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Sarah W. Sherman

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus, sarah.sherman@unh.edu

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Travels to England



Sarah Sherman

Associate Professor of English - College of Liberal Arts

Professor Sarah Sherman traveled to England in July to attend a conference on "Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers in Great Britain, Ireland, and Europe," and to chair a panel.



Sherman, second from the right, with colleagues who were on the panel she chaired, "New Englanders in Great Britain in the 1890s."

I am very grateful to have received a CIE grant to help fund my travel to Oxford, England this July for a conference entitled "Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers in Great Britain, Ireland and Europe." The conference was sponsored by the Harriet Beecher Stowe Society, the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Society, and the Margaret Fuller Society, as well as the Rothermere American Institute and St. Catherine's College, both based in Oxford. My UNH colleague, Professor Brigitte Bailey, was one of the conference organizers and another UNH colleague, Professor Lisa MacFarlane, also attended. Other participants in this truly transatlantic conference included scholars from England, Ireland, Germany, France, Norway, Canada, and Turkey. In fact, the panel that I chaired, on "New Englanders in Great Britain in the 1890s," included two scholars from England (Alison Easton from Lancaster University and F. Jane Silvey, an independent scholar based in Worcester, England) and a third from Turkey (Stephanie Palmer, an American now teaching American studies at Bilkent University). Jane Silvey and Alison Easton's papers dealt with transatlantic intellectual and literary influences on Sarah Orne Jewett, a writer I have studied extensively. It was fascinating to hear about the rich, new connections they had unearthed. A current interest of mine, in both my research and teaching, is the way that nineteenth-century writers like Jewett treated issues raised by liberal religious and political

thought. On this topic, both papers were illuminating. Silvey's addressed the long-standing correspondence between Jewett and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, the English author of a best-selling and controversial novel, *Robert Elsmere* (1888), about the intellectual and spiritual development of a young Protestant minister. Easton's paper looked at the wide range of Jewett's reading in English liberalism and her appreciation of progressive Episcopal ministers such as Boston's Phillips Brooks. A central goal of the conference was to bring these kinds of previously unstudied relationships to light and I thought the panelists succeeded brilliantly. Similarly, Stephanie Palmer's paper on Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, a local color writer and contemporary of Jewett's, demonstrated the complexities of transatlantic literary interpretation through a comparative study of English and American reviews of Freeman's New England stories. It was startling at times to see how differently English and American writers read the same texts: a case study in comparative cultural analysis. Other panels offered equally ground-breaking papers. For example, a talk on Harriet Beecher Stowe revealed her deep knowledge of German historicist criticism of the Bible and her application of those interpretive theories in her novels. A fascinating paper on George Sand persuasively argued that antebellum women writers in the United States were crucially influenced by this scandalous French woman writer, an influence they acknowledged in their private letters and journals, but felt forced to deny in public. I could continue at much greater length, but let me just say that this was a remarkably productive and inspiring conference, marked by great collegiality and good-will and capped by a magisterial keynote speech given by Elaine Showalter, a revered founder of the field of women's literary studies. I should add that, as an editor for the publishing series "Becoming Modern: New Nineteenth-Century Studies," which has transatlantic studies as part of its mission, I also used the conference as an opportunity to scout for promising manuscripts. I discussed some exciting projects with authors from both the US and abroad and managed, I hope, to raise awareness of the series, which is sponsored by the University of New Hampshire Press and the University Press of New England. Finally, my stay in Oxford was inspiring in itself. I had never been there before and the city was just as beautiful as writers have described it. To be part of such a wonderful scholarly occasion in such a storied place was pure magic and I am, again, extraordinarily grateful to the CIE for helping to make my trip possible.



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Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-2398 • Fax 603-862-0169

Thompson Hall • 105 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-1288 • Fax 603-862-0844

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