

Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers
Twenty-Fifth Annual Conference
October 22-25, 2020 at Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Call for Papers

Conference Committee for 2020:

David Bromwich, Yale University
Diana Senechal, Varga Katalin Gimnázium, Szolnok, Hungary
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 2020 membership rate for new members, graduate students, and retirees is \$50. Renewals are \$100. Membership includes a year's subscription to *Literary Imagination* (Oxford UP) and to *Literary Matters* (our online journal). Visit our website for detailed information (alscw.org).

Proposals of 300 words and a C.V. should be sent as email attachments to David Bromwich at <david.bromwich@yale.edu> and Ernest Suarez at <Suarez@cua.edu> on or before June 1, 2020.

Seminars

1) Proust

Moderator: Herbert Marks, Professor of Comparative Literature, Indiana University

Lyrical and analytical, meditative and satiric, descriptive and self-consciously parabolic, Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) stands as the definitive work of twentieth-century literature in scholarly and popular opinion alike. This seminar invites papers on any aspect of Proust's work, including his sources and legacy, both imaginative and critical. Readings of specific passages are welcome, no less than reflections on such perennial topics as the genesis of the work, fiction and memory, sexual identity, style, formal structure, and Proust's relation to the other arts.

2) Muriel Spark: Show and Tell, Surface and Depth

Moderator, Maria J. Fitzgerald, Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing, University of Minnesota

In an article on Muriel Spark in *The New Yorker* (April 5, 2010), Thomas Mallon wrote "in front of a New York audience in the nineteen-sixties, Spark had insisted that she loved her characters 'like a cat loves a bird.'" The British novelist and critic Gabriel Josipovici, in his essay *Muriel Spark and The Practice of Deception* ("The Teller and the Tale," Carcanet 2016), writes "The villains in MS's novels are those who cannot see the difference between fiction and reality. They seek to manipulate the lives of others for their own ends as the novelist manipulates his or her plot . . . an inattentive reader might not be aware that she was even subverting the form of the novel" (pp. 217, 219).

What can we take from these statements? Do they explain in any way Muriel Spark's writing? Is there any more that can be said, and is there anything very different that can be said? This seminar invites papers on any aspect of Spark's writing and career.

3) Ralph Ellison Now: What Can Ellison Offer Today?

Moderator: Paul Devlin, Assistant Professor, United States Merchant Marine Academy

Ralph Ellison studies is thriving, partly because his work appears more relevant than ever to many people. This seminar seeks papers relating to how Ellison's work can inform and illuminate the present moment. Albert Murray writes in his preface to *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray* (2000) that in the 1940s, Ellison "playfully" told him "stories endure not only from generation to generation but also from age to age because literary truth amounts to prophecy. Telling is not only a matter of retelling but also of foretelling." Can we use Ellison's work to test this playful claim? Possible paper topics include but are not limited to

Demagoguery and Oratory

The Global Rise of Fascism

Surveillance

Whiteness/Blackness

Weak Theory

Cultural Appropriation

Ellison and Albert Murray Studies

Ellison and Contemporary Writers (e.g., Mat Johnson, Kevin Young, Colson Whitehead, Viet Thanh Nguyen)

Ellison's Mentorship: Summing Up (several young writers he befriended in the 1970s died recently or are no longer writing)

Ellison's Library (cataloged recently)

The Ellison Archive/Ellison in the Archives of Others

Ellison and the Idea of Comedy

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

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

One area of the humanities that is thriving (in the midst of the oft-cited “death” of the humanities in higher education) is medical humanities, recently renamed the health humanities. Increasingly, on campus and in community, literature and writing are finding common ground with medicine and newly-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 of writers, scholars, and healthcare providers, as they parse out the developing definition and scope of this emerging 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.

5) Milton

Moderator: Tobias Gregory, Associate Professor, The Catholic University of America

Papers welcome on any aspect of Milton's work: poetry, prose, theology, politics, reception.

6) Transnationalism and American Literary Studies

Moderator: Robert S. Levine, Distinguished University Professor, University of Maryland

The last fifteen years or so have seen a challenge to the nation-based study of American literary history. Critics have developed compelling transatlantic, hemispheric, diasporic, and global approaches to American literary and cultural studies. This seminar aspires to take stock of such developments in a variety of ways over the full range of American literary history. We invite papers that demonstrate the value of, or potential problems with, transnational approaches via case studies or close readings; we also invite papers that engage with transnationalism more theoretically, pointing to new directions or raising critical questions about what happens to

American literary history when the nation is de-centered. Overall, we're hoping for a lively discussion of the transnational turn in American literary studies.

7) Simone Weil, Philosopher and Mystic: Poetics and Politics

Moderators: Katie Peterson, Associate Professor of English, University of California at Davis;
Walt Hunter, Associate Professor of English, Clemson University

The French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) explored enduring questions about individual freedom, human suffering, and the ethical obligations we have to others. Weil's key terms—affliction, human personality, grace—provide a fresh starting point for approaching contemporary questions of practical significance: what is the relation between the individual and the collective? And in an era of unsettled institutions, what are the forms and structures in which a secular humanism might thrive? While Weil's influence on contemporary theories of nationalism and human rights has been explored, her influence on poets has been less well understood. Likewise, interpretations of Weil's philosophy by poets have not been considered in depth. What happens when we think of the poems of Jorie Graham's *The Errancy* in terms of their interpretation of Weil? Or if we consider the career of Fanny Howe, in nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, as the fulfillment of Weil's work? Can we then turn back to critical work on Weil and see her ideas with greater clarity? This seminar will call together creative writers and scholars to situate Weil in a new context and to bring her philosophy and literary criticism into the present moment.

8) Figures of Civil War

Moderator: Michèle Lowrie, Andrew W. Mellon Distinguished Service Professor, University of Chicago

Civil war's proliferation across the globe and threats of a renewed outbreak troubling the United States make it urgent to revisit its representation with the aim of greater understanding. The term, which derives from Latin and originated in the Roman civil wars (first century BCE), specifies warfare and citizenship as decisive categories, but political scientists have had difficulty defining civil war systematically. Even in antiquity, Greek and Latin literature alike belied these restrictions: family, self, and cosmos offer battlegrounds for civil war. In modernity, deeper ties, of blood and soil, religion and ethnicity, spur members of the same state to bear arms against each other. Civil war refuses to stay within bounds, either conceptual or geographic. External enemies come under the guise of intimate bedfellows, while the internal enemy is often "othered" as alien.

In the seminar, literary scholars, writers, and artists with a comparatist bent will analyze civil war over the *longue durée* and from cross-cultural perspectives. Relevant questions include:

What categories (such as sedition, tumult, or putsch) help tell stories about civil war?

How universal are civil war tropes, such as fratricide and adultery?
What forms externalize the internal enemy and vice versa?
What boundaries does civil war cross?

9) Children and Childhood in the Stories of Anton Chekhov

Moderators: Rita Lipson, Retired Senior Lecturer in Slavic Languages and Literatures, Yale University and Diana Senechal, Varga Katalin Gimnázium, Szolnok, Hungary

Anton Chekhov is often known for his characters' meditations on (and struggles with) time, change, and aging. Yet children and childhood not only permeate his stories, in a variety of ways and forms, but also highlight his perspectives on imagination, language, and human nature. In this regard, his "childhood stories" are essential to an understanding of his work. In this seminar we will examine those stories of Chekhov that involve children and childhood, including "At Home," "Grisha," "Vanka," "Sleepy" (Spat' khochetsia), "The Steppe," and others. Papers should assume an English-speaking audience. (That is, you are welcome to quote and discuss the original Russian text—but please translate or explain it sufficiently for those who do not know Russian.) Papers may focus on one story or compare two or more; they should be approximately 10-12 double-spaced pages long. In discussing children and childhood, they may focus on characters, language, narrative structures, dialogue, conflicts and resolution (or irresolution), or other compelling aspects of Chekhov's stories.

10) Life Writing

Moderator: Elizabeth D. Samet, Professor of English, U.S. Military Academy, West Point

This seminar takes inspiration from the beginning of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show." This opening to what is commonly referred to as an autobiographical novel invites readers to think about the degree to which all written lives are shaped and the ways in which the narrative structures employed in various kinds of life writing (diary, memoir, autobiography, biography, personal essay) intersect with those of fictional genres—not only autobiographical novels but also lyric poetry, drama, etc. What is the nature of the relationship between fiction and nonfiction in life writing? How do expectations about that relationship differ across time and place? Is life writing inevitably a species of fiction?

11) Aesthetics, Politics, and Didacticism in African American Literature

Moderator: Mark Christian Thompson, Professor of English, Johns Hopkins University

African American writers—including Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Robert Hayden, Ernest Gaines, Alice Walker, Charles Johnson, Yusef Komunyakha, Toni Morrison, and Teju Cole—have drawn on aesthetic strategies and practices that help them avoid didacticism when writing about political issues. This seminar explores this phenomenon by

considering the tension between aesthetic considerations and the use of art as propaganda. What is African American literary form? Must it be propaganda, as W.E.B. Du Bois believed, and if so, how? What is didacticism's relation to African American literary form as a politics? How can we understand African American writing as a pedagogy of resistance? And finally, to what extent are African American literary practices appropriable by writers who are not African American?

12) The Jameses

Moderator: John Burt, Paul E. Prosswimmer Professor of American Literature, Brandeis University

The seminar will welcome papers on any aspect of the works of Henry, William, and Alice James. Here are some suggested topics about which scholarship has been brooding over the last few years.

About Henry James:

- * HJ in Film and Opera
- * HJ and the development of literary movements (HJ as realist, HJ as modernist)
- * HJ and characterization (perhaps especially his female heroines)
- * HJ and Gender (or HJ and sexuality)
- * HJ and the other arts (painting, music)
- * HJ on heroism and quietism
- * The Supernatural and the Uncanny in HJ
- * HJ and publication (magazine, book, collected edition, scholarly edition, teaching edition)
- * HJ and other writers (e.g. Flaubert, Turgenev, Howells, Wharton, Conrad, Ford, Toibin)
- * HJ on metaphor
- * HJ and his biographers

About William James:

- * WJ and "American Philosophy" (Royce, Santayana, Hocking)
- * WJ and Analytic Philosophy
- * WJ and Religion (or Ethics, or Aesthetics)
- * WJ, Cavell, Pragmatism, and Skepticism
- * WJ and Nature (and Humboldt, Thoreau, Darwin, Huxley)
- * WJ and the Post-Civil-War intellectual world
- * WJ and Henry Adams
- * WJ and Gender
- * WJ and Henry James, Sr.

About Alice James

- * AJ and the Diary form (or the letter)
- * AJ and illness
- * AJ and biography
- * AJ and gender

13) Poetic Innovation and Social Criticism

Moderator: Major Jackson, University Distinguished Professor, University of Vermont

Since the mid-twentieth century, radical shifts in poetry have been chiefly owed to social and political struggles or curative acts of inclusion. Even aesthetic experiments in poetry, at their core, exercise a politics of resistance. Consequently, the critical lenses we have cultivated lead us to chiefly assess the social value of such poetry but rarely allow us to forcefully measure innovative and authentic uses of language that alter how we experience poetry as an evolving, gainful art.

At the expense of noticing the full consequence of their linguistic, formal and rhetorical groundbreaking, aesthetic decisions, Terrance Hayes, Ilya Kaminsky, Khaled Mattawa, M. NourbeSe Philip, Claudia Rankine, Javier Zamora are among those contemporary poets whose works we celebrate for how they align with, illumine, or give voice to yesterday's injustices and today's headlines.

This panel invites scholars to engage radical advances in poetry and identify new linguistic and formal territories beyond the discourse of or reaction to modernist and postmodernist poetry. How have poets articulated discontent or participated in social conversations while elevating poetry in complex ways beyond its complacent and once-radical, now conventional confines?

14) Learning with Literature about Climate Disruption

Moderator: Anne-Lise Francois, Associate Professor, University of California-Berkeley, and Joseph Albernaz, Assistant Professor, Columbia University

“The perished patterns murmur”
Emily Dickinson

“Those are pearls that were his eyes”
Shakespeare

“What do literary practices bring to the study of climate change?” would be one way of articulating the question behind this seminar's title. But the phrase “learning with literature” also wants to be heard as learning with an impediment or obstacle: what are the habits of reading that slow or put a drag on the process of coming to terms with climate disruption, whether negatively or positively, in the spirit of what Donna Haraway calls “staying with the trouble”?

As Amitav Ghosh reminds us in *The Great Derangement*, disruption cannot be thought apart from unequally distributed illusions of regularity or stability; both disruption and continuance are ideologically determined concepts--relative values as much as they are ecological qualities. The lines from Dickinson and Shakespeare are offered both to signal the inadequacy of once dominant interpretive paradigms and ways of organizing seasonal time, and to remember literature's ability to salvage the no-longer-operative (or never cultivatable). This seminar invites papers considering contemporary radical climate instability in relation to prior and ongoing

disruptions, from the perspective of, for example, indigenous studies, disability studies, post-colonial, and/or critical race studies.

Papers might address any of the following:

- literary modes of organizing time (meter, rhythm, plot) in relation to “post-seasonality,” seasonal disorientation & the disaggregation of once coordinated actions or species
- New and old forms of literary transmission in a time of climate disruption (oral, documentary, digital)
- Climate and the archive
- Slants, tilts, orbits, habits and habitats
- Literature and lost knowledge; memory and forgetting -un-learning and the un-learnable -- what refuses to learn or be learned? what withdraws from being made an object of knowledge?

15) Imagining the Modern Self: Literary Portraiture from Austen to the Present

Moderator: Maria DiBattista, Charles Barnwell Straut Class of 1923 Professor of English, Princeton University, and Rebecca Rainof, Associate Research Scholar, Princeton University

The period between Austen’s fiction and today has seen the rise of the portrait as a means for capturing modern selfhood. This period saw the shift in portraiture’s cultural and class status from being an exclusive art commodity—the visual record of the aristocracy done in oil paint—to becoming the expression of “everyman” with the advent of photography. Pioneering photographer Nadar described a successful portrait as an “intimate likeness” as opposed to merely a “banal” image, and urged artists to “put yourself at once in communion with the sitter, size up his thoughts and his very character.” From the 19th century through to the present, this imperative has been taken up by writers who developed different approaches to literary portraiture that invoked a range of emerging media.

This seminar welcomes papers that explore the role of portraiture in literature from the 19th-century to the present day. Examples of literary portraiture might include, but are not limited to: portraits described via ekphrasis in novels or poetry (Mr. Darcy’s portrait in *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “My Last Duchess”), character description as a mode of literary portraiture (Dickensian character description and caricature), books that present themselves as portraits (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *The Portrait of a Lady*), fictional autobiography as a form of self-portraiture and problems of self-fashioning (*Jane Eyre*, *The Good Soldier*) biographical portraits (Boswell on Johnson), etc. We especially invite papers that express curiosity about the ideological work that portraiture does in different historical moments. We also welcome papers that address formal and aesthetic questions about literary portraiture. Do portraits blur the distinction between “the self in the real world and its analogue in the world of art,” as Richard Brilliant writes in *On Portraiture*? What kind of temporality does literary portraiture invoke in poetry and prose? How does literary portraiture implicate the reader and incorporate a viewing gaze into the subject being depicted? These questions are merely jumping

off points for what we hope will be a lively conversation about literary portraiture and its many different forms and effects.

16) Literature and Science

Moderator: Steven Meyer, Associate Professor of English, Washington University in St. Louis

Recent decades have seen the transformation of Literature and Science from a fairly discrete area of inquiry regarding the influence of science on literature into a much more expansive set of pluralistic and cross-disciplinary investigations of literary, artistic, and scientific practices, variously aligned with concurrent developments in science studies. Several contributors to *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Science* (2018) will present case studies building on their essays in the volume, and additional speakers are encouraged to propose topics relating to their own work in the field. Possible areas of focus include – although they are certainly not limited to – comparative discussions of scientific and literary practices; relevant expansions of empiricism; the limits of the two-cultures model; poetic aspects of science; and historical accounts of the mutual imbrication and “interanimation” of science and literature as well as, more broadly, of domains of inquiry in the humanities, arts and sciences.

Plenary Panels (by invitation only):

1) The Lives of the (American) Poets

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

2) Shakespeare’s Verse: Thinking on the Line

Moderator: Scott Newstok, Professor of English, Rhodes College

3) Editing and Its Discontents

Moderator: Christopher Ricks, William M. and Sara B. Warren Professor of the Humanities, Boston University

4) Translation Ancient and Modern

Moderators: Clare Cavanagh, Frances Hooper Professor of Arts and Humanities, Northwestern University, and Sarah Spence, Distinguished Research Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature Emeritus, University of Georgia

Events:

1. Poetry Reading

Ishion Hutchinson, Associate Professor, Cornell University

2. ***Literary Matters Reading***
Ryan Wilson, presiding

3. **Banquet, October 24th**
Remarks: Lee Oser, President, ALSCW
Keynote: Brian Morton, Writing Program Director, Sarah Lawrence College

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.