

“Framing the Human: (De)humanization in Language, Literature and Culture”

March 6, 2010 – University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Plenary Speaker: Professor Deborah Jenson, Duke University

14th Annual Symposium

Hosted by the Association of Graduate Students in Romance Studies

Debates around how “the human” is defined, interrogated and regulated often delineate boundaries that separate the human and its others (e.g. the animal, the divine, the monstrous). Far from being abstract exercises in taxonomy, assessments of these boundaries impose ways of knowing, reading and seeing. Political, ideological, scientific, religious and economic regimes participate in framing the human. Determining who or what counts as human under these regimes has profound consequences. For example, one can be biologically but not politically human (e.g. undocumented workers). One’s political “human-ness” can be stripped away or called into question after certain violations of the law (e.g. enemy combatants). Recent genealogies of gender, race and ethnicity remind us to what extent our “humanity” is precarious and contingent upon culturally coherent frames that not only produce the (in)human but reflexively legitimate that production. Definitions of the human are not fixed temporally or qualitatively but rather shaped by various lenses, filters and paradigms. This symposium will consider objects of literary, linguistic and/or cultural study, which engage with frames that produce, perform, disqualify, marginalize, or maintain and (re)appropriate conceptions of the human.

We welcome the submission of abstracts on topics such as (but not limited to):

- The inhuman
- Relative or marginal humanities
- The human and the animal
- Nature and the human
- The human and the divine
- Languages of the human
- Discourses of human rights
- Encounters with (in)human others
- Subjectivity
- Figures of the child
- Fantasy and science fiction
- Mental and physical “disorders”
- Humanities and the sciences
- Holocaust studies
- Genocide studies
- Feminisms
- Queer theories and/or gender studies
- Performance studies
- Postcolonial studies
- Agency
- Collectives as human (e.g. the state, the company)

We encourage submissions from a wide variety of fields including (but not limited to): literature, art history, linguistics, music, theater arts, history, political science, philosophy, medicine, disability, gender and women’s studies, religious studies, anthropology, geography, sociology, American studies, African Diaspora studies and cultural studies.

Please send an abstract of up to 300 words in anticipation of a 15-20 minute presentation in English to agsrs@umn.edu by December 31, 2009. Proposals for panels are also welcome.