



Call for papers

International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA)

Research Committee on Religion, Ethics, and Literature Panel

on

The Sacred and The Profane

for

XVII Biennial International Conference

organised by

Comparative Literature Association of India

in collaboration with

University of Delhi

(10th - 12th September, 2024)

In Jewish tradition, letters, words, texts, possess “secret” elements. Their existence implies that profane matter is constrained to bear the sacred so that a sacred phenomenal core erupts from its material prison in order to reveal a “secret.” While the project is associated with kabbalah in Judaism, its culmination occurs with the Polish novelist, Bruno Schulz, whose theory of immanent matter and golems suggests that the profane has always possessed this “mysterious” possibility. Although some might decry Schulz’s theory of immanence as heresy, it remains a driver in American fiction without parallel, so much so that Cynthia Ozick returns to the theme in *The Messiah of Stockholm*, *The Pagan Rabbi*, and *The Cannibal Galaxy*. Adam Mansbach’s recent *Golem of Brooklyn* also returns to this supposition positing the golem as the true.

In Christian tradition, texts have always been the bearer of the logos. Even the Christian testament’s pronouncement that the “word was made flesh” implies that profane matter can be transformed into sacred object. Christian messianism relies on this very decree. Thus literature’s uneasy occupation of the secular triggers ethical questions in western fiction:

can profane phenomenal experiences produce sacred texts? Is the sacred ever expressed mimetically in literature? This seminar looks at literature as the bearer of “secret” and “mysterious” traditions and asks whether these traditions are tied to “sacred” phenomena that choose expression in the profane, the secular, or whether the inversion of the question is more accurate: can profane phenomena produce sacred objects? In relation to literature, can the secular text ever be imagined as sacred? If it can, does the sacral element transform literary ontology? Does such a metamorphosis introduce an ethical obligation in literature?

The ICLA Research Committee on Religion, Ethics, and Literature, invites submissions that deal comparatively with any themes or writers that discuss “the sacred and the profane” from the context of literature, broadly construed. We are particularly interested in analyses that extend Eliade’s theories, that include “minor” traditions of literature, in languages other than English, and/or that offer alternative readings of canonical texts in any literary tradition.

Abstracts of about 300 words along with a short bio-note of about 50 words may be submitted to kmillet1@sfsu.edu and keep clai2024@admin.du.ac.in in CC. The last date to send your abstract is 31st May 2024.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: SUBMISSIONS TO THIS PANEL MUST BE CLEARLY MARKED
“ICLA RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON RELIGION, ETHICS, AND LITERATURE
PANEL” IN THE EMAIL’S SUBJECT LINE.**