

Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers
Twenty-Third Annual Conference
October 3-6, 2019 at The College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, Massachusetts

Call for Papers

Conference Committee for 2019:

Lee Oser, The College of the Holy Cross
Rebecca Rainof, Princeton University
Ernest Suarez, Catholic University
Rosanna Warren, University of Chicago

Please note: everybody who participates must be a current member of the ALSCW. We encourage participation by creative writers, scholars, critics, and secondary school teachers. The 2019 introductory membership rate for new members, graduate students, and retirees is \$50. Renewals are \$100. Visit our website for detailed information (alscw.org).

Proposals of 300 words and a C.V. should be sent as email attachments to Lee Oser at <leeoser@holycross.edu> and Ernest Suarez at <Suarez@cua.edu> on or before June 1, 2019.

Seminars

1) Style Matters

Moderator: Willard Spiegelman, Duwain E. Hughes Jr. Distinguished Professor of English, Emeritus, Southern Methodist University

Take the two words of this title and interpret them as you will: either a noun and verb combination, or a combination of two nouns in which the first functions adjectivally.

This seminar centers on discussions of literature that will begin with the premise (or perhaps, dangerously, contest it) that style is the distinctive part of the literary experience. Style matters most. Because I am hoping to find a wide range of subjects, I will entertain proposals about matters of style ("style matters") in texts both canonical and under-represented, from all periods and languages.

Many years ago, J. Hillis Miller termed the phrase "the linguistic moment" to refer to those places in books, poems, and other texts, where language calls itself to our attention; where language itself is foregrounded in the literary experience. If we broaden his phrase to "the stylistic moment" we'll have the basis for a lively and exciting discussion of what, for many of us, brought us into literary studies in the first place.

2) **Rewriting Shakespeare and Defoe**

Moderator: Mary Jo Salter, Krieger-Eisenhower Professor, Johns Hopkins University

In loose coordination with two other seminars in the current conference, “Shakespeare and the Bible” and “Defoe’s Palette: *Robinson Crusoe* at 300,” this seminar will look at some ways the work of canonical writers—in this case, Shakespeare and Defoe—has been re-imagined by writers who are themselves highly original minds. From W. H. Auden’s “The Sea and the Mirror,” a multi-form poetic response to *The Tempest*, to J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, a novel rewriting *Robinson Crusoe* with a female twist, new works are continually created that could not have been imagined without their predecessors and yet are independent, and indeed may in their own right come to seem essential to our literature.

Questions to be explored in panelists’ papers might include: What can a “re-writer” learn from Shakespeare and Defoe’s own relations to precedent texts? What might be the most successful “rewrites” of Shakespeare and/or Defoe, and what lessons can both creative writers and scholars take from these successes? What happens when a rewrite involves a shift in genre? What are the pedagogical values (or pitfalls) in assigning students to write imitations or spin-offs of Shakespeare and Defoe? And as time disengages us from canonical writers’ periods, what does it mean to “update”?

3) **Shakespeare and the Hebrew Bible**

Moderator: Noah Millman, Independent Scholar, Screenwriter, and Filmmaker

“After God,” Alexandre Dumas *père* proclaimed, “Shakespeare has created most.” But while God’s creation was born out of chaos, nearly all of Shakespeare’s plays were based on prior material that the poet reworked. Shakespeare’s genius was such that, in general, he comprehensively transformed his source materials, until his versions completely eclipsed their antecedents, and became the originals with which future generations of artists must engage.

But some sources are too powerful to be superseded in this manner. Writing in arguably the first generation for whom the Bible was readily available to individuals in English (the Geneva Bible being first printed in England in 1576), and in a country where scriptural interpretation had been the fulcrum of recent history, Shakespeare inevitably alluded to the Bible with great frequency. Did he also engage with the Bible in a deeper fashion, reworking biblical characters, themes and narratives in ways that throw new light on Shakespeare’s plays, and on the biblical texts themselves? Can what Robert Alter called “midrashic allusion” — “an exegetical meditation through narration on a potent earlier text” — be a framework for thinking about Shakespeare’s relationship with the Bible?

The seminar will circle around these and related questions about Shakespeare’s relationship to the Hebrew Bible in particular. Papers are welcome that approach these questions from a variety of angles, including both literary-critical and theological perspectives, as well as from the perspective of theater practitioners.

4) Defoe's Palette: *Robinson Crusoe* at 300

Michael Prince, Associate Professor of English, Boston University

Ventriloquism, dissimulation, irony--readers have struggled over the years to describe the causes and effects of Defoe's style. This call for papers invites scholarly and creative accounts of Defoe's stylistic breakthrough as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*. As Joseph Browne asks in *The Moon Calf* (1705), how did Defoe "step up from a *Hosier* to a Poet"? In what did this stepping up consist, such that today, three hundred years after first publication, *Robinson Crusoe* still inspires and resists attempts to explain its enduring qualities?

5) Afterlives of the Middle Ages

Sarah Stanbury, Distinguished Professor of Arts and Humanities, College of the Holy Cross

Since the end of the Middle Ages, a fascination with the idea of the medieval has remained robustly alive. We can think of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Dryden's translation of the *Canterbury Tales*; 19th-century Gothic and Arthurian revivals; and more recently, fantasy, from the *Lord of the Rings* to *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*. Indeed, the vitality of gaming as well as serial fiction and TV based on medieval themes suggests the Middle Ages has a particularly firm hold on today's popular imagination. What, this seminar asks, has been the enduring allure of the medieval, and why does its artistic legacy matter? Do fictions set in the Middle Ages present an opportunity for escape from the modern world or, conversely, do they represent a deliberate engagement with that world?

Papers on any post-medieval period are invited, and may address drama, fiction, poetry, film, TV, or gaming. Also welcome: creative work, works-in-progress, and papers about writing fiction or films set in the Middle Ages.

6) Romantic Literature and the Environment

James Engell, Gurney Professor of English, Harvard University

What are the legacies—enduring, valuable, and questionable—of the ways in which romantic literature represents the relationships of humans to the natural world? Topics might include anthropocentrism, new awareness of geologic time scales, incipient ideas of sustainability, the symbiotic bond of human communities and cultivated spaces, or human communities and wildness, even wilderness. Are we naively repeating a romantic ideology when we regard certain romantic texts and writers as foundations of modern ecological and environmental awareness? What of women such as Susan Fenimore Cooper, Charlotte Smith, or Eliza Farnham? Does romantic literature have much to say about indigenous peoples and the environment? The rise of botany, the (sensitive) plant and leaf? Human treatment of animals domesticated and wild? A sense of nature as continual process, never static, with evolving forms? What streams of modern thought concerning literature and the environment can be traced, however it meanders or goes underground, from current writers back through Rachel

Carson, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Thoreau, Wordsworth, and others? Are there cautionary tales about accepting romantic literature as a touchstone for environmental values?

7) 'He died in 1895. He is not dead': Frederick Douglass through American Poetry

Moderator: Ishion Hutchinson, Associate Professor and Meringoff Sesquicentennial Fellow, Cornell University

Frederick Douglass never leaves the civic imagination. Fixed in the public imagination, bearing what President Obama called his “mighty leonine gaze,” his image is famous. But that image derives from the cool element of prose, solemn and vulnerable to political appropriation. Does it admit Douglass’s fugitive rage? This seminar will explore how poetry sustains Douglass the agitator and radical, moving beyond mere portraiture and praise, into what can be broadly termed a poetics of conscience. Together we will gather the complex ways in which poets—from Henrietta Cordelia Ray in the nineteenth century to Robert Hayden in the twentieth century and after—integrate an enduring sense of Douglass’s will-seeking liberty within their private and public lives.

8) Melville at 200

Moderators: John Burt, Paul E. Prosswimmer Professor of American Literature, Brandeis University and Wyn Kelley, Senior Lecturer, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

2019 is Herman Melville’s Bicentennial year. This seminar will welcome papers on any aspect of Melville’s work. Here are some suggested areas of interest in which scholarship on Melville is already brewing:

Melville as a critic and analyst of politics and culture (as a theorist of race, as a critic of literature, as a philosopher and critic of philosophies, as a religious thinker)

Melville’s poetry (his poems and collections, is lyrics embedded in prose works, his long narrative *Clarel*, his sources, influences, and genres).

Melville's Lies Circumstantial and Lies Direct (Claggart as the last and most flagrant of M’s many liars, confidence-men, unreliable narrators, or the self-deceived)

Teaching and Reading Melville in the Digital Age (Digital Archives and Editing, Mapping and literary cartography, new spatial and temporal paradigms)

Papers on other aspects of Melville’s work are encouraged. We seek to encourage a wide variety of approaches to the subject and to engage writers, critics, and teachers at all levels (university, college, and high school).

9) The Health Humanities: A New Frontier in Literary Studies and Creative Writing

Moderator: Kate Daniels, Edwin Mims Professor of English, Vanderbilt University

Increasingly, on campus and in community, literature and writing are finding common ground with medicine and recently-articulated narrative practices of health care. An impressive amount

of research supports the efficacy of these interdisciplinary efforts which unite the arts and humanities with STEM-focused research and teaching, challenging the binary that has long separated “art” and “science” in academia. Known as Health Humanities, this new area of inquiry “champions the application of the arts and humanities in interdisciplinary research, education and social action to inform and transform health and social care, health or well-being.” (Crawford, Paul *Health Humanities*. Palgrave, 2015). In this session, we will consider some of the literature-based practices being done by writers, scholars, and healthcare providers, as they parse out the developing parameters and perimeters of this new area of work in the humanities. Topics may include ways to institute humanities-based creative practices into healthcare settings; examples of successful Health Humanities or Healthcare Arts programs, curricula, or events/symposia; Narrative Medicine; bibliotherapy; surveys of the field; or creative production emanating from the Health Humanities.

Contributions welcome from creative writers, historians of medicine, healthcare arts workers, and literary scholars.

10) Is Oratory Literature? Some Test Cases

Moderator: John Briggs, Professor of English, University of California, Riverside

The orator must be, to a certain extent, a poet.

--Emerson

Beneath the surface of repartee and mock seriousness, [Plato’s *Phaedrus*] is asking whether we ought to prefer a neuter form of speech to the kind which is ever getting us aroused over things and provoking an expense of spirit.

...

The literalist, like the anti-poet ... is troubled by [rhetoric’s] failure to conform to a present reality. What he fails to appreciate is that potentiality is a mode of existence.... The discourse of the noble rhetorician, accordingly, will be about real potentiality or possible actuality, whereas that of the mere exaggerator is about unreal potentiality.

– Richard Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*

What is oratory? What relation does the most eloquent oratory have, if any, to literature? Is rhetoric ultimately an enemy of the literary imagination? Are rhetoric and poetics quarrelsome, closely-bonded siblings? In the American nineteenth century, why was great oratory considered to be literature? Is the classical heritage of oratory lost to the modern world? Is Elizabethan dramatic oratory an anomaly confined to that age? Can oratory enlarge the literary character of a work of literature?

What is going on in the young Winston Churchill's strangely promising, never-published essay on rhetoric: "The Scaffolding of Rhetoric"? Is there a conjuring power at work in Daniel Webster's Bunker Hill orations? What does the power of parody in Twain's after-dinner speeches disclose about late nineteenth-century American oratory?

Why was *The Columbian Orator* so interesting to budding speakers, including Frederick Douglass? How might we characterize the depths and dimensions of speakers like Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, Edward Everett? What characterizes oratory that discovers an unheard public voice, as in speeches by abolitionists who were Suffragists: Frances Wright, Angelina Grimke, Abby Kelley, Lucretia Mott, Ernestine Rose, and Lucy Stone? As there is a kind of oratory in the musical *Hamilton: The Revolution*, is there music in the speeches of the historical Hamilton? Did the modern age strike oratory a mortal blow?

11) What Is Great Literature?

Moderator: Diana Senechal, Varga Katalin Gimnázium, Szolnok, Hungary

Beginning with the premise that great literature exists, we will consider how to define, identify, and honor it; why the greatness matters; and what role such literature plays in our education, culture, and individual lives. While considering questions of greatness in the abstract, the seminar will focus on specific works of literature: works that have been considered great over the centuries, works that have come in and out of recognition, and works still waiting to be noticed. Perspectives of writers, editors, and teachers are welcome.

Seminar papers might champion a particular work of literature; discuss how to introduce a great and difficult work to students; describe the pleasures of reading a particular work that does not fade in interest or quality over time; consider the work of a literary editor, who seeks out greatness in many forms; consider how certain literary works affect other works; consider the perils of rigid conceptions of greatness; or pursue another angle on this topic.

12) Graphic Poetics: Approaching the Relationship Between Comics and Poetry

Moderator: Jorge J. Santos Jr., Assistant Professor of Multiethnic Literature of the United States, College of the Holy Cross

In her recent article for *Poetry* magazine, comics scholar Hillary Chute delineates the potential fruitfulness of studying the relationship between comics and poetry – a casual comparison often made by such comics visionaries as Alison Bechdel and Art Spiegelman. As Canadian cartoonist Seth (Gregory Gallant) has noted, "The 'words and pictures' that make up the comics language are often described as prose and illustration combined. A bad metaphor: poetry and graphic design seems more apt" as this analogy can better elucidate the distillation, condensing, and visual rhythms of graphic narrative. As such, this panel seeks to take up this call by exploring the relationship between poetry and comics. Broadly speaking, this panel welcomes a diverse variety of approaches, from reconsideration of important earlier work (e.g. Don Marquis), to the referential strategies of Bechdel or Alan Moore, to the adaptation of specific poems from such collections as *The Graphic Canon* series or *Above the Dreamless Dead*, or a focus on the syntactical influence of poetic forms on graphic narrative structures. Other approaches to discussing poetry and comics are certainly encouraged as well.

Papers are generally pitched at an intellectually engaged lay audience. Proposals for papers and presentations are welcome from practicing poets, cartoonists, comics artists, or scholars in the field.

13) “Poor Passing Facts:” Re-reading Robert Lowell in the Age of Fake News

Moderator: Katie Peterson, Associate Professor of English and Chancellor’s Fellow, University of California at Davis

Robert Lowell, the first poet described as “confessional,” made details of the personal life central to the American poem’s aesthetics. In his time (1917 – 1977) he achieved unquestionable stardom. Making poems out of our lives is now so commonplace that we forget how audacious Lowell’s turn to the personal was. He knew all too well its dangers— as he writes of in one of his last poems, “Epilogue,” “We are poor passing facts, / warned by that to give / each figure in the photograph / his living name.”

As Lowell’s work enters the second year of its second century, what is the state of his “living name” in the world of poetry today? Which of his insights and innovations have persisted? What predicaments of personality still haunt his memory (Lowell, who published his ex-wife’s letters in a later collection, *The Dolphin* with little or no remorse)? What about Lowell’s relationship with other poets of his day, like Elizabeth Bishop? What do we gain from considering Lowell’s work in relation to contemporary poets, like Claudia Rankine, who has mentioned *Life Studies* as a model for her landmark volume *Citizen*? Lowell’s status as a poet was unparalleled in his day, but what remains of his *voice* for us to learn from, take pleasure in, and hear? What does any poem try to preserve, and what do facts have to do with it? This panel will aim to confront these and other questions in answer to its central query, *why re-read Robert Lowell in 2019?*

14) What do we mean by “close reading”?

Moderators: Christopher Schmidt, Chair, Upper School English at Parish Episcopal School, and Cassandra Nelson, Bradley Fellow, University of Virginia

In this seminar, literary critics and teachers of literature will seek to understand the cluster of practices known as “close reading,” and consider whether and why it matters in the 21st-century classroom and beyond. What does “close reading” entail, exactly? What are best practices for reading closely, and which texts deserve this kind of attention? Why, in an age of Twitter and emojis--and other technologies that encourage brevity, haste, and easy consumability, regardless of truth or beauty--does close reading matter at all? How should we teach the practice of close reading, especially (but not exclusively) to students in introductory literature courses?

We invite proposals for papers focusing on any aspect of close reading: its aims and methods, historically and today; its alignment, or lack thereof, with Common Core standards, literary criticism and theory, the digital humanities, or creative writing; best pedagogical practices at both the K-12 and college levels; and what is at stake in losing or maintaining the discipline of close reading. High school teachers and college professors who teach introductory literature courses are especially welcome.

15) The Landscape of Rome’s Literature

Moderator: Aaron Seider, Associate Professor of Classics, The College of the Holy Cross

In the stories of Rome's beginnings along the Tiber's bank; of its fields stained by the blood of civil war; and of its battles beyond empire's edges, Roman authors turned to the landscape to reflect on their society and their writing. What can close readings of Livy's early Rome, Vergil's Italian settings, or Tacitus' British battles, for instance, reveal about the relationship between language and landscape in Roman literature? This seminar offers a forum for exploring a range of questions related to the literary construction of landscapes, with a particular interest in what the Romans' written landscapes communicate about their identity and their work as authors. We invite papers that address these questions from any perspective, with a range of potential topics including the intersection between landscape and areas such as emotion, memory, genre, time, or aesthetics; the relationship between the natural and built environment; metaphorical uses of the landscape; and literary receptions of the classical landscape.

16) On What Philosophy and Literature May Teach Us about Who and What We Are, and How They Might Teach Us Differently

Moderator: Jeffrey Bloechl, Department of Philosophy, Boston College, and Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry, Australian Catholic University (Honorary)

If it is true, as many have suggested, that we are a mystery to ourselves; and if we nonetheless turn to philosophy and to literature in order to learn something of who and what we are; and if, finally, we do not wish to say that philosophy and literature are the same, we might do well to attend not merely to their many different words on our condition but more so, and perhaps first, to the different modes in which they are uttered. Philosophy is not literature, and literature is not philosophy. Yet we grant to each the right to teach us something. Would their different modes of addressing us and our different modes of listening to each of them say something important about our humanity?

Proposals for papers in the general orbit of these propositions are welcome from scholars, teachers and graduate students in philosophy and/or literature. These may build on readings of particular texts, draw mainly from the position of one or a few thinkers, or develop independent lines of reflection. We welcome proposals taking bearing in any historical period.

17) Literature and Theology

Moderator: Anthony Domestico, Associate Professor of Literature at Purchase College, SUNY and books columnist for *Commonweal*

The American novelist Paul Harding describes reading theology as "gratifying on every single level that you could want as a writer of fiction, as a person who contemplates." What role might theological reading play in literary creation, and what role might literary reading play in theological investigation? Can literature do theology, and by what means? What role does the literary have in theological discourse?

This seminar offers participants the opportunity to explore these and other questions, considering points of contact and departure between the literary and the theological. Papers are welcome from critics, poets/novelists, and theologians. Historical period (medieval, Renaissance, modern, etc.) and faith tradition (Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, etc.) are open.

Plenary Panels

1) **Ancient Greek Tragedy: Poetry of the Body**

Moderator: Sarah Nooter, Associate Professor of Classics and Theater and Performance Studies, University of Chicago

Antonin Artaud wrote that theater “which is in *no thing*, but makes use of everything—gestures, sounds, words, screams, light, darkness—rediscovers itself at precisely the point where the mind requires a language to express its manifestations.” Indeed, ancient Greek tragedy was a genre of words, song and suffering. Though most people encounter tragedy now through its language on the page, the presence of bodies is a paramount feature of the genre in its early incarnations. This seminar seeks to bring into conversation both the extraordinary poetry and music of tragedy and its embodiment and presence in performance.

Papers are welcome that look to any aspect of song, embodiment, gestures, poetry, voice, or sounds in tragedy, as well as papers that examine these aspects in adaptations or the reception of the genre in the modern era.

2) **Poets Resettling the United States** (by invitation only)

Moderator: Greg Delanty, Professor of English, Saint Michael’s College

- a) Carman Bugan, Gotham Writers Workshop, on her own experience
- b) Clare Cavanagh, Northwestern University, “‘Fairly Californian’: West Coast Miłosz.”
- c) Sally Connolly, University of Houston, “Eavan Boland, Paul Muldoon, and Vona Groake”
- d) Major Jackson, University of Vermont, on Derek Walcott

3) **Artistic Freedom and the Enforcement of Morals** (by invitation only)

Moderator: David Bromwich, Sterling Professor of English, Yale University

4) **Samuel Beckett’s Radio and Television Plays**

Moderator: James McNaughton, Associate Professor of English, University of Alabama

Samuel Beckett’s innovations were not limited to theater and fiction. His interest in other media emerges early: in 1936 Beckett applied (unsuccessfully) to work as a film-hand with Sergei Eisenstein in Moscow, for instance. And later in his career he wrote a short film and numerous plays for radio and TV. This panel attends to these less-appreciated aspects of

Beckett's work. Papers can address topics as diverse as those found in Beckett's writing itself, but whether writing about torture politics or specific productions, Beckett's ghosts or TV voice over, panelists should pay attention how Beckett exploits the formal possibilities of the medium. This call is semi-open: some papers have been invited and we seek others besides.

Events:

1. Plenary Reading,

A.E. Stallings, Director, Poetry Center, Athens, Greece

2. Plenary Reading,

Major Jackson, Richard Dennis Green and Gold University Distinguished Professor,
University of Vermont

3. Banquet, October 5th

Remarks: Kate Daniels, President, ALSCW

Plenary Reading: Rachel Hadas, Board of Governors Professor, Rutgers University

ALSCW Mission Statement:

The Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers seeks to promote excellence in literary criticism and scholarship, and works to ensure that literature thrives in both scholarly and creative environments. We encourage the reading and writing of literature, criticism, and scholarship, as well as wide-ranging discussions among those committed to the reading and study of literary works.