

Louisa May Alcott Society: Call for Papers: American Literature Association Conference (May 23-26, 2024)

The Louisa May Alcott Society is sponsoring three panels for the 35th Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, to be held May 23-26, 2024, at The Palmer House Hilton, 17 East Monroe, Chicago, IL 60603.

Session 1: Democracy and Gender in Alcott and Whitman

This session aims to pull together critical reflections on Walt Whitman's and Louisa May Alcott's thinking about democracy. We are especially interested in comparative papers that explore the role of gender in theories of democracy—for instance, the ways Whitman links democracy to “manly love” in the *Calamus* cluster or the ways Alcott imagines a more inclusive society in terms of “a loving league of sisters” in *Work*. We also welcome proposals that consider examinations of Whitman's and Alcott ideas about democracy in relation to race, queer and trans identities, and contemporary political thought and media.

This session is co-sponsored by the Whitman Studies Association and the Louisa May Alcott Society. One-page proposals may be sent to Stephanie Blalock (stephanie-blalock@uiowa.edu) and Gregory Eiselein (eiselei@ksu.edu) by January 15, 2024.

Session 2: “I Had a Stage-Struck Fit”: Alcott, the Stage, and Performance

Charles Dickens said it best: “Every writer, though he may not adopt dramatic form, writes, in effect, for the stage.” Louisa May Alcott is the embodiment of that statement. From the plays she and her sisters wrote and performed as children under their father's watchful and encouraging eye (later published as *Comedic Tragedies*) to her “Scenes from Dickens” and “Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works” that she wrote and performed to raise money for various causes, Alcott's love for the theatre permeated her life and everything she wrote. This panel centers Alcott's love for all aspects of the theatre and explores how her works consistently utilize theatrical elements. Possible topics might include (but are not limited to) the following:

- The influence of Bronson Alcott on his daughter's performance and playwriting
- Alcott's use of the *tableaux vivant* in her juvenile writings and later fiction
- Alcott's use of theatrical devices such as dramatic monologues, setting, make-up, masking, costuming, etc. in her fiction
- Alcott's creation of stage adaptation in her fiction (*Little Women* as a five-act revision of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, for example)
- Sources Alcott used for theatrical scenes (*Idylls of the King* in *A Modern Mephistopheles*, for example)
- Alcott's use of actresses as protagonists, especially in her sensational tales
- Examinations of Alcott's writings in light of recent performance theory

Please send one-page abstracts to Debra Ryals (dryals@pensacolastate.edu) by January 15, 2024.

Session 3: Teaching Alcott's Writings/ Teaching in Alcott's Writings

This panel will provide both a forum for papers highlighting new pedagogical approaches to teaching the work of Louisa May Alcott, as well as papers that engage with how Alcott thematizes pedagogy throughout her writing. Thus we welcome contributors who might present upon fresh classroom strategies and assignments (especially those that use new media technologies), creative syllabi, and course reading lists that place Alcott's life, times, and texts into dialogue with nineteenth-century and/or contemporary concerns including (though not limited to) abolition; the formation of gendered, sexed, and racialized identities; the persistence of income inequality; the precarity of labor under conditions of Gilded-Age capitalism then and now; or the role of pedagogy itself in the construction of (anti-)democratic subjects. What surprising literary/cultural figures might one pair beside Alcott? What role can the digital humanities or podcasting play in teaching the story of Alcott and her times? How can teaching adaptations of Alcott's work on film, television, audiobooks, etc., provide students with a reception history of Alcott and her writing? As the daughter of a pedagogical reformer, a student at Henry David Thoreau's school, and a sometime governess and teacher herself, Alcott's works are themselves saturated with pedagogical concerns. One thinks of *Little Woman's* representations of how didactic fiction like *Pilgrim's Progress* can shape human character; Jo's school for boys at Plumfield as the setting for *Little Men*; or the role of governesses explored in texts like *Work* and *Behind a Mask*. While Bronson Alcott is often remembered for being an innovative pedagogue in his day, how might we read Louisa May Alcott as a powerful theorist of education herself? Anyone who teaches Alcott or thinks about Alcott's approach to teaching is welcome to submit.

Please send one-page abstracts to Joe Conway (jpc0018@uah.edu) and Jaime Lynne Burgess (jamie@jamielynnburgess.com) by January 15, 2024.

Additional details about the 2024 ALA Conference may be found online at:

<http://americanliteratureassociation.org/ala-conferences/ala-annual-conference/>