



PREMIS seminar, 26 January 2022

Where? Online via Zoom:

<https://aboakademi.zoom.us/j/6950507660>

When? Wednesday 26 January, 16:15 –17:45

Welcome to the first PREMIS seminar of 2022! At the seminar, **Kevin Wolke** will present his ongoing PhD research.

By Virtue of the Absurd: A Philosophical Reading of Henry Miller and Hubert Selby

Kevin Wolke, Åbo Akademi University

During this seminar, I will present my ongoing dissertational work on new philosophical readings of American authors Henry Miller (1891-1980) and Hubert Selby Jr. (1928-2004). I will focus on the concept of “the absurd” in a hermeneutic approach based on two separate analyses of their *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) and *The Demon* (1976). The fictional narratives of the selected writers attempt the brutally honest representation of individual struggles against alienation from oneself in a modern New York City. Characters that try to make sense of their miserable lives lie at the heart of their novels. While the philosophical and religious influences on Miller’s novels are well-established, his reputation as an existentialist writer is frequently understated to present him as a unique concocter of a modernist blend. Selby, on the other hand, has never attracted much academic attention. Furthermore, most available publications on him are dated and leave us with open questions as to the paradoxical coexistence of determinism and individual responsibility in his novels. By referring to the distinctive ideas of Søren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, and Emil Cioran, complex thought processes are uncovered that explain why Miller’s I-narrator “*can* live joyously – one must! – in the midst of a world peopled with sorrowing, suffering creatures.” Additionally, they suggest why Selby’s protagonist Harry White chooses murder as a palliative measure for protecting his otherwise conventional lifestyle.

Kevin Wolke is a PhD student in the department of English Language and Literature at Åbo Akademi University, working on approaches to the twentieth-century US writers Henry Miller and Hubert Selby Jr. Publications include ‘Racist Expatriate? Henry Miller’s National Stereotypes in *Tropic of Capricorn* (1938) and *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945)’ in *British and American Studies*, Vol. 27 (2021).