

American Literature Association

38th Annual Conference

May 26-29, 2027

Boston, MA

Henry Adams Society

Call for Papers

“Pacific Island Sojourns: The Literary Context of Henry Adams’s Polynesian Engagements.”

In his long diary letters of 1890-1891, Henry Adams documents his epic sojourn among the equatorial islands of the Pacific: Hawai’i, Samoa, Tahiti, Fiji. Distinguished by the detail with which he depicts encounters with human otherness as well as the local impact of imperial forces actively disrupting indigenous island cultures, these letters constitute a major contribution to a body of work in which 19th-century anglophone authors record their travels in the Pacific world.

In addition to proposals that address Adams’s island engagements, we invite those that explore the work of other authors whose observations shape or in some manner overlap with Adams’s epistolary travelogue: Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Constance Gordon-Cumming, Charles Warren Stoddard, John La Farge, Jack London (among others).

Possible topics of investigation might include:

- the redefining—or even questioning—of the voyagers’ initial values as a result of the travel dynamics at work in such epic, sometimes picturesque journeys;
- the dialectics of sorts that might be observed in such writings, potentially resulting in a reversal of more usual or “traditional” perspectives;
- the role of the ocean and its symbolic value as a new frontier to be mapped out and explored;
- the transpacific journey itself as the “natural” continuation of previous transcontinental impulses and its relevance in the further defining—or redefining—of American identity;
- the exposure to otherness, in all its forms, and the potentially renovated perspectives emerging from the encounter with the Other;
- any other aspects illustrating the transformative quality of such Pacific experiences.

Please direct one-page proposals to Florent Atem (florent.atem@upf.pf), William M. Decker (william.decker@okstate.edu), and John C. Orr (orr@up.edu).

Deadline for Proposals: January 24, 2027.