

The **Mary E. Wilkins Freeman Society** is calling for abstracts for two guaranteed panels at the 2019 American Literature Association Conference, which will take place May 23-26 in Boston.

Panel 1: Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Religion

While Freeman is not generally considered a religious writer, she has an ambivalent relation to religion that is largely due to her strict, Congregationalist upbringing and, thus, as Fred Pattee put it, her paradoxical “nurturing” in “repression.” Freeman herself left Mount Holyoke Female Seminary after only one year, objecting to its monotonous diet and excessive goadings of conscience. Freeman’s rebellious and controversial relation to religion informs much of her fiction. Fervently religious characters feature, for instance, in such stories as “A Conflict Ended” and “A Far-Away Melody” as well as in her 1894 novel *Pembroke*. Religion can be a route into a modern experience of authenticity, solitude, and individuality, in which case the reader is constructed as modern and secular through the narrator’s encouragement of a detached, almost anthropological stance vis-a-vis religion (Johanningsmeier). But Freeman’s characters also maintain an affective relation to religion and believe in its performativity. Freeman’s stance toward religion is complex, and it is complicated by her experience with her New England community, which was populated not only by Congregationalists but also by Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, Catholics, and people of other denominations. As Aušra Paulauskiene argued at the 2018 ALA conference, Freeman’s widely-anthologized short story “A New England Nun” can be read fruitfully alongside Catholic fictions about religious practice. We are seeking papers that offer fresh perspectives on Freeman’s relation to religion and any sort of religious practice.

Panel 2: Open Topic on Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

We are also soliciting papers on any topic related to Freeman, her society, or her contemporaries. Discussions (and examples) of teaching Freeman’s works are particularly welcome. Please send 250-word abstracts and short vitae to Dr. Myrto Drizou, Assistant Professor at Boğaziçi University (myrto.drizou@boun.edu.tr) by January 15, 2019. For more information about the conference, please consult the ALA website www.americanliterature.org.