

23rd Annual Conference of the English and American Literature Association

Theme: Secrets

Conference organizers: English and American Literature Association of the Republic of China (EALA, Taiwan) & National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan

Date: October 31, 2015

Venue: National Cheng Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan

Call for Papers

Originating from old Latin *se*-("apart") and *cernere*("sift"), "secret" means "hidden, concealed, and private," thereby signifying the distinction between the true and the false, the light and the dark, the self and the other, and the private and the public. This definition has its history and origin, and yet it is questioned and challenged nowadays by post-modernism and post-structuralism, as when Derrida considers in "Literature in Secret," "Pardon for keeping the secret, and the secret of a secret . . . of not meaning at all." If the secret one keeps is a secret "of not meaning at all," unveiling the secret simply reveals its nothingness. And yet, without the endeavor to unveil the secret, how can one know that there is nothing behind it? Nothingness may allow one to inscribe (once again) the so-called "truth" or delusion. Moreover, when one part of the secret is revealed, others may be veiled. Is nothingness really nothing? This interplay between covering and uncovering the truth is where the complexity of the secret lies. The question of the secret is then the secret of and the secret in literature. That is, the unspeakable secret and the hidden exist at the heart of narrative, simultaneously concealing the truth and leading to the known and the revealed. Literature scholars have thus far been engaged with reading and interpreting strategies that decode the secret of the text, exploring the tensions between concealing and revealing that occur in various genres and time periods across the spectrum of English and American literature. From the tragic consequences in *Oedipus Rex* of the protagonist's obscured identity to the hermeneutics of suspicion developed in the post-modern era, secrets transform, inform, and influence the writing, reading, and interpretation of literature and culture.

The reader's task is to search for the concealed meaning or the "secret" of a text, which often revolves around the secret at different levels—at the level of signification, modes of expression, knowledge, and ideology, for what is veiled is, however, not only the truth or knowledge that is hidden behind thesecret, but also the unstated ideological agendas and implicit cultural assumptions. Mechanisms of surveillance are implemented to ensure that all secrets are guarded and available only to the select few. The "mystery" of the Medieval guilds reflects such an idea. The layers of identity in Renaissance drama (as well as its derivative, Gothic fiction) are only peeled off surreptitiously for the privileged protagonist and the audience. Winking flirtation in the comedy of manners and love romance is a game and fun for those who are in-the-know. Mysteries in nineteenth-century novels of suspense and horror may be unearthed through the labor of the characters, who may rather have them buried once again. Secrets, their encryption and decryption, their inscription and description—the complication and ambiguity involved, deserve further consideration.

Secrecy can characterize not only information, but also institutions and discourses that operate behind the world we know and affect the uninformed public. The belief in the existence of secret societies and their influence is probably a fantasy materialization of the vague consciousness of being trapped in an unknown network. Under seemingly omnipresent surveillance systems, resistance can form its own secret network and language; indeed, its existence is already a mystery for the ruling majority to crack. The coding and decoding of meaning in queer writing or post-colonial literature point toward similar operations of secrecy and revelation. The hegemony of colonialist discourse and its legacies, with the veil often used as a signifying trope, initiates the questions of identities in diaspora literature, rendering the boundary

between the self and the other unstable. As the divide between the public and the private blurs in the age of globalization, the role and function of secrets should become a topic for scholarly discussion.

We invite papers and panel discussions on secrets and their relationship to the fields of English and American literature and culture. Possible subtopics may include, but are not limited to:

1. Truth, Uncovering, and Concealment
2. Ethics of Secrecy
3. Secrecy and Conspiracy
4. Secrets, Power, Surveillance
5. Secrets, Blackmail, Gossip
6. Law and Privacy
7. Esotericism
8. Trading of Secrets
9. "Closets"
10. Secret Codes
11. Open Secrets
12. Taboos
13. Disguise and Secret Identity

The official languages of the conference are English and Chinese. Interested scholars are invited to submit a 300-word abstract (including keywords) and a brief CV (including name, e-mail address, institutional affiliation, and publication list) to 2015sealaconference@gmail.com by **February 25, 2015**. Electronic acknowledgements of submission will be sent to all submitters upon receipt of the abstract. Those selected to participate will be advised by **March 15, 2015** and will be required to submit full papers by **September 15, 2015**.

Important Dates:

- Abstract submission deadline: **February 25, 2015**
- Abstract acceptance notification: March 15, 2015
- Full paper submissions deadline: September 15, 2015
- Conference date: October 31, 2015

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the conference administrators at 2015sealaconference@gmail.com.