

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR AMERICAN STUDIES
(CAAS)**

The Gimmick in/as American Literature

Organizers: Ross Bullen (OCAD University, David Hollingshead (MacEwan University)

In *Theory of the Gimmick* (2020), Sianne Ngai argues that “the gimmick names an experience of dissatisfaction — mixed with fascination — linked to our perception of an object making untrustworthy claims about the saving of time, the reduction of labor, and the expansion of value.” Poe’s hoaxes, Hawthorne’s miracle cures, Flannery O’ Connor’s snake oil salesmen, and a host of other tricks, tropes, and techniques in American literature make it a rich archive for unpacking the gimmick’s functioning as “a miniature model of capital itself” (Ngai). Yet beyond the gimmick’s ubiquity as an object of fascination for its writers, American literature is itself consistently defined by an essential gimmickyness that helpfully expands the concept’s implications for the field. Leslie Fiedler’s 1960 description of the American novel as a “chamber of horrors disguised as an amusement park funhouse” anticipates a long scholarly arc that emphasizes both the aesthetic object’s inherent trickery and its need for critical unmasking. From “New Americanist” interventions into the trompe l’oeils of canon formation to the contemporary turn to the “deceptively simple” tropes of genre fiction, the gimmick concept continues to animate our scholarly proclivities.

We seek papers that explore any facet of gimmicks and gimmickry in/as American literature and culture. Authors may wish to take up Ngai’s own description of the gimmick, although we welcome all approaches to this topic.