

[Collecting Cases: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century Visions of Society](#)

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Collecting Cases: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century Visions of Society

Ghent University

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Organizers: Jules De Doncker and Elizabeth Amann

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries case studies focusing on deviant behaviour (such as crime, suicide or mental illness) and exceptional situations became an important part of both popular culture and the emerging human sciences. A number of collections were published which gathered such cases and analyzed them from various perspectives. Henry Fielding's *Examples of the Interposition of Providence in the Detection and Punishment of Murder* (1752) examined the cases from the standpoint of religion and morality. Gayot de Pitaval's and later Richer's *Causes célèbres et intéressantes, avec les jugemens qui les ont décidées* (1734-1741 and 1771-1781) focused on their significance with regard to the law and social mores. And in other texts such as Karl Philipp Moritz's *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* (1783-1793) and Friedrich Schiller's *Merkwürdige Rechtsfälle* (1792-1795), the cases serve to illustrate aspects of the human psyche.

The goal of this workshop is to explore how these collections of cases, through their inclusions, exclusions and narrative and rhetorical strategies, comment on and convey an image of the society of their times or of the (recent) past.

We welcome presentations that address the following topics and questions:

- Are the cases in a given collection put into dialogue with one another? What types of commentaries or debates emerge from this dialogue?
- Some cases appear in multiple collections. How are these treated differently in different contexts (nations, periods, genres, editorial venues, etc.) or from different perspectives (legal, medical, moral, historical, etc.)?
- What selection criteria are used? What types of cases are included or excluded?
- To what extent are the cases seen as exceptional or representative? If the case is representative, what social values does it emblemize? If it is exceptional, what does the anomaly suggest about the social norms?
- What literary, narratological or rhetorical strategies are used in these texts to shape an image of society or to convey social values?
- What types of emotional strategies are in these texts? How do they function to reinforce the social values put forth?
- Do these collections draw a distinction between the past and the present? How do they position their own society vis-à-vis the past? Are the cases seen as representative of a specific historical moment or as universal?
- To what extent do these case collections contribute to the formation or transformation of cultural memory?

This list is not meant to be exclusive. We are also open to other approaches to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century case studies and collections.

The long-term goal of this project is to publish an edited volume exploring these issues. It is our hope that the combined insights of the seminar will allow us to draw up a series of general reflections about how case collections create and pass down images of society.

We would like to invite expressions of interest in the form of a short abstract (200-300 words in English) describing your idea. Please submit your idea to jules.dedoncker@ugent.be by October 15, 2015.

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