

CFP: Rebecca Harding Davis and Louisa May Alcott:

Rebecca Harding Davis (1831-1910) and Louisa May Alcott (1832 – 1888) witnessed dramatic changes in American culture throughout their lifetimes. As authors, they explored a variety of genres, including realist fiction (often oriented toward reform), gothic fiction, children’s literature, essays, and journalism. Both women viewed aspects of the Civil War firsthand, were troubled by the effects of industrialization and the factory system, critiqued the position of women in nineteenth-century culture and advocated for women’s rights. They also at times examined the tension between philosophical ideals and the pragmatic demands of daily life. Both women experienced the vicissitudes of publication, recognition, and careers in authorship.

Davis and Alcott met during a visit Davis made to Concord in 1862. About this meeting, Alcott wrote in her *Journal* for May 1862 “Saw Miss Rebecca Harding, author of ‘Margaret Howth,’ which has made quite a stir, and is very good. A handsome, fresh, quiet woman, who says she never has any troubles, though she writes about woes. I told her I had had lots of troubles; so I write jolly tales; and we wondered why we each did so.”

The two authors encountered each other again years later, and Davis recorded their meeting in *Bits of Gossip* (1904):

Years afterward she came to the city where I was living and I hurried to meet her. The lean, eager, defiant girl was gone, and instead, there came to greet me a large, portly, middle-aged woman, richly dressed. Everything about her, from her shrewd, calm eyes to the rustle of her satin gown told of assured success.

Yet I am sure fame and success counted for nothing with her except for the material aid which they enabled her to give to a few men and women whom she loved. . . . Louisa Alcott wrote books which were true and fine, but she never imagined a life as noble as her own.

To explore the connections between these two significant 19th-century women’s voices in greater depth, the Rebecca Harding Davis Society and the Louisa May Alcott Society will offer a joint panel at the American Literature Association in May 2017. We invite papers that examine how Alcott and Davis treat or respond to any of the issues mentioned in the opening paragraph.

Send brief abstracts by January 20, 2017 to Mischa Renfroe (Mischa.Renfroe@mtsu.edu) and Melissa Pennell (Melissa_Pennell@uml.edu)