



2016 American Lectures in the History of Religions (ALHR)

Presents

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Unsilencing the Sacred: Poetic Conversations with the Divine

Speaking Truth to Power: Candid Conversations with the Divine

Monday, October 24, 4:00 PM

University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Center for International Studies (Great Hall)

Echoes in the Cosmic Chamber: Love's Voice in the Poems of Hafez

Tuesday, October 25, 4:00 PM

University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Center for International Studies (Auditorium)

Strolling in the Garden of Desire: Sadi's (Homo)erotic conversations

Wednesday, October 26, 3:30 PM

Northwestern University, Harris Hall 108

"Do the Stars in Heaven Speak?" Rumi, a Poet for the 21st Century

Thursday, October 27, 7:15 PM

Elmhurst College, Frick Center

Hubbub in the Wine House: The Mutinous Voice in 'Attar and 'Iraqi

Friday, October 28th, 4:30pm

University of Chicago, Saieh Hall 146

Unsilencing the Sacred: Poetic Conversations with the Divine

Sunday, November 20, 3:00pm

Convention Center-Stars at Night 4 (3rd Level), San Antonio, TX

Sponsored by the American Academy of Religion, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame, Northwestern University, Elmhurst College, and University of Chicago

All lectures are open to the public, but you must be registered to attend the San Antonio lecture. Information on registration is available [here](#).

About the ALHR

The American Lectures in the History of Religions (ALHR) was founded in 1891 to encourage path-breaking scholarship through a lecture and book series. ALHR flourished under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies and Columbia University from 1936 to 1994, at which point the American Academy of Religion assumed administrative responsibility for the series.

In 2002 the ALHR was disbanded due to the sudden passing of the scheduled lecturer. The Executive Director for the AAR, Jack Fitzmier, created the ALHR Committee in 2013, which was charged with electing a lecturer to deliver and publish the American Lectures in the History of Religions in order to revive the series. Through the support of the AAR and the hard work of the ALHR Committee members Louis Ruprecht, Jr., Ebrahim Moosa, and Pamela Klassen, the ALHR is once again establishing itself as an avenue of valuable discourse and scholasticism in the history of religions.

As the culmination to the Lecture Series, the ALHR has now teamed with the AAR to provide a final lecture from each series at the Annual Meeting. The ALHR Lecture Series is planned to continue biennially, with the 2018 series presenting Dr. Jeffrey Stout (Princeton University) in Research Triangle, NC. Historically, at the conclusion of the lectures many of the presenters have had their lectures published through Columbia University Press. ALHR plans to continue this relationship well into the future, as every lecture series will now be published through Columbia University Press.

About the Lecturer

Fatemeh Keshavarz, born and raised in the city of Shiraz, completed her studies in Shiraz University, and University of London. She taught at Washington University in St. Louis for over twenty years where she chaired the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures from 2004 to 2011. In 2012, Keshavarz joined the University of Maryland as Roshan Institute Chair in Persian Studies, and Director of Roshan Institute for Persian Studies. Keshavarz is the author of award winning books including *Reading Mystical Lyric: the Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (USC Press, 1998), *Recite in the Name of the Red Rose* (USC Press, 2006) and a book of literary analysis and social commentary titled *Jasmine and Stars: Reading more than Lolita in Tehran* (UNC Press, 2007). She has also published other books and numerous journal articles. Keshavarz is a published poet in Persian and English and an activist for peace and justice. She was invited to speak at the UN General Assembly on the significance of cultural education. Her NPR show "The Ecstatic Faith of Rumi" brought her the Peabody Award in 2008. In the same year, she received the Herschel Walker Peace and Justice Award.

Monday, October 25, 4:00 PM

University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Center for International Studies

Speaking Truth to Power: Candid Conversations with the Divine

Within Islamic poetic traditions, the conversations addressed to God have at times been less than smooth agreements. In classical Persian literature, the daring/blasphemous assertions of Omar Khayyam (d. 1131) are well-known. This presentation suggests that candid conversations with the Divine were not limited to skeptics. Nor did they neatly fit into the “rebellion versus obedience” binary. Believing mystics often used the dynamics of ambivalence, doubt, inquiry and sarcasm to open up a fresh poetic arena in which to redefine popular perceptions of the sacred presence. In the process, they demanded divine justice – and by extension the attention of the political and religious authorities – to marginalized issues and classes.

Tuesday, October 25, 4:00 PM

University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Center for International Studies

Echoes in the Cosmic Chamber: Love’s Voice in the Poems of Hafez

Known as the “tongue of the unseen,” Hafez of Shiraz (d. 1390) is to this day popularly believed to be speaking with a knowledge nourished by the divine and inaccessible to ordinary mortals. Scholars such as Annemarie Schimmel have compared his lyrics to perfectly polished diamonds. This presentation lays out the geography – and the poetic cosmology - of the seamlessly connected spaces within which our poet moved. It demonstrates that in their poetic and multilayered constructions of cosmic chambers and dilapidated wine shops, the ghazals of Hafez put the voice of the Divine and that of the ordinary fellow in an elegant and meaningful conversation with far reaching echoes. Over the centuries, these conversations have excited as much literary/religious debate as they have fired up the imagination of a vast popular readership.

Wednesday, October 26, 3:30 PM

Northwestern University, Harris Hall 108

Strolling in the Garden of Desire: Sadi's (Homo)erotic conversations

If Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden for approaching the forbidden tree, Sa’di’s (d. 1297) lyrical garden is one of presence and possibility. His garden of ghazals is an attempt - in Julia Kristeva’s words - “to open up the amorous experience of the speaking being to the complex gamut of his untenable passion, paradise and hell included.” Unlike ‘Eraqi or Attar, Sa’di’s poetic voice is not mutinous. The garden in which he has us stroll, is not the counter-space of a dilapidated wine house. It is a fresh, orderly, and vibrant garden infused with a divine lyrical ambience in which beauty is central. This beauty is not abstract or formless either. It is erotic and embodied. Clear and candid about the gender and the nature of the inhabitants of the garden, Sa’di keeps the gates open to all varieties of beauty and love including homoerotic imagery. This presentation explores role of the (homo)erotic desire/energy in connecting with the Divine.

Thursday, October 27, 7:15 PM

Elmhurst College, Frick Center

“Do the Stars in Heaven Speak?” Rumi, a Poet for the 21st Century

Jalal al-Din Rumi (1273) has been a best-selling poet in translation in many parts of the globe for several decades now. He is embraced by those in the center and periphery of the tradition and crowned as the king of the New Age spirituality. How is a towering mystic immersed in the religious/scholarly tradition of his times speaking to us all in the 21st century? He did mix poetry with music and whirling, to be sure. And his life was altered after meeting a wandering dervish by the name of Shams of Tabriz. But what did that encounter change, exactly? How rooted was he in the religion of Islam? Did he care about writing poetry? Why was he so enamored of silence? If silence was central, why did he speak so much – and often to the Divine? This presentation explores the reasons why Rumi has become a poet for all seasons.

Friday, October 28, 4:30 PM

University of Chicago, Saieh Hall 146

Hubbub in the Wine House: The Mutinous Voice in ‘Attar and ‘Iraqi

‘Attar of Nishapur (d. 1220) - pharmacist, Sufi poet, and hagiographer - was a learned and careful scholar. However, when he wrote ghazals, he transformed into an antinomian figure with mutinous thoughts and actions. Fakhr al-Din ‘Iraqi (d. 1288) lived a controversial life equally known for pious conformity as for acts of transgression and misconduct. Among the latter was his love for a young minstrel boy whom he pursued from Hamadan, Iran to northern India. This presentation is centered on the deliberately mutinous note that animates the voices of such Sufi poets. This is particularly the case in moments of encounters with the Divine. Utilizing the genre of ghazal, these poets rebel against every generic, social, and religious convention that underpin the tradition that they revere. The wine-house becomes the center of the mutiny and the hubbub rising from this counter-establishment space fuels their poetic energy and spiritual quest. Where is the Divine located in all this?

Sunday, November 20, 3:00pm

AAR & SBL Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX

Convention Center-Stars at Night 4 (3rd Level)

Unsilencing the Sacred: Poetic Conversations with the Divine

This presentation is a general summation of the above inquiries into the verbal/poetic exchanges with the Divine. The purpose here is not to determine if our poets succeeded in reaching a divine cosmic presence. Nor is it to decode, understand, or interpret the content of these exchanges. Even though both these themes can be the subject of independent studies, the focus here is on the ways in which these exchanges – these imaginative struggles with language as Detweiler would call them – open up new conceptual spaces in which the locus, purpose, and meaning of the Divine may be re-imagined and re-articulated.