Scientific Annual Report 2017

Niels Bohr Professorship
Uses of Literature. The Social Dimensions of Literature

Niels Bohr Professor Rita Felski
Researcher-in-charge, Professor Anne-Marie Mai
The Niels Bohr Professorship “Uses of Literature. The Social Dimensions of Literature” at the University of Southern Denmark funded by the Danish National Research Foundation commenced its activities on September 1, 2016. This Scientific Annual Rapport 2017 describes the activities that have been achieved in 2017 under said Professorship.
**Annual Highlights**


In co-operation with NICE Welfare and NCoE Nordwel, UOL organized the “9th International Nordwell Summer School: State, Society, Culture & Citizen – Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Welfare State Development” for PhD students and Postdocs. The Summer School was held in Rome, 12-16 June, 2017, and 10 distinguished scholars from all over the world participated as teachers. In charge from UOL were Prof. Petersen, Prof. Simonsen and Prof. WSR Marx.

On Sept 21, 2017 the UOL group sponsored an international and interdisciplinary workshop on the theme “Actor-Network-Theory Across the Disciplines”. Eight distinguished speakers from the United States, the UK, Australia, France, and Denmark addressed the relations between the humanities and social sciences with specific reference to the work of Bruno Latour.

Prof. Mai, Prof. Simonsen, Associate Prof. Schwartz, and Assistant Prof. A. J. L. Rasmussen have organized a new programme on Narrative Medicine for BA’s and MA’s at the Faculty of Health Sciences (SDU). SDU is the first university in Denmark where a course in Narrative Medicine has become mandatory for the BA students at the The Medical School. Narrative Medicine is a part of an introductory course for medical students at SDU called “Mennesker først”. Furthermore, UOL has organized an elective course at the MA programs for Health Studies. The program in Narrative Medicine at SDU has experienced an extensive press coverage.

A 3-day event in Oct 2017 on Narrative Medicine was sponsored by UOL and The Nordic Network for Narratives in Medicine: “Workshop on Writing Narratives and Medicine”, in cooperation with REHPA Videncenter for Rehabilitering og Palliation; “Public Conversation with Prof. Rita Charon (Columbia University), Niels Bohr Prof. Felski and Emeritus Prof. (SDU) and Writer David B. Morris (University of Virginia)” and “Seminars with Morris about his book *Eros and Illness* (Harvard UP, 2017)”.

Niels Bohr Prof. Felski’s recent book *The Limits of Critique* was the topic of several different scholarly symposia: an eight-person response in *PMLA*, the leading journal of literary studies; a five-person response in the journal *Religion and Literature*; and an issue of *The American Book Review*.

On June 14, 2017 Prof. Mai gave the first ”Einar Hansen-föreläsning” ever, ”Om nordisk kvindelitteratur i de første tiår af det 21. århundrede”. The lecture was arranged by the Einar Hansens Allhemsstiftelse and Centre for Scandinavian Studies – Copenhagen-Lund (CSS). [Mai’s lecture is accessible online](#).

On Dec 12, 2017 Prof. Mai was invited to give a talk about history of literature, at Kungl. Vitterhetsakademien’s (The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities) symposium about “Natur och Kulturs Litteraturhistoria” in Stockholm. Title of Mai’s talk: “Reflektioner över litteraturhistoriskutvärdering”.

Prof. Mai has been appointed Chair for the Humanities at D∙IAS (Danish Institute for Advanced Study).

Prof. Petersen has been appointed Professor 2 at The University of Oslo. Petersen is affiliated with the interdisciplinary research project Nordic Branding.
Årets Højdepunkter


Niels Bohr Prof. Felskis seneste bog The Limits of Critique har været genstand for adskillige videnskabelige diskussioner og debatter i løbet af 2017: en 8-personers respons i PMLA, det ledende tidsskrift indenfor litteraturforskning, og en 4-personers respons i tidsskriftet Religion and Literature; og et nummer af The American Book Review.


Prof. Mai er blevet udnævnt til Chair for Humaniora ved D∙IAS (Danish Institute for Advanced Study).


Fra venstre prof. emeritus D. B. Morris, Niels Bohr prof. R. Felski & Prof. R. Charon på SDU, oktober 2017
The Organization/Staff

During 2016 and 2017 job interviews for vacant positions were carried out. In 2017 UOL had the pleasure of welcoming the following new staff members:

### Assistant Professors

**Alastair Morrison** took office Sept 1, 2017. Morrison’s project: “Dementia as a challenge to literature”. Morrison's project considers representations of dementia in contemporary Anglophone and Nordic literature, arguing that the distinctive narrative forms used to represent this illness - one of whose symptoms is a difficulty in speaking for oneself - are an index to larger concerns about self-determination in the present context of the welfare state.

**Anita Wohlmann** took office Nov 1, 2017. Wohlmann’s project: “Literature and narrative medicine”. Wohlmann’s research focuses on the use of metaphors in literature, health humanities and narrative medicine. Wohlmann combines metaphor theory with narrative theory and explores the ambiguities, potentials and problems involved in figurative language and comparisons, both in literature and medical practice.

**Emily Hogg** took office Feb 1, 2017. Hogg’s project: “Recognizing the Precariat: Narratives on alcohol as social disease”. Hogg’s research is about precarity and alcohol consumption, and the way these topics are depicted in contemporary British literature. Hogg’s project focuses, in particular, on the way literary representations of home, time, city space, and responsibility can illuminate the drinking cultures of precarious lives.

### Postdocs

**Bryan Yazell** took office April 1, 2017. Yazell’s project: “A literary analysis approach to welfare semantics”. Yazell’s research focuses on the links between Anglophone literature and public policy, especially in relation to the welfare state. Yazell’s recent work, which examines popular discourse about vagrant and migrant populations, incorporates sources ranging from early-twentieth century memoir and ethnography to recent science fiction narratives.

**Patrick Fessenbecker** took office June 15, 2017. Fessenbecker’s project: “Aligning literary analysis with new political history”. Fessenbecker's research is on nineteenth-century British literature, moral philosophy, and the connections between philosophy and literature more generally. Fessenbecker has published a number of essays on these topics and is currently completing a book on the relationship between a text's aesthetic properties and the ideas it expresses.

### PhD students

**Marie-Elisabeth Lei Holm** took office Feb 1, 2017. Lei Holm’s PhD project: “On the complexities of recognition as a literary concept”. Lei Holm’s project deals with literary and social recognition. Focusing on why readers recognize themselves in literary texts and whether this phenomenon fuels social recognition, Lei Holm examines Scandinavian and American texts and the public debates they have sparked regarding race, health and gender.

**Mathies Græsborg Aarhus** took office Feb 1, 2017. Græsborg Aarhus’ PhD project: “Literature, unemployment and precarious labour”. Græsborg Aarhus’ research project analyzes changing conceptions of unemployment in contemporary society from the perspective of British, American, and Danish fiction.
Sophy Kohler took office Nov 1, 2017. Kohler’s PhD project: “Literary works as actors – a new approach to literary studies”. Kohler’s project explores the way in which Actor-Network theory may be used to better understand the complexity of transnational literary relations. Through a close reading of a selection of novels of migration and a look at the networks in which these novels circulate, the project aims to show how such literature is able to translate matters of fact into matters of concern.

As it appears from the above not all candidates took office as announced in Appendix 3 “List of Personnel and Budget” in the original agreement. The reason being that some of the candidates had obligations at their former place of employment.

**Recruitment and Gender Strategy**

We strive to create a group with a sound gender balance, but we also emphasize the importance of professional abilities. The project UOL is headed by two women (Niels Bohr Prof. Felski, and Researcher-in-charge, Prof. Mai), and two men (Prof. Simonsen, and Prof. Petersen). In 2017 UOL group consists of 17 women and 18 men distributed among:

♀
- Professors: 2
- Professors WSR: 0
- Associate Professors: 5
- Assistant Professors: 2
- Postdocs: 0
- PhD students: 3
- Affiliated members: 3
- Administrative Officers: 2

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- Professors: 2
- Professors WSR: 1
- Associate Professors: 4
- Assistant Professors: 3
- Postdocs: 2
- PhD students: 1
- Affiliated members: 5
- Administrative Officers: 0

**Research Integrity**

As scholars engaged in interdisciplinary research we are conscious of methodological difficulties in tracing the social uses of literature. In published and presented work, all UOL colleagues acknowledge their debt to the works of other researchers. All UOL participants follow The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

**Research Plan**

March 29, 2017 the “Workshop on Current Theories and methods in Literary and Cultural Studies” took place. Three scholars from different traditions presented cutting edge work in three fields: digital humanities (Prof. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Aarhus University), queer studies (Prof. Elizabeth Freeman, UC Davis), and textual analysis (Assistant Prof. Patrick Fessenbecker, Bilkent University) resulting in fruitful developments of especially junior researchers’ projects.

May 29-30, 2017 a seminar for the members of the UOL group was held in Nyborg. At the seminar Niels Bohr Prof. Felski was chair on the “Workshop on Shared Concepts and Methodolgies”. The purpose of this sections was to continue the project of developing common ground within the group. We’re not looking for a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model but will work toward a common vocabulary and shared terms that aiming at the over-all project. Prof. Mai chaired a session with Centre Leader and Prof. Lars Boje Mortensen from Centre for Medieval Literature (SDU/York), Centre of Excellence. Mortensen presented his experiences in organizing and running a large and ambitious cross-disciplinary research center. The seminar resulted in pinpointing of important topics, agreements on upcoming seminars, and publication projects of the works.
packages. And further the result was both a better sense of our common mission and the individual work packages’ research goals and strategies.

June 6-7, 2017 UOL hosted a visit by Prof. Toril Moi (Duke University).

- June 6, 2017 Moi gave a lecture, “Must novels be fiction? Language and reality in Knausgård's My Struggle (Min kamp).” When the first volume of My Struggle was published in Norway, Knausgård insisted that everything in the book was true. But he also insisted that his book was a novel. What is a novel? What is My Struggle if it is not a novel? Do recent debates about the relationship between fiction and nonfiction (memoir, history, personal essay, lyrical essay) illuminate My Struggle? Does My Struggle illuminate those debates? Moi wanted to show that My Struggle challenges long-standing ideas concerning the relationship between language and reality.

- June 7, 2017 Moi led a seminar on her new book Revolution of the Ordinary. Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell (Chicago UP, 2017). This radically original book argues for the power of ordinary language philosophy - a tradition inaugurated by Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, and extended by Stanley Cavell - to transform literary studies. In engaging and lucid prose, Moi demonstrated this philosophy’s unique ability to lay bare the connections between words and the world, dispel the notion of literature as a monolithic concept, and teach readers how to learn from a literary text. Moi’s new scholarship is highly relevant to the aims of the UOL project and her visit was very helpful in clarifying our reservations about established literary methodologies, and in developing alternatives.

In cooperation with NICE Welfare and NCoE Nordwel UOL organized a Summer School on welfare studies in social science and Humanities, June 12-16, 2017 in Rome. 10 distinguished scholars from France, the United States, the UK, Canada, Germany, Finland participated as teachers.1 From UOL Prof. Petersen, Prof. Simonsen and Prof. WSR Marx were in charge of the Summer School. The result was important networking with senior and junior researchers and interdisciplinary discussions between social science, history and literature.

On Aug 31, 2017, Niels Bohr Prof. Felski gave a workshop on the topic of “Publishing in International Journals” to faculty and graduate students from SDU and other Danish universities, drawing on her extensive experience as a journal editor as well as author. At the workshop Postdoc Fessenbecker gave a presentation: “ITCO: The pattern of an academic essay” on his experiences in submitting articles for publication. The result of the workshop was to disseminate wider knowledge of the challenges of publication in highly ranked journals of literary and cultural studies, as well as specific strategies for tackling these challenges.

Sept 21, 2017 UOL organized the “Workshop: ANT Across the Disciplines”. Eight distinguished speakers2 addressed the relations between the humanities and social sciences with specific reference to the work of Bruno Latour. The workshop wanted to explore what happens to actor-network-theory (ANT) as it moves from its original home in STS (Science and Technology Studies) through the social sciences into the humanities. How is ANT changing as it is taken up in new fields of inquiry? What are the benefits and costs of such translations? Especially interested in the recent uptake of ANT within traditionally text-based or work-based disciplines such as literary studies and art history and the challenges this raises. The workshop addressed a broad range of issues relating to disciplines, method, interdisciplinarity, and ANT. Actor-network-theory is a key approach in the UOL group. The workshop helped the group to clarify the challenges of adapting ANT to the specific concerns of literary studies.

1 Project Director, PhD Jenny Anderson (SciencesPo, Paris), Old Dominion Foundation Prof. Bruce Robbins (Columbia University) who is affiliated member of UOL, Senior Lecturer Dr. Julia Moses (University of Sheffield), Prof. Daniel Béland (University of Saskatchewan) who is affiliated member of UOL, Prof. Dr. Herbert Obinger (Bremen University), Presidential Prof. Leslie McCall (City University New York), Prof. Paulli Kettunen (University of Helsinki), Prof. WSR Paul Marx (SDU), Prof. Peter Simonsen (SDU), and Prof. Klaus Petersen (SDU).

2 Associate Prof. Anders Blok (University of Copenhagen), Associate Prof. Heather Love (University of Pennsylvania), Prof. and Research Director Antoine Hennion (MINES ParisTech, PSL Research University, Jury Chair of English Language and Literature Stephen Muecke (University of Adelaide), Research Associate Prof. Casper Bruun Jensen (Osaka University), Prof. Ben Highmore (University of Sussex), Prof. Marianne de Laet (Harvey Mudd College), & Niels Bohr Prof. Rita Felski (SDU).
In Oct a 3-days event on Narrative Medicine sponsored by UOL and The Nordic Network for Narratives in Medicine took place:

- Oct 4, 2017: Public Conversation with Prof. Charon, Prof. Emeritus and Writer David B. Morris (University of Virginia) and Niels Bohr Prof. Felski. The Public Conversation was about Narrative Medicine and Medical Eros as two comparable strategies to counter or at least supplement the current predominance of biomedicine. Charon coined the term “Narrative Medicine” around 2000, Charon has made a strong argument about the need for “narrative knowledge” in the medical system. Likewise, Morris has argued in his book, *Eros and Illness* (Harvard University Press, 2017) that “medical logos” cannot stand alone in the healthcare system and should be accompanied by what he calls a “medical eros”. Both Charon and Morris use literature and art in order to recognize the deeply human needs of patients.
- Oct 5, 2017: A Seminar with Morris about his book *Eros and Illness*. Morris looks at myths, memoirs, paintings, performances, and narratives to understand how illness is intertwined with the things we value most dearly.

The courses in Narrative Medicine at SDU (mentioned above in the passage “Annual Highlights”) has meant intensified collaboration with scholars from Columbia University, i.e. Prof., Founder, and Executive Director of the “Program in Narrative Medicine” at Columbia, Rita Charon, and Director of the “Medicine, Literature and Society Program” at Columbia, Assistant Prof., Dr. Rishi Goyal. Furthermore, Columbia’s Summer School in Narrative Medicine for Physicians is planned to be held in Odense in 2020 in collaboration with UOL and SDU. The 3-days event in Oct also resulted in establishing a Nordic network for narrative medicine and in contacts with medical researchers within palliation and rehabilitation on creative writing workshops. The visit by Charon and Morris gave us important intellectual tools for thinking about the relationship between health, ill-health, and literature—including a critical examination of the concept of empathy.

Dec 13-14, 2017 UOL hosted an “Event in the Speaker Series: Disciplinary Intersections between Literature and the Social Sciences” by Associate Prof. Anna Kornbluh (University of Illinois):

- Dec 13, 2017 Kornbluh facilitated a workshop “Imaginative Projections: Reading like a Marxist” where she led participants in a discussion of sources useful for re-thinking the disciplinary boundaries between the Social Sciences and Literary Studies.
- Dec 14, 2017 Kornbluh gave a lecture “Formalism, Realism, and Social Space”. Formalism’s constitutive fascination with composed arrangements has been neither received nor elaborated as a political ethos of composition, making, building. Taking up the problem of literary realism – the aesthetic mode perennially centered in debates about the politics of aesthetics, and perennially unamenable to formalist analysis – this talk advocated for a formalist praxis of building that can reinvigorate the utopian promise of critique. The lecture and the workshop – as well as more informal discussions with Kornbluh was an important step in qualifying the work in Work Package 4 on the theoretical challenges in bridging social science and literary theory.

During 2017 UOL has also arranged minor lectures by Guest Professors:

- March 22, 2017 Film Director Ruth Olschan was invited to give a lecture. The meeting resulted in a useful discussion on migration research and on the study of autobiographical material, and an important discussion about the relation between literature, film and witnessing/documentary genres.
- Sept 27, 2017 Associate Prof. Benjamin Kohlmann (University of Freiburg) gave a lecture, “On Surface reading”. Kohlmann’s talk aimed at rehabilitate the concept of mechanical causality as an explanatory model in literary theory and historiography. The result was important basic methodological reflection and formation of new networks.
Dec 6, 2017 Prof. Walter Erhart (University of Bielefeldt) visited UOL and gave a lecture, “Does Literature Make us Vulnerable? Comparison and Recognition”. Erhart has worked extensively on the relation between literature, recognition theory and aesthetics - he is interested in the social-history of literature (being one of the main editors of *Internationales Archiv der Sozialgeschichte der Literatur, IASL*). Result was important basic methodological reflection and formation of new networks.

During Niels Bohr Prof. Rita Felski’s time at SDU in 2017 Felski wrote a chapter on “Attachment” relating to her new book *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. The manuscript is now two-thirds complete.

Wednesday Meetings for all members of the group have been carried out nearly every other week, where projects have been presented and discussed. The participants have grown to know one anothers projects well and are now able to coordinate activities and discuss the main research questions and topics of the project.

Monthly meetings in the work packages have been carried out. The cooperation within the project is strengthened, the participants have become familiar with the individual research projects and the overall aim of the project. The exchange of ideas within the project is vivid and very useful to the participants.

Work Package 1 met regularly to discuss readings and to discuss work-in-progress by members of the group. An issue of particular concern was that of defining the term “attachment” and clarifying its relevance and potential uses for literary and cultural studies. Several members of the group are starting to plan a conference on love, to take place in 2019, with a potential spin-off publication.

Work Package 2 are working on an edited volume anthology: *Brug af litteratur*. A successful Work Package 2 retreat took place in November in Middelfart.

Work Package 3 has met to discuss foundational texts on the precariat and to present and discuss work in progress. A Work Package 3 retreat in August in Middelfart was fruitful. At the moment Work Package 3 have two co-authored article-length works in progress under review, plan a September workshop which hopefully can result in an anthology or special journal issue.

Work Package 4 are currently working on co-authored article, review article and book chapter on the use of literature in the social sciences. Furthermore, individual articles have been published and are in progress based on discussions within the group. Work Package 4 are planning a workshop on emotions, rituals and the social ultimo 2018/early 2019.

The research plan has been carried through as described in the contract. The publication plan works very well, co-writings have been arranged and the dissemination of the research results works well. An early career meeting will be organized from 2018 to give further support to the research training of the PhD students, the Postdocs and the Assistant Professors and the exit strategy of the project. Regarding education we are happy to announce that we have organized a mandatory course in narrative medicine at The Medical School of SDU and an elective course at the Masters programs for Health Studies.

**Any Other Business (Comments to the Appendix)**

As mentioned in Section B, Niels Bohr Prof. Rita Felski has been invited to give talks at international conferences. As well Felski has been invited by various universities to give presentations about her current research and the UOL project at:

- Humanities Center, Brigham Young University, US (Feb 2017)
- English Department, Muhlenberg College, US (March 2017)
- Humanities Center, Williams College, US (May 2017)
- Luce Project, “Religion and its Publics”, University of Virginia (July 2017)
- Annual Dalziel Lecture, University of Otago, New Zealand (Sept 2017)
• Film Studies, University of Copenhagen (Oct 2017)
• TORCH, Oxford University (Nov 2017)
• Modernism Workshop, University of London (Nov 2017)
• English Department, University of Pecs (Dec 2017)
• Gender Studies, Central European University, Budapest (Dec 2017)

Prof. Anne-Marie Mai has also been invited by universities to give presentations:
• Lecture about theory and practice in literary history writing, Department of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric, Aarhus University (April 2017)
• Lecture about Mai’s publication Galleri 66. En historie om nyere dansk litteratur (Gyldendal 2016), Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion, University of Gothenburg (Oct 2017)

Prof. Anne-Marie Mai has been committee-member of the annual PhD Cup arranged by the Danish newspaper Dagbladet Information, DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) and Lundbeckfonden.

Minor academic events which are not mentioned in the appendices:
- Wednesday Meetings for all members of UOL nearly every other week - facilitated by the PI group
- Precariat Reading Group facilitated by PhD student Mathies Græsborg Aarhus and Assistant Prof. Emily Hogg
- Feedback Sessions facilitated by Postdoc Bryan Yazell and PhD student Marie-Elisabeth Lei Holm

Assistant Prof. Anita Wohlmann is in charge of a newly established initiative, “The Uses of Literature’s Early Career Club” for PhD students, Postdocs and Assistant Professors affiliated to the project UOL.

When Niels Bohr Prof. Felski stays in Virginia the academic members of UOL and Administrative Officer Pernille Hasselsteen are in near daily contact with Felski, especially via email.

I hereby confirm the correctness of the information concerning annual accounts, including itemizations. Also, I confirm that the compiled annual reporting, including the appendices, is correct, i.e., it is free of material misstatement or omissions, and that the administration of the funds has been secure and sound, and in accordance with the conditions of the center/Niels Bohr professorship agreement.

Virginia, March , 2018 Odense, March , 2018

Niels Bohr Professor Rita Felski Researcher-in-charge, Professor Anne-Marie Mai
Some of the members from the group Uses of Literature in Nyborg, May 2017

Photos: David Binzer, SDU