

VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO (VSAO)

Victorian Intersections with Disability

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The Victorian period experienced waves of shifting ideological frameworks regarding bodies, bodily functions, and bodily autonomy. As new discourses of psychology, medicine, social policy, and education came to occupy the public consciousness, disability emerged as a complex identity: both socially constructed and materially embodied. From Bertha Mason to Anne Catherick, Tiny Tim to Long John Silver, themes of disability and disabled characters appear across literature in a variety of modes — some sympathetic, some disastrous — as Victorian authors contend with the ways in which disability is produced, sustained, and informed by the world around it.

This panel invites papers that examine the ways in which disability intersects with other social, political, and imaginative realities of the Victorian era.

Possible themes might include but are not limited to:

- industrialization, urbanization, and technology
- Darwin, decolonization, and race
- physical displacement, the social body and the body politic
- Western versus 'traditional' medicine
- childbirth/reproduction, the marriage market
- queer studies
- religion, morality, self-help
- sensation, melodrama, and emotional excess
- medical professionalization and the 'mad trade'
- disease, contagion, and death
- Victorian authors with disabilities
- incarceration, confinement
- freakshows, asylum tours, and performance