

Narrative Possibilities: Human Rights and Art of Storytelling

Academic content in course

Human rights is a profoundly interdisciplinary topic, approachable from a broad variety of scholarly perspectives and susceptible to a range of methodological approaches. Following the 'narrative turn' that has exerted such influence across academia in recent decades, this course has two core aims: to investigate the ways in which the study of narrative is uniquely equipped to illuminate dimensions of human rights issues less easily accessible to other modes of textual representation; and to explore how storytelling practices condition our understanding of the world, and, by extension, scholarly engagements with human rights issues within and beyond the humanities. Beyond the specific domain of human rights, the course addresses the broader question of why it is important for scholars and students who deal with different aspects of the human existence – historians, psychologists, lawyers, social scientists, and medics, to name a few – to have an understanding of the fundamentals of narrative theory and explores a variety of answers to this increasingly salient question.

Required prerequisite knowledge

A completed MA thesis within a relevant field.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

The candidate will have advanced knowledge of:

- A selection of key concepts in the fields of narrative representation and reception;
- The ways in which different modes of textual representation illuminate different aspects of the topic(s) they engage, particularly in the context of human rights;
- The ethical dimensions of narrative engagements with human rights issues;
- The complexity of the processes of writing and reading narratives, and how these condition research in both the humanities and the social sciences.

Skills

The candidate will be able to:

- Identify and analyse the uses of strategies characteristic of narrative representation in both a literary context and a more general academic context;
- Utilise narrative-based analytical methodologies to explore issues and concepts within human rights discourse, and social-scientific domains more broadly.

General competences

The candidate will be able to:

- Critically assess text-based research and knowledge production within the humanities, social sciences, and creative aesthetics with academic integrity;
- Critically apply their knowledge and understanding of the operations of different genres of text to their own reading and writing practices;
- Communicate with precision about reading and writing, both in terms of their own processes and on a theoretical level.

Learning activities

Two-day seminar, comprising four modules.

The teaching and working forms are:

- Lectures with discussions;
- Seminars with presentations, featuring discussions about the literature and the candidate's planned research work;
- Obligatory reading and preparatory work prior to the seminars.

Supervised professional training

Coursework requirements

Please see 'Forms of assessment' (below).

Compulsory activity and compulsory attendance

Successful completion of the course is contingent on approval of an essay submitted after the course is completed, and on active participation in all teaching sessions.

Course expenses

Forms of assessment

Written essay consisting of 2,000 – 2,500 words, which will be graded as pass/fail.

The obligatory essay should clearly relate to the course material, the lectures and seminars, and the work completed during the course. The essay must demonstrate that the candidate has achieved the learning objectives as described in the course description. It must also conform to academic standards regarding referencing and citation practices.

Examination support material

Miscellaneous

n/a

Literature (reading list)

- Benjamin, W. (1936/2007). The Storyteller. In Arendt, H. (Ed.) *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections* (pp. 83-109). Schocken Books.
- Benjamin, W. (1935/2007). The Work of Art In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In Arendt, H. (Ed.) *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections* (pp. 217-251). Schocken Books.
- Butler, J. (2009). Primo Levi for the Present. In F. Ankersmit, E. Domanska, and H. Kellner (Eds.) *Re-Figuring Hayden White* (pp. 282-303). Stanford University Press.
- Dawes, J. (2007). Storytelling. In *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* (pp. 164-229). Harvard University Press.
- Dawes, J. (2009). Human Rights in Literary Studies. *Human Rights Quarterly* 31(2), 394–409. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20486757>.
- Mansfield, N. (2011). Human Rights as Violence and Enigma: Can Literature Really Be of Any Help with the Politics of Human Rights? In Goldberg, E. S. and A. S. Moore (Eds.). *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (pp. 217-230). Routledge.
- Roy, A (2011). *Walking with the Comrades*. Penguin Books.
- Stonebridge, L. (2021). Introduction: Literature in the End Times (?) of Human Rights. In *Writing & Righting. Literature in the Age of Human Rights* (pp. 1-20). Oxford University Press.
- White, H. (2004). Figural Realism in Witness Literature. *Parallax* 10(1): 113-124.
- White, H. (2000) Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Representation. In *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (pp. 27-42). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ypi, L. (2021). *Free: Coming of Age at the End of History*. Penguin.

Approved course plan

Course approved by PEDRES committee at meeting on 14 December, 2022.

Change description

