

RA Conference 2017—Supernatural Romanticism

Strasbourg, Alsace, France 1-3 August 2017

Keynote Speakers:

Frederick Burwick (UCLA), Susan Wolfson (Princeton), Richard Eldridge (Swarthmore)

The Romantic era was haunted by the past, by the spectres of revolution and violence, and even in a sense by the future. It was also beset with a unique set of intellectual problems arising from the clash between the religious past of European culture and an increasingly international understanding of human culture, the clash between scientific and other understandings of the world, and the clash within strains of thought that were at once universalising, and yet focused on the value of the individual.

These pressures in turn often fuelled the peculiar nostalgia for sentimentalised medieval or ancient worlds, or rather for the spiritual hierarchies that could be derived from those mythic backgrounds. In at least some cases, the use of these mythic backgrounds leads into an interrogation of Europe's rich and conflicted theological past, as well as its rich and conflicted political past. Arguably, many of the strains of the "Supernatural" in Romantic culture function as explorations of this historical and intellectual background, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Some classic accounts of Romanticism engaged with the intellectual implications of the supernatural, or of depictions of the supernatural (M.H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*, Harold Bloom in *The Visionary Company* and others). However, this has not been a major approach in recent years, and the older accounts stand in need of reconsideration, and of being placed in their own historical contexts.

This conference is dedicated to exploring the varieties of uses to which the supernatural was put during the Romantic era. This might include:

- the visionary or mystical
- the supernatural in religious thought
- the transcendental as supernatural
- the supernatural as an open-ended secularised system of religious contemplation
- depictions of superstition
- the historical reality of superstition in the period
- depictions of religion as superstition
- depictions of a haunted world (*Eve of St. Agnes*, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Erlkönig*, the gothic etc.)
- Frankenstein and the man-made supernatural
- the Romantic focus on Shakespeare's supernatural plays
- supernatural understandings of the classical or medieval past
- depictions of a tension or ambiguity between supernatural and natural explanations of the world
- the supernatural quality of various scientific theories (galvanism, gravity, magnetism, astronomy)

The conference will take place between many of the other summer conferences, with plenty of time for participants to get to and from other conferences.

Papers should be 20 minutes and in English. Please email 300-word proposals, including a brief bio, in word format to Richard Berkeley (berkeley5000@gmail.com) by 15 April 2017.

All information can be found at www.romanticism55.com