

## [NeMLA 2021 CFP What Goes Up Must Come Down: High and Low Theories of the Victorian Novel](#)

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Call for Papers

Date:

March 11, 2021 to March 14, 2021

Location:

Pennsylvania, United States

Subject Fields:

British History / Studies, Literature, Popular Culture Studies

This panel at the 52nd annual meeting of the Northeast Modern Language Association examines high and low theories of the Victorian novel. Value of the 19th-century novel has fluctuated over time and under the influence of critics. Taking core theories into renewed consideration, this panel aims to gain perspective over high and low culture in its relation to the novel.

Caroline Levine reminds us that, though “extremely popular,” the 19th-century novel was largely thought of as “frivolous” if not outright “dangerous.” Concerns that the low, commercial form of the novel might morally corrupt its reader and divert their attention from more serious art forms were of genuine moral concern. And yet, the Victorian novel now enjoys its own undeniable place in the pantheon of literary history as a legitimate and serious form studied in classrooms at every grade level, in undergraduate and graduate programs in every public and private school. What was once low is held pedagogically on high. This in itself, however, is only a recent development, as Elaine Freedgood’s 2019 *World Enough* argues, documenting the rise of British realism in the 1970s. Literary critics established the novel as we know it, obfuscating a literary history which had previously deemed it bad art.

This panel aims to revisit the 19th-century novel and the continued debate over its value by way of the interpretation of high and low forms. We might consider how Frye’s concepts of the high and low mimetic modes in his *Anatomy of Criticism* formed new standards for rethinking the shared qualities of texts across genres. Halberstam’s low theory in *The Queer Art of Failure*, on the other hand, re-circumscribes the limits of high and low culture and its value. As a form which both goes slumming and depicts high society, how do we understand the novel as extending the limits of both high and low aesthetic forms? How might these theories prove to be crucial interventions into ongoing revisions of how we view the 19th-century novel and what it does?

Deadline to submit abstracts is **September 30**. Please upload your abstract of no more than 300 words directly through the NeMLA portal (membership is NOT required to submit):

<https://www.cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/18937>

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