

UCLA Department of English Kanner Forum of the Futures of Literary and  
Cultural Studies presents

# Fictional Flesh and the Technology of Writing: Prosopopoeial Experiments in the Twelfth Century

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*Osculetur me osculo oris sui.* “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.” In the first words of the Song of Songs, a voice announces itself, and with it, a corporeal figure comes flickeringly into existence, speaking from the page. The prosopopoeial momentum of this and subsequent verses fascinated readers and writers in the Middle Ages, especially because the Song’s eroticized Bride and Bridegroom were understood as uniquely non-literal figures in the Bible, even fictions. This talk considers an especially influential instance of that medieval fascination, in Bernard of Clairvaux’s virtuosic Sermons on the Song of Songs. Bernard’s sermon cycle was no straightforward work of homiletic exegesis, but (as Prof. Orlemanski argues) a reinvention of the Song’s own poetics of prosopopoeia for the media environment of the twelfth century, which was defined by monasticism’s new techniques of bureaucratic consolidation and the Church’s evangelical efficacy. It is within this context that we can consider Bernard’s engagement with the Song of Songs over the final eighteen years of his life—an engagement that hinges on Bernard’s need for the textual fiction of his own speaking persona, as much a prosopopoeial specter as the Bride. This talk explores the borderlands between fiction and figuration, how literary form accommodates itself to the limits of writing, and the implication of even the most delicate tropes in a rhetorical anthropology that shapes how audiences are hailed and formed.

## **ZOOM LINK & INFORMATION**

<https://ucla.zoom.us/j/96133239276?pwd=eXNabUw2VkJpaWcySFlyTkxxRnRxQT09>

**Meeting ID: 961 3323 9276 | Passcode: 129134**