

***Love Across the Atlantic: An Interdisciplinary Conference on US-UK Romance***

**University of Roehampton, June 16 2017**

**In conjunction with New College, University of Alabama**

**9.30am – 10.00am – Registration** – Reception, ground floor Elm Grove building

Tea & coffee (and refreshments throughout the day) on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Elm Grove from 9.30am

***NB Keynotes, all panels and closing remarks will be on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Elm Grove***

10.00 – 11.20 – Welcome & Keynote

11.20 – 11.45 – Break

11.45 – 1.25 – Panels 1a and 1b

1.25 – 2.15 – LUNCH

2.15 – 3.35 – Panels 2a and 2b

3.35 – 4.00 – Break

4.00 – 5.20 Panels 3a and 3b

5.20 – 5.30 Closing Remarks

5.30 – 6.30 Reception (Conference Centre)

6.45 – Supper at King's Head (optional)

**10am – 11.20 Welcome from Deborah Jermyn & Catherine Roach and Opening Keynote**

Professors Karen Randell, Nottingham Trent University and Alexis Weedon, University of Bedfordshire

'Transatlantic love: distance makes the heart grow fonder - Love and romance across the miles in the work of Elinor Glyn'.

**BREAK**

**Panels**

**11.45am – 1.25pm**

**1a – Small screen, big love: Transatlantic romance on TV Chair: Deborah Jermyn**

Frances Smith, University College London: '*Catastrophe: Love in the Glocal City*'

Martha Shearer, Universities of Surrey and Royal Holloway, "'British people are awful": Anglo-American romance and gentrification in *Looking* and *You're the Worst*'

Ashley Morgan, Cardiff School of Art & Design: 'An Englishman in New York – Sex and Celibacy in *Elementary* (2012-)'

Caroline Bainbridge, University of Roehampton: 'Post-feminism as catastrophe? Sharon Horgan and the transatlantic psycho-politics of comic romantic tragedy'

**1b – Transatlantic love in cross-media and cross-cultural contexts Chair: Karen Randell**

Ted Trost, University of Alabama: "'Imagine there's no countries": John Lennon's Politics of Love'

Rona Murray, University of Lancaster, 'Lost in Fauxmance: How Tom – and British sangfroid – may finally have been beached by #Hiddleswift'.

Catherine Roach, University of Alabama: 'The New Sexual Revolution: Changing Cultural Stories of Love in the US and UK'

## **LUNCH – 1.25pm – 2.15pm (4<sup>th</sup> floor)**

### **2.15pm – 3.35pm**

#### **2a - Transatlantic literary love Chair: Alexis Weedon**

Finn Pollard, University of Lincoln: 'Towards *Something Fresh*?': P.G. Wodehouse, transatlantic romances in fiction and the Anglo-American relationship'

Inmaculada Pérez-Casal, University of Santiago de Compostela: 'Businesslike Lords and Gentlemanly Businessmen: the Romance Hero in Lisa Kleypas' *Wallflowers* Series'

Veera Mäkelä, Independent Scholar: 'Infiltrations: How the American Cavendishes Took the Regency'

#### **2b – Transatlantic Love on Film I: Crossing borders Chair: Barbara Brickman**

Manuela Ruiz, University of Zaragoza: 'On the Fragility of Love Across the Atlantic: Cosmopolitanism and Transatlantic Romance in Drake Doremus' *Like Crazy*'

Jay Bamber, Independent Scholar: 'Why Does She Have To Be Just A Girl? The Working Title Romantic Comedies and Their Love/Hate Relationship With Americanness'

Anna Martonfi, University of East Anglia: "'Where, in the Zoo?' – Extra-textual Meanings and the Mediation of Otherness through Peggy Martin's Character in *The Ghost Goes West* (1935)'

## **BREAK**

### **4.00pm – 5.20pm**

#### **3a – 'A special relationship': Trans-Atlantic Political Coupledrom Chair: Ted Trost**

Hannah Hamad, University of East Anglia: "'I Will Be With You, Whatever": Blair and Bush's Baghdadi Bromance'

Neil Ewen, University of Winchester: "'Somewhere between a Martin Scorsese film and a scene from the heyday of the Third Reich": Trump and Farage's blossoming populist union'

Shelley Cobb, University of Southampton: "'Political Soulmates": Reagan, Thatcher, the 'Special Relationship' and the Powerful Chemistry of Celebrity Coupledrom'

#### **3b – Transatlantic Love on Film II: Contexts of Production and Reception Chair: Mike Witt**

Barbara Brickman, University of Alabama: "'We Go Together': Blockbuster Synergy and *Grease*'s 'Special Relationship' with its UK Fans"

Alice Guilluy, King's College London: "'It's the American Dream': UK audiences read the romance narrative in *Sweet Home Alabama*'

William Brown, University of Roehampton: 'Bridget Jones' Special Relationship: No Filth, Please, We're Brexiteers'

## **5.20 – 5.30 CLOSING REMARKS (3<sup>rd</sup> floor) followed by drinks reception (4<sup>th</sup> floor) till 6.30pm**

### **Supper at King's Head, 1 Roehampton High St., from 6.45pm**

*Love Across the Atlantic gratefully acknowledges the financial support of Roehampton's CRFAC (Centre for Research in Film and Audiovisual Culture) and the Southlands Methodist Trust.*

## ABSTRACTS

**Transatlantic love: distance makes the heart grow fonder - Love and romance across the miles in the work of Elinor Glyn.**

**Karen Randell, Nottingham Trent University & Alexis Weedon, University of Bedfordshire**

In the 1910s and 1920s the British romantic novelist, Elinor Glyn's, love affair with America was publicised in the magazines, in the cinema and on radio. Arnold Bennett wryly observed it was a historical watershed: 'the distant past ... before America and Elinor Glyn had discovered each other'. Glyn was to become a household name as a glamour icon, filmmaker and opinion leader. She was not alone in this affair, traveling in 1908 on Mauritania after the success of her romantic novel *Three Weeks*, she was one of millions crossing the Atlantic on Cunard's liners recreating themselves in the New World.

Through an exploration of the themes of the conference, we examine this special relationship and its transformative effects through the movies and the life of Glyn. We reflect on the ups and downs of an alliance based on money, marriage and the military and the advantages and disadvantages of distance for Glyn and our movie heroines in these special relationships.

**Panel 1a – Small Screen, big love: Transatlantic romance on TV Chair: Deborah Jermyn**

***Catastrophe*: Love in the Glocal City.**

**Frances Smith, University College London**

This paper examines the construction of London as a glocal city in *Catastrophe* (Channel 4, 2015-), a television romantic comedy depicting the whirlwind romance between Irish Sharon (Horgan) and American Rob (Delaney). In cinema, the romantic comedy has been the site of a number of transatlantic alliances, most notably those conceived by Working Title productions, whose recent *Bridget Jones's Baby* looks set to be 2016's highest grossing film in the UK. These films portray London as grand, yet quaintly old-fashioned, a romantic playground of recognisable landmarks and white Christmases.

In contrast, *Catastrophe* shows London to be an open, global city. Both leads are expressly portrayed as first-generation immigrants to the city, without whose economic clout their encounter could never have occurred. This London resembles the New York City that Jermyn (2007) identifies as central to the Hollywood romantic comedy. For her, New York embodies serendipity and possibility, which is linked to the city's positioning as a space of opportunity.

*Catastrophe*'s London eschews both Manhattan gloss, and *Notting Hill* twee in favour of the quotidian, localised spaces of Hackney, the City, and London Fields. The show's urban environment is thus expressly connected to its national and generic hybridity, at once embracing the chief constituents of the transatlantic romantic comedy, as well as the caustic brutality of recent British sit-coms.

Through close attention to particular scenes, the paper proposes that *Catastrophe*'s portrayal of London as a glocal city allows the show both to nod to the Hollywood romantic comedy, while also retaining the focus on everyday absurdity that is the calling card of British television comedy.

**"British people are awful": Anglo-American romance and gentrification in *Looking* and *You're the Worst*.**

**Martha Shearer, Universities of Surrey and Royal Holloway**

This paper will focus on the representation of transatlantic relationships in two contemporary US television shows, *Looking* (HBO, 2014-16) and *You're the Worst* (FX/FXX, 2014-) in terms of how those relationships inflect the shows' engagement with the gentrification of the West Coast cities in which they are set, San Francisco and Los Angeles respectively. While the British characters are, implicitly or otherwise, marked as working class, their presence in these cities also suggests the idealized social and spatial mobility of a so-called

“creative class”, with the British men in questions working as a writer (in *You’re the Worst*) and in video game design (in *Looking*). I therefore position depictions of transatlantic relationships in the context of debates around the “creative city”, whereby cities compete to render themselves attractive to both creative industries (including aggressive interurban competition for media production) and a mobile, flexible creative class by encouraging gentrification and the development of amenities presumed to be attractive to creatives. In addition, both shows contrast relationships between American characters and British creative workers with prominently featured local Latino characters. This paper will therefore explore the ways in which transatlantic relationships are represented in relation to contexts of fiercely contested battles over gentrification in both cities, particularly through the use of British characters to address issues of class. *You’re the Worst* contrasts LA hipster culture with Jimmy’s grotesquely depicted working-class Mancunian family, glossing over local class tensions and debates around gentrification. *Looking*, while more sensitive to issues of race and class, nonetheless stages a symbolic reconciliation between the tech industry and the city that elides local tensions and conflict. I argue that, ultimately, depictions of transatlantic relationships enable both these shows to both address and deflect tensions in the cities in which they are set.

### **An Englishman in New York – Sex and Celibacy in *Elementary* (2012-).**

**Ashley Morgan, Cardiff School of Art & Design**

There have been many incarnations of Sherlock Holmes since his first appearance in print in 1887, and subsequent screen representations starting in 1900. The common tropes of Holmes position him as a master of deduction, an adventurer, a drug addict, and a sexual ascetic. Arguably, a lack of engagement with sex gives Sherlock Holmes a timeless quality, and reiterates his British identity (in a 'no sex please, we're British' manner), but in recent times he has become imbued, through fan fiction, with all manner of sexual fantasies. In the successful CBS iteration, *Elementary* (2012-), Sherlock Holmes is played by British actor, Johnny Lee Miller, as a washed up Englishman in New York, and as a recovering drug addict who engages in lascivious sexual relationships with a range of different women. This representation is a study in reverse, as his sidekick, Dr. Watson, played by American actress, Lucy Liu, is for the most part, celibate. While transposing him to another country is not uncommon in other representations, refiguring Sherlock Holmes as a sexual being outside of fan fiction, is more unusual. This paper explores the impact of sexual behaviour on Sherlock Holmes, and suggests that, rather than his English cultural identity alienating him from US audiences, sex is used as a means by which to locate him, making him seem more of the world, and weakening his relationship to an English Victorian past, and strengthening his identity as a contemporary New Yorker.

### **Post-feminism as catastrophe?**

**Sharon Horgan and the transatlantic psycho-politics of comic romantic tragedy.**

**Caroline Bainbridge, University of Roehampton**

On both sides of the Atlantic, media coverage of Sharon Horgan often frames her as a ‘queen of difficult women’ (Wiseman, 2016), suggesting that her work on shows such as *Pulling* (2006-9), *Catastrophe* (2015 - ), *Motherland* (2016), and *Divorce* (2016 - ) depicts the ‘brutal’, ‘bleak’ existence of ‘brittle’ women who regularly ‘f\*\*\* up’. Horgan herself has remarked that her work amounts to a form of personal therapy, and she makes frequent reference to her own lived experience of relationships as well as that of trusted friends. This paper explores transatlantic media coverage of Horgan’s work, together with the complex patterns of textual representation that her shows offer for feminist scholars. Drawing on psychoanalytic ideas about catastrophe, it explores the psycho-politics of contemporary images of women in television, examining representations of their roles both in front of and behind the camera. Making links to thorny debates about the evolution of feminist ideas over time, and to the complex relationship between contemporary female experience and the neoliberal ideals of post-feminism, I suggest that Horgan’s work constitutes an outlet for the unconscious anger and anxiety that runs under the surface of everyday female experience. Her shows open up a space of subversion for viewers, permitting many hitherto taboo dimensions of women’s experience to be articulated.

The comic form is crucial here, despite the frequency of its reception as 'cruel' or 'excruciating'. In shaping a space of encounter with the 'desperation' of contemporary female experience and its 'harsh reality', Horgan's work overturns notions that women must strive to 'have it all'. In this way, it makes a forceful and timely contribution to understanding the potentially catastrophic effects of post-feminism and offers new ways to re-conceptualise gender politics in relation to discourses of love, marriage, motherhood and divorce.

**Panel 1b – Transatlantic love in cross-media and cross-cultural contexts Chair: Karen Randell**

**"'Imagine there's no countries": John Lennon's Politics of Love'**

**Ted Trost, University of Alabama**

The concept of love in a variety of manifestations has always been central to Christian identity. This paper takes its title from John Lennon's song 'Imagine' (1971), which anticipates a world without borders 'and no religion, too.' Research for this presentation has consisted of three key themes. Firstly, the reception the Beatles received from Americans upon first disembarking in the U.S. (1964) a few months after the assassination of John Kennedy. This reflection on 'fandom as romance' culminates in the circulation of John Lennon's famous quote from the *London Evening Standard* that the Beatles are 'more popular than Jesus Christ' (1966)—an observation or assertion that led to protests against the Beatles during their 1966 U.S. tour and perhaps to their decision to stop crossing the Atlantic as a touring act altogether. Secondly, the quality of the romance relationship as it develops in Beatles' compositions from, for example, 'She Loves You' (1963) to 'The Word' (1965) and 'All You Need is Love' (1967). Thirdly, it focuses on John Lennon and the invocation of Christ in the ballad about his marriage to Yoko Ono ('Christ, you know it ain't easy' etc). With this tangential or perhaps provocative reference to religion, I consider the way Lennon locates the romance narrative at the heart of a theological meditation in the song 'God' (1970) ('Yoko and Me, and that's reality') and how this intimacy serves as the foundation for both imagining a new world and as a politics for changing the existing world (as in 'Give Peace a Chance' or Lennon's critique of the American prison system in the song 'Attica State'). Significantly, by this point Lennon has again traversed the Atlantic and is seeking residence in the U.S.—even while agents of the U.S. government are endeavouring to orchestrate his deportation.

**Lost in Fauxmance: How Tom – and British sangfroid – may finally have been beached by #Hiddleswift.**

**Rona Murray, University of Lancaster**

The modern portmanteau word, 'Fauxmance', indicates our culture's cynicism regarding celebrity romance. Even as long distant relationships go, Tom Hiddleston and Taylor Swift's transatlantic romance was desperately short-lived. Nevertheless, it quickly established a vivid presence on Social Media, from the beaches of Rhode Island to Suffolk, whilst #Hiddleswift was a gift to Internet MEME-ers. Three months on, *Vogue* declared Tay Tay the winner of the break-up whilst 'poor Tom', the Shakespearean actor, was left out in the cold. Caught up within (in P. David Marshall's words) the 'social network patterns of presentation of celebrities', he seemed to be out of his depth.

There is nothing new about a Classical British actor being enfolded into the far greater celebrity of his female lover, in an immediate blaze of transatlantic publicity. However, something in the will to self-destruction represented by Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor's romance foregrounds the infantilised nature of #Hiddleswift and contrasts the 'emotional labour' (Biressi and Nunn, 2010) of the Welsh 'boyo' in public compared to his Eton-Cambridge educated, beach-ready, modern equivalent. Tom revealed the same spontaneity of feeling and apparent inattention to self-image that Burton did; however, Burton did not damage *his* British 'class' in the same way as Hiddleston appears to have done. Indeed, Burton was still able to export British sangfroid onscreen, expressed most lucidly through his voice. Hiddleston's actions, performance or otherwise, seems to reveal a different kind of British male, shaped by the demands of a culture less about voices, more about bodies.

Marshall has noted how celebrities constitute part of the social 'structures of feeling' (2010). Burton and Taylor's lifelong passion became a modern-day tragedy; in the merely 'tragic' of #Hiddleswift, the man appears to pay. Perhaps, inadvertently or otherwise, Tom showed us how brittle is the kind of class represented by British 'sangfroid' now that American 'girls' are in charge. Deliberately or not, his performance indicates that the old stereotype of the British male, one which has served Hollywood for many decades into the twenty-first century, may be well and truly washed-up.

### **The New Sexual Revolution: Changing Cultural Stories of Love in the US and UK**

**Catherine Roach, University of Alabama.**

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#### **Panel 2a - Transatlantic literary love Chair: Alexis Weedon**

**Towards *Something Fresh*?: P.G. Wodehouse, transatlantic romances in fiction and the Anglo-American relationship.**

**Finn Pollard, University of Lincoln**

British-American romantic entanglements became a staple of P.G. Wodehouse's mature fiction. This paper explores his first experiments with this theme across the four comic romances he published between 1910 and 1915: *A Gentleman of Leisure* (1910), *The Prince and Betty* (1912), *The Little Nugget* (1913) and *Something Fresh* (1915). These novels appeared at the tail end of the era of the "dollar princesses", marriages of usually wealthy American daughters to usually impoverished British aristocrats, a phenomenon which established a long standing trope for the representation of Anglo-American romantic relations. Yet Wodehouse's romances of these years persistently played against this type, instead using their European or British settings as backdrops to unite pairs of American lovers (at the expense, in both *Gentleman* and *Something Fresh*, of the impoverished aristocrat-arriviste American pairing).

This paper explores these early Wodehouse experiments on this theme in the following ways. Firstly, what is the relationship between Wodehouse taking up this theme and the contemporaneous state of Anglo-American relations in other areas (most notably in diplomatic terms this was the era of what Bradley Perkins has termed the "great rapprochement" – did Wodehouse reflect this?) Secondly, to consider the relationship of Wodehouse to the history of fictional representations of Anglo-American romance. To what extent was Wodehouse making *Something Fresh*?

### **Businesslike Lords and Gentlemanly Businessmen: the Romance Hero in Lisa Kleypas' *Wallflowers* Series**

**Inmaculada Pérez-Casal, University of Santiago de Compostela**

England is a favourite reference for popular romance fiction, and despite the "Americanization" that Pamela Regis described in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003), the genre's most notable examples continue to evoke England's history, its landscape, as well as its idiosyncrasy. Historical and regency romance novels attest to the enormous appeal that England and the English have for the romance community; these novels keep on deploying an ideal of Englishness defined, among other features, by the rigidity of its class system, its well-defined gender roles, and the decadent splendour of colonial power.

Being one of the most acclaimed writers of historical romance, Lisa Kleypas' preference for English settings and characters is widely known. Her works, however, exhibit a most-striking particularity: her heroes are an interesting blend of aristocratic English privilege, and of American capitalist entrepreneurship. This representative feature is most visible in the volumes that conform the *Wallflowers* series, where the heroes are either English noblemen with professional aspirations, like Lord Westcliff or Lord St. Vincent, or, American self-made businessmen that adopt English codes of behaviour, as in the case of Rafe Bowman and Matthew Swift.

In this paper, I analyse Kleypas' characterization of hybrid romance heroes and study how the male protagonists combine features traditionally associated to each Atlantic community, such as aristocratic lineage or the idea of self-made prosperity. But more importantly, my discussion reveals how Kleypas is revising the tensions that have historically marked the relationship between America and England, two national powers that despite their apparent good relationship, have been and still are in a constant struggle for economic, cultural and moral supremacy.

### **Infiltrations: How the American Cavendishes Took the Regency.**

**Veera Mäkelä, Independent Scholar**

In 2016, several American heroines appeared on the stage of popular historical romance. Maya Rodale's still on-going four-part series *Keeping Up with the Cavendishes* introduced the titular family in *Lady Bridget's Diary* (2016), followed by *Chasing Lady Amelia* (2016). Eloisa James, in turn, wrote her first American heroine in *My American Duchess* (2016). All the heroines – Bridget, Amelia, and Merry – struggle to fit in their new environment and a new set of social expectations.

The English upper-class society the heroines find themselves in makes requirements of them that contradict their upbringing and character and, subsequently, question their very identity. Both Rodale and James show their heroines negotiating new expectations and their true selves, thus bringing forth several interesting points of consideration: how far one can change without losing their self, how much change is necessary, and, above all, what has love got to do with it? Does love require change?

These are the main questions this paper will attempt to answer through a close examination of the novels named above. The first section will inspect the way the heroines perceive themselves as individuals and Americans. The cultural clashes between heroine and society, and heroine and hero, will be addressed in the second section. The third section will be devoted to the analysis of the outcome of these romances, and the conclusion will suggest an idea of what these novels ultimately tell us about the necessity of change in cross-cultural romantic relationships.

### **Panel 2b – Transatlantic Love on Film I: Crossing borders Chair: Barbara Brickman**

**'On the Fragility of Love Across the Atlantic: Cosmopolitanism and Transatlantic Romance in Drake Doremus' *Like Crazy***

**Manuela Ruiz, University of Zaragoza**

Cosmopolitanism, understood as an approach to present day social life which allows us to reflect on both the positive effects of crosscultural encounters (Delanty, 2009) as well as on their most disquieting implications (Stacey, 2015) might be regarded as a productive conceptual framework to analyse contemporary cinema. Movies, like individuals, may be understood as "performers of cosmopolitanism" through the display of a variety of signifying practices to be critically interpreted (Deleyto, 2016). The growing fluidity of personal relations in a global society significantly defined by new mobilities, cultural exchange, transnational experiences and a multiplicity of borderland spaces has become not only a recurrent topic in social theories (Elliot and Urry, 2010) but also a key narrative concern in a wider range of cinematic representations of intimate relations.

Like other recent romantic comedies concerned with stories of transatlantic love, including *The Holiday* (Meyers, 2006) or *Chinese Puzzle* (Klapisch, 2013), Drake Doremus' *Like Crazy* (2011), I will argue, can also be analysed as a cultural text from a cosmopolitan perspective. Confronted with the challenges of distant love and strict immigration regulations, Anna and Jacob, played by the British actress Felicity Jones and the American actor of Russian origin Anton Yelchin, as a kind of updated version of the Shakespearean Romeo and Juliet, articulate the notion of 'love across the Atlantic' as a cosmopolitan endeavour largely through the film's emphasis on subtle visual representations of borders as central to the construction of romantic ideals. Their

unconventionally open-ended and occasionally melodramatic transatlantic love affair, I will conclude, raises questions not only about how intimate culture as it is represented in contemporary cinema can be understood in cosmopolitan terms but also about the impact of handheld communication upon the twenty-first century sense of intimacy across the Atlantic.

### **Why Does She Have To Be Just A Girl? The Working Title Romantic Comedies and Their Love/Hate Relationship With Americanness.**

**Jay Bamber, Independent Scholar**

This presentation will focus on how the Working Title romantic comedies seek to both expand upon and diminish the power of 'Americanness' within their narratives, making it both a source of strength and embarrassment. In her analysis of the British film industry, Claire Monk stresses the role that the 'Heritage Film' genre (that is, adaptations of classic English Literature) had in establishing Britain as a viable producer of movies. This is a theory that I will argue still has ramifications for films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Notting Hill* (1999), *Wimbledon* (2004) and *Bridget Jones's Baby* (2016), especially in their conflicted approaches to the benefits of the concept of Americanness and the legitimacy that Englishness can provide it.

These films clearly situate British and American sensibilities as complimentary. They become the site of romantic fulfilment, but they also express a desire to dismantle their American protagonist by referring them in such derogatory terms as "slut" and positioning them, as Annabelle Honess Roe argues (2008), as some kind of foreign Other. In contrast, Andrew Wallace *Charmings* (2014) argues that this deeply divided approach to American characterisation actually results in a subversion of the male gaze and more complex female narratives, which further complicates any simple interpretation of the power structure between transnational partners in these rom-coms.

England, and London, in particular, is the setting in which these romantic entanglements play out and by examining the romantic spaces that the genre privileges it is possible to interrogate the kind of Englishness that these films are both glorifying and problematizing. If Englishness is presented as a kind of civilizing force on Americans, then it is important to question which English milieu is imbued with the ability to do so.

### **'Where, in the Zoo?': Extra-textual Meanings and the Mediation of Otherness through Peggy Martin's Character in *The Ghost Goes West* (1935).**

**Anna Martonfi, University of East Anglia**

'Where, in the zoo?' is Peggy Martin's (Jean Parker) reply to impoverished Scottish aristocrat Donald Glourie's (Robert Donat) claim that he in fact has met many Americans in the 1935 comedy *The Ghost Goes West*. The film's plot centres around the purchase of a castle, and the purpose of this paper is to bring together the themes of American nouveau-rich ignorance and Robert Donat's well-publicised dislike of America, by interrogating the character of his on-screen romantic partner in *The Ghost Goes West*, Peggy Martin, and the terms of their romance.

It examines the way the film portrays Peggy Martin as 'other', and what tools the filmmakers use to mediate her otherness in order to enable the romance between her and Donat's Scottish aristocrat, Donald Glourie. Donald's (and Donat's) antipathy towards America and the perceived ignorance of Americans, specifically wealthy Americans, is most prominently exhibited in the film through the character of Joe Martin, Peggy's father; whereas the tools the film uses to render Peggy's character an acceptable match for Donald juxtapose Peggy's cultural capital with her father's economic capital, providing a contrast between the two of them.

This romance has implications not only regarding Anglo- (or Scottish-) American relations within a mid-1930s context, but exploring it may also prove conclusive when taking into account class in British and American societies in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The paper aims, therefore, to explore the extra-textual implications of the romance between Donald and Peggy, including Robert Donat's own dislike of Hollywood

and America; as well as the methods and tools the makers of *The Ghost Goes West* use to mediate this romance within the social and political contexts of 1930s Britain and America.

**Panel 3a – ‘A special relationship’: Trans-Atlantic Political Coupledrom Chair: Ted Trost**

**‘I Will Be With You, Whatever’: Blair and Bush’s Baghdadi Bromance.**

**Hannah Hamad, University of East Anglia**

On 6<sup>th</sup> July 2016 the long awaited report detailing the findings of the Chilcot Inquiry into the role of the United Kingdom in the war waged on Iraq by coalition forces between 2003 and 2011 was finally published. Of the 2.6 million words that comprise the report, six words stood above all others, as one short phrase rose to discursive prominence in news media reportage of the inquiry’s findings: “I will be with you, whatever.” These words, attributed to the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair, come from a memo sent by Blair to US President George W. Bush on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2002 in which he promised to back his plan for war. The romantic connotations to which this wording lent itself proved instantly irresistible to satirists, commentators, culture jammers and memesters spanning the spectrum of the online mediascape, such as one Twitter user, operating with the handle ‘Call Me Ishmael’, whose response to the publication of the report referred to the memo as a “valentine”, and to Blair and Bush’s relationship as “a bromance which will live in infamy”. This paper thus interrogates the mediation of the transatlantic ‘special relationship’ between Tony Blair and George W. Bush, through the lens of “bromance”, a discursive formation of mediated masculine intimacy that attained considerable currency over the course of the 2000s, arguably peaking towards the end of that decade – and thus coinciding with the end of the Blair-Bush era – with the emergence, popularity and success in the UK and the US of a cluster of so-called ‘bromantic comedy’ films, of the kind typified by John Hamburg’s *I Love You Man* in 2009. And it asks what is at stake in mediating the political, economic and military alliance between these two Anglophone nations through the irreverence of this topical gender discourse of masculine intimacy.

**“Somewhere between a Martin Scorsese film and a scene from the heyday of the Third Reich”: Trump and Farage’s blossoming populist union.**

**Neil Ewen, University of Winchester**

If Reagan and Thatcher’s special relationship was such that they can be characterised as political soulmates or as a celebrity couple, and Bush and Blair’s relationship can be seen as a Bromance, we might wish to consider the blossoming relationship between Donald Trump and Nigel Farage as a peculiar manifestation of the global populist turn: both in terms of a political style (Moffitt 2016) and in terms of an ideological retreat towards authoritarianism (Muller 2016) and unreconstructed masculinity (Faludi 2007). It is in this context that this paper examines the union between these two self-proclaimed men-of-the-people and the mainstream media’s reaction to it. Beginning with a consideration of Farage’s homoerotic summary of Trump’s final debate with Hillary Clinton (“He looked like a big gorilla prowling the set. He is a big alpha male – that’s who he is” [Mahdawi 2016]), it then scrutinises the reaction to the now infamous photograph of Trump and Farage shaking hands in one of Trump Tower’s gold-plated elevators in the wake of the US election (described by the *Guardian*’s art critic Jonathan Jones as being “somewhere between a Martin Scorsese film and a scene from the heyday of the Third Reich” [Jones 2016]). It argues that in light of the previous “special relationships” between US and UK politicians, and in a milieu during which Barack and Michelle Obama’s relationship is being celebrated as a shining liberal light, the union between Trump and Farage as elaborated in the media should be read dialectically: as an unwelcome instance of retrograde masculinity; and as a reason for the mainstream media to wax nostalgically about other, problematic, political relationships.

**“Political Soulmates”: Reagan, Thatcher, the ‘Special Relationship’ and the Powerful Chemistry of Celebrity Coupledom.**

**Shelley Cobb, University of Southampton**

According to No 10, in a phone conversation between President-elect Donald Trump and Prime Minister Theresa May, Trump “talked about enjoying the same relationship Reagan and Thatcher did”. Notwithstanding Nigel Farage’s intervention into this potential relationship, Trump and May have set themselves a high bar. Though Thatcher and Reagan’s ‘special relationship’ has been reassessed as a ‘difficult relationship’ (Aldous) since both of their deaths, their apparent chemistry and closeness in both politics and personal life powerfully haunts all the subsequent relationships, or non-relationships, between the leaders of the UK and the US. This paper argues that it is necessary to understand Thatcher and Reagan as a celebrity political couple, one in which each of their identities as a celebrity *politician* (Street) is ‘bound up in discourses of [the] companionship’ (Cobb & Ewen) they had with each other.

As a platonic celebrity couple Reagan and Thatcher presented a political and personal chemistry with erotic (both hetero and homo) undertones, exemplified by their most famous quotes about each other: Reagan said of Thatcher that she was “the best man in England”, and she said he was “the second most important man in my life”. This closeness was significantly memorialized when Thatcher gave a recorded eulogy at Reagan’s state funeral and escorted Nancy Reagan on the plane from Washington to the President’s ‘private’ funeral in California. Though both have been analyzed as individual celebrity politicians (particularly Reagan), and their political ‘special relationship’ has been duly scrutinized in the context of the Cold War (especially compared to Roosevelt and Churchill), as well as their combined push for neoliberal economics, they have yet to be considered as a kind of celebrity pseudo-couple, whose powerful personal chemistry (Nochimson) and power on the world stage of politics in the 80s continues to set a template for Anglo-American political relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Panel 3b – Transatlantic Love on Film II: Contexts of Production and Reception Chair: Mike Witt**

**‘We Go Together’: Blockbuster Synergy and *Grease*’s ‘Special Relationship’ with its UK Fans**

**Barbara Brickman, University of Alabama**

Despite being produced by Robert Stigwood, whose music ventures and West End phenomena, like *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*, had found enormous success with U.K. audiences, there was little guarantee that *Grease* (1978) would be a hit across the Atlantic. Reviewers in the U.K., like the ones at home, were not kind to the lighthearted film musical adaptation of Jim Jacob and Warren Casey’s raunchy and, at times, critical parody of 1950s American culture and music. Yet British fans flocked to the nostalgic film, famously swarming its stars at the premiere in September of 1978 so that they had to escape the Empire Theater by fire truck. The question remains what would draw these devoted fans to such a “cotton candy” American youth musical when their own country was wracked with unemployment, rocked by violence in Northern Ireland and at home, and divided by a rising conservative tide. This paper will explore the unlikely love affair in the late 1970s and beyond between U.K. fans and the bubble gum American teen musical dubbed “stupidity expressed in hysteria” at the time of its release.

**‘It’s the American Dream’: UK audiences read the romance narrative in *Sweet Home Alabama***

**Alice Guilluy, King’s College London**

The romantic-comedy genre has been the subject of a marked increase in academic attention in the past decade. Whilst most of the scholarship has explored the genre’s often-thorny gender politics (McDonald 2007; Radner 2011), several contributions have specifically investigated the construction of and relationship between American and British national identities in contemporary UK/US co-productions, with a particular

attention to the films of Richard Curtis (Honness Roe 2009; Higson 2011). However, unlike other popular genres aimed at a principally female audience (on soap opera for instance, see Ang 1985; Liebes and Katz 1994) no work on romantic comedy has yet addressed the issue of the genre's transnational reception. My paper seeks to address this issue by focusing specifically on UK audiences' response to contemporary Hollywood romantic comedy. I will be drawing here on a series of interviews I conducted with British audiences as part of my PhD thesis, which included a viewing session and discussion of the 2002 film *Sweet Home Alabama* (dir. Andy Tennant). My paper will outline how UK audiences (as compared to the French and German participants I also interviewed), expressed a particular form of sensibility to the film's Americanness. This was evidenced both in their interactions during the screening, which included playfully imitating the characters' American (and specifically Southern) accents, as well in the post-screening discussion where they regularly described the film's romance storyline as 'very American'. Drawing on Catherine Roach's definition of the romance narrative as 'involving hard work' (2016, 20), I'll argue that British participants draw a strong connection between the film's romance narrative and the self-determinism which they identify as central to the American Dream. In doing so, I hope to bring together current discussions in the fields of both romance studies and transnational audience studies.

**Bridget Jones' Special Relationship: No Filth, Please, We're Brexiteers.**  
**William Brown, University of Roehampton**

Bridget Jones (Renée Zellweger) falls into some mud at a music festival in England. Fortunately, Jack (Patrick Dempsey) is on hand to help her up, and thus begins the journey of the eponymous heroine of *Bridget Jones' Baby* (Sharon Maguire, Ireland/UK/France/USA, 2016) towards motherhood. In this paper, I shall argue that the presence in this third installment of an American man, Jack, who makes Bridget realize what she really wants – namely Mark Darcy (Colin Firth) lends to the film a transnational dimension absent from *Bridget Jones' Diary* (Sharon Maguire, UK/France/USA/Ireland, 2001) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (Beeban Kidron, UK/France/Germany/Ireland/USA, 2004), where Bridget ummed and ahed about whether to pluck for Mark or Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant). In marking Bridget's relationship with Jack as 'filthy' (Bridget is covered in mud), the film sets in play how Bridget's 'special relationship' with Jack (who runs a dating app) leads her back to Mark. That is, the contemporary era of job insecurity and online hook-ups is characterised as American and desirable, but also somehow impossible as Bridget settles back down with Mark Darcy and helps her Conservative mother (Gemma Jones) to win her local council election. While the latter's victory is supposedly based upon openness to others (gays, immigrants, etc), the conservative turn away from Jack would suggest this as a fantasy as post-Brexit Britain really does want to keep its others at arms length. Nonetheless, while the rejection of others finally emerges, the typically British repression of desire for filth/sex is sublimated by Jack's nationality and America's association with cinema, as also seen in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, UK, 1994), *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, UK/USA, 1999) and *Love, Actually* (Richard Curtis, UK/USA/France, 2003).