"The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature

"Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all."
- Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons"

“Our work is to build a vibrant, usable commons, powered by collaboration and gratitude.”
- Ryan Merkeley, CEO of Creative Commons

The idea of “common sense” suggests transparency and mutual understanding, denying the need for explication or elaboration. But what would it mean to theorize the common(s)? From the Latin communis, etymologically related to the words for both “gift” and “wall,” the commons binds but also delimits. A term of relation, it is also a space, a sense, a site of contestation. To define something as common is to suggest the shared, but also the ordinary. Can these ideas be reconciled? Should they? The aim of this conference is to facilitate a discussion of the commons and the common in literature and literary history as a means of probing the relationship between aesthetics, politics, and the environment.

This conference welcomes conceptual and philosophical explorations, literary analyses, as well as historical and cultural studies of the topic. We invite studies ranging from the specific to the broad in scope. We look forward to perspectives coming from a wide variety of fields, such as comparative literature, political theory, history, classics, philosophy, and media studies. Those interested in participating should submit a 250-word abstract for a 20-minute presentation to yale.thecommons@gmail.com by December 1st, 2017.