

## **Portals of Potentialities: Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* and the Digital Literary Festival**

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### **Abstract**

Claims that reading is a solitary activity are undercut by the popularity of literary festivals in the UK as readers search for social encounters to extend their experience of the codex. Literary festivals have become increasingly reliant on an imagination of the book on screen since the coronavirus pandemic prevented physical events. One such literary festival is Hay Festival in Wales which held purely digital editions of their event in May 2020 and 2021, the first of which garnered the festival's largest audience to-date with over 500,000 online attendees. Primarily, literary festivals capitalise upon the reader's yearning for connection, binding their experience of books to their events. Using the case study of Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*, a novel about the 'portal' of the internet, and the novel's corresponding event at Hay Festival Digital 2021, this article examines the twofold "portal" of the book as a portal for readers, and the digital literary festival as a portal for readers to further connect with the book. I question how reading and interacting with a book about the digital world at a digital literary event impacts the individual reader's impression of the book.

**Keywords:** Social life of books, reading, digital literary sphere, internet, literary festivals, digital platforms, digital engagement, audience

## Introduction

Literary festivals are events which gather writers and readers in interactive spaces, and they have increasingly become reliant on an imagination of the book on screen since the coronavirus pandemic (Prieto, 2020). Pre-pandemic, the book was the object that festivalgoers bought at festival-adjointed bookstores, something clung onto during the live events and read from out loud by authors, all closing with a blessing of the book by the author's signature (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013: 246-250; Meehan, 2005; Murray, 2018: 48; Weber, 2018: 115). Transposing the book to the screen, the digital literary festival attempts to endow the book with a similar weight in the digital space as it becomes the virtual body guiding discussion and forges the path for what Beth Driscoll calls the 'temporary community' between readers and authors (2014: 170).

In what follows, I reflect upon the significance of the codex at digital literary festivals where the book is both the crux of discussion and engagement, as well as an object which opens potential connections online. This article begins by discussing the relationship between the internet, books, and reading communities. I describe what happens to the book and audience interactions with it at online events such as the digital literary festival. I then use the case study of Patricia Lockwood's 2021 novel *No One Is Talking About This* to investigate how a book about the internet is presented on screen at a digital literary festival. I ultimately argue that digital literary festivals act as a portal for the material book, widening the potential connections and interactions that readers gain from reading books.

## Setting the Scene

Throughout the pandemic, online engagements between readers blossomed on Goodreads, Amazon reviews, Bookstagram, BookTok, and BookTube, as well as through Twitter and Instagram celebrity book clubs such as those run by the rapper Noname (Conteh, 2021; Jerasa and Boffone, 2021; Semingson and Kerns, 2020; Tolstopyat, 2018; Walsh and Antoniak, 2021: 275). The desire for book interactions despite physical distance persisted. This creation of digital book communities reflects the new dynamic and hybrid relationship between participatory reading and interactions in the 'digital literary sphere' which is described by Simone Murray as the relationship between digital communication technologies and contemporary literary culture (2018: 1-15). Consequently, book interactions are placed online where readers search for new environments to extend their experiences of books, such as at digital literary festivals.

The joining of the material book and the online world was shown no better than at Hay Festival Digital 2021, the second fully digital festival for Hay Festival due to the coronavirus pandemic. Hay Festival is a prominent literary festival based in Hay-on-Wye on the border of England and Wales and underlines the possibilities and potentialities of literature with its slogan 'imagine the world' (Matthews, 2021). At Hay Festival, the book is the object that the festival orbits around. The festival demonstrates that the codex is not a

boundary or a sealed border, existing in a vacuum, but rather what Genette calls 'a threshold' that 'offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back' (1997: 2). If we see the codex as a threshold, or a portal of potentialities, when it is placed on screen at the digital literary festival, it can also push understandings of the online world, and literature itself, something that I will explore further with my discussion of Patricia Lockwood's novel and her corresponding Hay Festival Digital event.

Literary festivals have existed in the digital literary sphere long before the pandemic, making use of digital technology's potential to defy geographical limitations and engage with larger audiences through video recordings, podcasts, guest blogs, social media, and the live-streaming of in-person festivals (Murray, 2018: 15). One pertinent example of this is Afrolit Sans Frontieres, created by the South African writer Zukiswa Wanner and featured five 'seasons' of literary discussions in 2020 during the pandemic, each with different themes and with the tagline 'African literature social distancing'.<sup>1</sup> The free virtual literary festival was established by African writers to connect with readers across the world and took place exclusively on Instagram and Facebook, where the audience posted their questions to the authors during the live videos, informing the content and structure of the events. Afrolit Sans Frontieres is an example of how digital literary festivals bring events into living rooms, where readers in their hundreds were able to 'access whichever writer and being able to ask them questions from the serious ones to the mundane ones' (Dahir, 2020). Hay Festival, however, is different to exclusively virtual literary festivals such as Afrolit Sans Frontieres as it has a long history of successful in-person events, beginning in 1988. During the pandemic, Hay Festival had to rely wholly upon its existing digital resources and technologies to produce the entire festival online.

## Conceptual Framework

Recently, the materiality of the book and the reader's preference for owning the codex has been emphasised, especially following the failed prophecy in the 2000s of a mass eBook revolution (Grady, 2019; Murray, 2018: 1), and the pandemic book sale boom where readers sought physical connections in an increasingly online world (Flood, 2021). This bias towards material books has amplified what Jessica Pressman defines as 'the aesthetic of bookishness', meaning 'the fetishized focus on textuality and the book-bound reading object' which arose in opposition to the repeated rhetoric about the 'death of the book' in the late twentieth-century (2009: 466). Pressman argues that this 'book-bound aesthetic' is a result of the new media technologies of the internet and eBooks, causing a shift away from a book-centred society where books as a reading technology are one medium of accessing information among many, and consequently, 'book-bound content becomes more associated with the literary' (2009: 468). The term 'literary' is defined by Pressman any text that 'plays with the aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> @afrolitsansfrontieres (Afrolit Sans Frontieres), 'African Literature social distancing', Instagram profile, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/afrolitsansfrontieres/>.

possibilities of the codexical format', and I will return to this definition later in the article (2020: 31). Pressman's research is effective because it helps us to understand deeper the book in contemporary literary culture as one with powerful nostalgic value attached to it.

The shifting of material interactions with books to the digital sphere during the pandemic exists in what Alexandra Dane and Millicent Weber call a 'post-digital' world, where the digital and the material are both simultaneously relevant (2021: 1-7), and analogue technologies remain resilient in digital environments through the revival of seemingly 'old' media technologies (Cramer, 2015: 17). Seeing digital literary festivals as post-digital and a part of Murray's digital literary sphere is a useful way to understand how a book and book events transform when put on screen.

As the other articles in this special edition no doubt show, there are a multitude of ways that the book is represented on screen. Investigating on screen representations of the codex through book buying on Amazon, (book)'shelfies' on Instagram, and Zoom bookshelf backdrops, Amanda Lastoria asks important questions about the materiality of the book: '[h]ow are the book's design and production values – its typography, layout, paper, inking, binding, edging, weight, format and so on – depicted in print and on screen? How does that depiction skew the consumer's perception of the book's objecthood and, by extension, the reader's reception of the text?' (2022: 134). Lastoria's questions probe at the disconnect between the physical book and its representation on a screen, where it cannot be touched or held, and its features – typography, layout, paper, etc. – cannot be experienced. My article considers Lastoria's questions in the arena of the digital literary festival, where the interplay between the physicality of the book grapples with the book's digital presentation as I examine how a book changes on the screen and why this matters.

The codex often elicits physical responses, expressing readers' somatic relationships to their books. Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo's investigation into contemporary book reading communities and mass reading events (MREs) concludes by reinstating the 'special status' of the physical artefact of the book, noting that 'the codex evokes a powerful response in its devotees, and that the book as an object remains both emotionally meaningful and culturally significant for many keen reader' (2013: 246-247). Likewise, the book at the literary festival is embedded in an emotional, affectual, and often haptic response, where readers attend literary festivals in order to extend their experience of the book into one that is communicative and community-building. At literary festivals, the book is the most cherished object. Whether it is with the well-worn copies brought along, or new purchases, interactions with books are encouraged at every opportunity through bookshops onsite, book signings, and, more obviously, a programme of events which pivot around the text itself through readings and discussions. As my conceptual framework has shown, books and their materiality are important to readers' responses. But what happens to readers' experience of the book when it is placed in the online space? I will now use the case study of Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* at Hay Festival Digital 2021 to answer this question and explore what happens when a material book about the online world is presented at a digital literary festival.

## **Portals into the Online World: *No One Is Talking About This***

Hay Festival Digital 2021 ran a series of events called '10@10: New Writers' made up of thirty-minute Q&As held with ten debut authors discussing their books at 10am BST. One of these authors was American poet, essayist, and novelist Patricia Lockwood who talked to British author Nina Stibbe about Lockwood's debut *No One Is Talking About This* (2021b). The Hay Festival 10@10 event was a simple question and answer, with no room for audience questions at the end, and the discussion was guided by Stibbe's interests as an author and as a representative for the absent audience.

*No One Is Talking About This* follows a woman known for her viral social media posts, whose entire existence revolves around the internet, specifically Twitter – what she terms 'the portal'. The word 'portal' was originally used in early computing as a server or website that provides internet access, and now more commonly is defined as a website or service that provides access to several sources of information and facilities, such as a directory of links to other websites, search engines, email, online shopping (OED, n.d.: n.5). Also meaning gate or doorway, in coining Twitter 'the portal', Lockwood suggests a sense of mysticism and absorption, with social media acting as a passage to a new world of possibilities (OED, n.d.: n.1a). In the second half of the novel, family tragedy and the portal collide, and the protagonist confronts a paradoxical world of reality and digital life.

*No One Is Talking About This* is semi-autobiographical. Lockwood is herself a popular Twitter user and she rose to prominence with her viral poem 'Rape Joke' (2013). Lockwood employs the language of the internet in the novel, specifically that of Twitter, combined with poetic language and form, to create a sense of the internet moment of the late 2010s. This coded language of the internet underlines a sense of digital immediacy as the novel's temporality grapples with the question of how to portray the online world in novel-form, and whether it will always be out-of-date and out-of-touch from the moment it is written down. Translating the language, phrases, and references usually only found on timelines and newsfeeds, Lockwood's novel attempts to blur the boundary between the material codex and the immaterial digital space.

The protagonist of *No One Is Talking About This* speaks at public events in cities across the world about social media, 'the new communication, the new slipstream of information' (Lockwood, 2021a: 13). In a mirror image, following the publication of the novel, Lockwood spoke at (all online) events, talking about her book about this new communication technology. As part of her book tour, Lockwood was paired with her literary contemporaries, such as Raven Leilani, Jenny Offill, and Sheila Heti and at literary festivals such as Dallas, Dublin, and Edinburgh. Most of Lockwood's events were with other writers, opening out dialogues about literature and the internet, and how they can exist symbiotically.

At the Hay Festival Digital event, Lockwood discusses how 'absolutely perverse' it is that authors are told by editors to not write about the internet due to a fear of irrelevance in the fast-moving ephemeral online world. She challenges the anxiety of transcribing the internet to the written page, stating: 'these are the things people do with their days, why are

we not talking about them?’ (Lockwood, 2021b). Lockwood’s novel alternatively celebrates this evanescent space as one which dissolves boundaries and can represent the intersection of our online and physical lives within literary texts.

The dissolving boundary between our digital and physical lives is conceptualised by Laurence Scott’s ‘four-dimensional human’ (2015: xx). Scott ponders the role of the human within the internet (what he calls the fourth dimension), and asks questions such as, ‘[w]hat new senses are available to someone who is such a concentrated blend of matter and media?’ and ‘[h]ow does time pass in this dimension?’ (Ibid). Scott discusses ‘the everywhere-person’, one that is like Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, equally inside and outside of the world as ‘being out, out, far out to sea and alone’ and also:

[P]art of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, her self. (Woolf qtd. in Scott, 2015: 13)

In both recognising human interconnectedness yet sensitive to its boundaries, Woolf’s overall notion of human relations figures us as strangers to one another. And yet, the spaces of the internet in online chat rooms, Twitterspheres, and the digital literary festival such as Hay Festival, attempt to override this separation by placing us somewhere with one another, albeit in virtual space. Scott concedes that ‘some would argue that all this extensiveness isn’t *us* at all, and that we’re still as confined as ever we were to the long-and-shorts of our bodies’, but ‘one illusion that we’re continually perfecting is not simply how to be here and there at the same time, but how to be *there* while looking like we’re *here*’ (2015: 14-15). The mesh of bodies connected across digital and physical spaces makes plain the interrelation between Lockwood’s material book discussing the immaterial lives and experiences of four-dimensional humans.

## **Defining Liveness**

I will now turn to the audience’s experiences of the book and the Hay Festival Digital event. As the 10@10 event was held at a purely digital festival and was pre-recorded, made available to audiences at its 10am broadcasting time, and then available to watch again on-demand once it had been originally broadcasted, there is a shift in the perception of liveness in the online space which challenges ideas of the immediacy of the digital. Due to the pre-recorded and on-demand nature of events like Hay Festival’s, definitions of ‘liveness’ in the digital space differ. Cultural critic Philip Auslander, for instance, argues that digital liveness does not have to do explicitly with temporality or the time that the art is created, or recorded in this case, but instead with how the audience experience the virtual as live through a conscious engagement with the event:

[L]iveness does not inhere in a technological artifact or its operations – it results from our engagement with it and our willingness to bring it into full presence for ourselves. We do not perceive interactive technologies as live because they respond to us in real time ... Rather, we perceive real-time response in some cases as a demand that concretizes a claim to liveness, a claim that we, the audience, must accept as binding upon us in order for it to be fulfilled. (2012: 3-11)

If, as Auslander claims, digital liveness concerns primarily an audience's active engagement with an event, then engagement can come in many forms, whether that be through live-tweeting (or tweeting in their moment of liveness), contributing to the chat-box, or the simple act of watching an event, recorded or 'live-streamed', in their time and being fully present (Murray, 2018: 82). The idea of liveness as primarily an interaction produced by the audience's conscious and willing engagement with the event can be applied to literary festivals and the digital mediated encounters that they facilitate.

That Lockwood's 10@10 event was a pre-recorded online talk creates an exclusive and wholly digital space, not one constrained by temporality. However, the audience who watched the Lockwood event 'live' at 10am were able to engage and discuss with other audience members through the event's live chat box, which was unavailable to those watching on-demand, producing a sense of co-presence with other attendees. Ostensibly, the audience does not need to be present to ask questions to experience the immediacy of the event; what is important is how the audience choose to interact and engage – either through seen forms such as public chats and live-tweeting, or unseen forms such as thinking, listening, and taking one's own notes. This distortion of liveness is also shown through Twitter. Using the hashtag '#HayFestival2021' one user tweeted '[c]atching up with some of the Hay Festival events and that was a great talk with Patricia Lockwood and so I've definitely added her new book, which also references life in the Twittersphere, to my books shopping list!'.<sup>2</sup> Tweeting the day after the event was initially broadcasted and referencing 'catching up', this tweet depicts an audience member creating their own sense of liveness by watching events on-demand. Further, in discussing an event which focuses on a book which is about 'life in the Twittersphere' on Twitter itself, the audience member participates in the very portal that Lockwood is describing while also fulfilling a core aim of the author's appearance at the literary festival: to sell books.

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<sup>2</sup> @Franglais27 (L), 'Catching up with some of the Hay Festival events and that was a great talk with Patricia Lockwood and so I've definitely added her new book, which also references life in the Twittersphere, to my books shopping list! #HayFestival2021 @hayfestival', *Twitter*, May 29, 2021, <https://twitter.com/Franglais27/status/1398650640054820871>.

## Remediation in the Digital Literary Sphere

In *No One Is Talking About This*, Lockwood transplants the language of the internet to the pages of the codex, melding new media technologies with old print and bringing new meaning to the immediacy and liveness of the internet on the written page. The narrator discusses their surprise in finding out that some internet information and trends such as popular TV shows that everyone seems to be watching and dieting fads are ‘planted’ in the digital sphere. They say: ‘When we learned that they had been planted there on purpose by people who understood them to be poisonous, who were pointing their poison at us, well. *Well. WELL!* 🍌W🍌E🍌L🍌L🍌!!!’ (Lockwood, 2021a: 92). While emphasising the artifice and insincerity of the virtual world through the transfer of digital emojis to the pages of the physical book, Lockwood also crosses a boundary between new media and material which is usually upheld. This remediation of forms alludes to the post-digital world and illustrates Pressman’s bookishness and the deconstruction of digital-material division through the plethora of creative acts that engage the physicality of the book *within* digital cultures (2020: 15). From mobile phone cases that look like bookshelves, to Jane Austen leggings, jewellery in the shape of miniature codices, book sculptures, and novels which feature a book as a central character, the nature of this new contemporary literary discussion erodes the traditional division between the codex and digital technologies into a hybrid and expansive medium (Pressman, 2020: 15-16).

However, digital-material remediation in novels is not new. Jennifer Egan’s 2010 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* features a chapter made entirely from a PowerPoint presentation. Flipping and swiping through the chapter is a strange and powerful act of remediation which changes the relationship to the printed page through the insertion of new media into old. Writing in a non-traditional format, such as PowerPoint, highlights the gaps, awkward spots and changes of style and tone throughout the whole novel, and as Egan says herself, ‘PowerPoint is not continuous ... It is not a flow. It is a series of images and moments. Which is really how the whole book works’ (Guenther, 2011). Transcribing digital forms reserved entirely for screens onto print matter skips the dimensions by altering interactions with the book, jolting readers out of their normal reading experience, and helps to accentuate the themes of the novel. *No One Is Talking About This* enacts a similar judder through the use of internet emojis, references, and the short paragraphs jarred by line-breaks and dashes, which, much like digestible tweets themselves, read like a long thread of stream of consciousness thoughts (and interruptions) on the page and illustrate the protagonist’s blurring of digital-material experiences.

## Internet Language, Literariness, and Co-Presence

Despite the digital remediation, Lockwood does not want us to perceive that *No One Is Talking About This* is written entirely in what she calls ‘internet language’ (2021b). She says at the Hay Festival Digital event that ‘some people made the mistake of talking about the book as if it



were written in internet language, which it's not, it's written in very poetic language'. Lockwood's resistance towards 'internet language', that of emojis and nods to collectively known memes and jokes in the living archive of social media, shows perhaps an anxiety towards her novel not being seen as credible or esteemed literature because it writes about the internet. Lockwood's novel instead couples both internet and poetic language through wry wittiness steeped in allusion. The glimpses of the digital space creep into the novel as slithers of self-reference and joyous nods to the portal itself. Lockwood brings the internet to the two-dimensional typed page of the novel, not by overusing internet syntax, but by embodying the digital form. Like Pressman's definition of 'literary' which plays on the form of the book, Lockwood's novel is a hybrid, mixing digital with material, and poetic language with internet language, to stretch the possibilities of the codex. Jocular in form and language, *No One Is Talking About This* represents the post-digital novel and the expansiveness of post-digital experiences.

The pervasiveness of the internet as a space which frames and closes off a scene, while also expanding out of it, is shown by the presence of Lockwood at the Hay Festival Digital event. She is framed by the square of the event's screen, discussing her iteration of the internet and her book which is, in a way, a window (or portal) into the online world through her written text. In the novel, the conflict of digital and material is reflected in the narrator's statement:

It was in this place where we were on the verge of losing our bodies that bodies became the most important, it was in this place of the great melting that it became important whether you called it *pop* or *soda* growing up, or whether your mother cooked with garlic salt or the real chopped cloves, or whether you had actual art on your walls or posed pictures of your family sitting on logs in front of fake backdrops, or whether you had that one Tupperware stained completely orange. You were zoomed in on the grain, you were out of space, it was the brotherhood of man, and in some ways you had never been flung further from each other. You zoomed in and zoomed in on that warm grain until it looked like the coldness of the moon. (Lockwood, 2021a: 12-13)

The collective pronouns of 'we' and second person 'you' interpolate the reader into the internet and its desperate attempt to find community and co-presence in anything, reminiscent of Scott's four dimensional human and the connection between Mrs Dalloway's solitary existence while also being 'part of people she had never met'. Lockwood's 'brotherhood of man' implies what the cultish nature that 'being online' and disembodied entails, while simultaneously juxtaposing the idea that the internet disconnects and makes people aware of their own bodies. The author's interplay between 'zoomed' conjures images of the conference software Zoom, a portal in itself of split screens and split bodies connected in the same digital room while being concurrently distant. Furthermore, the poetic language and imaginings of the internet's dichotomy between intimacy, immediacy, and distance

breeds a situation that is echoed at the 10@10 event. Next to each other on the screen, Stibbe and Lockwood discuss writing, and the novel itself, though there are connection lapses and actual lapses in time zones as the physical distance between them is vast, tightened only by a connection of literary and book-talk.

Lockwood creates a coded language in *No One Is Talking About This* which is something both private and public, known to those that are there – in the online space – and indecipherable to those who are not. In the novel, Lockwood comments on the style of writing about the internet in a metanarrative moment:

Why were we all writing like this now? Because a new kind of connection had to be made, and blink, synapse, little space-between was the only way to make it. Or because, and this was more frightening, it was the way the portal wrote.  
(Lockwood, 2021a: 63)

Lockwood directly links the supposed disconnection, blankness and ‘little space-between’ to the internet and the action of physical pages turning: ‘these disconnections were what kept the pages turning ... these blank spaces were what moved the plot forward’ (Ibid). Lockwood weaves the internet through her novel, all the while undercutting it and questioning it. In the ‘little space-between’, Lockwood alludes to the junctions that offer spaces to connect online: blank text boxes, open-reply sections, and live chat spaces, all white with flashing cursors, waiting for something witty or thought-provoking to fill in the space and communicate.

There is a passage in *No One Is Talking About This* where the narrator discusses with a fellow internet personality (referred to as ‘balls guy’ because he posts pictures of his testicles on the internet) about the difficulty of writing about the portal:

‘You could write it, you know,’ she said, leaning forward into a wind. ‘Someone could write it. But it would have to be like Jane Austen – what someone said at breakfast over cold mutton, a fatal quadrille error, the rising of fine hackles in the drawing room.’ Pale violent shadings of tone, a hair being split to the DNA. A *social* novel ... [I]f someone doesn’t, she thought, how will we preserve it for the future – how it felt, to be a man around the turn of the century posting increasing amounts of his balls online?

He lit a cigarette, and as she took one from him, to be funny, she said, ‘They’re getting it all wrong, aren’t they? Already when people are writing about it, they’re getting it all wrong.’ ‘Oh yes,’ he said, exhaling gently through his nostrils to be funny, in a tone that meant she was getting it wrong too.  
(Lockwood, 2021a: 26-27)

This idea, that writing about the internet has to mimic the quotidian and historical specificity of an Austen novel by depicting a certain moment and time recalls the idea of the immediacy and temporality of the internet as something already out-of-date, as well as Lockwood’s

attempt to make claims for placing her novel among the canon through purporting its literariness. Turning back to previous forms and language to capture the contemporary digital moment links to the trends and technologies of the nineteenth century, in Austen's age the popular dances, and in the twenty-first century, the varying internet trends and memes. In a review of the novel, Clair Wills writes:

[T]he point for [balls guy] is keeping one step ahead of the portal, generating new content and feeding the new sense of humor. Why would you need to write about it, rather than simply produce it? (2021)

But in writing about it, literature provides a record and mark of the internet in which new forms can be experimented with and new culture formed. Lockwood says at Hay Festival Digital that the reluctance by publishers to publish a novel about the internet is akin to 'if for a period of twenty or thirty years you weren't allowed to talk about telephones or novels, it doesn't make sense' (2021b). She sidesteps the internet-as-taboo issue by not relying upon just using the language of the internet but creating a new literary hybrid-poetic form. Wills notes that however one writes about the internet:

You are folding new modes of communication back into old ones, and by mentioning Austen, Lockwood wants us to notice this ... [*No One Is Talking About This*] is an arch descendant of Austen's socio-literary style—a novel of observation, crossed with a memoir of a family crisis, and written as a prose poem, steeped in metaphor. (2021)

If the internet is seen in simple terms as a digital technology which permeates daily lives, *No One Is Talking About This* speaks to a long tradition of 'social novels' which remark upon the daily lives of its characters; daily lives which interact with technology and the online space. The lacunae of Lockwood's novel, 'the little space-between', come from the supposed inability to write about the internet, and it is within these short gaps that connections are made by silences, prompting, in turn, conversations and the ability to communicate in the blank text boxes. At digital literary events such as Hay's 10@10, the gap or pause can be unwelcomed, a sign perhaps of bad communication, poor internet, or a lack of understanding, or simply a sign of a pause for thought. In *No One Is Talking About This*, pauses and omissions are rife, and thus make up the title of the novel; pointing to the unsaid, unspoken, and lost thoughts, those oppressed, not thought of as literary enough, and the generally popular and never-ending repeated exclamation online about things people naively believe that 'no one is talking about'.

## Conclusion

In her Hay Festival Digital talk, Lockwood states that she is 'less online' nowadays, though she does 'think that it was worth having been there' as it has become a part of her (2021b). As *No One Is Talking About This* progresses to part two, the protagonist becomes consumed by her sister's pregnancy and subsequent tragedy, but the internet persists; 'she still uses these images, she still uses this language, it has given her something, it was a place of human connection that improved her to observe' (2021b). Coalescing the portal and the written book, Lockwood's corresponding Hay Festival Digital event represents the hybrid medium of *No One Is Talking About This* by enacting the various portals at play: the portal of the internet through which they are watching, the portal of the discussion which brings insights to the novel, and the portal that is the text itself. The book, the event, and the audience themselves become entwined in a temporary community marked by being online, in 'a place of human connection' where discussion comes freely.

While this article has focused on a particular novel and its corresponding digital event, my analysis has pointed to an increasing desire to combine digital and material lives through books and book events on screen. Understanding the want to join these experiences underlines the importance of co-existing digital and physical cultures, where one does not usurp the other. Furthermore, considering how the codex is presented at digital literary festivals through literary analysis of both event and novel can begin a deeper study into how the content of a literary text transforms when the book is the subject of discussion in live events. The digital medium through which a book is examined imparts certain conditions, restrictions, and ideas onto the written page, and changes their meaning. When that book, as with Lockwood's, is also about the internet, the event and the book's reception fold into one another into an endless portal of potential meanings. The necessity of digital events during the pandemic has amplified the importance of the material book to readers and has allowed new literary and human connections to flourish.

## Biographical Note

Ellen Addis is a PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham. She is funded by Midlands4Cities, and her research interests revolve around live and digital literary cultures, literary festivals, social reading practices, and how literature changes through these social interactions.

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