

**CFP: Society for the Study of American Women Writers (SSAWW) Panels
at the American Literature Association Conference
May 24-27, 2018 | Hyatt Regency San Francisco**

The Society for the Study of American Women Writers (SSAWW) is pleased to invite proposals for the following panels to be held at the 2018 American Literature Association (ALA) Conference in San Francisco, CA. Each panel examines a different interpretation or representation of labor from early American literature to the literature of the twenty-first century.

**“There Are Few [Pieces] about Pregnancy and Childbirth”: Explorations into the Labor of
Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Motherhood in American Women’s Writing**

In 2000, Julie Tharp and Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb published *This Giving Birth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women’s Writing*—an edited volume exploring the poetry and prose of writers from Anne Bradstreet to Toni Morrison who gave voice to the experiences and emotions of childbirth far too often silenced or ignored in a society that once saw childbirth as a woman’s central obligation. These essays therefore reflect growing interest in American maternity literature, especially as more and more women writers began to acknowledge the breadth of emotions they encountered, such as “the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness” (Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*). In stirring conversation regarding labor, it is thus vital to explore representations of pregnancy and childbirth in American women’s writing and the insights such authors reveal into the psycho-social experience of motherhood, from the mid- to late-1700s through the present day. **In exploring this subject across genre and across time, this SSAWW panel asks participants to consider any related issues such as motherhood as gender role to the refusal to have children as an expression of identity or as a socio-political act.** SSAWW welcomes papers that explore a wide range of texts and authors related to this overarching topic.

**“She Was Becoming Herself and Daily Casting Aside that Fictitious Self”:
Critiques of Domesticity and Servitude in American Women’s Writing**

Responding to the constraints of a patriarchal society, American women writers fought not only for a more expansive role in the social and political sectors of American life but also for a more nuanced representation in literature. As a result, texts of the nineteenth century and beyond often challenged the cult of domesticity with works such as Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” revealing the internal and external struggles of women to explore their social, political, economic, and sexual freedom outside of the home. Such texts ultimately emerged alongside works by women of color, including Harriet Wilson and Marvel Cooke, who sought to challenge the equally limited roles afforded marginalized communities in American society. By studying servitude from slavery to the Bronx slave market and beyond, these authors sought to challenge the racial and economic hierarchy at work while also exploring the many untapped possibilities for women once valued as contributors and leaders in American life. **Seeking to examine domestic life, servitude, and the literature that interrogated/challenged these realities, this panel asks its participants to consider the ways in which American women writers probed the limitations of submissive gender roles as well as the journeys of women to hone their voices and forge identities of their own.** SSAWW welcomes papers that explore a wide range of texts and authors related to this topic.

“Female Wage Labor [As] a Key Site of Ideological Contest”:

Agency, Enterprise, and the Labor Force in American Women’s Writing

Rebecca Harding Davis’ 1861 *Life in the Iron Mills* was ultimately a groundbreaking text of its time not only for its portrayal of “the bleak lives of industrial workers in the mills and factories of the nation” (Gray) but also for its insights into the lives of mill girls, who saw their jobs as vehicles for social, economic, and educational opportunity. Though there has since been a shift in socio-cultural thought, where the restrictive gender norms of the not-so-distant past began to ease and women began to seek new roles among the labor force of American society, women and labor has always been a contested subject in American culture and literature, even in the present day. Texts such as Lori Merish’s 2017 *Archives of Labor: Working-Class Women and Literary Culture in the Antebellum United States* are, then, important in stirring scholarship on these vital works (and not just those in the United States) by exploring the push for increased agency and visibility among American working women who move beyond notions of sentimental domesticity to forge a room of their own. **This SSAWW panel therefore asks participants to consider texts (from feminist and activist literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the many progressive novels, poems, short stories, autobiographies, and plays produced across time) that examine the labor force as a contested but potentially freeing space for American women.** SSAWW welcomes papers that explore a wide range of texts and authors related to this overarching topic.

Please send proposals of no more than five hundred words (for fifteen-minute papers) to the Vice President of Development, Dr. Christopher Allen Varlack (ssaww.vpdevelopment@gmail.com) **no later than January 5, 2018** with an expected response no later than January 12, 2018. Note that **presenters must be members of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers by January 29, 2018 in order to secure their place on the program.** In addition, please indicate any AV equipment needs in your E-mail.

For more information on the Society for the Study of American Women Writers, please visit our website at ssawnew.wordpress.com.