

Dr. Chen Edelsburg, University of Haifa

Alternating Readers' Histories: Accountability, Coercion, and the 'Antagonistic You'

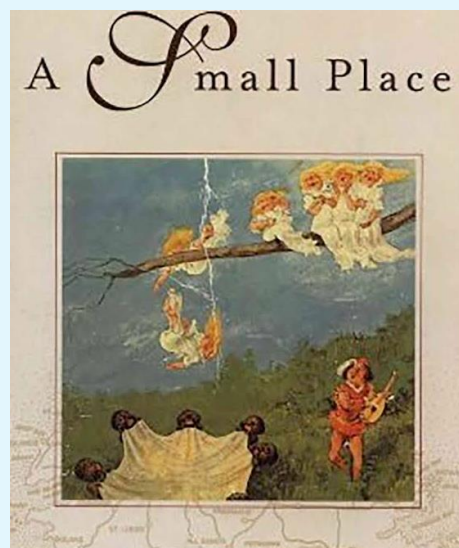
Tuesday, November 22nd, 2022

12.15-1.45 pm

Hall 101, Students building

Abstract: In her book *A Small Place* Jamaica Kincaid creates an alternative biography for her readers. From the outset, she stresses the speculative status of this imaginary biography by opening with the words "If you go to Antigua," thus emphasizing that her text embeds the reader within an alternative life story. *A Small Place*, I argue, is exemplary of one of the most intricate phenomena in the field of intersectional narratology: the 'antagonistic you' (or 'conflictual you'),

I suggest, serves many minority writers of double marginalization (mostly women), as a means of arousing readers' accountability. This effect is created by stirring the reader's sense of their own personal history, using the second-person address in a way that both suspends and encourages identification. This complex type of interpellation allows readers to wholly or partially reject the biography that the text attributes to them, while reading their own (real) account from a new perspective. This counter-historicity leads to the reader's recognition of the affective elements of the hypothesized biography in the text – mainly shame and guilt – and thus acceptance of accountability for some form of social oppression.



Bio: Chen Edelsburg is a scholar of Comparative Literature working on American and Hebrew literatures and the intersections between them, with a special interest in medical humanities and feminist and intersectional narratology. Her book "Dear (Female) Reader: The Gendered Address in Hebrew Literature," is forthcoming with Magnes, The Hebrew University Press.