

Call for Papers: American Literature Association (ALA)

Boston, May 2027

Proposed Panel: Lyric Occasions

Lyric poetry has long been bound to occasion — the epithalamium, the elegy, the aubade. Yet even where no occasion is named, lyric stages its own occasionality: the deictic “now,” the apostrophic address to the absent listener, the marvellous fiction of an utterance happening *here*, in this moment, for this reason. We often judge straightforwardly occasional poems, like those written on somebody’s birthday, as trite, light, more like a writing exercise than a lyric poem proper. But what might lyric poetry *need* from a contingent occasion? This panel will ask what it means to read lyric poetry as fundamentally occasional — as poems that construct, perform, or resist the condition of being occasioned.

We invite papers that consider lyric occasions in any period of American literature, from any theoretical, historical, or formal angle. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- **Occasional Address:** poems that are addressed to a certain person on a certain occasion, like epistolary poems, and how they might toggle between the addressee of that particular occasion and a more generic addressee.
- **The Occasional Everyday:** poems that theorize the ongoing occasion of the day, or dailiness.
- **The Occasional Procedure:** poems that take certain occasions as procedures for their generation (i.e. the occasion of December 21 for Bernadette Mayer’s *Midwinter Day*).
- **Theorizing Occasion:** engagements with lyric theory (Culler, Jackson, Vendler, and others) on the tension between occasion’s contingency and lyric’s claims to timelessness or universality.
- **The Anti-Occasional Lyric:** poems that refuse, parody, or trouble the demand to be occasional — private lyric written against public expectation, or occasional forms hollowed out from within.

Submission Guidelines:

Please send a 250–300 word abstract and a brief bio or CV to Lara Meintjes (larameintjes@berkeley.edu) and Hannah Piette (hannah.piette@yale.edu) by December 10th, 2026. Please note any AV requirements with your submission.