



## A National PhD School

Funded by the Norwegian Research Council

Run by a consortium of all faculties of Law and Humanities in the four major Norwegian universities, and the two major national theological institutions

Coordinated by the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo

# Abstracts and Readings

Reception: Practices and Strategies for Interpreting Texts

ATTR Research seminar and PhD seminar

14 – 18 March 2021

Ika Willis, University of Wollongong

*Title*

Text, Context, Hypertext, Paratext, Intertext

*Abstract*

Gian Biagio Conte defines intertextuality as ‘the condition of literary readability’, arguing that ‘the sense and structure of a work can be grasped only with reference to other models hewn from a long series of texts of which they are, in some way, the variant form’ (1986: 29). This aligns with more recent work on the ‘neuroaesthetics’ of reading (Armstrong 2013), showing that readers make meaning by observing how texts conform to, and deviate from, culturally-established narrative, generic, and formal patterns.

Conservative literary critics from T. S. Eliot (1919) to Harold Bloom (1975) have used this idea to define literary traditions or canons which must be preserved, and whose boundaries must be defended, in order for literature to survive. In this paper, however, I want to move away from the notion of an organically coherent ‘tradition’, while preserving the basic insight that texts only have meaning in relation to other texts. I do this firstly by reigniting the structuralist/post-structuralist notion of intertextuality (cf Fowler 2000), and secondly by insisting that connections between texts are made by readers. Indeed, this is the only way in which authoritative texts can travel across historical and cultural boundaries, by being taken up, sampled, and re-inserted into new contextual, intertextual, and paratextual networks.

*Preparation for seminar discussion:* Please come to the seminar with some ideas about how the texts in your own research have travelled from their ‘original’ position in a textual network and how new intertextual relationships have been created. How do the texts seek to position themselves in relation to other texts (e.g. through references and allusions)? How are they positioned by later readers, translators, editors, and creative rewriters, in relation to other contexts, intertexts, and traditions?

*Required reading*

‘Rewriting’, in Willis, Ika *Reception* 2018, pp. 35-67.

*Recommended reading*

Fowler, Don, ‘On the Shoulders of Giants: Intertextuality and Classical Studies’, in *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin* (OUP, 2000), pp. 115-137.

Frow, John, ‘Afterlives: Texts as Usage’, *Reception* 1 (2008): 1-23.

Kolodny, Annette, ‘A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts’, *New Literary History* 11:3 (1980): 451-467.

Sanders, Julie, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Routledge, 2006).

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Tore Rem, University of Oslo

*Title*

World Literature and the History of Books: The Case of Ibsen

*Abstract*

How was Ibsen possible? When Henrik Ibsen published his first play, *Catilina*, in 1850 it was in a peripheral culture with almost no book production of its own. Forty years later Ibsen had acquired European fame and his works were being published simultaneously in several countries and languages, perhaps as a first instance of synchronized world literature. Ibsen had reached the centre, and since then has acquired a secure place in the canons of world theatre and literature.

What can be learnt from the case of Ibsen? In which ways may it be exemplary? In my lecture I will give an overview of the Norwegian playwright's career at home and of his early reception abroad. What were the world literary mechanisms that helped create this phenomenon? What were the relationships between periphery and centre(s), and how did they play themselves out? And what roles did book publication play in Ibsen's domestic and international success, and, more generally, translation, literary institutions, literary middlemen- and women and various forms of appropriation? I will suggest that we can learn much about the lives and survival of texts by combining the perspectives of book history, reception studies and world literature.

*Required reading*

Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem, 'Networks, Asymmetries and Appropriations: Towards a Typology', *Ibsen Studies*, 19:2 (2019), 65-87.

*Recommended reading*

Roger Chartier, 'Labourers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader', in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 87-98.

Emily Apter, *Against World Literature. On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013).

Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem, *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2018).

Hannah Strømmen, University of Chichester

*Title*

Scriptural Assemblages: The Use of the Bible in European Far-Right Movements

*Abstract*

The use of the Bible in contemporary European far-right movements might be dismissed as superficial, even banal. Isolated biblical verses are cited on social media and vague references are made to 'biblical values'. The banality of this Bible-use is not, however, a reason to dismiss it. In this talk I argue that it is key to understand how so-called banal Bible-use can be effective in propagating political messages, in garnering popular appeal, and in forging connections across far-right networks. After addressing concrete examples of Bible-use by contemporary far-right groups in Europe, I argue that a prime way to understand this Bible-



use is through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of 'assemblage'. Bibles, I propose, can be understood as assemblages. In other words, Bibles are changing and changeable entities that are always connected to a number of non-biblical elements that come together to make them work and function a particular way. To study biblical reception, then, questions to ask would be: how does this Bible (or this biblical text) work, at what speed, and with what else?

#### *Required reading*

Thomas Nail, 'What is an Assemblage?', *SubStance* 46:1 (2017), 21-37.

#### *Recommended reading*

Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, translated by Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017).

Hannah M. Strømmen, 'Christian Terror in Europe? The Bible in Anders Behring Breivik's Manifesto', *The Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 4:1 (2017), 47-169.

Hannah M. Strømmen, 'Biblical Blood-Lines: From Foundational Corpus to Far Right Bible', *Biblical Interpretation* 25:4-5 (2017), 555-573.

Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017).

### [James Bielo, Miami University](#)

#### *Title*

Making the Biblical Past Real: Biblical Tourism, Sensory Choreography, andn the Power of Entertainment.

#### *Abstract*

In this presentation, I tell the stories of two conservative Protestant sites on the U.S. landscape: Ark Encounter in Kentucky and the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. Both are sites of evangelical tourism, places where politics and piety, fun and faith, leisure and devotion, imagination and morality intermingle. And, both sites advance the ideological and political ambitions of this religious movement through the sensory techniques of experiential design. The embrace of design industry methods reflects and embraces a broader cultural shift toward the experience economy, in which commodities are appraised by their capacity to create or advance emotionally stirring sensory environments. Given this emphasis on sensation, the experience economy is also an affective economy. Success – as product, brand, or destination – rests on consumers forming ideological attachments that are registered and practiced somatically. Ultimately, this analysis of Ark Encounter and Museum of the Bible addresses several questions: how do these sites claim and contest cultural legitimacy and authority across multiple experiential registers? How are the material channels of body, technology, object, and place mobilized for ideological work? And, ultimately, what is the power and promise of entertainment for religion in late modern life?

#### *Required reading*

Bielo, James S. 2020. Experiential design and religious publicity at D.C.'s Museum of the Bible. *The Senses & Society* 15(1): 98-113.



### *Recommended reading*

- Agnew, Vanessa. 2019. "Gooseflesh: Music, Somatosensation, and the Making of Historical Experience." In *The Varieties of Historical Experience*, edited by Stephan Palmie and Charles Stewart, 77-94. London: Routledge.
- Handman, Courtney. 2018. The Language of Evangelism: Christian Cultures of Circulation beyond the Missionary Prologue. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47: 149-65.
- Rose, Lena. 2020. Nazareth Village and the Creation of the 'Holy Land' in Israel-Palestine: The Question of Evangelical Orthodoxy. *Current Anthropology* 61(3).

Giuliano D'Amico, University of Oslo

### *Title*

Hermetic Semiosis and Conspiracy Thinking as Modes of Reception

### *Abstract*

Conspiracy theories are everywhere around us, and they have become a phenomenon that anyone as citizen and thinking individual has had to cope with in the last few decades. Such development has coincided with an increasing scholarly interest. What has been much less thoroughly researched, however, is how hermeneutical and epistemological mechanisms that lie at the foundation of conspiracy theories—what I term “conspiracy thinking”—have sneaked into other forms of discourse. Can conspiracy thinking also be traced where there is no hidden or evident conspiracy? What are the consequences for our understanding of the texts that contain and disseminate such mode of thinking? And are the boundaries between a conspiratorial and a legitimate interpretation of a work of art or literature always clear-cut? In my paper I will present some thoughts about how conspiracy thinking sneaks into literary interpretation, drawing upon examples of interpretation of Henrik Ibsen’s play *Peer Gynt*. To do so, will use Umberto Eco’s concept of “hermetic semiosis” as my main methodological tool. I will discuss the hermeneutical mode of reception it rests upon, and how it offers relevant interpretive strategies for conspiratorial readings of works that are not “hermetic” in a strict sense, but that share a hermeneutical approach with selected esoteric currents.

### *Required reading*

- Eco, Umberto, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler and Christine Brooke-Rose. 1992. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, edited by Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 45–66 (chapter 2).

### *Recommended reading*

- Barkun, Michael. 2003. *A Culture of Conspiracy. Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1–15 (chapter 1).
- Eco, Umberto. 1994 [1990]. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 23–43 (chapter 2).
- Rees, Ellen. 2014. *Ibsen’s Peer Gynt and the Production of Meaning*. Acta Ibseniana 11. Oslo: Centre for Ibsen Studies, 7–16 (introduction).

Rita Felski, University of Virginia

### *Title*



## On Resonance

### *Abstract*

My talk draws out affinities between the ideas of Hartmut Rosa and two novels: *Stoner* by John Williams and *Theory* by Dionne Brand. Both novels capture moments when words crackle, reverberate, come alive; they speak to the transformative aspects of intellectual life, while also acknowledging the alienating aspects of academic institutions. The idea of resonance, I argue, can clarify the force of attachments to both literature and theory; it speaks to the phenomenology as well as sociology of our intellectual commitments.

### *Required reading*

Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, Cambridge: Polity, 2019, chapter 5: "Resonance and Alienation as Basic Categories of a Theory of Our Relationship to the World".

### *Recommended reading*

Zadie Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement: A Voyage around Joni Mitchell.", *The New Yorker* December 17, 2012, available online at

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/17/some-notes-on-attunement>

Also available in *idem*, *Feel Free: Essays*, New York: Penguin, 2018, 100–116.

Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020, chapter 2: "Art and Attunement".

## Gabriel Levy, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

### *Title*

On the Reception of Science in Religion

### *Abstract*

In this talk I plan to focus on the reception of scientific texts in religions, the study of religion, and the humanities more broadly, focusing in particular on the reception of cognitive science. I plan to juxtapose two recent approaches in my field, one exemplified by John Lardas Modern's *Neuromatic: Or, A Particular History of Religion and the Brain* (2021, University of Chicago Press), the other, by my own book *Beyond Heaven and Earth: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (2022, MIT Press). Modern's book is a discursive history of the brain sciences and their application to religion, while Levy's attempts to lay out a way forward for nonreductive scientific approaches to religion and the humanities. In the first part of the talk I will examine the relation between authority and reception using theories from hermeneutics and the cognitive sciences. I will discuss the relation between science and other types of performances, and the pragmatic constraints around the discursive authority of science. In the second part I compare the authoritative reception of science in the content and practice of the aforementioned books. A few central points of similarity and difference emerge in the comparison, namely around topics of materiality, emotions, information, cognition, politics, and agency. To prepare for the lecture I ask the students to read a chapter from each of these texts, which will be provided.

### *Required reading*



Gabriel Levy, *Beyond Heaven and Earth: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (2022, MIT Press)\_  
the Introduction.

*Recommended reading*

John Lardas Modern, *Neuromatic: Or, A Particular History of Religion and the Brain* (2021, University of Chicago Press), the Introduction.

[Hans Petter Graver, University of Oslo](#)

*Title*

Materialities, politics, and emotions in the reception of European law in the Norwegian welfare administration

*Abstract*

In 2019 it was revealed that the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) had been depriving thousands of their right to benefits during sickness. Many had been sentenced to prison for giving false information to NAV about going abroad. The basis for this was a provision in the Norwegian social security act that stated that rights to sickness benefits were suspended if the beneficiary stayed outside of Norway. This provision was in contradiction with the right to free movement under the EEA Agreement, and was therefore not legally applicable. How was it that the Norwegian authorities could enact legislation and uphold a practice in conflict with European law that had been made part of Norwegian law since 1994? The answer to this question sheds light on materialities, politics, and emotions in the reception of foreign law into a national legal order.