

American Religion and Literature Society Newsletter

Wilder Family Funds New Publication for ARLS Members

By Deshae E. Lott

This initial issue of the American and Literature Society (ARLS) newsletter reaches ARLS and American Literature Association members because of the gift from Tappan Wilder and Catharine Wilder Guiles, executors of the estates of playwright Thornton Wilder, their uncle, and theologian Amos N. Wilder, their father.

We join the Wilder Family in their memorial tribute to these two prominent figures in America's *belles lettres* and in their belief that Thornton and Amos would appreciate the ideas ARLS members explore. We hope that you will find provocative the following excerpts the family shared with us for inclusion in the initial *ARLS Newsletter*; material is quoted with the permission of Tappan Wilder. As the selections from their narrative, poetic, and dramatic works reveal, both brothers envision the creative space as both dark and light, chaotic and orderly. Their writings seek to illuminate

for us the beauty and divine amidst the horrible and the mundane and the hope that creation and exploration offer humanity.

Amos N. Wilder

"Modern letters and the modern arts ... testify to the changing experience of mankind, at least in the West. A concern with this change is one legitimate approach to literature since language and reality are so closely related. The vicissitudes of the word open up to us today as in all periods basic issues with respect to past and present, tradition and revolt, meaning and vitality. What we are going through can be seen as a crucible of language, a crucible of images, a testing and transformation of signs and symbols, a revolution of sensibility. This situation is one which engages all our disciplines, all our traditions, all our vocations in mutual illumination." (Continued on Page 3)

ARLS Embraces a Logo in Its Eighth Year

By Susan Rushing Adams with Kathleen Smith and Deshae E. Lott

Special thanks to our graphic artist, Daniel Smith, for creating an image that matched our vision for it.

The Book

The open book suggests the ways that religion and literature open up some of the most difficult and meaningful questions of human existence, presenting space for un-

derstanding and improving ourselves and the world in which we live. From the *Bay Book of Psalms* to Zen poetry, American literature—the book—provides shared and often individual expressions and interpretations of religion, reflecting and reinforcing our connection to the divine and to one another. The printed word allows us to explore and explain our world and ourselves, giving insight into what motivates and inspires us. (Continued on Page 2)

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American Religion and Literature

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Special points of interest:

- Toast the *ARLS Newsletter: a New Forum for ARLS Members Created in Part with a Grant from the Wilder Family.*
- Note Our New ARLS Logo.
- ARLS Seeks Your Ideas and Talents. Contact Any Officer to Present Your Suggestions, Skills, & Other Resources.
- Check Out Members' Poems!

ARLS Embraces a Logo in Its Eighth Year, Continued

The Door

The American Religion and Literature Society offers its members a space to raise as many questions about religious culture in America as we answer, to open doors into rooms that have not been investigated, and to re-investigate what we deem familiar, compelling, resurgent. We answer one question, sometimes in multiple ways, but new questions crop up. As we recognize structures, systems, and codes that define the human community, we also celebrate the diversity of the belief systems that appear in American literary works, welcoming shared scholarship on the varied expressions of religious and spiritual thought.

The Spiral

The spiritual journey may be compared to an outward spiral

that we each traverse, revisiting old places while progressing ever closer to the infinite, to the eternal, to God. The journey is both individual and collective, so that the spiral identifies similarities and differences at the spiritual level just as the familiar double helix identifies them at the genetic level. When Watson and Crick published their research on the double helix structure of DNA, they confirmed and extended the research of earlier eminent biologists and geneticists such as Mendel. Their discovery opened more doors and led to entirely new fields of research; this is what we, too, seek to do. Science alone cannot fully illuminate the human condition, but here at the intersection of religion and literature, we can examine such issues as personal choice, values, and faith, letting each discovery lead to others.

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Call for Contributions to Future *ARLS Newsletter* Issues

The editors of the *ARLS Newsletter* welcome submissions from ARLS members. We seek article abstracts, brief book reviews, calls for papers, notice of members' publications, news of interesting journals, resources for researchers, and short creative pieces. Send your ideas and contributions to

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and

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Projected Contents for the Next Issue:

- ALA 2005 Panelists' Abstracts
- 2004 Scholarly Books of Interest to ARLS Members
- Academic Journals of Interest to ARLS Members
- ALA 2006 CFP for ARLS Panels
- Members' Short Creative Works, Research Notes, Book Reviews

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Tell Us What You'd Like to See in the *ARLS Newsletter*.

Showcase Your Work!

Share Your Ideas and Discoveries.

ARLS Members' Poems Add to Our Field of Study

Dickinson At Her Window

By Charlotte Mandel

A banner at my beck ~ The Pleiades
furls through the window frame ~
shimmering spectrum ~
planets on rounds and I

in their midst ~ a sharp
discourteous collision Windrush
as gravity explodes Earth
a blue marble sent flying

on the snap of a child's knuckle ~
my soul's torn out page
spinning between light
and the body's shadow

Radiance leans into me ~ and Dark ~
Recto and Verso read as one ~
that no portion may be
left ragged in the path of the sun

(Continued on Page 3)

Wilder Family Funds New ARLS Newsletter, Continued

The null point
Breeds new algebras,
The ruin in nature
Proffers auguries ...

From "A Hard Death"

Thornton Wilder

THE BOY: What further remains to be done? You have poured on my eyes and ears and mouth the divine ointment; you have laid on my tongue the burning ember. Why do we delay? ... I am not afraid of life. I will astonish it. ...

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED: Others shall know a certain

peace, and shall live well enough in the limits of the life they know; but you shall be forever hindered. For you there shall be ever beyond the present a lost meaning and a more meaningful love.... The life of man awaits you, the light laughter and the misery in the same day, in the selfsame hour the trivial and the divine. You are to give it a voice. Among the bewildered and the stammering thousands you are to give it a voice and to mark its meaning.

From the playlet *Nascuntur Poetae* found in *The Collected Short Play of Thornton Wilder, Vol. II* (1998)

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ARLS members appreciate the opportunity the Wilder Family offers us by providing the start-up funds for a newsletter.

ARLS Members' Poems, Continued

Wooden Virgin With Child

By Alicia Ostriker

Once the trunk of a lovely tree
She sits on her narrow chair
In an alcove of the Cloisters.
Patient, modestly shawled,
As yet only slightly hunched,
For she is still young, in fact
(Though dry, cracked a bit
Flecks of paint clinging to bodice)
Like one fresh from the convent.
Selfless, she does what she's told
But will not meet your eye.
The manchild between her knees like a doll,
Hand risen to bless, but headless,
Is the one with the book.

You and I stand and look
In our velvet jackets and tough
Boots, free to come or go,
At this mystery. Who
Would have been the model, was she
The sculptor's mother, was she his wife?
Honor his wisdom, to know
That God needs the protection
Of this sad, simple woman,

His wish also to pity her, she
Who is said to be the incarnation of pity.

(from *No Heaven*, U of Pittsburgh P, 2005. With permission.)

Little Who, My Mule

By Marilyn Sherwin Burel

She hung me out
over a cliff so high
the trail boss said *a man*
could roll a cigarette
and smoke it before he
hit bottom.
Her rump followed
her neck around Devil's
Corkscrew, down Jacob's
Ladder. I learned to trust her
clop clop clop clop
as I'd learned to trust
the Creator of lavender verbena
and tiny barrel cactus blooming
fuchsia from Paleozoic rock
imprinted by reptile toes
two billion years ago
before the reign of dinosaurs.
I settled into her saddle,
stared at our destination,
the ancient sage snake below,
the digger of this Grand Canyon.

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History and Goals of ARLS

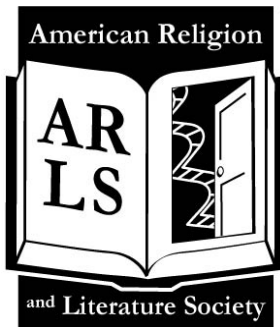
Founded in 1997, the American Religion and Literature Society (ARLS) is a member society of the American Literature Association (ALA). ARLS explores the mutual influence of religion and literature in American culture. We welcome a variety of scholarly approaches and methodologies that will put the traditional religion and literature canon in conversation with new texts and perspectives. Literary artifacts may include, but are not restricted to, print texts such as novels, short stories, poetry and non-fiction prose from any period of American history. Religious and spiritual experience may be broadly construed, favoring no religious creed or affiliation.

ARLS officers work throughout each academic year to help members see their panel and presentation ideas manifest into engaging sessions at the annual ALA meeting each May. ARLS holds a business meeting open to all ARLS members or potential members and encourages ARLS members to gather informally for dinner during the conference. ARLS typically has held a reception at the ALA meeting. In these settings members often suggest future program topics. In

lieu of an expensive reception, this year officers chose to allocate funds generated from membership dues to the newsletter that encourages communications among ARLS members, whether or not they attend the ALA meeting.

The founders of ARLS aimed to create possibilities for conversation that do not exist within some of the larger professional societies. ARLS members tend to express interests in pedagogical approaches to religion and literature, in scholarly endeavors within the broad category of religion and literature, and in a personal, spiritual journey. We determine success by a sense that ARLS has nurtured both a meaningful witness to the vitality of religion-and-literature studies as well as collegial friendships within the field.

Any individual interested in chairing or presenting during an ARLS panel or interested in contributing to the ARLS newsletter must be an active ARLS member. We invite members to offer suggestions and contributions to the ARLS officers and newsletter editors and invite non-members to join us. ∞



Joining ARLS

Membership Form

To join ARLS or to renew your current membership, submit this page or a photocopy of it to the ARLS Treasurer.

Kind of Membership:

- Faculty Member
- Graduate Student/Independent Scholar
- Returning Member
- New Member

Method of Payment

- Check
- Money Order
- Visa
- MasterCard
- American Express

Dues

\$15.00
\$10.00

Send Membership Form to:
Kathleen Smith, ARLS Treasurer
and Webmaster
English Department
LSUS
One University Place
Shreveport, LA 71115

E-Mail: ksmith@pilot.lsus.edu
Phone: 318-797-5270
Fax: 318-797-5290

Credit Card # _____

Exp. date _____

Signature _____

Name _____

E-Mail Address _____

Address _____

Phone _____

List Your Areas of Scholarly Interest:

Do you have a call for papers you would like to share? A session you would like to chair? If so, please briefly describe its topic here, and e-mail the ARLS President with more details.

Researchers' Resource: The American Tract Society

By Susan Rushing Adams

With thanks to Kristen Mitrisin, ATS Archivist

Tract societies, often overlooked in the scholarly study of religious culture, were important influences on religious life and immigrant culture in New York in the 19th century. The largest of these societies, the American Tract Society (ATS), was founded in 1825 and housed in New York's publishing center between the offices of the *New York Tribune* and *The New York Times*. Colporteurs (traveling agents) distributed the tracts, which were used as tools for Christian evangelism; at one point tracts were printed in 188 languages and dialects. ATS also published religious classics such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, schoolbooks, and children's books.

Not wishing to alienate potential Southern converts, ATS

chose not to take an official position in tract publications regarding abolition. However, Henry Ward Beecher served on ATS' board of directors, and Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Earthly Care, A Heavenly Discipline* for ATS of Boston, which broke from the New York group and was more vocal about abolition. The New York and Boston societies rejoined after the Civil War to provide former slaves with housing and education, helping to establish and manage Freedman's Village in Arlington Heights, Virginia.

Relocated to Garland, Texas, in 1978, the American Tract Society is celebrating its 180th anniversary and continues to publish tracts. It now houses the Frank E. Gaebelein Memorial Library, an extensive archive of the tracts and other publications. More information about these resources is available at: <http://www.atstracts.org>. ∞

ARLS Members' Publications

Roy Anker, *Catching Light: Looking for God in the Movies* (Eerdmans, 2004).

Jewel Spears Brooker, *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge UP, 2004).

Jacqueline Doyle, "Faces of the Virgin in Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek*," in *Things of the Spirit: Women Writers Constructing Spirituality*, ed. Kristina K. Groover (U of Notre Dame P, 2004).

John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in American from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford UP, 2004).

Emily Griesinger, "The Shape of Things to Come: Toward an Eschatology of Literature" in *Christianity and Literature* 53.2 (Winter 2004): 203-232.

Susan M. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism & Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge UP, 2004).

Deshae E. Lott, "All Things Are Different Appearances of

the Same Emptiness': Buddhism and Jack Kerouac's Nature Writings" in *Subterraneans and Celebrities: Reconstructing the Beat Generation*, ed. Jennie Skerl (Palgrave Macmillan-St. Martins; 2004).

David McGlynn, "Eclipse" in *Western Humanities Review* 56.1 (2002): 32-42.

—, "Flesh and Blood" in *Black Warrior Review* 30.1 (2004): 48-61 .

—, "The Space Between Our Bodies" in *Image* 30 (2001): 5-14.

—, "Virginity" in *The Mars Hill Review* 17 (2001): 19-30.

Mary R. Reichardt, *Catholic Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Greenwood, 2001).

—, *Exploring Catholic Literature: A Companion and Resource Guide* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

—, ed. *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature*. 2 Vols. (Greenwood, 2004). ∞

Journals of Interest to ARLS Members

By Catherine A. Rogers

ARLS will publish occasional random samplings of periodicals that may interest our members, whether as opportunities to publish, resources for research, or simply interesting reading. If you know of a journal that should be better known, please tell us about it.

This Issue's List Follows:

Magistra: A Journal of Women's Spirituality in History. A refereed journal, published semi-annually, focusing on "feminine" spirituality as practiced by both women and men.

Though rooted in Christian monasticism, the editors welcome articles dealing with other traditions. Contact Sr. Judith Sutera, OSB, Mount St. Scholastica, 801 S. 8th, Atchison, KS, 66002.

Parabola: Myth, Tradition, and the Search for Meaning. Aimed at the educated general reader, publishes serious, well-researched articles on "the quest for meaning as expressed in the world's myths, symbols, and religious traditions," particularly related to modern life. Not academic, but worth a look. More information is available at <http://www.parabola.org>.

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American Religion and Literature Society

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Explore Our Website!

www.arlshome.org

ARLS Panels at ALA Meeting in Boston, May 26-29, '05

Though meeting rooms and panel dates and times remain unavailable at the print date for this newsletter, you may input these details in the space below when you view a print or online conference program. Full conference information is available at the following url:
http://www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/ala2/american_literature_2005.html

Epiphany and Anti-Epiphany: Authorial Responses to an Ambiguous World

Date:

Time: **Room:**

Chair: Michael A. Brown, Creighton University

"Concealment and Anti-Epiphany in American Naturalism and Realism," Robert Murray, St. Thomas Aquinas College.

"Puritan Anagnorisis: Thornton Wilder's Dramatic Awakenings," Lincoln Konkle, The College of New Jersey.

Informal Business Meeting

T.B.A. at ARLS panels

Nontraditional Awakenings: Redemption through Fiction

Date:

Time: **Room:**

Chair: Kathleen Smith, Louisiana State University in Shreveport

"Grace Awakenings in Flannery O'Connor's 'The River,'" Rachel Payne, Baylor University.

"'They Think They Know the Answers': Born Again Awakenings in Anne Tyler's Saint Maybe," Jonathan Little, Alverno College.

"Confabulating the Confessional: Tim O'Brien's Formal Strategies in The Things They Carried," David McGlynn, University of Utah. ∞