



Invitation

Siemens Lecture

MELVILLE'S LAW

Thursday, October 13, 2011 – 7:00 pm

Jennifer Culbert

Associate Professor of Political Science, Johns Hopkins University

Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* is a work of fiction often interpreted as depicting the tragic consequences of an irresolvable conflict between two types of law: natural (or ancient or divine) and positive (or modern or state). Jennifer Culbert takes issue with this interpretation, arguing that in Melville's texts the acts of violence that make law manifest are not instances of dialectical opposition. Drawing from Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections on love in *The Inoperative Community*, and on W.H. Auden's poem "Law like Love", Culbert argues that law in Melville's fiction concerns the difference that lies not at the heart of things but at any and every point of contact between them. Cuts and blows are refractions of this condition of intimate alterity. Melville's characters, as such, are shattered and exposed by law rather than determined or fulfilled by it.

Jennifer Culbert is an associate professor in the Political Science department at Johns Hopkins University, where she teaches political theory and legal philosophy. She is the author of *Dead Certainty: The Death Penalty and the Problem of Judgment* (Stanford University Press, 2008), which draws on Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics to analyze the unfolding of capital punishment law in the United States. At the American Academy in Berlin, Culbert is working on her next book, tentatively entitled *The Jurisprudence of Hannah Arendt*, about the power of making (*poesis*) that Arendt discusses and exercises in her reflections on fables, foundations, and the constitution of political spaces.

Registration required by October 7

fax: (030) 804 83-444 or e-mail: program@americanacademy.de

Limited seating available.



THE AMERICAN
ACADEMY IN BERLIN
HANS ARNHOLD CENTER

Registration

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Please return by October 7, 2011

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YES, I would like to attend the lecture.

NO, I regret not being able to attend.

Name: _____

Position / Institution: _____

Email: _____

Accompanied by:

Name: _____

Position / Institution: _____

Email: _____