

Guest Lecture

May 7, 2026 | 6 p.m.
P 6, Philosophicum

The Lessons of Banned Books in 21st-Century America



Corinna Norrick-Rühl



Silvia Schultermandl

Corinna Norrick-Rühl is Professor of Book Studies at the University of Münster. She has written widely on twentieth- and twenty-first century publishing and reading cultures, with a special interest in popular series and book clubs, mass-market genres, and celebrity book culture. Recent publications include "Genre, Diversity, and Metanarrative in Reese's Book Club," published in *Contemporary Literature* (co-authored with Alexander Starre) and "Moving Memoir Across Markets and Media: A Study of Popular Memoir and Its Genre Effects," published in *Book History* (co-authored with Danielle Fuller).

Silvia Schultermandl is Professor and Chair of American Studies at the University of Münster. She is the author of *Transnational Matrilineage: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in Asian American Literature* (2009) and *Ambivalent Transnational Belonging in American Literature* (2021) and co-editor of eleven collections of essays and special journal issues which explore various themes in transnational studies, American literature and culture, as well as critical kinship studies. Her articles have appeared in the following journals, among others: *Meridians*, *Atlantic Studies*, *Interactions*, *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, and *Journal of American Culture*. Her areas of interest include affect theory, literary theory, critical race theory, queer theory, aesthetics, and transnational feminism. She is currently developing the *Palgrave Series in Kinship, Representation, and Difference* and is completing a book project on kinship and archives.

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The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech. However, book banning activities have skyrocketed since 2010, as documented by PEN America and the American Library Association - by 2025, book bans had been "normalized" in contemporary US education contexts. While the Biden administration moved to counteract these often local, regional, and state book banning measures, the second Trump administration declared book bans a "hoax" in January 2025. Escalating this further, Republicans initiated House Resolution 7661 (H.R. 7661), also known as the "Stop the Sexualization of Children Act" in February of 2026, attempting to instate national book bans, with the outcome as yet uncertain (as of March 2026). Against this rapidly evolving backdrop, our interdisciplinary talk, coming from literary studies and book studies, considers the recent novel *Lula Dean's Little Library of Banned Books* (HarperCollins/William Morrow 2024) by Kristen Miller. We show how the mainstream fiction novel is both a testament to and form of activist engagement with this historic moment; not only, but **also in relation to the upcoming semiquincentennial celebrations in the USA.*** In our talk, we discuss Miller's novel as both text and book, including its critical responses on the material, representational, and affective levels. We thus heed the call issued by the Modern Language Association in January of 2026 on "Why We Need the Lessons of Banned Books Now More Than Ever."

* This talk is part of the **Obama Institute event series** on the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence "These Truths at 250."