Form and Person

CFP for the Brown-Harvard-Yale Graduate Student Conference on April 6, 2019

We are pleased to announce a sequel to the 2017 interdepartmental conference with graduate students and faculty members from the German Departments at Brown, Harvard and Yale. This year’s event will be hosted by the German Department at Yale on Saturday, April 6, 2019. This year’s theme is “Form and Person,” aiming to invite many different approaches to many different texts from all historical periods.

The seminar investigates the form of the person by exploring the complex interrelation between the modern conception of the person and literary forms. As Hobbes has made clear, the modern legal and political concept of the person is deeply informed by the theater and the theatrical mask (persona). In order for a subject to manifest itself such that we can ascribe words and deeds to it and recognize it as the author of these words and deeds, it needs to appear in the form of a person. The person can thus be understood as the outward form in which the subject may appear, become expressive, and authoritative. Yet this public person or outward form can only put the subject on display by simultaneously masking it. The form of the person is thus enabling the expression of an inner intelligible character and constituting the authority of the personified subject, by at the same time opening up a space of the inexpressible or unimputable hidden behind or supplanted by the mask. It is this other side of the person that literary forms often explore in unmatched ways.

Against this background, the workshop seeks to investigate the sense in which the modern person is informed and reflected, structured and questioned by literary means. What are the – legal, political, ritualistic, and literary – techniques and mechanisms that are necessary to establish, invest and decode a modern person? And what are the literary forms by means of which these procedures can in turn be reflected, questioned, and transformed? The prominence of the theatrical paradigm notwithstanding, narration and poetry have developed their own forms for establishing personhood and personification. We invite proposals for theoretical analysis as well as literary reading that explore the structures and tensions, potentials and limitations inherent in the modern conception of personhood through attention to literary form.

Topics may include but are not limited to the distinct contributions of the specific literary genres of drama or theater, prose, and poetry, investigating, for instance, the performance of personhood on the stage, the formation of the narrative protagonist and the narrator with the rise of the modern novel, or the rhetorical forms of personification in modern poetry. Critical reflections on
the role of gender, race, and social class for the form of the person are of special relevance, as well as investigations of figures of the nonperson (the witch, the monster, the outcast). Connecting reflections on theatrical, rhetorical, and narrative form to contemporary debates on human, animal, and environmental rights are encouraged. Contributions investigating broader questions on the interrelation of form and subjectivation are welcome, as well as papers from other disciplines exploring the form of the person from an anthropological, legal, or philosophical perspective.

The sessions aim to include two short presentations from two graduate students from each department, plus a response from a graduate student and/or faculty member from a different department, before opening up to general discussion.

12:00 – 1pm: Welcome Reception with catered lunch

Session 1: 1:00 – 2:30. Grad student presentations (Brown and Harvard), with grad student and/or faculty response from Yale

Session 2: 3:00 – 4:30. Grad student presentations (Yale and Brown), with grad student and/or faculty response from Harvard

Session 3: 5:00 – 6:30. Grad student presentation (Yale and Harvard), with grad student and/or faculty response from Brown

Graduate students from all three German departments are warmly invited to attend. Travel expenses for Brown and Harvard students will be covered by their departments.

Should you be interested in presenting a paper, please submit a title and brief abstract (300 words) to Katrin Truestedt (katrin.truestedt@yale.edu) by February 22, 2019. Selected participants will be asked to submit their papers to their respondents by March 29 for pre-distribution.