

Catharine Maria Sedgwick Society – ALA 2022

Inventing the Novel

Writing to her friend Susan Channing in 1822, newly minted author Catharine Maria Sedgwick reflected on her recently published work *A New-England Tale*. "I began that little story for a tract," she told Channing, "but I had no plans, and the story took a turn that seemed to render it quite unsuitable for a tract." This anecdote suggests that the line between "tract" and "story" was thin, since Sedgwick accidentally transgressed it by way of a simple "turn" in her plot. What is more, Sedgwick herself referred to her long work as "a story" and "a tale" and yet critics of early American literature consistently identify it as her first novel.

The novel has long been a difficult form to define, particularly in the American context where the proliferation of print media and a longstanding debate over "novel" vs "romance" have shaped literary-historical values. This difficulty has been exacerbated by the novel's shifting cultural cachet, with early authors abjuring or decrying this generic category that later critics would impose on their work. This proposed panel explores how the novel has been invented and reinvented over the last several hundred years. Rather than tracing a narrative of the novel's "rise," we seek papers that examine the novel's circuitous trajectory through literary and critical history, whether as an aesthetic category, a platform for political action, a site of critical wrangling, or a container for formal innovation. What generic forms, such as letters, sketches, personal narratives, and tracts, preceded, accompanied, or were absorbed into the novel form? How, in turn, did the nineteenth-century novel transform (subsume?) these other types of writing? How did authors and critics come to terms with the protean nature of the novel form? How did they continue--how are we continuing?--to incorporate these early forms into the ongoing invention of the novel in the twentieth and even twenty-first centuries?

This panel celebrates the 200th anniversary of *A New-England Tale*. The Sedgwick Society welcomes and encourages proposals pertaining to Sedgwick's era or later periods of American literature that engage with the novel's circuitous path through the nineteenth century.

Submit proposals of around 250 words to Ashley Reed (akreed@vt.edu) by January 15th.

Care Work in the Texts of Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Her Contemporaries

Depictions of nursing and care are common in early national and antebellum literature, though the status of care workers and the professionalization of their labor shifted enormously during the first hundred years of the republic. The Sedgwick family was famously supported by the care work of Elizabeth Freeman both before and after Freeman sued for her freedom before the Massachusetts state courts. Catharine called Freeman her "second mother" because her own mother, Pamela Dwight Sedgwick, suffered from mental illness and experienced both home care and institutionalization. Depictions of care work--and the important recognition that care *is* work--suffuse many of Sedgwick's writings, from regional fiction like *Redwood* to didactic novellas like *Live and Let Live* to non-fiction sketches like "Slavery in New England."

This panel invites papers on any aspect of care work as discussed or depicted in the literature of the American nineteenth century, including but not limited to:

- gendered and raced aspects of care and healing
- professionalization of care
- care and/as domestic labor
- mental illness care
- disability and care of/by disabled persons
- care work in the Civil War and other conflicts
- care work by/for/among enslaved people

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