, *Done in a Day: Telex from the Fall of Saigon*, about the last day of the Vietnam War and the last helicopter that evacuated civilians from the rooftop of the US embassy. Now, more than fifty years later, the book offers a social and cultural autopsy of that moment, based in personal history but vividly unfolding amid the vast documentation of America's obvious defeat, which never seemed to register even as it got out, in the writings of journalists and essayists, in the backchannel cables between the US ambassador and Henry Kissinger, in congressional hearings, and in photographs of the war's end. The book is about the 1970s and its psychologies of denial and defeat, about "limited" wars that are also endless wars, and about the problem of how to raise consciousness of world events. Her talk will reflect on all that ended in a day—and about what it means to recognize and to write about endings even as we live through them.

All events will take place in the large seminar room downstairs at the Rothermere American Institute.