

Department  
of English and American Studies  
Winter Semester 2014/15

## **Nora Berning**

(International Graduate Centre for  
the Study of Culture, Gießen)

### ***Experiencing Ethics in Contemporary American Literature: Border-Crossers, Frame- Breakers and Some Serious Crime***

Indirect modes of symbolization such as narrative have the potential to change consciousness and to thematize, problematize, foreground and/or background as well as consolidate values and norms and, by implication, existing world-views and world-versions. In her lecture on "Experiencing Ethics in Contemporary American literature," Nora Berning argues that a productive way of experiencing ethics in literary narratives is to draw on ethical narratology and, more precisely, Critical Ethical Narratology (CEN) as a framework for analyzing the narrative's ethics or, to use Fredric Jameson's term, 'politics of form.' Using the example of James Frey's non-fiction novel *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), she probes into the ethical issues posed by narratives in which the worlds of fact and fiction merge. In what ways can readers reap ethical experience from Frey's novel and those of other border-crossers and frame-breakers such as Truman Capote, for instance? By pinning down the authors' ethical pursuit and shedding light on the characters' ethical identities as well as the choices they make when encountering such ethical dilemmas as crime, murder, and other human abysses, Berning illustrates how contemporary American literature projects and responds to its contemporaneity – involving complex ethical environments – and makes its readers live as ethical beings.

3 February 2015, 18:30

Dorotheenstr. 24 (Hegelplatz)  
Room 1.601, 10099 Berlin-Mitte

The W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures are sponsored by:  
*Institute for the International Education of Students (IES),  
Embassy of the United States of America, Berlin,  
and Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik,  
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*



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**American Studies**