

Keynote Speakers

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Challenging Precarity: A Global Network

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Writing the Trespasser: Permitted Migration, Prohibited Personhood

John McLeod, University of Leeds

As the recent and troubling “Windrush scandal” in the UK reminds us, the varying status of all migrants — long permitted or perpetually prohibited — is always a precarious matter, while the strategic distinction between sanctioned and proscribed arrivants is never clear-cut and



can shift without warning. Indeed, the certification and legitimation of those permitted to remain always places constraints on personhood: not only where one is allowed to stay, but who one is allowed to be. My keynote address explores the representation of such sanctioned migrant figures in contemporary literature, especially those texts which explore the consequences when permitted settlers seek to trespass — to move precariously beyond not only circumscribed domains of dwelling but also the forms of personhood which sanctioned migration often imposes. How does the literary exploration of such migrant trespassing expose the constraints and curtailments of personhood required by legitimate(d) citizenship? What happens when such certified figures push against the borders of being authorised and policed at large? I pursue these question with reference to the recent work of Caryl Phillips, in particular his literary representation of the Nigerian stowaway David Oluwale who died at the hands of Leeds City Police.

Digging into Precarious Lives in the Anthropocene. Stratigraphy in Postcolonial Literature Carmen Concilio, University of Torino, I

In this contribution I would like to consider the paradigm shifting study by Jan Zalasiewicz, *The Anthropocene as a Geological Time Unit* (2019), and the view on stratigraphy produced by the scholars of the Anthropocene Working Group in relation to three postcolonial texts. J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (1990) from its very title hints at geological time units, while also considering the origin of species and



human evolution, the metamorphosis of Lepidoptera, and extinction. Most interestingly, the novel by the South African Nobel Prize winner elaborates on stratigraphy and geology, when describing South Africa's soil as a mass grave for black people under Apartheid. Similarly, the section of the novel by the Canadian author Anne Michaels, *The Winter Vault* (2009), about Warsaw during the Second World War, provides a view of stratigraphy in times of armed conflict, in 1945. In this case, the city has been rebuilt on layers of debris and human bodies plastered together. A further example of stratigraphic conscience and geological representation of the strata in our Lithosphere is to be found in Teju Cole's novel *Open City* (2011), where the *flâneur* ponders over an African Burial Ground, which is situated right below a New York expanse of buildings, and which was exhumed while building new estates.

These are all sites of “violence, vulnerability and mourning” in Judith Butler's terms; sites that speak of “precarious lives” (2004). What if we tear up the Earth's crust just to look at the layers of our Anthropocene as a mirror of our failing humanity, of our own precarious history of progress? Colonialism in general, Apartheid in South Africa, Wars in Europe affected the geological layers of our planet in a way that literature cannot ignore and cannot avoid interrogating. Thus, the present contribution aims at providing an original reading of postcolonial literary texts as chrono-stratigraphic documents, within the wider scope of stratigraphic studies and vulnerability studies of our Anthropocene.

The Precarity of Meaning in *Wuthering Heights* Tabish Khair, Aarhus University



Can one talk of precarity in the context of literature, without actually turning literature into just a mirror of other factors, political, social or economic? If human existence is precarious in the context of Judith Butler's usage of precarity as a 'politically induced condition', and if socio-economic livelihood is precarious in the context of Alex Fonti's coinage of the 'precariat' (based on the old 'proletariat,' but taking into account post-industrial and neo-liberal developments), then what is it that is precarious in the context of literature *qua* literature? This paper seeks to answer this question by looking closely at Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. It essentially argues that the precarity of literature has to do with meaning, and making meaning, and connects it to the larger discussion.

Myths of Modernity: Living Between Poverty and the Pavement

Bashabi Fraser, Edinburg Napier University

A Global Transformation effected by the rise of globalisation and neo-liberalism (Guy Standing, 2009, 2014) has seen the dismantling of earlier binaries of the bourgeoisie and the working class, of the 'neat' divisions between the middle and working classes, which have now been eroded by the reality of an increasing inequality. This is evident in the creation of an ever expanding precariat, whose lives are dominated by the certainty of uncertainty as they are affected by the myths of having incentive and enterprise, involving risk taking, marked by one constant that marks their borderline existence: instability. This paper will look at how precarity makes the struggle against poverty an ongoing battle as worker's rights are ignored and state support diminishes or is non-existent, making the descent from poverty to the pavement a looming nightmare that can easily be translated into a reality. With references to select literature from the UK and India and some recent films from both countries, this study will use postcolonial perspectives of mimicry (Bhabha) and hegemony (Gramsci) and the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to explore the complexity of modernity as people are continuously displaced by rural-to-urban migration, conflict and climate change, leading to a growing tribe of the dispossessed and disaffected as trends and demands of the global north affect and even control lives in both developed nations and in the global south.



Uncertain Futures Precarious Lives Higher Education, Skills & Employability: Uncertain Future

Rohit Singh, AURO University



Precariat is a psychological condition that cuts across class and regions. People who live unstable lives and suffer from insecure employment and income could be considered precariats. Precariats are everywhere - in India as well as in Europe, USA and other parts of the world. The present moment is witnessing a global transformation in the form of free economy and liberalization. However, this moment is underpinned with deep

crisis and uncertainties since globalization operates on the idea of 'Rentier Capitalism' where return from the property and assets is more than any other business proposition. This has led to a situation where a class of people generate more income from these assets than from business. On the other hand, the labor class (which is also pretty high in India) has to live on low income and money wages which is uncertain; as it is subject to temporary employment opportunities with no written contract and for shorter duration; thus losing access to rights; they are not citizens but rather than denizens. Thus, it is a creation of class from a class itself.

Guy Standing in his book, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011), rightly advances the idea of Universal Basic Income. The Government of India is also mulling on the thought of bringing Universal Basic Income for its citizen certain rupees/ per person. One needs to reconsider two qualifications that uniquely position India for the implementation of a universal basic income (UBI) - the lack of women in the public labour force and the presence of a large informal sector. First, the UBI would help Indian women gain greater financial independence and thus enhance gender equality. Several economists assert that using cash transfers to make a sizable dent in poverty would

require India to scrap existing welfare programs like PDS & MNREGA. Several other measures like initiating program at National Level under the aegis of NSDC, bringing in collaboration & convergence of schemes between central & state government to trickle the effect of benefit to the masses. These efforts will also create possibility of income generation, reducing the level of unemployment, building possibilities and bridging the gap between different classes. The scenario of Precariat is like circling an old pond whereas a new ocean has come up and we are not able to see it.