

**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.

INTERNATIONAL GOTHIC ASSOCIATION (IGA)

Tales from the Lab: Scientific Gothic

Organizer: Karen Macfarlane (Mount Saint Vincent University)

This panel invites papers that explore the relationship between the Gothic and science. Men of Science have ruled the Gothic since some of its earliest works and what are arguably the most famous texts of the mode revolve around the tension between science and belief, the horror of science usurping nature, or the terror of discoveries that challenge existing epistemologies. Papers that engage with any aspect of science (experimentation, medicine, psychology, parapsychology, botany, zoology, technologies...) as they are manifest in Gothic texts are welcome.

MARGARET ATWOOD SOCIETY (MAS)

Also a Novelist: Atwood's Other Genres.

Organizers: Tina Trigg (King's University), Karen Macfarlane (Mount Saint Vincent University)

While Margaret Atwood's novels have dominated her work and the work of critics since the 1980s, her recently published poetry collection, *Dearly*, provides an opportunity to re-engage with Atwood's work in other genres. This panel invites examination of Atwood's writing (other than her novels) from diverse critical perspectives; works of interest include, but are not limited to:

- later-career poetry collections (*Dearly*, *The Door*, *Morning in the Burned House*)
- short fiction
- prose poetry
- graphic novels
- film adaptations
- cultural presence (Twitter, interviews, virtual engagement)

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

Panel 1: Unprecedented Romanticism

Organizer: Andrew Sargent (Western University)

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?

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

Panel 2: Re-collecting the Romantics

Organizer: Andrew Sargent (Western University)

This panel seeks papers that engage Romanticism's investment in archival re-collection as an editorial project and/or a politics of memory. Godwin's editing of Wollstonecraft's literary remains, Mary Shelley's re-assembling and sanitizing of P. B. Shelley's chaotic *Triumph of Life* manuscript, Coleridge's obsessive revising of his works, Wordsworth's literal remembering of his minor works in *The Prelude* and his compartmentalization of his corpus under specific genres and themes in his *Poems* (1842) — these instances testify to editorial activity as part of what Andrew Benet has called Romanticism's "culture of posterity," a self-conscious orientation toward literature's survival and future reception.

This panel asks how Romantic writers' re-collections both enable and resist their future perfect reception, or what de Man called their "monumentalization" as foundations of a future moment. For example, how might Blake's re-collection of his earlier texts within the esoteric "System" of his long prophecies, for which he thought himself "unlikely [to] get a customer," proleptically repel rather than seek a posterity that would appreciate him?

Papers are welcome to take practical or theoretical approaches to "re-collection" and its ethical and/or aesthetic ramifications. How do our contemporary practices of editing and anthologizing risk granting or denying Romantic texts and writers a future they may or may not have wanted? How might we square our editorial activity with Romanticism's uncertain re-collections of the literary archive, such as we see in the ominously "thrown open" libraries at the end of Shelley's *The Last Man* that could either release the archive from, or consign it to, ruin?

VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO (VSAO)

Victorian Intersections with Disability

Organizer: Meghan Burry (Queen's University), Melanie Byron, (Western University)

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