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ICLA Research Committee on Religion, Ethics, and Literature / 2024

I. Scope

The research committee investigates the philosophical and theoretical roles of religion and ethics in relation to literature, as well as explores the fraught relationship between secularism and post-secularism. It examines global literary phenomena as instances of subject formation in order to rethink new relationships between these three disciplines. We are particularly concerned with the modern displacement of religion, and modernity's epistemological underpinnings as these aspects reflect judgments about the world, culture, and its relationship to a religious past. While the examination of religious imagery, symbolism and the role of myth will not be the purview of this committee, the signifiers of religion in as much as they motivate "an ethical turn" in the text is a key element of the committee's purview.

As a result, the committee has a wide-ranging concern with literature's interstitial spaces, those places that reimagine the boundaries of religion, ethics, and literature, as fluid conditions. In other words, we question the epistemologies and categories that underwrite the ways that religion, and ethics coalesce around aesthetic experience and literary object. Moreover, the committee examines literature's unique ontology in relation to religion and ethics to ponder how these epistemic structures can be transformed by it.

II. Publication and Research

For 2024-25, the committee is preparing a collection of papers from the committee's 2024 conference in San Francisco as well as several papers submitted to committee panels from 2023-2024. This collection, *Literature and its 'Other' Traditions* explores how literature absorbs other disciplines, sacred and secular cultural traditions, in order to transform literary ontology. Additionally, the proposal for *Sacred Phenomena and Profane Objects*, comprised of essays from committee members's presentations at ACLA over the last three years will be going forward as planned. In conjunction with this volume, Professor Millet is also editing a special issue of "Humanities" on the theme of "Comparative Jewish Literatures." Papers presented by committee members at ACLA, MLA, CLAI, and AJS will be considered for this special issue.

III. Conferences

The committee co-sponsors annual ACLA seminars. This year's seminar included 8 papers presented over 2 days. The committee welcomed several new members into its cohort. We marked last year as a renewable ICLA research committee, by hosting "Literature and its 'Other' Traditions" at Professor Millet's institution of SF State in 2024. With 18 papers over three days, scholars from several countries explored literature's intersection with religion, ethics, race, gender, and transgression. Finally, we also are participating in CLAI this year. The committee sponsors 19 papers on literary heresies and redemptions.

The committee's newest research project, Zoom conferences and workshops on topics of interest to our members globally, continues to evolve; we hope to launch our first such workshop for early career researchers in the coming months. The committee hopes that having online conferences and workshops, biannually, will lessen a growing sense of isolation, that several have communicated to me since ACLA's cancellation. My immediate goal is to have each of the committee's officers and several of the senior professor members in our committee host one such event. The long term goal is

to transform each cohort of presenters into a work group on subtopics for eventual publication so that the committee continues to identify venues in which members can submit their research for peer review and publication.

IV. Membership, General Information, and Officers

With its inception in 2014-15, the committee became a three-year renewable committee with the ICLA. At the 2020 Executive Council Meeting, we were renewed for another three-year term. We will put before the executive council our request to become a standing committee in coming year. The research committee comprises 90 members, gaining approximately 3-6 members annually, with membership boosts ICLA and ACLA Congresses. Our membership is global and particularly active in Europe, the United States, and Israel. The international tenor of our committee speaks to several issues confronting comparatists globally.

1. This committee has recruited heavily among comparatists without national organizations in their countries.
2. Likewise, we have also invited comparatists whose appointments are in other disciplines, ie they have been lost to the field institutionally.
3. Graduate students and contingent faculty remain a large constituency within this committee. Approximately 40% of the committee derive from these two groups. Thus the committee plans to develop professional mentorship opportunities for this cohort.

Our four officers include: Professor Kitty Millet (San Francisco State University) chairperson; Professor John Hawley (Santa Clara University), first vice president; Katie Lally, Doctoral Student (University of California, Santa Cruz), second vice president; Dr. Zainab Mahmood, Assistant Professor (Shanghai Tech University), third vice president. Terms are three-year terms. We plan to hold new elections coinciding with the ICLA congress in Korea.

Information about our committee can be found on the ICLA website. For copies of our quarterly reports, lists our sponsored panels at different conferences, and membership information, please contact Professors Millet (kmillet1@sfsu.edu) or Mahmood (zainab.mahmood@nyu.edu). Although Professor Kitty Millet chairs the committee, committee members remain actively engaged in growing the committee, determining its next events, and targeting potential audiences.