Literature and Rights Symposium

Abstracts and Biographies

Keynote speakers (in alphabetical order):

Cheryl I. Harris (UCLA School of Law, USA) - The Afterlife of Slavery: Race, Property and Debt

Cheryl I. Harris is the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation Chair in Civil Rights and Civil Liberties at UCLA School of Law where she teaches Constitutional Law, Civil Rights, Employment Discrimination, Critical Race Theory and Race Conscious Remedies. The interconnections between racial theory, civil rights practice, politics, and human rights have been important to her work. She was a key organizer of several major conferences that helped establish a dialogue between U.S. legal scholars and South African lawyers during the development of South Africa’s first democratic constitution. This work played a significant role in the production of her acclaimed and influential article, “Whiteness as Property” (Harvard Law Review). Since joining the UCLA Law faculty in 1998, Professor Harris has continued to produce groundbreaking scholarship in the field of Critical Race Theory, particularly engaging the issue of how racial frames shape our understanding and interpretation of significant events like Hurricane Katrina—(“Whitewashing Race”, in California Law Review), admissions policies (“The New Racial Preferences” in California Law Review)(with Carbado) and anti-discrimination law (“Reading Ricci: Whitening Discrimination, Race-ing Test Fairness” in UCLA Law Review) (with West-Faulcon). View full biography.

Elizabeth S. Anker (Cornell University, USA) - Screening Immigrant Rights, or the Biopolitical Constitution of Europe

This talk examines the preoccupation with the human rights of immigrants that extends across a series of 21st century films by some of the most acclaimed European and other directors of global cinema (Michael Haneke, Stephen Frears, and the Dardenne brothers, among others). It contextualizes this focus in relation to the breakdown of the movement for a formal European Constitution and the biological (or “biopolitical”) associations of the term constitution, raising questions about whether and why the form of the constitution has conventionally been wedded to national identity and conceptions of citizenship.

Elizabeth S. Anker is an Associate Member of the Law Faculty and Associate Professor in the English Department at Cornell University. She is the author of Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature. In addition, Anker has recently published essays that explore the relevance of literature and film to questions of sovereignty, animal rights, democracy, 9/11, the history of American slavery, and constitutionalism. She is currently writing two books. First, Our Constitutional Metaphors: Law, Culture, and the Management of Crisis studies literature, film, television, and architecture to conduct a comparative analysis of the aesthetic forms through which constitutions gain legal and popular authority. Second, Human Rights and Critical Theory explores the recent focus on human rights within the humanities and especially literary study. She is also working on two
Other speakers (in alphabetical order):

Bruce Barnhart (University of Oslo) - Temporality, Racial Violence, and Property Rights: James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* and the Race Riot of 1919

This paper investigates the psychic and social structure of racial violence in the U.S., using critical theory and literary representation as part of a reflection on the ways in which the temporal orientation of capitalist property rights work to structure white identity. The paper focuses on a literary representation of whiteness and racial violence from the 1930s in order to shed some light on the ongoing serial violence directed at African American men and women in the present. It looks at James T. Farrell’s 1935 trilogy, *Studs Lonigan*, a naturalist bildungsroman that chronicles the social and psychic life of its protagonist in minute detail. This protagonist, Studs Lonigan, is an eager participant in the Chicago race riots of 1919 and sees himself as a defender of ‘white turf’. Farrell’s representation of Studs asks readers to understand him as a product of his environment, a case study of the ways in which economic and cultural forces construct him as a defender of existing racial and economic regimes. Key to this construction is the way in which the rhythms of capitalist acquisition inculcate in Studs a set of proprietary investments in the future. Studs is cathected as a bearer of property rights that grant him both “reasonable expectations” about the future and the “right to exclude” others from his present and future. The paper explores the way in which Farrell’s depiction of racist violence and its attendant personality types help us understand the connections between the temporal orientation of capitalist property, white subjectivity, and anti-black violence.

Alba Morollón Diaz-Faes (University of Oslo) - Who Is Afraid of Queer Fairy Tales? LGBTQ+ Representation in Contemporary Retellings

Fairy tales have historically perpetuated what Adrienne Rich termed ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,’ 1980), which meant that queer love, desire and identities would never appear represented in the tales. It was not until the 90s that queer retellings of fairy tales gained any degree of popularity. This paper will investigate three of such queer retellings and draw possible parallels between their increase in popularity, the progressive attainment of civil rights and a larger media presence of LGBTQ+ people.

*Fairy Tales: Traditional Stories Retold for Gay Men* (Peter Cashorali, 1994), *Sleeping Beauty, Indeed* (edited by JoSelle Vanderhoof, 2009) and *Alice in Tumblr-Land* (Tim Manley, 2013) address a gap in the exclusive, sanitized fairy-tale tradition by foregrounding non-normative identities and by making sexuality matters explicit. The authors, all of whom are LGBTQ+, are thus reclaiming the right to represent and see themselves represented in the genre, infiltrating the genealogy of storytellers that have adapted the fairy tale to better fit their times, contexts and sensibilities.

Alba Morollón Diaz-Faes is a PhD Research Fellow with the project *Literature, Rights, and Imagined Communities*
Dean Franco (Wake Forest University, USA) - The Matter of the Neighbor: Budd Schulberg, James Baldwin, and the Watts Writers Workshop

This paper investigates the limits and possibilities of the neighbor as a figure for the ethics and politics of recognition, and as a basis for renovating democratic polity. The paper begins with a discussion of the efficacy of the recent Black Lives Matter political movement, and its interruption of a normative discourse of civil rights and liberal opportunity. Black Lives Matter seeks political recognition as the precedent for an ethical reconstruction of democracy, a reversal of the priority of ethics and politics typical in theories of recognition. Using BLM as a problematic, the paper turns to the history of the Watts Writers Workshop, founded by Budd Schulberg in 1965 after the Watts Riots, and investigates how Schulberg’s project shifted from a faith in liberal opportunity to a more trenchant politics of materiality. Seeking to be the ethical neighbor to Watts, Schulberg became unwittingly involved in a political project instead. The paper closes by examining a long 1966 conversation between Schulberg and his friend James Baldwin, who critiqued Schulberg’s presumptions and directed his friend to remedy the political order that required and produced black dispossession in the first place. Baldwin’s critique brings us back to Black Lives Matter, and its renovation of democracy based in a politics of love.

Dean Franco is Professor of English and Director of Jewish Studies at Wake Forest University, where he teaches courses on race, ethnicity, and literature. He is the author of two monographs, Ethnic American Literature: Comparing Chicano, Jewish, and African American Writing (Virginia UP, 2007), and Race, Rights, and Recognition: Jewish American Literature Since 1969 (Cornell UP, 2012). He is currently completing a monograph on Race, Literature, and Los Angeles titled “The Border and the Line.” His essays on diaspora, trauma, race, religion, and theory appear in PMLA, NOVEL, Cultural Critique, MFS, and Contemporary Literature, among other journals. He recently co-edited with Daliya Kandiyoti a special issue of the journal Studies in American Jewish Literature on Jewish-Muslim Crossings in the United States and the Americas. Dean co-founded the Wake Forest Humanities Institute in 2010, and will begin a term as the Institute director in January 2017.

Jan Grue (University of Oslo) - The Right to Representation: Character and Characterization in John Williams’ Stoner

John Williams’ novel Stoner, originally published in 1965, enjoyed something of a renaissance from the 2000s onwards, after being republished by New York Review Books Classics. The story centers on William Stoner, a farm boy from whose parents send him to the University of Missouri to major in agriculture. At the university, Stoner discovers literature and devotes his life to it, partly due to an epiphany brought on by close reading of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73. Stoner arguably faces two primary and one secondary antagonist. One primary antagonist is his wife, Edith, who turns out to be a bitter and classically frigid woman; the other antagonists, appearing in his working life, are Stoner’s colleague Hollis Lomax and Lomax’ protégé Charles Walker. They are respectively described as a “hunchback” and a “cripple” who threaten Stoner’s career, his personal integrity, and the integrity of the academy in general. Stoner presents a tightly structured and highly troubling narrative in which class, gender and physical impairment/disability are driving forces. William Stoner’s background in poverty and deprivation arguably render him particularly receptive to the spiritual power of literature, and his pursuit of the adherent life goals are hindered on the temporal plane by two main factors: His wife’s preoccupation with mundane and superficial aspects of life, and his academic antagonists’ debasement of academic ideals. Lomax, though
intelligent and capable, is a damaged man whose bitterness and sexual jealousy mirrors Edith’s frigidity. He uses his talents to promote Walker, who is an intellectual fraud with no true literary qualifications. The physical impairments/limitations of all three antagonists are opposed to Stoner’s aspiration towards intellectual and spiritual purity; their impure bodies and souls are contemptuously juxtaposed with Stoner’s authentic masculinity.

Jan Grue is Professor of Qualitative Methods at the Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo. He works chiefly in disability studies, discourse analysis, and rhetoric. His latest books (both 2015) are Disability and Discourse Analysis (Ashgate) and Teori i praksis: Analysestrategier i akademisk arbeid (Fagbokforlaget).

Marit Grøtta (University of Oslo) - Literature, Politics, and Forms-of-Life: Giorgio Agamben’s Rethinking of the Political Subject

Taking his cue from Hannah Arendt, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben criticizes the abstract notion of (human) rights for subordinating individual lives to a sovereign power (such as the state). In times of emergency, this sovereign power proves to be incapable of protecting these lives (such as refugees), and it also posits the power to declare a state of exception, thus excluding citizens from their rights and exposing them to violence. Highlighting the thin line between sovereign power and violence, Agamben warns against a politics based on rights and calls for a reconsideration of the political subject. He suggests that the refugee and a life in exodus be models for a "coming community," and he also introduces the notion of "form-of-life," thus demonstrating the difference between a being "for whom happiness is always at stake" and biological life/life as mere survival. In his discussion of these questions, Agamben (as well as Arendt) frequently refers to Kafka's stories, and there seems to be an intimate connection between Kafka's literature and Agamben's political thought. This paper discusses Agamben's rethinking of the political subject, emphasizing the notion of "form-of-life," and it explores the connection between Kafka's literature and Agamben's political thought.


Bea Klüsener (Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany) - “The Reign of Reason, Liberty and Peace”? Romantic Women Writers and The Notion of Human Rights

The quotation has been taken from a poem by Charlotte Smith. I would like to examine her works, but also pieces written by other female authors of the Romantic period with regard to their being involved in the discussion of human rights against the background of the French Revolution and its reception in Britain.

Bea Klüsener is Assistant Professor at the Chair of English Literature and European Studies at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany. She wrote her PhD thesis on concepts of evil in the nineteenth-century British novel. In addition, she has published several articles on female vampire creatures in British literature, and on interrelations between
Victorian literature and contemporary theories of criminology. Klüsener has also co-edited (with Richard Nate) a volume titled *Culture and Biology: Perspectives on the European Modern Age* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2011). She is currently researching British perspectives on “Europe” during the period of Romanticism.

**Hanna Musiol (NTNU, Norwegian University of Science and Technology) - Aesthetic Justice**

How do aesthetic practices produce social and political identities, value, rights, justice? What does it mean to refer to humans as “socio-cultural artifacts” (Elizabeth Grosz) or see aesthetic genres as “fleshy” (Kara Walker)? This project focuses on aesthetic evaluation as a capricious classification system which can both generate and suspend human rights in the city streets, in a museum exhibit, at a border crossing, in the courtroom, in a poetic line, and in the classroom. The talk will examine specifically the juridicopolitical dimensions of aesthetics in our own discipline and pedagogical work, and in the literary and visual projects by Kara Walker, George Witte, and William Kentridge.

Hanna Musiol is an Associate Professor of American literature and culture at NTNU. Her research interests include transnational American and Anglophone literatures, visual studies, archive and curation, digital humanities, critical pedagogy, gender studies and critical theory, with emphasis on migration, political ecology, human rights, and decolonization. She has published widely on literary and visual aesthetics and human rights, and her work has appeared in *Journal of American Studies, College Literature, Journal of Labor and Society, Oil Culture* (University of Minnesota Press), *Human Rights and Literature* (Routledge), and *Discursive Framing of Human Rights* (Birkbeck Law /Routledge). She also associate-edited *Cultural Studies: An Anthology* (Blackwell) and is the creator of the (Im)Migrant Experience Initiative (IEI), an open-access digital archive devoted to the preservation of narratives of migration and displacement at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her current book project is called Aesthetic Jurisdictions.

**Richard Nate (Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany) - “Give it, like a royal heart”: Human Rights and Their Enemies**

At the beginning of the twentieth century the idea of human rights was increasingly questioned or even openly attacked. This paper investigates to what extent a mutual reinforcement of neo-romantic and Social Darwinist concepts may have been responsible for this. It focuses on the Scottish nineteenth-century writer Thomas Carlyle’s cultural criticism as well as on publications by American, British and German eugenicists.

Richard Nate is Professor of English Literature at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany. His latest books include *Biologismus und Kulturkritik: eugenische Diskurse der Moderne* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2014); *Cultural Identities in Europe: Nations and Regions, Migration and Minorities*, co-edited with Verena Gutsche (Königshausen & Neumann, 2014); and *Culture and Biology: Perspectives on the European Modern Age*, co-edited with Bea Klüsener (Königshausen & Neumann, 2011).

**Belinda Molteberg Steen (University of Oslo) - The Right to Belong: English 17th-Century “Conversion Narratives”**
This paper will address the topic of literature and rights from a historical perspective. By focusing on two collections of “conversion narratives” published in London in 1653, Vavasor Powell’s *Spiritual Experiences of Sundry Beleevers* and John Rogers’ *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh*, the paper will investigate the admission processes of two congregations situated in Ireland and Wales in the seventeenth century, congregations belonging to a radical Puritan sect called The Fifth Monarchists. The narratives of these collections do not concern themselves with conversion in the traditional sense – as a change of church – but rather, as a change of soul: A turning away from sin towards God. To become a member of these congregations one was required to orally deliver such a narrative and give visible evidences of one’s election. The right to belong to the religious community – and by extension, the possibility of eternal life through Christ – was thus dependent upon narratives. As this screening process very much resembled a trial, both in its language and its performativity, these congregations created what can be termed *narrative communities*: Making up their own rules of admission and creating a hierarchical system of salvation, they enforced a sense of community through storytelling.

Belinda Molteberg Steen is a PhD Research Fellow with the project *Literature, Rights, and Imagined Communities*