

THE NORTH AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF ROMANTICISM (NASSR)

Panel 1: Unprecedented Romanticism

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When Hannah Arendt writes that “the phenomenon of revolution is unprecedented in premodern history,” she narrates the birth of modernity from the spirit of the “unprecedented.” For Arendt and Reinhart Koselleck, this possibility of radical novelty cut loose from the past defines our modern historical consciousness in the wake of the American and French revolutions. For us living in 2021 — beset by daily news of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing climate crises, racial injustice, escalating geopolitical tensions — we are reminded constantly that we are living through an unprecedented cocktail of events “unknown in former times,” as Wordsworth said of his historical moment. If our unprecedentedness has precedent in the Romantic period, how might we think the un- of the former as dialectically entwined with the “precedent” it supposedly undoes? This panel seeks papers that engage our understanding of the Romantics’ sense of unprecedentedness, as well as the critical topos of Romanticism itself as an unparalleled literary and historical phenomenon. How might our habitual troping of “newness” through ruptures and paradigm-shifts occlude ways of conceiving of Romanticism’s modernity otherwise? Or is something lost if we stray from recognizing the period’s “groundbreaking” character? In lieu of Lee Morrissey’s notion of the Renaissance as a “transperiod” whose “re-birth” is constellated with an unfixed antiquity, might we read Romanticism’s or our unprecedentedness as recurring and/or recapitulative, as an acceleration or re-constellation of, rather than a break with, various pasts? And more broadly, what might the constellation of our and the Romantics’ unparalleled historical moments teach us about surviving in unprecedented times?