Hi Andy, tell me a bit about yourself.

I’m a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Edge Hill. My research interests include Romantic period women’s writing, the geographies of Gothic fiction, and children’s literature. My first monograph, *Wollstonecraft’s Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period* has recently been published. In a weird way, this combines all of my interests: the book explores Wollstonecraft’s legacy on Romantic period writing; it does so by focusing on the way she seems to haunt women’s writing of the early nineteenth century; and she is a profound thinker about the urgent need to improve the education of children: to prepare boys and girls to be critically thinking citizens – as necessary now as then!

What’s your current research?

At the moment, I’m dividing my time between two projects: one on how Austen continues to engage with the Gothic, beyond Northanger Abbey, by positioning it in different locations – London, Ireland, the Mediterranean, Antigua, fairy land – away from the geographies of her novels; the other looks at how contemporary children’s literature makes use of the past in ways which move beyond nostalgia.

I haven’t read beyond Austen’s major novels but will you be using any of her juvenilia for instance? I loved Whit Stillman’s *Love and Friendship* last year (an adaptation of Austen’s *Lady Susan*), and wondered why nobody had done it before.

I love that film! It presents such a different vision of Austen from most other adaptations, focusing more on her satirical wit, verging towards cynicism at times. I read an interview with Kate Beckinsale, who plays Lady Susan in the movie, and she felt the character was full of rage, which I think is a new perspective on Austen. We still tend to think of her like Virginia Woolf did, as the cool, stylish one, contrasted with Charlotte Bronte’s anger, but
I want to think about an angrier, more awkward Austen, railing against the injustices her heroines face.

Tell me about a formative influence on your work; it could be a person, a book, an exhibition, or a piece of advice.

My PhD supervisors, Jane Spencer and Adeline Johns-Putra (who also supervised my MA on Wollstonecraft’s *Letters from Sweden*) remain my models of how to be academics: pastorally and personally supportive, intellectually and academically challenging, excellent scholars both.

I know of Jane! She’s written some great stuff on the links between 18thC natural history and natural rights. I think 18thC women’s studies and ecocriticism have a lot to say to each other.

Yes, Jane was moving into Animal Studies over the course of my PhD – I remember she presented a paper on the orangutan in one of Peacock’s novels! She was a fantastic supervisor, shaping the development of my ideas through patient, scrupulous, and encouraging discussion.

What’s your own personal recipe for researching or writing successfully?

I think I’m yet to discover the perfect recipe but I find writing the first draft of a piece of work the closest I can get to transcendence in this fallen world.

Are there any support networks you’ve found useful?
I’d be a hopeless wreck without my wife, Abbi McInnes, and my writing would be a hopeless wreck without the editing skills of my friend and PhD peer, Rebecca Mills. *(Interviewer’s note – Rebecca researches 20thC poetry and geography – proving you don’t have to be an expert in your friend’s field to be able to critique a friend’s writing. In fact, it often helps not to be)*

Finally, what’s the last thing you read or saw – it doesn’t have to be work-related?

I’m writing a lecture on the Romantic Self and have decided to tackle Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* - and in Andrew Bennett’s *Wordsworth in Context*, in an essay by Maureen McLane called ‘Wordsworth Now’, I stumbled upon a poem by Bob Perelman called ‘Fake Dreams: The Library’ which captures my divided feelings towards Wordsworth’s undeniable power and awfulness, ending in obscenity.

Obscenity! Do you mean Perelman’s poem ends in obscenity or your feelings towards Wordsworth do?! I know he’s frustrating at times...

‘Fake Dream: The Library’ begins with a couple trying to have sex in a library, against the collected works of Wordsworth, which allows the speaker to engage in a poetic critique of
Wordsworth’s self-representation. It ends in a men’s room with the speaker’s partner pointing out obscene graffiti, which McLane argues in ‘Wordsworth Now’ is Perelman’s surprisingly sympathetic rewriting of Wordsworth’s desire to write in ‘the real language of men’. I remember hating Wordsworth as an undergraduate, but one of the pleasures of growing up is changing your mind about things: now, I find parts of The Prelude – the ‘Crossing the Alps’ episode, for example – extraordinarily powerful poetry: both vertiginous and precisely ordered.