Brigitte Bailey, Associate Professor of English, COLA travels to France

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One of the most substantial shifts in recent American literary studies has been the move to understand US writings in transatlantic and global contexts. This development has prompted new thinking about the modern nation, as a concept created in transnational contexts, and about writers who at once identify strongly with their nation of origin and have sustained international careers. For three days, 5-7 July 2017, I attended the Society for the Study of American Women Writers conference “Border Crossings: Translation, Migration, and Gender in the Americas, the Transatlantic, and the Transpacific” in the beautiful and historic French city of Bordeaux. Traveling to Bordeaux gave me the opportunity to participate in the SSAWW’s first international conference, to join a panel on the 19th-century writer Margaret Fuller, to discuss future collaborations with a fellow Fuller scholar working on a digital project, and to chair another panel. More broadly, it gave me the chance to absorb current scholarship on the ways in which transnational approaches are reshaping our thinking about women writers from Harriet Beecher Stowe to Susan Sontag.

The SSAWW conference’s location at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne, which hosted the conference, and its topic brought together US and European scholars. For example, on my panel, “Margaret Fuller Across Borders,” I, the chair, and one other panelist were from the US, while three other panelists were from Denmark, Italy, and Russia. Fuller was an antebellum...
Panelists at dinner in Bordeaux: Prof. Bailey, Professor Sonia Di Loreto of the University of Torino, Professor Christa Holm Vogelius of the University of Copenhagen, Charlene Avallone of Hawaii (an independent scholar and our panel’s chair), Professor Marina P. Kizima of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and Professor Kathleen Lawrence of Georgetown University.

Panelists discussed her early reading of European writers, her pedagogy, her dispatches to the Tribune, and her reception in the Russian press in 1850. My paper, “Travel, Gender, and Genre in Fuller’s European Writings,” discussed the Tribune dispatches; in doing so, I was drawing on a long involvement with Fuller’s Italian journalism, but I was also looking ahead to my next project, on antebellum periodical writings. After our session, I met with one of my fellow panelists, Professor Sonia Di Loreto, from the University of Torino, to discuss my possible contribution to her digital project contextualizing and analyzing Fuller’s transnational correspondence and publications. This is an exciting project, and I am glad to be invited to participate. I ended the conference by chairing another 19th-century session, which included two papers on Fuller—also innovative and illuminating research.

I have been involved in conferences and publications in this field for the last 10 years. In order to bring this burgeoning area of study to campus, in 2014 I created a graduate seminar on “Antebellum Transatlantic Writers.” The experience at this conference will enrich this seminar the next time I teach it and will allow me to introduce students more fully to this current scholarly conversation.

I was also glad to explore Bordeaux: its medieval cathedral, 18th-century waterfront (especially dramatic at night), and such 19th-century sites as the Monument aux Girondins, a public intellectual—a transcendentalist, editor, and journalist—whose career stretched from Boston to Rome, where she covered the 1848-49 Roman Revolution for the New-York Tribune.
dramatic fountain memorializing moderate French revolutionaries executed during the 1793 reign of Terror. As a parting gift, the host of the bed and breakfast where we stayed handed us a bottle of excellent Bordeaux.

Back to Faculty Travel Reports Index >> (/global/faculty-travel-reports)