

The Uses of religion in 19th Century Studies

Armstrong Browning Library • March 16-19, 2016 • Baylor University

In 2016 the Armstrong Browning Library at Baylor University is hosting a special conference on “Uses of ‘Religion’ in 19th C. Studies.” Work on the invention and history of the category “religion” by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political philosophers, theologians, and scholars of religious studies has begun to influence scholarship on nineteenth-century literature and culture. Literary scholars of the nineteenth century have thereby increasingly recognized that the modern *category* of “religion” is a uniquely Western construction generated and reinvented in mutually constitutive dialogue with “the secular” and forms of secularism, and never in neutral ways—being, for example, deeply entangled with the formation of state power, imperial expansion, and discriminatory portrayals of non-Europeans. Within the last five years, scholars such as Michael Warner, Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Philip Gorski have edited important interdisciplinary collections on the religious, the secular and secularism, their historical constructions, and their (troubled) applications to European and global contexts. Comparable interdisciplinary discussions are still needed in nineteenth-century studies, in particular between scholars of nineteenth-century literature and scholars from other disciplines. This conference is designed to address the need.

The Armstrong Browning Library (ABL) is a world-renowned research center and rare-collections library devoted to the study of nineteenth-century literature and culture, located on the campus of Baylor University in Waco, Texas. In keeping with the ABL’s holdings and areas of scholarly focus, proposals on nineteenth-century authors and texts in some way linked to Europe and North America will be given priority, though the committee is open to proposals on all subjects related to the conference theme. Furthermore, although this conference will critically interrogate Western conceptions of “religion,” it does not promote, and indeed aspires to resist, confining attention to “Western” forms of religious belief and practice. The conference will highlight literature, but scholars of every discipline interested in reconsidering uses of “religion” in nineteenth-century studies are strongly encouraged to submit proposals for papers.

Proposals might address, **but are not limited to**, the following broad topics:

- The causes and consequences—literary, socio-economic, theological, political—of the dominantly epistemological view of religion in nineteenth-century Western societies
- Constructions of the secular and forms of secularism vis-à-vis religion through literary texts, and how disciplines other than literary studies might approach this subject
- Constructions of the category “literature” vis-à-vis religion and forms of secularism through literary texts, and how disciplines other than literary studies might approach this subject
- Renderings of religion and religious experience in nineteenth-century poetry and poetics—in discussions of poetics and prosody; in the practice of verse; in the construction of the category “poetry”; or in related debates about the “poetics” of worship, devotion, and church architecture
- Formation of religion and religious experience through the interaction of nineteenth-century music, visual art, literature, and other arts, both secular and sacred
- The degree to which the categories of religion and religions are specific to the history of Western Christianity, and the (mis)representations that result when nineteenth-century Western writers apply them to geographically diverse beliefs, rituals, and practices
- Relationships among imperialism, orientalism, constructions of race, the comparative study of religion, and representation of religion in nineteenth-century literature
- Representations of religion in scholarship on nineteenth-century literature and culture, and how this scholarship is itself historically conditioned and in need of critique
- How religion is defined and experienced as a result of the rapid growth of print culture, mass media, mass communications, and new communications technologies
- How constructions of religion and narratives of secularization are entangled with portrayals of class and class tensions, particularly as these are mediated through literature
- Gendered constructions of religion, religious experience, the secular, and secularism in nineteenth-century literature and culture
- Deployments of religion as a category in representations of science and scientific authority in nineteenth-century literary texts



Proposals should be for paper presentations of 20-25 minutes. Fifteen will be selected for the conference. Two of these fifteen spaces will be reserved for PhD candidates or those who have received their PhD within the last three years. All fifteen invited participants will receive generous travel funding (up to \$1,250 for participants outside of North America; up to \$750 for participants within North America but outside the U.S.; up to \$400 for participants within the U.S.); coverage of all conference meals; and fully funded lodging in apartments near the Armstrong Browning Library (ABL).

Participants will present their papers at the ABL in sessions open to the public, and all speakers will be expected to attend every session. The ABL will also coordinate sessions with rare materials specialized to participants' interests. The long-term hope is to revise papers from this conference for an edited collection on "The Uses of 'Religion' in Nineteenth-Century Studies."

A 300-500 word proposal, and a one-page CV with primary publications and research achievements, should be emailed to ablconferences@baylor.edu.

Deadline for Proposals: 5:00 p.m. Friday, September 18, 2015

Further details are available under the conference tab on the ABL's website (<http://www.browninglibrary.org>). Any queries should be sent to the lead organizer, Joshua King, at ablconferences@baylor.edu.