



BARS 2017: IMPROVEMENT

The 15th International Conference of the British Association for Romantic Studies

BARS 2017 Open Panels

Proposals are invited for the following sessions at BARS 2017. Please email the panel chairs with 250 word abstracts by 9 January 2017, and include your name and institutional affiliation (if any).

Imaging the City: Improvement and Decline in the Romantic Period

Chair: Dr Alison O'Byrne, University of York

This panel seeks papers focusing on the relationship between improvement and decline in representations of the city in the Romantic period. Areas of exploration might include, but are not limited to, proposals for urban improvements; antiquarian tours and surveys; descriptions of ruins; accounts of the urban poor; and disaster narratives.

Email proposals to: alison.obyrne@york.ac.uk.

Education and Useful Knowledge

(Dissenting academies, clubs, societies, and networks of improvement; 'home' and domesticity vs. transcultural and transnational encounters, European associations.)

Chair: Dr Carmen Casaliggi

This panel invites papers that examine the importance of the 'group', 'circle', or 'coterie' as a way of understanding Romantic-era literary production both in Britain and abroad. Papers will explore the

way in which Romantic writers exist not merely or even primarily as distinct or solitary voices but rather as members of a series of self-consciously defined groups whose intent is to underpin an educational ethic of mutual improvement. Possible topics of examination include, but are not limited to, the dynamic and shifting mediations between, within, and outside the Lake School, the Cockney School, the Holland House Set, the Satanic School, the Pisan Circle, radical and Dissenting circles such as the Warrington Academy, the Della Cruscans, Bluestocking salons, and the Peasant-Poets. While acknowledging the role that solitary meditation has to play in Romantic-era writing (Mee, 2002), the aim of this panel is to challenge traditional understandings of Romanticism that revolve around paradigms such as the 'Age of the Individual' or the 'Age of Nationalism' in order to suggest that the period is defined by a remarkable sense of sociability, which develops rather than rejects eighteenth-century models of sympathetic identification and engagement in the public sphere.

Email proposals to: ccasaliggi@cardiffmet.ac.uk

"Scottish Innovation"

(The Centre for Scottish Culture, University of Dundee)

Chair: Dr Daniel Cook (University of Dundee)

This panel considers the innovative practices of Scottish writers in the long eighteenth century. Following the lead of Murray Pittock and others, contributors might extend their reach to include not only canonical Romantics such as James Macpherson, Robert Burns and Walter Scott, and Gothic authors like James Hogg, but earlier writers such as Allan Ramsay, figures whose star is on the rise, including Thomas Campbell, or lesser known writers of the period more generally. Contributors might discuss specific forms and genres, including the plays of Joanna Baillie or the rural fiction of John Galt, or those on the periphery of Scottish identity like Byron. Papers might consider the influence of Scottish writing on major figures of the Romantic period within the British Isles or beyond. Contributors might also consider the role of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and other publishing centres in the production, promotion, and reception of major editions.

Email proposals to: d.p.cook@dundee.ac.uk

The (C21) Lives of Hester Thrale Piozzi: Recovery, Form, Improvement

Chair: Dr Elizabeth Edwards (University of Wales CAWCS)

Hester Thrale Piozzi has long been recognized as a significant figure in eighteenth-century and Romantic literary history, known for her diary-writing, her life as a bluestocking hostess, and most of all for her ambiguous, longstanding relationship with Samuel Johnson. But although she has been well-served by C20 scholarly editors, from Katharine Balderston's *Thraliana* (1942) to Edward and

Lillian Bloom's six-volume *Piozzi Letters* (1989-2002), and biographers (James Clifford, 1941; William McCarthy, 1985), her position within the period remains surprisingly peripheral.

Beyond her time as 'Dr Johnson's Mrs Thrale', Thrale Piozzi was also a Welsh child heiress, a longsuffering wife and mother, a political campaigner, a woman of scandal, a seasoned traveller, a literary celebrity, an antiquarian, a patron, and a prophet. Throughout these phases of her life, she was one of the most innovative, successful and notorious writers at work in eighteenth-century and Romantic Britain, publishing in a dauntingly wide range of genres: from poetry and political pamphlets, to works of travel writing, biography, history and lexicography, and leaving a large body of miscellaneous manuscripts.

In a critical culture arguably more attentive than ever to nonfictional prose – much more popular and prestigious in the period than we give it credit for today – how should we understand Thrale Piozzi's writing career now? In pioneering new forms that reach into almost every aspect of eighteenth-century life, what kinds of 'improvement' does her career represent? What do we gain by adding her more fully to the period, or miss in overlooking her?

This roundtable invites 10-minute papers offering new perspectives on Thrale-Piozzi studies, including (but not confined to) discussions of her work in relation to:

- Genre (life writing, travel writing, biography, history, lexicography, poetry, puzzles, translation, literary criticism)
- Canonicity and literary recovery
- Scholarly editing, and the availability/accessibility of Thrale Piozzi's work
- The place of nonfictional prose forms in current literary studies, including in the classroom
- The current state of manuscript studies, especially miscellaneous and fragmentary forms
- New methods in digital humanities, including digital editing and new evaluative tools, such as network theory
- The place of critical-creative methods/responses, including adaptation in any format

Email proposals to: e.edwards@wales.ac.uk

'Apology for the Literary Pursuits of Physicians'

Chair: Prof Jon Mee, University of York

In 1786, John Aikin published a short article under the title 'Apology for the Literary Pursuits of Physicians' in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. His article was identifying what was already deemed a distinct cultural formation – literary doctors – that was to continue well into the romantic period.

John Keats, of course, is now the most famous example, but Aikin was part of a group of doctors who all had literary achievements to their name, including James Currie, editor of Burns, John Ferriar, who wrote on Sterne, Thomas Percival, author of *Medical Ethics* (1803) They were in contact with other well known medical practitioners, including Erasmus Darwin. Rather than simply addressing poets, novelists, and playwrights who had trained as doctors, this panel invites papers that consider broader issues in the relationship between medicine and literature. Potential topics include:

- Medicine, polite letters, and social status/professionalization.
- The making of medical ethics and/or the sympathetic imagination
- Body/mind questions in medicine and literature, especially in relation to categories like taste, luxury, gender etc
- Medical discourse and the idea of the case
- Ideas of disease, infection etc as developed through medico-literary discourse
- Medical and literary networks
- Medicine, Literature, and the Scottish Enlightenment
- Medicine, Publishers and/or Book History
- The medical body politic and national identity

Email proposals to: jon.mee@york.ac.uk

Improving Austen

Chair: Dr Ivan Ortiz (University of San Diego)

If Claudia Johnson's recent study *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* (Chicago UP, 2012) has taught us anything, it's that the power of Austen's fiction shows no signs of waning. Not only do the novels seem to improve with age, their reception over last two hundred years has extended pressing questions raised by Austen in her own time. We learn from Johnson, for example, that the Victorians looked longingly backward to the idylls of Austen's novels from the perspective of seemingly unstoppable industrialization and a rapidly expanding empire. We also learn about the fascinating politics of gender and nation that emerged in World War I and II as soldiers read Austen in the trenches, one that oddly recalls the crisis of sensibility expressed by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Austen herself was quite skeptical of improvement, and so it's no surprise that we as devoted inheritors of her novels continue to call on her wisdom to appraise our own social, political, and gendered "improvements." This panel invites papers that reflect on the afterlife of Austen's fiction in the spirit of Johnson's project. Do certain novels "read better" in particular historical contexts or geographical locations? If so, what new and old issues do those contexts refract? Do Austen's cinematic adaptations improve upon her novels? Finally, in what ways might we

be better suited to read her novels today than, say, fifty years ago? If, for Austen, "improvement" is an ambiguous endeavor, what do we continue to learn from her romantic vision and her skepticism?

Email proposals to: iortiz@sandiego.edu

Improvement in Austen's Novels

Chair: Dr Emily Rohrbach (University of Manchester)

Alistair Duckworth's 1971 study of Jane Austen's novels, *The Improvement of the Estate*, took *Mansfield Park*, with its motif of the estate, as its point of departure. The drama of estate improvement, Duckworth argued, exemplified Austen's pervasive moral commitment to finding the proper relation between the individual and society, between energy and inherited culture. How has recent criticism advanced—or pivoted from—Duckworth's landmark study, and how might we think anew the ideas of 'improvement' in Austen's novels? For this session, we will approach the issue of improvement as, in part, a narratological question. Papers are welcome that examine improvement from any number of critical angles (ecocritical, postcolonial, historiographical, feminist, etc.), but they should address relations between ideas of improvement and strategies or theories of narration—such as plotting and the event; narrative self-reflexivity and voice; and/or contingency and the counterfactual. Do Austen's narrative strategies reinforce or resist the various ideas of improvement that the novels introduce?

Email proposals to: emily.rohrbach@manchester.ac.uk