SCRIPTURE AND LITERATURE IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY UNITED STATES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM

Friday, March 6, 2020

All events, with the exception of the closing reception, will be held in the Glass Pavilion, Levering Hall, Johns Hopkins Homewood Campus.

8:30-9:00: Meet-and-Greet over Light Breakfast

9:00: Welcome

9:15-10:45: Panel 1

DIVINE TRUTHS AND HUMAN SCIENCES: A PRELIMINARY GENEALOGY OF THE MODERN DISCIPLINES

What nineteenth-century intellectual and institutional histories of the disciplining of knowledge underlie the categorical distinction between “scripture” and “literature”? How might we think about the contemporary academic disciplines of literary studies, religious studies, and history as end products of those histories? By tracing those histories, how might we alternately embrace, contest, and redraw the limits of what these disciplines can and should accomplish? What forms of transdisciplinary inquiry might emerge as a result?

“What Is An English Department?: A Rationale for Ethnographic Study of the Textual Disciplines”

Emily Ogden, Associate Professor of English, University of Virginia

“The Mariner and the Albatross”

Colin Jager, Professor of English and Director of the Center for Cultural Analysis, Rutgers University

“Backgrounded by Savagery”: Black Flesh as Scripture

Vincent Wimbush, Director of Institute for Signifying Scriptures

Moderator: Jared Hickman, Associate Professor of English, Johns Hopkins University

10:45-11:00: Coffee Break
11:00-12:30: Panel 2

(RE-) MEDIATING TRANSCENDENCE IN A SECULAR AGE

What are the media infrastructures through which transcendence is (re)envisioned, experienced, and refused in “a secular age”—the nineteenth century in particular? How do revolutions in book manufacture and print culture, for instance, alter the self-understanding and propagation of “religions of the book” and enable and/or limit the emergence of new religious communities and spiritual practices? How are modes of charismatic performativity and communion, including ritual, (re)invented in this context?

“Blank Books and Sacred Writings in The Book of Mormon and the Early Church”

Elizabeth Fenton, Professor of English, University of Vermont

“Dow Dreams of Eternity: Scripturalizing and Mediating Experience in the Early Nineteenth Century”

Seth Perry, Assistant Professor of Religion, Princeton University

“The Literary and Ritual Dimensions of Joseph Smith’s Book of Abraham”

Kathleen Flake, Richard Lyman Bushman Professor of Mormon Studies, University of Virginia

Moderator: Emily Ogden, Associate Professor of English, University of Virginia

12:30-1:45: Lunch Break

1:45-3:15: Panel 3

“MAKING UP” STORIES, MAKING “RELIGION”: TOWARD NONSECULARIST HISTORIES OF FICTIONALITY

What theological and pastoral work is assumed and accomplished by nineteenth-century narratives whose veracity is variously deemed dubious—narratives labeled as fictional? Where does the history of the novel intersect with the history of "religion" as a category and of the various phenomena typically sorted into that category? What kinds of sacred truths and elevated states of being are made accessible by narratives (self-) identified as fictional?

“A Solemn Parody: The Book of Mormon in American Literary Studies”

Grant Shreve, Independent Scholar

“The Character(s) of Revelation: The Scarlet Letter as a Mid-Century Case”
“Scripture, Fictionality, and the Trope of the Found Manuscript”

Nancy Bentley, Donald T. Regan Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

Moderator: Kathleen Flake, Richard Lyman Bushman Professor of Mormon Studies, University of Virginia

3:15-3:30: Coffee Break

3:30-5:00: Panel 4

SETTLER COLONIALISM AS
ESCHATOLOGICAL CONDITION OF MEANING-MAKING

How did the alternately deifying and decimating process of settler colonialism through the expropriation of indigenous land and resources and exploitation of enslaved African labor fundamentally determine the prospects for making ultimate meaning in the nineteenth-century United States? How did this process condition both first-order settler and indigenous cultural production and second-order settler and indigenous categorization of cultural production? How did a pervasive but variously valenced sense that histories were being consummated or concluded in the nineteenth-century US delimit the field of communicative possibility?

“Scripts of Sovereignty: Native Visionary Media in Early America”

Jennifer Graber, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Texas-Austin

“The Romance: From ‘Secular Scripture’ to Settler Scripture”

Jared Hickman, Associate Professor of English, Johns Hopkins University

“David Walker’s Appeal and American Scripturalization”

J. Kameron Carter, Professor of Religious Studies, Indiana University

Moderator: Joel Childers, PhD Candidate in English, Johns Hopkins University

5:00-6:00: Reception in Tudor and Stuart Room, Gilman Hall 388