

# Hermes 2018 Summer School University College London

## *Vulnerability*

Italian Institute of Germanic Studies  
Villa Sciarra-Wurts, Rome, Italy

18-22 June 2018

### **Invited Speakers**

Giandomenico Iannetti (University College London)

Katherine Ibbett (University of Oxford)

Peter Leary (University College London)

Timothy Mathews (University College London)

Simona Micali (University of Siena)

Baldassare Pastore (University of Ferrara)

Ellen Sapega (University of Wisconsin-Madison) - tbc

### **Organising Committee**

Florian Mussgnug (UCL)

Jennifer Rushworth (UCL)

Roberta Ascarelli (IIGS)

Lucia Corso (Enna)

### **Sponsors**

Faculty of Arts and Humanities, UCL

PRIN "Legal Entity and Vulnerability"

University of Enna Kore

Italian Institute of Germanic Studies

### **General Information**

University College London (UCL) is proud to be a founding member of the [Hermes Consortium for Literary and Cultural Studies](#), a long-standing collaboration of eleven doctoral schools in Belgium, The Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, France, and the USA, with a proven record of international excellence in the field of Comparative Literary Studies. The Consortium's **annual summer school**, hosted in turn by each partner institution, brings together specialists, delegates from the partner universities and 22 PhD students (two per university). Intensive training workshops and work-in-progress presentations focus on shared methodologies and themes and lead to the publication of an annual edited volume, published by [UCL Press](#) in the *Comparative Literature and Culture* series, co-edited by Prof. Timothy Mathews and Dr Florian Mussgnug.

The 2018 edition of Hermes, jointly hosted by UCL and the [Italian Institute of Germanic Studies](#) in Rome [[Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici](#)], will take its timely topic from the [UCL Institute of Advanced Studies](#) (IAS) ongoing research initiative for 2017-18: “Vulnerability”. We will explore the intrinsic ambivalence of this concept, which suggests both fragility and openness, and will pay attention to narratives of vulnerability but also to the ways in which texts and traditions may become vulnerable: to loss, censorship, editorial intervention, or interpretation. We will engage with shifting historical contexts and approach comparative studies as an opening to other fields of disciplinary inquiry, including neuroscience, which provides new perspectives on human perception and defence behaviour. Our philosophical and juridical understanding of vulnerability will be further advanced by the contribution of **PRIN 2015 “Legal Entity and Vulnerability”**, a large collaborative research initiative funded by the National Research Council of Italy.

Hermes aims to expand internationally collaborative research and research-based learning, and promotes international mobility and collaboration across Europe. Our summer school thus embraces the aims of the newly established [UCL Rome Regional Partnership Fund](#), which facilitates and supports academic collaboration between UCL and institutional partners in Central Italy. We are delighted that this year’s summer school will be hosted in Rome and welcome this opportunity to open the Hermes network to the Italian doctoral schools associated with the Italian Institute of Germanic Studies.

### **Call for Contributions**

Vulnerability, from the Latin *vulnus* (‘wound’), signifies a susceptibility to being wounded. It suggests both fragility and openness, and it is this ambivalence that we wish to explore.

Thinking about vulnerability often raises questions which are political and ethical in nature: who or what is vulnerable? What reactions does vulnerability provoke? What forms of responsibility does vulnerability entail? Vulnerability has been argued to be a defining characteristic of the human condition. The American philosopher Daniel Callahan writes that “we are as human beings intrinsically vulnerable. We are vulnerable to time and nature [...] and we are vulnerable to each other”. Yet these vulnerabilities are shared not only by humans but also, for instance, by non-human animals. Indeed, the recognition that animals, too, are vulnerable is a key argument in animal rights. To recall a much-quoted phrase from Jeremy Bentham: “the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?”

In literary studies, vulnerability can be approached from a number of different angles. It may concern characters and situations, and encourage us to reconsider literary expressions of suffering and woundedness on the level of plot, theme, and characterization. Then again, texts themselves may also be vulnerable: to loss, censorship, editorial intervention, or interpretation. How is a text made vulnerable by its readers and how are readers made vulnerable by certain texts?

In the context of this conference we want to explore the specific contributions that comparative literature can make to vulnerability studies. A comparative approach encourages us to consider whether vulnerability has a distinct form in literature from different times and different places. It also benefits from a recognition of the importance of other

disciplines — philosophy, psychoanalysis, neuroscience *inter alia* — in understanding discourses of vulnerability. Finally, we propose that comparative literature might itself be understood to be defined by its own vulnerability, in the two senses of the term introduced earlier: fragility and openness. Like comparative literature, vulnerability is at heart a mode and form of relationality.

We welcome abstracts (150 words) related — but not limited — to the areas listed below. Each speaker will be allocated 20 minutes to give their paper. In addition to presenting on their own work and areas of expertise, speakers may wish in their papers to reflect on methodological questions raised by the general topic of vulnerability.

- Figurations of vulnerability, in literature, art, humanitarian discourse, politics and poetics
- The constitution/construction and representation of vulnerable subjects and groups, regions, languages, populations or communities
- The vulnerability of text(s) and writing
- The instrumentalizations of vulnerability in human rights discourse, humanitarian studies, refugee studies, public policy and politics
- Vulnerability and victimhood: ethics, values, agency and moral judgement
- Vulnerability and violence: epistemic, actual and strategic
- The relationship of 'vulnerability' to 'precarity', 'fragility' or 'risk'
- Vulnerable forms: genres, mediums, practices, objects, structures, materials, modes of being, life-worlds
- The gendering/ageing/sexing of vulnerability: vulnerability and intersectionality
- Vulnerability and visibility, vulnerability and difference, vulnerability as image
- Vulnerability and the law, discourses of protection, care and control, compassion and support
- Vulnerability, performance and performativity
- Vulnerability and power, vulnerability and strength/resilience
- Comparative literature as a vulnerable discipline

**Abstracts of no more than 150 words, accompanied by a short biographical presentation of similar length should be submitted by email to [j.rushworth@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:j.rushworth@ucl.ac.uk) by Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018.**

### **Practical Information**

Accommodation for delegates, speakers and student participants will be provided for **four nights** (18th June to 22nd June 2018) at [Villa Maria Guest House](#), in the immediate proximity of Villa Sciarra-Wurts and within easy walking distance from the vibrant neighbourhood of Trastevere and the historical centre of Rome. Students will be hosted in shared double rooms with en suite bathrooms.

A **conference fee** of **EUR 270.00** per participant, to be paid to the organisers on arrival, will include participation, accommodation, lunch on four days, conference dinner, and a guided walking tour of Rome.

Participants are requested to make their own travel arrangements. Please see [here](#) information on how to reach Villa Maria Guest House. In case of dietary or other special needs, please contact the organisers at your earliest convenience, at [f.mussgnug@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:f.mussgnug@ucl.ac.uk)

## **Bibliography**

Participants are encouraged to consult the [IAS homepage](#) for reading suggestions and information about ongoing research initiatives and events around the theme of vulnerability. Recommended preparatory reading will be sent by the organisers in pdf, in preparation for the summer school. We also recommend the following monographs and edited collections:

- Bentham, Jeremy, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. by J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- Butler, Judith and Zeynep Gambetti (eds), *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016).
- Callahan, Daniel, 'The Vulnerability of the Human Condition', in *Bioethics and Biolaw*, ed. by P. Kemp, J. Rendtorff, and N. Mattsson Johansen, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers, 2000), II, 115–22.
- Ganteau, Jean-Michel, and Susana Onega (eds), *Victimhood and Vulnerability in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
- Ganteau, Jean-Michel, *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Vulnerability in Contemporary British Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2015).
- Gilson, Erinn, *The Ethics of Vulnerability* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- Greene, Thomas M., *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- Haraway, Donna J., *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016).
- Latour, Bruno, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).
- McCoy, Marina, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Maillard, Nathalie, *La Vulnérabilité : une nouvelle catégorie morale?* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2011).
- Mathews, Timothy, *Alberto Giacometti: The Art of Relation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).
- Morton, Timothy, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
- Pick, Anat, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
- ten Have, Henk, *Vulnerability: Challenging Bioethics* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- Scarry, Elaine, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- Tylus, Jane, *Writing and Vulnerability in the Late Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).