

Lunch Talk hosted by the American Studies Program

Thursday, May 21st, 12:00 to 14:00

Universitätsstraße 12, 45141 Essen

R12 R04 B11

RACE, CLOSE READING, AND CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM



PAULA M. L. MOYA

Paula M.L. Moya (Professor of English at Stanford University) presents her forthcoming book *The Social Imperative: Race, Close Reading, and Contemporary Literary Criticism*.

Finger food and soft drinks will accompany the rich intellectual fare.

Organizers: Barbara Buchenau (barbara.buchenau@uni-due.de) and Dietmar Meinel (dietmar.meinel@uni-due.de), Department of Anglophone Studies

In the context of the ongoing crisis in literary criticism, *The Social Imperative* reminds us that while literature will never by itself change the world, it remains a powerful tool and important actor in the ongoing struggle to imagine better ways to be human and free. Figuring the relationship between reader and text as a type of friendship, the book elaborates the social-psychological concept of schema to show that our multiple social contexts affect what we perceive and how we feel when we read. Championing and modeling a kind of close reading that attends to how literature reflects, promotes, and contests pervasive sociocultural ideas about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, Paula M. L. Moya demonstrates the power of works of literature by writers such as Junot Diaz, Toni Morrison, and Helena Maria Viramontes to alter perceptions and reshape cultural imaginaries. Insofar as literary fiction is a unique form of engagement with weighty social problems, it matters not only which specific works of literature we read and teach, but also how we read them, and with whom. This is what constitutes the social imperative of literature.