



University of
Reading

centre
for **book**
cultures &
publishing

**Class in Publishing and Print: ceilings,
inequalities, diversities**

University of Reading, London Road Campus,

Friday May 20th 2022

Class in Publishing and Print: ceilings, inequalities, diversities

Information booklet

Contents

- Welcome
- Essential information
- Programme
- Keynote Speakers
- Panel Speakers & Abstracts

Welcome

We are pleased to welcome you to this year's annual conference: Class in Publishing and Print.

Social class has long been a barrier for writers from working-class backgrounds to getting into print. From D. H. Lawrence to James Kelman, Buchi Emecheta to Pat Barker, working-class writers have been told to edit and revise dialect, style and characters to get their work published in the literary mainstream.

Thanks to austerity policies and the erosion of the welfare state, barriers to entry in the creative industries are higher than ever (see *Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries* by Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2018). Prompted by today's inequalities and the systemic barriers to entry in the cultural and creative industries, interest in contemporary working-class writing is at a high and publishers are trying to address the "class ceilings" and regional biases in their own workforces.

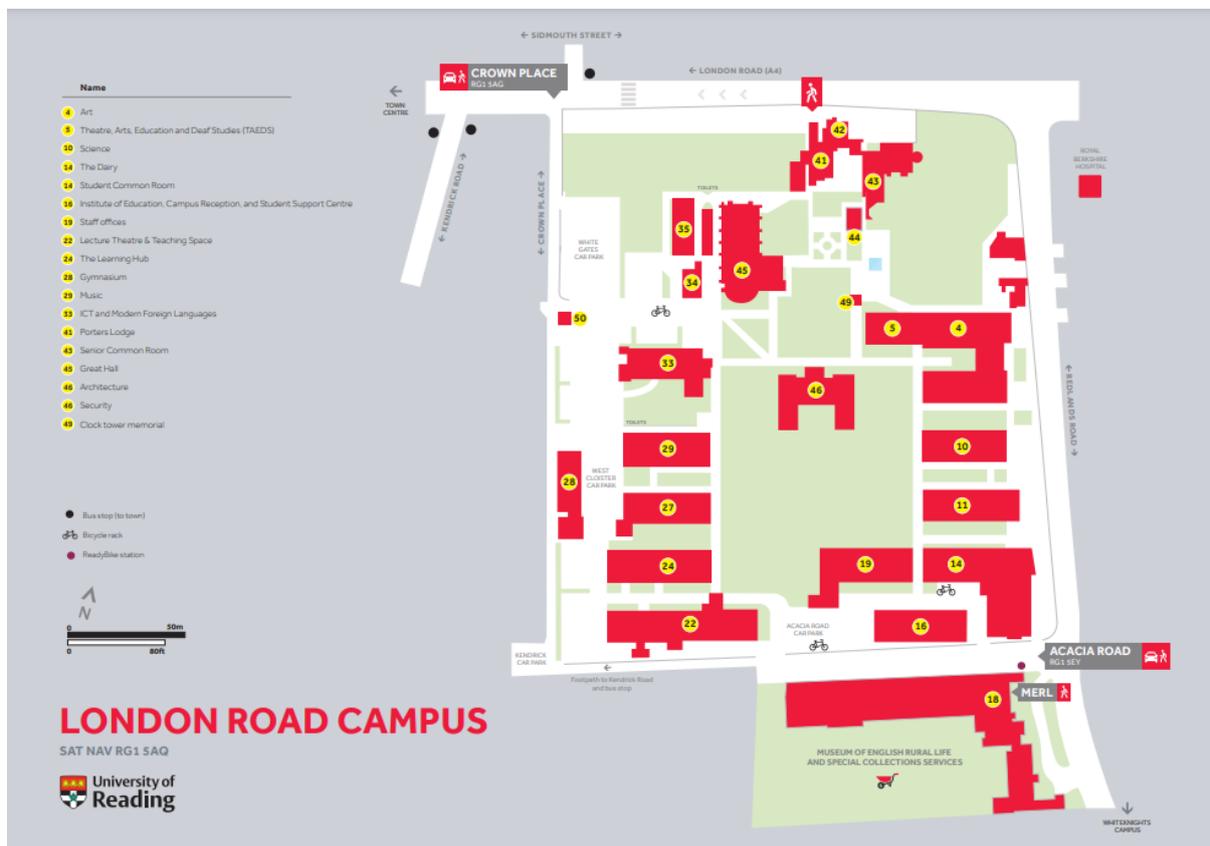
This conference at the University of Reading brings together academics, writers, publishers and agents to explore the relationships between publishing genres, printing, national and regional diversity, readers, business decisions and social class.

Essential Information

Morning and afternoon refreshments will be provided, as will a lunch with vegan and vegetarian options.

The conference is taking place in Building LO22, Lecture theatre room G03, on the University of Reading London Road Campus (RG1 5AQ).

<https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/University-of-Reading-London-Road-COLOUR-NUMERIC.pdf>



Programme

9.30-10am Arrival and refreshments

10am Welcome and introduction by Nicola Wilson

10-11am **Keynote:** Dave O'Brien (Professor of Cultural and Creative Industries, Sheffield University Management School), 'Not getting in, and not getting on: Class and social mobility in the publishing industry'

Chaired by Nicola Wilson

11am-12.15pm Panel One: Literature/Histories

Stephen Donovan (Uppsala University, Sweden), 'Undercover Journalism and the Spaces of Class Experience, 1860-1920'

Lawrence Jones (University of Reading), 'Woolf and expunging the working class in *The Waves*'

Chris Adams (Institute of English Studies), "'Daydreaming into existence what I wanted": Kenneth Martin and 1950s Queer Fiction Printing'

Chaired by Jenny Harper

12.15-1pm Lunch (provided)

1-2pm

Industry Panel

Lisa Blower and Natasha Carthew

Chaired by Nicola Wilson

2- 2.15pm

Afternoon refreshments

2.15-3.30pm Panel Two: Contemporary

Katherine Stanton (Northumbria University), 'Away from Work: The Working Classes at Leisure in *Common People*'

Sarah Franklin (Oxford Brookes University), 'It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it: Language, class and invisible bias in publishing'

Stevie Marsden (Edinburgh Napier University), "'I take it you've read every book on the shelves?": Demonstrating taste, value and class through bookshelves'

Chaired by Pritha Mukherjee

3.30-4.30pm Online

Emma Shercliff (comments, to introduce)

Keynote: Katy Shaw (Professor, Northumbria University) 'Common People: Breaking the class ceiling in UK Publishing' (remote delivery)

Chaired by Elizabeth West

Keynote Speakers

Dave O'Brien

(Professor of Cultural and Creative Industries, Sheffield University Management School)

Katy Shaw

(Professor, Northumbria University)

'Common People: Breaking the class ceiling in UK Publishing'

The United Kingdom has just one percent of the world's population but is the largest exporter of books in the world. As a thriving creative industry, UK publishing also makes a significant indirect economic contribution to the British economy via immediately adjacent sectors including retail, printing and marketing. However, the under-representation of British working class writers in UK publishing has been identified as a major social and economic challenge by major publishers and the British government. In 2018 Arts Council England funded the first ever writing development programme aimed at redressing the balance for British working class writers. This paper evaluates the impact of this unique initiative on both creatives and the creative industries in the UK, as well as on wider industry awareness of the presence and impact of the class ceiling in UK publishing. It assesses for the first time the impact of a targeted class-based writing development programme on creatives and the creative industries in the UK, as well as on professional awareness of the challenge posed by the class ceiling in the wider UK creative industries today, and proposes new initiatives and recommendations arising from the research through implications for writers, readers and the future sustainability of British publishing in a post-Brexit context.

Panel Speakers

Stephen Donovan

(Uppsala University, Sweden)

'Undercover Journalism and the Spaces of Class Experience, 1860-1920'

Undercover journalism in its modern form was effectively launched in 1867 when James Greenwood published an incognito exposé of a London workhouse in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In subsequent decades, Greenwood's imitators in Britain and around the world went undercover in a vast range of cross-class guises -- including emigrants, tramps, street sellers, manual labourers, itinerant musicians, and nursemaids -- in order to convey the experiences of the distressed and socially marginalized to their largely genteel readerships. But what exactly were those experiences? In this paper I take issue with previous accounts of this phenomenon by outlining a model of nineteenth-century investigative journalism as a new narrative subject-position founded on more than just vicarious sensationalism or reformist zeal. Drawing on a wealth of newly discovered primary materials, I show how each of the various spaces opened up by undercover journalism was characterized by a unique set of readerly concerns. The paper concludes with a consideration of the impact of these investigations upon the representations of cross-class experience in Victorian literary writing.

Lawrence Jones

(University of Reading)

'Woolf and expunging the working class in *The Waves*'

The first draft of Virginia Woolf's 1931 novel, *The Waves*, initially featured several working-class characters but the published version is populated solely by six members of the upper middle class inhabiting a privileged world where people outside of their social sphere are all but invisible. It has been argued that Woolf deleted her maids, cooks and drapers because she realised 'how much her characterisation was tinged with revulsion'. But an analysis of the first draft of *The Waves* reveals that something else may have been going on. I will argue that Woolf's maids and drapers may have been sacrificed in an attempt to reduce what Simon Kovesi calls the 'separation' between a bourgeois narrator's linguistic register and the vernacular used by their working-class characters. Secondly, the editing out of the working-class register meant that Woolf could better achieve her aim of having six characters who were the 'same person, and not separate people'. The exclusion of the working class was therefore possibly less nefarious than has been suggested.

Chris Adams

(Institute of English Studies),

"'Daydreaming into existence what I wanted": Kenneth Martin and 1950s Queer Fiction Printing'

Kenneth Martin (b. 1939) was sixteen when he wrote the queer coming-of-age novel *Aubade* (Chapman & Hall, 1957). While *Aubade* intersected with a global publishing 'phenomenon' for novels written by teenagers dealing frankly with aspects of adolescent sexuality (e.g. *Bonjour Tristesse*, *Chocolates for Breakfast*), it also responded to a wider mid-century trend for the publishing of 'queer novels' or novels 'with a homosexual theme'. With his £100 advance, Martin moved from his working-class home in Bangor, Northern Ireland, to London, where he was quickly adopted by--and just as quickly ejected from--the queer literati. Facing pressure from his publisher to capitalise on *Aubade*'s success, he wrote two further novels in

quick succession, *Waiting for the Sky to Fall* (1959) and *A Matter of Time* (1960) before financial pressures forced him to abandon fiction writing for journalism.

This paper will explore the challenges Martin faced as a young, adopted, queer, working-class, Northern Irish writer suddenly thrust into literary circles and a publishing industry that were deeply entrenched in networks of (English) privilege. It will trace the importance of other queer literary texts to the development of *Aubade* and will tease out the ways in which being queer and working-class both helped and harmed his development as a novelist. This paper draws from material in the Chapman & Hall archive (UoR), including sales records, print orders, and advertising books, as well as an interview conducted with the author (Martin is now 80 and lives in San Francisco) in October 2019.

Katherine Stanton

(Northumbria University)

'Away from Work: The Working Classes at Leisure in *Common People*'

This twenty-minute paper will consider leisure in contemporary working-class writing, focusing on Kit de Waal's anthology *Common People* (2019) and in particular one story, 'This Place Is Going to the Dogs' by the Middlesbrough writer and filmmaker Louise Powell.

Historically, the working classes have often been defined by their labour in literature and criticism. My research, which considers the evolution of post-millennial working-class writing, identifying continuities and change, seeks – in the spirit of *Common People* – to reclaim and redefine working-class experience and representation, while always resisting fixity and generalisation. It also moves away from an understanding of class experience that pivots around the masculine sphere of industrialised work.

Profound shifts in the nature of work over the last fifty years – such as the decline in industrial employment and the move to 'post-

Fordist' labour processes – have radically altered experiences of both work and leisure in the twenty-first century. This paper considers some of the ways in which working-class writers have articulated class experiences in society today through a foregrounding of leisure.

Common People shows traditional, conventionally masculine forms of working-class recreation such as darts, pool, football, and dog-racing re-imagined by women for the twenty-first century. Louise Powell's story of going to the dogs reveals an impulse that is both regressive and progressive, inscribing in our stories traditional working-class culture but from a feminine perspective, dismantling stereotypes of northern working-class life – and reconfiguring both leisure and work to show that industrial categories find new forms in times of scarcity.

Sarah Franklin

(Oxford Brookes University)

'It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it: Language, class and invisible bias in publishing'

Whilst some barriers to inclusivity are visible and can be addressed directly, there are many other invisible deterrents within the publishing industry. Ironically for a word-centered business, some of these are to be found in the body of language employed within this world.

This presentation considers attitudes towards language both within the actual books being published as well as the idiolect of the publishing world, and asks what needs to change in order to foster a truly inclusive industry.

- Does the publishing jargon with which we are all so familiar create an impermeable barrier to entry for potential industry applicants as well as for aspiring authors?

- Are books assigned a certain value according to their linguistic register?
- Do publishers' marketing and promotional materials contain bias even as they seek to publish more diversely?
- What can be done to ensure we remain accessible without losing the very variety of language that people seek from books?

Using case studies from within publishing as well as work on word vectorisation, this presentation will interrogate language usage across the landscape of publishing and identify challenges and solutions.

Stevie Marsden

(Edinburgh Napier University)

“I take it you've read every book on the shelves?": Demonstrating taste, value and class through bookshelves'

During a video-call interview on the UK Sunday breakfast television show 'Sunday Brunch' on 12th July 2020, the comedian and writer Russell Kane was asked if he had read all of the books displayed in the expansive shelves covering the walls behind him. Kane jokingly responded that because he had a 'working class accent' it was 'good to check' that he could in fact read. He continued, saying 'there was only one way out of my estate, to read my way out, so I did'.

While made in jest, Kane's response referred to an underlying tension that the daily exposure of people's homes and bookshelves through televised video-calls during the pandemic revealed. The trend for people to be surrounded by books when featuring on television in the UK in the summer of 2020, brought to the fore debates concerning not only what books people owned, but exactly *who* owns books. Both the absence or display of books was open to scrutiny, particularly with regards to the perceived cultural and economic capital of the person sitting in front of them. Accordingly,

this paper will examine how the display of personal domestic spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how book ownership—particularly in terms of quantity, organisation and display—remains a contentious and performative act imbued with complex representation(s) and negotiations of cultural and socio-economic capital(s). Specifically, this paper will illustrate how book ownership continues to be tied to perceptions of socio-cultural and economic distinctions of class and cultural consumption in the UK.

Industry Panel Speakers

Lisa Blower

Lisa Blower is an award-winning writer, academic and workshop facilitator. Hailed by Kit De Waal as the "natural heir to Arnold Bennett", Lisa is a champion of working-class literature and regional voices, often paying homage to The Potteries where she grew up. She's the author of two novels, 'Sitting Ducks' (Fair Acre Press, 2016) - shortlisted for the Arnold Bennett Prize, the Rubery Award, and longlisted for the Guardian's Not the Booker - and 'Pondweed' (Myriad Editions, 2020). Lisa's academic work is focused upon her interest in working-class fictions, the short form, regional voices and autogeographical selves. She hosted the first dedicated working-class fictions creative writing module at a UK university, and regularly contributes to panels, events and articles championing regional and working-class voices in literature.

Emma Shercliff

Emma Shercliff is a publishing consultant with over 20 years of experience in the publishing industry. She has worked for publishing companies in Paris, Melbourne, Abuja and London, for the British Council in Nigeria and the Middle East, and as a Group Strategy Consultant for Macmillan Publishers. Emma has a wide range of international experience, having travelled to over 40 countries during her publishing career. In 2020, Emma established Laxfield Literary Associates, based in Suffolk, as a response to the lack of literary agencies based outside London, and with a focus on working with writers from under-represented backgrounds. Her authors include Kalaf Epalanga, Tom Shakespeare and Luke Wright.

Natasha Carthew

Natasha Carthew is a working-class country writer from Cornwall, where she lives with her girlfriend. She has written all her books outside, either in the fields and woodland that surround her home or in the cabin that she built from scrap wood. She has written two books of poetry, as well as three novels for young adults, *Winter Damage*, *The Light That Gets Lost* and *Only the Ocean*, all for Bloomsbury. Her first novel for adults, *All Rivers Run Free*, is published by riverrun/ Quercus. Natasha has written for many publications on the subject of wild writing, including the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*, *Eco-fiction*, *TripFiction*, the *Guardian*, the *Big Issue* and the *Dark Mountain Project*. She's currently writing her second literary novel for adults and a new collection of rural poetry.