

**ALA 2025 Call for Papers**  
**Organized by the William James Society**

The William James Society seeks papers for a panel on **“Pragmatism and Literary Studies”** at the 2025 American Literature Association conference in Boston. Pragmatism—at least according to Charles Sanders Peirce’s “Pragmatic Maxim”—is a method for clarifying the meaning of a concept by tracing its practical consequences. When William James practices this method in his famous squirrel-round-the-tree example from *Pragmatism* (1907), he leans on close reading: interpretation “depends on what you *practically mean* by ‘going round’ the squirrel.” For James, pragmatism is less about wielding theories as means to decipher hidden meaning and more about activating theories as “instruments” that might be useful for future interpretive work: “Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one at work.”

This panel seeks papers addressing this central question: what would a pragmatist literary theory look like? What, in other words, does pragmatism offer literary studies? Relevant topics may include:

- the “classical pragmatists” (Peirce, James, Dewey) on literature and aesthetics
- later pragmatists (e.g., Cavell, Rorty) on the role (or lack) of literature in pragmatism
- the relationship between pragmatism and current trends in literary theory (e.g., affect theory, non-suspicious reading)
- American pragmatism from a transnational literary perspective
- pragmatist readings of specific texts

Please send a 250-word abstract and CV to Thomas W. Howard ([thomas.howard@bilkent.edu.tr](mailto:thomas.howard@bilkent.edu.tr)) by 20 January 2025.