

Passing on: Property, Family and Death in Narratives of Inheritance

13-15 November 2019

Aarhus University, Denmark

From Shakespeare's *King Lear* to Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau, who lives off of his uncle's money, and Edward St Aubyn's novels about the troubled heir Patrick Melrose, literature has always been occupied with inheritance and inherited wealth. The insights provided by this literary legacy are more important than ever. Once considered a relic from the aristocratic past superseded by liberal meritocracy, inherited wealth is now recognized as a source of rising social inequality. It therefore poses an important challenge for the present – and for the future. To meet this challenge, inheritance must be understood in all its historical and cultural complexity. For inheritance is more than a means of transferring wealth between generations. As a social practice that involves personal and cultural responses to dying and last wills, it confronts individuals and families with official views on gender and wealth distribution inscribed in inheritance laws; inheritance also has the power to divide families and cause rivalries between sons and daughters, older and younger brothers or legitimate and illegitimate children; and it can create difficult dilemmas for heirs between a sense of obligation towards the dead and personal independence. All these aspects of inheritance and many more have formed the plots of narrative literature for centuries - and sometimes an inheritance has allowed authors to write in the first place. If we wish to understand the economic, emotional, cultural and social meanings of inheritance through Modern history, there is no better place to start than with literature.

“Passing On: Property, Family and Death in Narratives of Inheritance” seeks to explore the multiple ways in which literature deals with inheritance, from the Early Modern period until today, across national and linguistic borders. One of the conference's main objectives is to open up for a comparative study of inheritance in literature and to encourage productive exchange between scholars of all forms of literature.

We invite 20 minute paper presentations that examine inherited wealth and other questions of inheritance through a variety of theoretical, thematic, and methodological approaches. Themes and topics might include (but are not limited to):

- Death and inheritance in literary works
- Last wills and testaments as forms of writing
- Inherited objects and heirlooms in literature
- Inheritance and emotion: Family, marriage and literary sentiment
- Heiresses and wealthy widows: Inheritance and gender
- Bastards and foundlings: Literary explorations of illegitimacy
- Inheritance and crime: From forged testaments to poisoned millionaires
- The narrative space of inheritance: Estates, global business and wandering heirs
- Literary explorations of religious and legal meanings of inheritance
- Narratives of inherited wealth, inequality and social mobility
- Politics of inheritance: Royal succession and forms of aristocratic power in fiction
- Rentier culture, patronage and literary production
- Critical and theoretical concepts of literary and cultural inheritance

To apply, please submit an abstract of approx. 300 words and a short biography to inheritance2019@cc.au.dk **no later than 15 May 2019**. Participants will be notified of the status of their proposal by 15 June 2019.

Keep an eye on the conference website for updates on the event: <https://events.au.dk/inheritance2019>

The conference is organized by Jakob Ladegaard, Julie Hastrup-Markussen, and David Hasberg Zirak-Schmidt from the research project “[Unearned Wealth: A Literary History of Inheritance, 1600-2015](#)” and funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark.



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