

[ACLA: Human Rights Literature and the Politics of Responsibility](#)

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Call for Papers

Date:

October 31, 2022

Location:

Illinois, United States

Subject Fields:

Colonial and Post-Colonial History / Studies, Human Rights, Literature, Race / Ethnic Studies

In recent decades, human rights have risen to prominence as a “dominant discourse for addressing issues of social justice” (Swanson Goldberg and Schultheis Moore 2012, 4). Scholars have demonstrated (and interrogated) the role that literature has played in human rights’ ascension—from the novel’s progressive expansion of the category of the “human” (Hunt 2007), to the widespread (albeit compromised) liberal belief that conveying narratives of suffering to concerned publics can promote justice (Schaffer and Smith 2004), to the evidence that “human rights bestsellers” shore up American militarism and neoliberal imperialism (Anker 2012).

Yet the idea of human *rights* entails the thorny question of *responsibility*. If “[e]very right implies corresponding or ‘correlative’ duties in order to see that right respected, protected, or fulfilled” (Moyn 2016), then how should scholars conceptualize responsibility for human rights? In particular, how might we theorize responsibility for forms of ordinary abuse, or “structural injustice” (Young 2011), produced not (necessarily) by state actors or other clear-cut perpetrators but rather by the unevenness of the global socioeconomic order itself? In the entanglements of neoliberal austerity, debt peonage, and resource scarcity, for example, we see how this unevenness poses threats to human social rights and exacerbates the effects of climate crisis—in turn fomenting conditions for the global migration of refugees, reactive ethnonationalism, and fascist politics.

How might literature help scholars to better conceptualize forms of diffuse responsibility for chronic human rights violence? How does literature expand the timescale of responsibility, framing contemporary inequality as the long afterlife of transatlantic slavery, colonial exploitation, and racial capitalism? How can scholars theorize responsibility *responsibly*—in a way that does not reify North-South divides or collapse into humanitarian saviorism? And most importantly, how might literature offer new ways of imagining transnational solidarity in struggles to change the structural conditions that produce human rights violations?

We invite contributions that explore both how literature helps us respond to these questions and how the challenges of thinking responsibility for human rights spur innovations in literary form. Possible topics can include:

- Care ethics (Collins 2015; De la Bellacasa 2017; Mihai 2022)
- Responsibility of implicated subjects and beneficiaries (Rothberg 2019; Robbins 2017)

- Migrant and refugee literature (Fukushima, 2019; Le Espiritu et al. 2022)
- Human-nonhuman interdependence (Iheka 2017)
- Politics of narrative empathy (Keen 2007)
- Global climate justice and reparations (Táíwò 2022)
- Human rights and “literary accountability” (DeStrooper 2022)

We welcome presenters working in all languages, historical periods, and theoretical frameworks as well as presenters whose work crosses conventional disciplinary boundaries.

This CFP is for a proposed seminar for the American Comparative Literature Association's Annual Meeting, to take place March 16-19, 2023 at the Sheraton Grand in Chicago, Illinois. The deadline for abstract submissions is **October 31, 2021**. Papers for this seminar can be submitted here: <https://www.acla.org/node/add/paper>. The ACLA Program Committee will review all seminar proposals and notify seminar organizers of acceptance or rejection by December 15, 2022. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email: astambler@g.ucla.edu or alossada@berry.edu.

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<https://www.acla.org/human-rights-literature-and-politics-responsibility>