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Posted on: February 4th, 2004 by Rick Peterson

Lawrence University scholar Faith Barrett examines the diverse cross-section of American poetry produced during the American Civil War and the role that poetry played in defining new versions of American identity in the aftermath of the war in an address at Lawrence.

Barrett, an assistant professor of English at Lawrence, presents “Drums Off the Phantom Battlement: American Poets and the Civil War,” Tuesday, Feb. 10 at 4 p.m. in the Wriston Art Center auditorium on the Lawrence campus.

The address is the third and final in the lecture series held in conjunction with the traveling national exhibition, “Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln’s Journey to Emancipation,” which is on display in the Lawrence library until March 5.

While Civil War-era poetry has been largely neglected by most American literature scholars who have traditionally limited their focus to a few select poets such as Walt Whitman or Herman Melville, writers who explicitly addressed the war in some of their work, Barrett argues the Civil War produced an extraordinarily rich and interesting body of poetry, including works by women, African Americans and poets who chose not to publish.

In her address, Barrett will discuss and share works from some of the less well-known writers of that era, including Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt, a Kentucky-born poet who moved North at the start of the war, George Moses Horton, an African American poet who published two volumes of poems while he was a slave in North Carolina and Obadiah Ethelbert Baker, who wrote several volumes of journals and poetry while serving in the Second Iowa Cavalry.

She will examine both the political differences that divided these writers and the ways in which poetry served as a vital political function of the day.

Barrett, who joined the Lawrence English department in 2003, is co-editor of the forthcoming anthology “To Fight Aloud, Is Very Brave: American Poetry of the Civil War” (University of Massachusetts Press). The author of the 2001 poetry chapbook, “Invisible Axis,” Barrett earned her doctorate in comparative literature at the University of California-Berkeley.