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ICLA Research Committee on Religion, Ethics, and Literature / 2020-21

I. Scope

The research committee investigates the philosophical and theoretical roles of religion and ethics in relation to literature, as well as explores the fraught relationship between secularism and post-secularism. It examines global literary phenomena as instances of subject formation in order to rethink new relationships between these three disciplines. We are particularly concerned with the modern displacement of religion, and modernity's epistemological underpinnings as these aspects reflect judgments about the world, culture, and its relationship to a religious past. While the examination of religious imagery, symbolism and the role of myth will not be the purview of this committee, the signifiers of religion in as much as they motivate "an ethical turn" in the text is a key element of the committee's purview.

As a result, the committee has a wide-ranging concern with the interstitial space that literature makes visible, a space that is not reducible to the literary, religious, or ethical, and yet intersects with all of these nodes of expression. In other words, we question the epistemologies and categories that underwrite the ways that religion, and ethics coalesce around an aesthetic and/or literary object. In this way, the committee proposes literature to be unique in its ontology.

II. Publication and Research

In 2020, the committee's research volume, *The Fault Lines of Modernity: the Fractures and Repairs of Religion, Ethics, and Literature* became available in paperback. A collection of thirteen essays, the contributors represent early career researchers, graduate students and senior scholars in comparative literature and related disciplines. Its essays engage a range of theoretical projects, encompassing literary traditions in Russian, German, French, Hebrew, English, Hindi, Afrikaans, and Japanese. The collection is listed as part of Bloomsbury's Religion, Philosophy, and Literature division, and is included within its Cultural Histories collection. Consequently, it is marketed not only to comparatists, but also scholars within religion, philosophy, and other related fields.

Due to Professor Millet's new series *Comparative Jewish Literatures* (Bloomsbury), committee members working on Jewish texts within comparative literature have new opportunities for their projects. The series aims both to establish Jewish literatures as a subfield within comparative literature and to connect comparatists working with Jewish literary traditions to scholars within Jewish Studies in order to foster a deeper and richer understanding of the notion of the "Jewish text."

III. Conferences

The committee co-sponsored one 2021 ACLA seminar, with the ICLA Committee on Gender. It comprised 16 papers to be presented over 3 days. The committee welcomed two new members into its cohort and both ICLA committees are determining further avenues for collaboration between our constituencies.

The committee's new research project, Zoom conferences and workshops on topics of interest to our members globally, is evolving; we hope to launch our first such workshop for early career researchers in the coming months. The committee hopes that having online conferences and workshops, biannually, will lessen a growing sense of isolation, that several have communicated to me since ACLA's cancellation. My immediate goal is to have each of the committee's officers and

several of the senior professor members in our committee host one such event. The long term goal is to transform each cohort of presenters into a work group on subtopics for eventual publication so that the committee continues to identify venues in which members can submit their research for peer review and publication.

IV. Membership, General Information, and Officers

With its inception in 2014-15, the committee became a three-year renewable committee with the ICLA. At the 2020 Executive Council Meeting, we were renewed for another three-year term. The research committee comprises 81 members, gaining approximately 3-6 members annually, membership boosts after the Macau and Vienna Congresses, as well as at ACLA in Utrecht. Hence our membership is global and particularly active in Europe, the United States, and Israel. We have four officers, Professor Kitty Millet (San Francisco State University) chairperson; Professor John Hawley (Santa Clara University), first vice president; Katie Lally, Doctoral Student (University of California, Santa Cruz), second vice president; Dr. Zainab Mahmood, Visiting Assistant Professor (NYU/Shanghai), third vice president.

For now, the committee website contains a copy of our quarterly reports, lists our sponsored panels at different conferences, provides a list of our members, updates our publications progress, and offers instructions for membership (<http://online.sfsu.edu/kmillet1/faultlinesgrp.html>). However, the committee will migrate its site to another server sometime before the end of 2022. Although Professor Kitty Millet (kmillet1@sfsu.edu) chairs the committee, committee members remain actively engaged in growing the committee, determining its next events, and targeting potential audiences. The committee remains active in the national comparative literature associations and offers at least one multi-day seminar at the ACLA annually.