

**Reader Studies in the Digital Age:  
Community, Diversity, and the Data of Literary Consumption  
Price Lab for Digital Humanities, UPenn  
April 5 to 7, 2024**

**Friday, April 5**

5:00 – 6:30

Faculty Lounge, Fisher Bennett Hall, 3340 Walnut St

General Welcome: Jim English

Introduction of Keynote Lecturer: Angelina Eimannsberger

Keynote Lecture:

Simone Murray, Monash University

“Actively Seeking Emotional Devastation: Affective  
Cross-Currents on BookTok”

Wine and cheese reception following Professor Murray’s lecture

7:00 – 9:00 Dinner for Speakers at Co-Op, in The Study hotel, 20 S 33<sup>rd</sup> Street

**Saturday, April 6**

8:30 – 4:45

Humanities Conference Room, 619 Williams Hall, 255 S. 36<sup>th</sup> Street  
Enter at 3600 Spruce, ADA Entrance

8:00 – 8:45 Coffee and breakfast snacks

8:45 – 9:00 Stewart Varner, Managing Director of the Price Lab  
Welcome Remarks

9:00 – 10:30 Ann Steiner, Uppsala University  
“Intensive or Extensive Reading? Careful and Casual  
Reading Behaviors on TikTok”

Federico Pianzola, University of Groningen  
“The Global Scale and Local Specificities of  
Digital Social Reading”

10:45 – 12:15 Jim English and J. D. Porter, University of Pennsylvania  
“Locating the Eclectic Reader: Patterns and Outliers”

Jacinta Saffold, University of Delaware  
“Operating in the Black: Notes from the Essence Book Project”

- 12:15 – 1:30 Catered Lunch in Williams Hall
- 1:30 – 3:00 Kinohi Nishikawa, Princeton University  
“Black Reading Online and IRL”
- Melanie Walsh, University of Washington  
“The Meme of the Author”
- 3:15 – 4:45 Angelina Eimannsberger, University of Pennsylvania  
“Finding Diverse POVs when Studying Readers with Digital  
Humanities and Ethnographic Methods”
- Erik Fredner, University of Virginia  
“The Ends of Reading”
- 6:30 – 8:30 Dinner for Speakers at Dim Sum House by Jane G, 3939 Chestnut St.

**Sunday April 7**

9:15 – 1:30

Humanities Conference Room, 619 Williams Hall, 255 S. 36<sup>th</sup> Street  
Enter at 3600 Spruce, ADA Entrance

- 8:45 – 9:30 Coffee and breakfast snacks
- 9:30 – 11:00 Hannah Jorgensen, Duke University  
“Ethical Reading: The StoryGraph and Contemporary Book Reviewing”
- Richard Jean So, McGill University  
“Reading #BlackLivesMatter”
- 11:15 – 12:15 Karl Berglund, Uppsala University  
“The Aggregate and All the Individuals: Investigating Reading Time  
Diversity through Audiobook Streaming Data”
- 12:15 – 1:30 Wrap-Up Luncheon Session: Future Paths of Reader Studies Research

Staff: Pamela Horn <pamhorn@upenn.edu>  
Stewart Varner <svarner@upenn.edu>  
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## Participant Bios and Abstracts

**Karl Berglund** is an assistant professor of literature at Uppsala University, Sweden. He is a part of the Section for Sociology of Literature at Uppsala, and the founder and coordinator of Uppsala Computational Literary Studies Group. Berglund's research spans popular genre fiction, publishing and reading studies, and cultural analytics. He is the author of *Reading Audio Readers: Book Consumption in the Streaming Age* (2024). His writing has appeared in *PMLA*, *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, and other publications.

### **The Aggregate and All the Individuals: Investigating Reading Time Diversity through Audiobook Streaming Data**

The current rise of streamed audiobooks is deeply affecting what it means to read in the 2020s. Today, the audiobook medium can no longer be seen as a niche market or a mere substitute for 'real' reading. It is competing with print books and ebooks for the attention of book readers in a large and diverse range of national book economies. Based on my recently published book *Reading Audio Readers: Book Consumptions in the Streaming Age* (2024), this talk highlights the temporal aspects of the audiobook boom. Empirically, I draw from a dataset on logged sessions of audiobook streaming from Storytel – a global audiobook platform that, second to Amazon's Audible, is among the largest in the market. By tracking hundreds of thousands of readers on the level per user and hour, this data enables a simultaneously large-scale and precise understanding of when people stream audiobooks.

In this talk, I want to make two points. First, the temporal aspects of reading matter. Asking the question when people are reading is perhaps not the most obvious approach for investigating readerships. Yet, when books are read is not at all an unimportant aspect of what reading is and what it means for people. It can reveal a lot about reading practices and the uses of literature. And it is especially relevant in an audiobook context. Since you don't have to have your hands and eyes occupied, audiobooks enable reading in many more daily situations – while working out, cleaning, cooking, walking the dog, driving, etc. This difference in reading media shows in the data. Second, audiobook readers cannot be treated as a coherent group that share similar reading practices. Rather, the data tells a story about diverse patterns in terms of reading time. Most people have their own and ingrained way of reading audiobooks. Previous computational work (e.g. Piper 2018; Long 2021) has rightly challenged the norm of the case study in literary scholarship. There is an 'evidence gap' between the part and the whole; one cannot presuppose that the part is representative for the whole. I argue that it is important to recognise that this also works the other way around. Aggregate averages do not imply that most readers read in ways that lie close to the mean, but rather that various quite distinctly different reading practices together form the aggregate.

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**Angelina Eimannsberger** is a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania and holds a Graduate Certificate in Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies. Her dissertation is tentatively titled *Trivial Pursuits: Women Readers, Materialist Feminism, and the Bookish Life in Twenty-First Century America*.

### **Finding Diverse POVs When Studying Readers with Digital Humanities and Ethnographic Methods**

If you are a US based social media person whom the algorithm identified as a reader, chances are your various social media feeds in January 2024 are saturated with content about the released of mega-selling Sarah J Maas's newest "romantasy" novel, *House of Flame and Shadow*, the third installment in her

Crescent City series. While it is easy to pick up on such major trends, and observe the reading public response to it in a general way given that bookish communities and individuals use social media to share their reading and love of books, how can we systematize, deepen, and otherwise methodologically develop such scholarship. In the now well-established age of the “Digital Literary Sphere” researchers have unprecedented access to information about readers’ taste, behavior, demographics, and lifestyles. At the same time, the large scale and amorphous form of readerly activity online creates methodological challenges, especially when trying to understand readership beyond the mainstream.

Building on the ethnographic work with romance readers that made Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* as well as the recent boom in readership studies by DH scholars, this paper presents an early analysis of my surveys and Interviews with Bookstagrammers as well as readers who use the website Goodreads that our project at the Price Lab has identified as highly active romance readers. I will propose that ethnographic work allows us to focus on a variety of minoritized positions of readers, ranging from racial identity to cultural taste. Presenting some early results, I will showcase the kind of information about readers that surveys and interviews are able to make available to scholars, and what limitations this work might run up against, and further consider how ethnographic work with readers might be situated within the Digital Humanities, and especially the field of reader studies.

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**Jim English** is John Welsh Centennial Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania and founding Faculty Director of the Price Lab for Digital Humanities. His main fields of research are the sociology and economics of culture; the history of literary studies as a discipline; and contemporary British fiction, film, and television. His most recent book is a collection of essays co-edited with Heather Love, *Literary Studies and Human Flourishing* (2023). His other books include *The Global Future of English Studies* (2012), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (2006), *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), and *Comic Transactions* (1994). He has co-edited three special issues of academic journals, one on scale and value in literary historical research (*MLQ*, 2016), one on new sociologies of literature (*NLH*, 2010), and one on postmodernism for *Postmodern Culture*, a journal he edited from 1999 to 2005. He is currently writing a book about the history of rating and ranking systems in literature and the arts.

**J. D. Porter** is a Digital Humanities Specialist in the Price Lab for Digital Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania. He specializes in text mining, American literature from modernism to today, and the intersection of literature with philosophy of language and metaphysics. He is working on a book about genre. Places to find his work include *Synthese*, *Cultural Analytics*, *Episteme*, *The Atlantic*, and (soon) *PMLA*.

### **Locating the Eclectic Reader: Patterns and Outliers**

Eclecticism has been among the most central concerns in the sociology of cultural consumption for 30 years, but hardly any research has been done on the eclecticism of *readers*. We have been using data from Goodreads to address this blind spot. Our research enables us to describe some general patterns of breadth vs narrowness in the reading habits of highly active Goodreads users, which largely resemble the socially hierarchized schema of omnivore vs univore discerned by scholars in other fields of cultural practice. But our analysis also highlights the limitations of our model, and indeed of *eclecticism* itself, a concept rife with problems that have largely gone unremarked in the sociological literature. In this paper, we will discuss groups of readers who cluster at the margins of our dataset and trouble our algorithms in ways that can clarify the conceptual as well as practical difficulties in deploying eclecticism as a metric of

taste. These groups include Black women readers of urban romance novels, and readers who favor books that are unavailable in English.

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**Erik Fredner** is is Postdoctoral Research Associate and Lecturer in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *PMLA*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, *The Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, and elsewhere. He studies US literature and culture using computational methods. His first book project shows how US literature over the long nineteenth century began to think statistically. He collaborates on computational literary studies projects with the Stanford Literary Lab and the University of Pennsylvania Price Lab for Digital Humanities.

**The Ends of Reading: Reading Statistics and the Overestimation of Literary Studies' Aims.** Literary scholars are universally aware of two trends for which we have ample evidence both anecdotal and statistical: declining numbers of academic jobs and majors. However, we are mostly unaware of a third set of statistics that this essay argues need to be a part of every conversation in which we invoke the numbers of majors and jobs: Namely, statistics about reading for pleasure.

Focusing solely on what literary scholars need to know, this essay reviews the history, methods, and findings from two representative national surveys of reading conducted by the US Census Bureau on behalf of two other federal agencies between 1982 and 2022: the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts and the American Time Use Survey. It compiles historical data about pleasure reading from both surveys in one place for the first time, incorporates data newly published at the end of 2023, and uses that data to describe changes in US reading over the past forty years with new analyses not presented in any government report. Both surveys reveal recent declines in the odds of reading for pleasure of more than 40%, and, within certain groups, by more than 80%. Ultimately, it considers how this data relates to the argument at the core of John Guillory's new book, which he terms the overestimation of literary criticism's aim.

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**Hannah Jorgensen** is a PhD Candidate at Duke University, working on contemporary literature, pop culture, and fan studies. She also works in the digital humanities, employing computational methodologies. Her dissertation project focuses on character and fictionality, and how new media ecologies are changing how characters are written and received in fictional (or not so fictional!) texts.

### **Ethical Reading: The StoryGraph and Contemporary Book Reviewing**

A decade ago, Lisa Nakamura called Goodreads a new "social valence of reading," describing the profound shift in reader behavior towards reviewing books within networks. Goodreads, since acquired by Amazon, now boasts over 125 million users; but given rising uneasiness with Amazon's labor practices and environmental impact, there is a new shift in reader behavior as they search for more ethical places to track reading. Readers have turned to the Black-woman owned app The StoryGraph, which boasts features appealing to conscientious consumers and promises improved recommendations thanks to their AI algorithms. Central to its approach is the collection of nuanced reader data, particularly focusing on readers' emotional responses and reading pace, indicating a centering of affect-based reviewing. Readers are also prompted to answer questions when leaving a review, including whether the text is plot- or character-driven, whether there are loveable characters or strong character developments, and whether there is a "diverse cast of characters." An expression of contemporary reading practices, the StoryGraph

positions diversity as a legitimate component of novel evaluation. My comparative study of data from Goodreads and the StoryGraph shows how these reviewing categories interact with rating disparity between the platforms. Using a dataset of popular books from the years 2022 and 2023, metadata for each novel was collected from each site, as well as the answers to the review questions from the StoryGraph. Correlative analyses will be presented to show how diversity corresponds with ratings on the StoryGraph, how this depends on the “mood” of the book, and where differences between Goodreads and StoryGraph users begin to emerge in the data. As readers have expanded options for reviewing, my study will help us begin to understand how literary criticism is articulated differently within distinct reader networking frameworks.

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**Simone Murray** is Associate Professor in Literary Studies at Monash University, Melbourne and an elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. She is author of four books: *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (Pluto Press, 2004); *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (Routledge US, 2012); *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2018); and *Introduction to Contemporary Print Culture: Books as Media* (Routledge UK (2021)). She is currently finalizing a new monograph, *Literary Media Studies: The Digital Future of English*, from which the presentation is drawn.

### **Actively Seeking Emotional Devastation: Affective Cross-Currents on BookTok**

During the global lockdowns triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, mainstream media users began to learn about a new bookish community of avid readers congregating on the social-media platform TikTok. BookTok, as the subcommunity labelled itself, comprises enthusiastic readers who share brief videos about their reading experiences, compile book recommendations, and intervene in assorted literary debates. Likely because the dominant bookTok demographic is teenage girls and twenty-something women – a long-stigmatized readerly constituency -- the literary academy has paid the phenomenon scant attention. When it does deign to notice how bookTok is creating overnight bestsellers out of often backlist titles, the general tone is one of weary cynicism or outright disparagement. This is especially so regarding the best-known bookTok subgenre #booksThatMadeMeCry, in which readers film their intense emotional reactions to fictional narratives: crying; sobbing; shaking; and occasionally scribbling on a volume or hurling it across the room to give vent to excess readerly affect.

Curiously, academic dismissal of bookTok is occurring during the same period that literary studies has been reconsidering the discipline’s foundational banishment of readerly affect as too subjective and impressionistic to ground a rigorous academic discipline. Having long valorized cerebral detachment over embodied emotion, literary studies now finds itself attempting to chart a path out of the ideology critique that has dominated the discipline for the last half century, with its default stance of suspicion and emotional aridity.

The keynote address will analyze how bookTokers inventively demonstrate their love for the printed codex via the affordances of one particular digital platform. These performances of bibliophilia are at once saturated with personal emotion and at the same time readily instrumentalized by the TikTok platform for commercial advantage. In a further twist, bookTokers are intensely aware of this fact, and deploy co-optation, irony and self-satire as they attempt to forge readerly community on a platform governed by an unknowable, all-powerful algorithm with hazy links to foreign powers. Given such a dynamic and

contested environment, we need to move beyond the academy's longstanding preoccupation with what affect is, and ask instead what affect does in the digital literary sphere.

The keynote address unpacks a fascinating contemporary case-study while also asking more searching, discipline-wide questions about how literary studies can productively reconceptualize the ever-thorny problem of affect.

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**Kinohi Nishikawa** is Associate Professor of English and African American Studies at Princeton University, where he specializes in twentieth- and twenty-first century African American literature, book history, and print culture studies. He is the author of *Street Players: Black Pulp Fiction and the Making of a Literary Underground* (2018), and his major work in progress is *Black Paratext*, a study of how book design has influenced the production and reception of African American literature from the rise of the modern paperback in the 1940s to the contemporary book arts scene. Nishikawa has also published articles and book chapters on the incorporation of Black amateur authorship into conglomerate publishing. He is the current President of the Bibliographical Society of America.

### **Black Reading Online and IRL**

Histories of African American reading have relied greatly on Black newspapers and magazines' ability to provide data that, for decades, went ignored by the publishing industry and the mainstream press alike. The Black press's circulation among a specific demographic indexed individual and communal reading habits at the local and national levels. Against this backdrop, the demise of print periodicals in the digital age has posed an important evidentiary question: Where do we locate African American reading practices within a mediascape of platform consolidation and discourse integration? This paper ventures an answer by studying online communities of Black reading. It considers the rise of virtual Black book clubs as part of the rise of virtual book clubs everywhere. But it also tracks African American readers' unique ways of self-identifying their communities online. This is done not only through explicit markers of "Black" but through social, historical, and even genre terms that recreate the readership specificity of the old Black press.

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**Federico Piazola** is Assistant Professor of Computational Humanities at the University of Groningen (Netherlands) and Principal Investigator of the EU-funded project GOLEM (Graphs and Ontologies for Literary Evolution Models). He has a PhD in Italian Literature awarded in 2014 by the University of Florence and the University of Cambridge. He's especially interested in how people talk about books online and uses computational, qualitative, and quantitative methods to study how people read. He is on the governing board of IGEL (the International Society of the Empirical Study of Literature) and his book *Digital Social Reading: Sharing Fiction in the 21st Century* will be published by MIT Press in Fall 2024.

### **The Global Scale and Local Specificities of Digital Social Reading**

Collections of printed books have been developed and maintained for centuries, but ordinary readers' responses to books have rarely been documented in a systematic way. As a consequence, we know very little about what people think and feel while reading, and about the impact that books have on them. So far, the social, cognitive, and educational potential of fiction, especially for teenage readers, has been presented mainly on the basis of a few number of qualitative case studies. However, in the 21st century, there is a wealth of data coming from digital platforms used for reading or posting book reviews that offer an unprecedented insight into the lives of readers.

In this presentation, by comparing various platforms and languages (English, Italian, Korean), I show what online comments and book reviews can tell us about how teenagers read and what impact fiction has on their lives. I use computational methods that allow me to extend the analysis to thousands of comments and reviews, revealing general patterns and differences across platforms, reading communities, languages, and cultures.

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**Jacinta R. Saffold** is an assistant professor of African American Literature at the University of Delaware and a digital archivist. She researches 20th and 21st century African American literature, Hip Hop Studies, and the Digital Humanities. Currently, she is working on her first manuscript, *Books & Beats: The Cultural Kinship of Street Lit and Hip Hop* and the *Essence* Book Project, a computational collection of popular African American Literature.

### **Operating in the Black: Notes from the Essence Book Project**

The 1990s ushered in a new wave of Black cultural production akin to the Harlem Renaissance. The confluence of rapidly evolving digital technology and the advent of social media expanded the ways Black people tell our stories. It also was a time of innovation in the Black culture market. In 1994, *Essence* magazine celebrated its 25th anniversary by launching a monthly bestsellers' book list to support the boon in book clubs, fairs, and stores popularized by Oprah Winfrey's book club television segment and Terry McMillan's books-to-box office success. The list was compiled from sales data supplied by Black owned bookstores in the United States and Canada and was meant to showcase the reading priorities of Black communities. The list also provides an important snapshot into the Black economy of reading. Though *Essence* ceased publishing the list in 2010, the list has taken on a second life as the *Essence* Book Project—a computational archive of every book ranked on the list. The *Essence* Book Project leverages digital humanities tools and African American literary theories to historicize the trove of popular books that entertained and educated Black communities as we entered a new millennium.

This presentation will explore the ways the *Essence* Book Project reveals a shadow canon of African American literature that has been largely ignored in American literary studies but has had a profound impact on the culture and economy of African American communities. The bestsellers' list published in *Essence* magazine provided the foundation for intra-communal conversations through a prism of books. In addition to stoking Black national discourses around certain books, the *Essence* bestsellers' list helped curate reciprocal relationships between Black authors and their readers. The strong author-reader relationships in Black communities at the turn of the new millennium—fueled in large part by readers' responses to the texts—gave way for Black books to be reimagined in new creative mediums, which in turn expanded the reach of said Black books. The robust discourse of books in Black communities directly translated into a multitude of lucrative means of storytelling beyond the printed text like music, film, and fashion. The *Essence* Book Project charts how Black books and their readers helped African American communities build wealth, or more simply put, operate in the Black.

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**Richard Jean So** is associate professor of English and cultural analytics at McGill University. He works on computational and digital approaches to contemporary culture, from the novel to television to social media. His most recent book is *Redlining Culture: A Data History of Racial Inequality and Postwar Fiction*, and his current project is *Fast Culture, Slow Justice: Storytelling and Social Movements in the Digital Age*. Beyond this project, he is also working on several co-authored pieces on generative AI and literary production; new computer vision methods for the analysis of long-form video; Youtube and the demotic



production of mass amateur "history"; and US network television and political polarization. He has published in literary studies journals such as *PMLA*, computer science proceedings such as *EMNLP*, and popular periodicals such as the *New York Times*.

### **Reading #BlackLivesMatter**

This talk presents a new approach to reader response theory in the age of the Internet. Drawing on both close reading and computational methods, it uses the popular book reviewing website, Goodreads, to explore questions of race and literary reception in the present moment. It does so by analyzing how reader communities defined by an explicit interest in race (e.g., reviewers of "African American fiction") exhibit different forms of topical interest and character cathexis as compared with communities less overtly inflected by racial identification. Further, it explores the potential influence of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests (as manifested by the #BLM hashtag) on the evolution of these reader communities. In sum, the talk argues that online platforms like Goodreads afford a unique opportunity to extend established theories and approaches to reader response, particularly with respect to matters of race and social identification.

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**Ann Steiner** is a professor in sociology of literature and head of the section for Sociology of Literature at the University of Uppsala. Her research focuses on literature and society and includes studies on values of literature, the development of book trades and publishing, book history, bestsellers, girls' reading, audiobooks and children's digital literature. At present, she works on studies on global publishing, audiobooks and the consequences of a digital book market. Her most recent publication in English is "Talking About Audio: Analysing Book Industry Trade Talk on Audiobooks and Streaming in Sweden and Norway," published in *Publishing research quarterly*.

### **Intensive or Extensive Reading? Careful and Casual Reading Behaviors on TikTok**

TikTok has been said to create, albeit a much debated, reading frenzy among young people and the question in this presentation is what kind of reading is displayed on BookTok? The paper is based on empirical material from TikTok/BookTok where readers in various ways describe or visually show their reading habits. The main research question is whether the general pattern on BookTok is one of intensive or extensive reading, i.e. how can we understand and frame reading practices as presented by users of TikTok?

The project has a book historical perspective using Rolf Engelsing's concepts of intensive and extensive reading to understand overall changes in reading behaviors. Engelsing's terminology was developed to describe changes in reading behaviors in Germany during the 18th century but is a well-functioning tool for an analysis of present-day uses of literature. The project is based in sociology of literature drawing from recent academic publications on digital reading (Thomas 2020, Pianzola 2021, Baron 2021, Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2023) as well as Jessica Pressman's concept of "bookishness" (2020) as a new materiality of books in digital surroundings.

Careful or casual, intensive or extensive, rereading or new reading are all words that can describe the practices and ideals of young readers on Tiktok. In what Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo has called a "reading industry" (2023), Tiktok has become a tool for young readers to express their desire for books and reading. The film clips have been scorned and criticized for their aesthetics and a unintellectual content, but others have seen the potential in reading being visible on social media platforms. The project

is based on Tiktok clips covering reading lists, reading recommendations, reading journals, planned and performed readings of individual texts, book shelves, and clips on how to physically read a book.

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**Melanie Walsh** is an Assistant Professor in the Information School at the University of Washington. Her research interests include data science, digital humanities, cultural analytics, contemporary literature, and library and information science. She investigates how data and computational methods shape contemporary culture — such as the publishing industry and public libraries — and how they can be used to understand culture in turn. Previously, she was a Postdoctoral Associate in Information Science at Cornell University. She received her PhD in English Literature from Washington University in St. Louis, where she specialized in computational approaches to text and social media data and served as a Fellow in the Humanities Digital Workshop. Walsh is currently working on a book called *When Postwar American Fiction Went Viral: Protest, Profit, and Popular Readers in the 21st Century*, which traces how postwar literary texts were recirculated and reimagined by various internet communities and political movements, such as Black Lives Matter. She is also co-PI of the NEH-funded AI for Humanists project (formerly the BERT for Humanists project), and she is co-editor of the Post45 Data Collective, a peer-reviewed, open-access repository for literary and cultural data from 1945 to the present. Lastly, she is the author of the widely used online textbook, *Introduction to Cultural Analytics & Python*, which was voted the “Best Digital Humanities Training Material” of 2021.

### **The Meme of the Author**

The rise of the internet and social media has enabled scholars to study reading and literary reception in expanded ways because it has made reception evidence more findable, tractable, and quantifiable as data. Much of the recent data-supported scholarship in this area has focused on social media communities that explicitly center books and reading, such as those found on Goodreads, “Bookstagram” (Instagram), and “BookTok” (TikTok). While this work is vital and exciting, social media data also enables scholars to study how texts and authors circulate in broader social, political, and cultural conversations. I focus on these broader conversations in my book-in-progress, *When Postwar American Fiction Went Viral: Protest, Profit, and Popular Readers in the 21st Century*. Drawing in part on social media data and web archives, I analyze how post-1945 literary texts by James Baldwin, Kurt Vonnegut, Sandra Cisneros, Chris Kraus, and David Foster Wallace have been taken up by various online communities and political movements in the 21st century. In this presentation, I will share work that discusses how these authors have been transformed into communally-constructed symbols akin to “memes” and how communities ranging from #BLM activists to Reddit bros have seized upon these authorial memes to forge both individual and collective identities.