

CALL FOR PAPERS

PLURAL SPHERES AND MARGINAL SPACES: IMAGINING ENVIRONMENT IN EARLY AMERICA

October 9-12, 2025

University of Massachusetts Boston
Boston, Massachusetts

A conference sponsored by the Charles Brockden Brown Society

<https://brockdenbrownsociety.cah.ucf.edu/>

From atmospheres and biospheres to public and intimate spheres, the ways we imagine environments, interconnectedness, separations, and materiality impact the globe and its worlds. *Plural spheres* gestures at the numerous and ever-changing spatial metaphors that scholars use to conceptualize their fields of study, fields that are constantly in flux and perpetual motion, never quite solidifying to remain vibrant. *Marginal spaces* emerge from the pressures and consequences created by the shifting dimensions of plural spheres. By foregrounding the conjunctions and complex intersections between plural spheres and marginal spaces, this conference opens up conversations about the dynamic histories, materials, and locations that one encounters while sifting through the wreckage of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Drawing on the conference location at the campus of UMass Boston, the 2025 meeting of the International CBBS invites papers that consider the role of plural spheres and marginal environments in early American literature. Located southeast of downtown Boston on the Columbia Point peninsula, the UMass Boston campus occupies a space just beyond the sites usually regarded as landmarks in colonial U.S. history. Our conference site is located along the multi-use coastline of the Massachusetts Bay, a space marked by a long history of environmental interventions, through its role as a home for Indigenous settlements and hunting, fishing, and agriculture; as a colonial site for cattle grazing; as a nineteenth-century site for sewage pumping and removal; and as a twentieth-century zone for housing projects, highways, military operations, and educational sites including the UMass Boston campus, Commonwealth Archives, and John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. Visible from its harbor location are islands that have been used as sources of livelihood, as well as spaces of quarantine and containment, for centuries.

Building on this unique spatial and environmental history, the Fifteenth Biennial Conference of the Charles Brockden Brown Society invites papers/presentations that explore the role that marginal, dynamic, shifting and/or unusual or unexpected spaces have played in early national American literature.

Though we are an author society, we solicit proposals from a broad range of texts and practices *beyond* those associated with Brown and his writings alone. We also encourage interdisciplinary scholarship, work emphasizing non-U.S. literatures, and presentations on teaching practices.

Our conference culture aims to create a space of egalitarian consideration free from career-oriented and competitive attitudes, a place for new work to flourish. Thus, we have no concurrent sessions, so that all may be heard by all.

A 250-word proposal deadline and short CV is due **March 1, 2025**. Please send a proposal in .docx format to kerin.holt@usu.edu.

Possible topics may include the following, arranged broadly by area/theme:

- **Ecocriticism and Environmental Studies:** Literary and interdisciplinary approaches to representations of nature, ecology, biopolitics, sustainability, environmental history in early American texts.

- **Marginal Spaces:** Literary representations of liminal spaces or spaces outside of social, cultural, or political norms and/or the people who inhabit these spaces. This might also include textual spaces, including studies of marginalia, fragments, letters, diaries, etc.
- **Water:** Explorations of the role that water and waterways play within the environment, which may include studies of currents, tides, irrigation, transatlantic crossings and networks, water-oriented trade, uses of harbors, rivers, ports, role/position of islands
- **Transit:** Analyses of routes and transportation within spaces, infrastructural realities and development, spatial technologies, transportation and infrastructural fantasies, experiences of migration.
- **Natural networks:** Studies of weather and climate, representations of the natural world, landscapes, animal studies
- **Boundaries:** How and why are boundaries drawn? How are they defined and revised? This topic may also address practices of mapping, experiences of incarceration, quarantine, and representations of urban and/or rural spaces.
- **Form:** How does genre, literary form, and the materiality of texts provide avenues for revising and imagining space? Particularly with regard to formal experimentations, representations of palimpsests, and perspectives.
- **Indigenous spheres:** How are Indigenous spaces represented in early American literature within Indigenous and/or settler texts? How do Indigenous people use, imagine, transform, or manage spaces in early American texts?
- **Waymaking/Placemaking:** How do early American literary works create or define meaningful spaces? How do they create or inhibit accessibility to spaces? How are people included or excluded from these spaces, particularly in relation to disabilities or experiences of migration? This topic can include studies of official or institutional spaces or more informal, shifting, or temporary spaces.
- **Imaginative spaces:** How are spaces represented imaginatively in early national literature? This is the space to consider any weird, wild, or unusual spatial imaginings in literatures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Mentoring for Graduate Students: Graduate students who are interested in receiving feedback on their abstracts before the submission deadline may submit their abstracts for revision suggestions by Feb. 15, 2025. Review does not guarantee acceptance. Graduate students will also have the option to be paired with a faculty mentor during the weekend of the conference.

Travel Support: Some travel support will be available to those with limited institutional funding. Applicants requesting travel funding should indicate their interest and need in a short cover letter sent along with the abstract and short CV. Graduate students should provide information about whether or not they are ABD.