

Open Graves,
Open Minds

University of
Hertfordshire **UH**



Sea Changes:

The fairytale Gothic of
mermaids, selkies, and
enchanted hybrids of
ocean and river.

6–8 September 2025



Conference Schedule

6 September 2025 On line

09:15 - 09:30 Welcome

Teams Conference Room 1

Assoc. Prof. Sam George (OGOM Project;
University of Hertfordshire)

09:30 - 10:30 Parallel Session: Panels 1 and 2

1 Hybridity, monstrosity and taxonomy

Teams Conference Room 1

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| 8 | The mercreature as metonym - Suspension and onto-epistemological resistance in the Blue Weird | Fredrik Blanc
(Manchester Metropolitan University) |
| 17 | Wittgenstein's family resemblances and the hybridity of ancient sea monsters | Dr Ryan Denson
(University of Silesia in Katowice) |
| 63 | The machine in the monster and the monster in the machine: Towards a teratology of technology through the techno-monstrosity of Nemo's <i>Nautilus</i> | Dr Kwasu Tembo
(Lancaster University) |

2 Aquatic romance 1

Teams Conference Room 2

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|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 54 | Love, Atlantean style: Portrayals of merfolk sex, love and marriage in adult cartoon series | Raymond Rugg
(Bridgewater State University) |
| 55 | Making waves: The fluidity of gender in merfolk mythology | Madelaine Sacco
(University of Newcastle, NSW) |
| 75 | Forging the literati self: The merbeing in 'Bai Qiulian' | Dr Jie Zhuang (University of California, Irvine) |

10:30 - 11:30 Plenary 1: Forging the mermaid in Romantic Scotland

Teams Conference Room 1

Dr Katie Garner (University of St Andrews)
Introduced by Bill Hughes

11:30 - 11:45 Tea/Coffee Break

11:45 - 12:45 Parallel Session: Panels 3 and 4

3 Mermaids, loas and otherness

Teams Conference Room 1

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| 30 | The struggle of one thing twisting into another and back again': The re-enchantment of the sea lung in Julia Armfield's <i>Our Wives Under the Sea</i> | Fred Hook
(Queen's University, Kingston) |
| 34 | Mermaids of memory: Cultural memory, resistance and reclamation in Rivers Solomon's <i>The Deep</i> and Monique Roffey's <i>The Mermaid of Black Conch</i> | Dr Sheetal Jain
(Shri Vaishnav Vidyapeeth Vishwavidyalaya) |
| 45 | The Haitian Voodoo river gods: The shamanic call in Wilson Harris's <i>The Secret Ladder</i> | Shareed Mohammed
(University of the West Indies) |

4 Romanticism and sirens

Teams Conference Room 2

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| 22 | 'A hypnotic matrix': Liz Frazer, embodiment, and the sirenic appeal of the Cocteau Twins | Noah Gallego (California State Polytechnic University, Pomona) |
| 48 | Dangerous waters: Demonic motifs and folklore in Polish Romantic literature | Dr Malgorzata Nowak
(Adam Mickiewicz University) |
| 65 | Let 'brooks and echoing falls repeat': John Thelwall's <i>Fairy of the Lake</i> | Prof. Judith Thompson (Dalhousie University) |

12:45 - 13:45 Lunch

13:45 - 14:45 Parallel Session: Panels 5 and 6

5 Myth and storytelling

Teams Conference Room 1

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|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 | Tlaloc and Chac Mool over Mexico City: The haunting of Aztec water deities on Mexico City | Dr Antonio Alcalá González (Tecnológico de Monterrey, Santa Fe Mexico City) |
| 69 | ‘Farewel, ye Fair Illusions’: The distorted siren’s song in Dryden’s <i>King Arthur</i> and Shadwell’s <i>Psyche</i> | Amanda Trainham (SUNY) |
| 71 | The tale of the Mermaid of Thermaikos | Agelika Velissariou (AUTH, School of Primary Education, Thessaloniki) |

6 Traumas, threats, and transformations: Traditional and contemporary selkie stories from Scotland to the Arctic

Teams Conference Room 2

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| 1 | Selkie transformations: Trauma, memory, and environmental exploitation in C. J. Cooke’s <i>A Haunting in the Arctic</i> | Dr Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir (University of Iceland) |
| 28 | Preternatural phocids: seals, selkies and the imagined sea | Dr Lizanne Henderson (University of Glasgow) |
| 61 | Mermaid love and seal hunting: The complexities of the Irish seal skin | Colleen Taylor (Boston College) |

14:45 - 15:45 Mermaid Flash Fiction

Teams Conference Room 1

Dr Daisy Butcher (University of Hertfordshire)

15:45 - 16:30 Parallel Session: Panels 7 and 8 (2 papers each)

7 ‘The Little Mermaid’ and adaptation

Teams Conference Room 1

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| 38 | Breaking the shell: How modern mermaid fiction rewrites the Disney Princess | Jubby Kumar
(Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya) |
| 43 | ‘Part of Your world’: The reinterpretations and retellings of ‘The Little Mermaid’ (1837) based on the history and society of the human world, | Protyasha Mazumdar
(University of Hertfordshire) |

8 Mermaids, hybridity and the aquatic environment

Teams Conference Room 2

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| 6 | Water, desire, and crisis in the Southern Bayou: Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s ‘Natalie’ as a modern mermaid tale | Dr Barbara Barrow (Lund University) |
| 80 | Dark and watery metamorphoses: Mermaids, dystopian fiction, posthumanism | Dr Francesca Arnavaš (University of Tartu) |

16:30 - 16:45 Tea/Coffee Break

16:45 - 17:45 Plenary 2: A reading from the memoir *Ring of Salt*, drawing on the Selkie myth

Teams Conference Room 1

Betsy Cornwell (Writer)
Introduced by Sam George

17:45 - 18:00 Closing remarks and instructions for Days 2-3 at the British Library

Teams Conference Room 1

Assoc. Prof. Sam George (OGOM Project;
University of Hertfordshire)

7 September 2025 British Library

11:00 - 11:15	Registration - tea and coffee	Eliot Room
11:15 - 12:15	Introduction and Plenary 3: <i>The luck of the Ningyō: Hybridity and the rise of the fake museum mermaid</i>	Eliot Room Assoc. Prof. Sam George (OGOM Project; University of Hertfordshire) Introduced by Bill Hughes
12:15 - 13:15	Parallel Session: Panels 9 and 10	

9 Aqueous creatures and gender identity **Eliot Room**

12	From sea horror to queer grief: Representations of the sperm whale and the colossal squid, 1851–2021	Dr Monika Class (Lund University)
53	Feminism and spiritualism in Evelyn De Morgan's <i>Little Mermaid</i> triptych (1886–1914)	Cecilia Rose (University of Exeter)
59	The maiden in the mountain lake: Becoming-woman in Sigrid Undset's <i>Kristin Lavransdatter</i>	Dr Per Elben Svelstad (NTNU in Trondheim)

10 Hybridity and metamorphosis **Dickens Room**

3	Sirens in the city: On river spirits, politics, and the collapse of spatial limitations in Ben Aaronovitch's <i>Rivers of London</i> series	Andrin Albrecht (Friedrich Schiller University Jena,)
11	Habitat-fluid and water-bound: metamorphic characters in Mercè Rodoreda's 'The Salamander' and 'The River and the Boat' (1967)	Dr Anna Casablanclas-Cervantes (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

13:15 - 14:00	Lunch and Exhibition	
14:00 - 14:45	Parallel Session: Panels 11 and 12 (2 papers each)	

11 Re-enchanting nature **Eliot Room**

40	'Touch with chaste palms moist and cold, / Now the spell hath lost his hold': Sabrina, Nymph of the River Severn in Milton's <i>A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle</i> (1634)	Beth Lettington (University of Hull)
73	'This modern world is a world where the wonderful is utterly commonplace': Dangerous disenchantment in H. G. Wells's <i>The Sea Lady</i> (1902)	Dr Amy Waterson (Royal Holloway, University of London)

12 Reimagining the merfolk of fairy tale **Dickens Room**

57	Venture where you will: the aquatic Other in fairy-tale retellings	Dr Silvia Storti (Early Career Researcher)
79	Cola Pesce and the Gothic Mediterranean: Hybrid bodies and haunting waters in contemporary reimaginings	Dr Elena Emma Sottiolotta (University of Cambridge)

14:45 - 14:55	Tea/Coffee Break	
14:55 - 15:55	Parallel Session: Panels 13 and 14	

13 The Gothic Little Mermaid

Eliot Room

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| 10 | Tentacular Defiance: An exploration of Hans Christian Andersen's Sea Witch and female sexuality in 'The Little Mermaid' (1837) | Dr Daisy Butcher (University of Hertfordshire) |
| 25 | Poor unfortunate souls: The Faustian bargain of 'The Little Mermaid' | Rebecca Greef (University of Hertfordshire) |
| 67 | Mysterious fathoms below: Exploring the depths of Disney's Gothic mermaids | Sinead Tobin (Lancaster University) |

14 Sirens, selkies and the feminine

Dickens Room

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| 27 | Femme fatale, occult waters, and siren Silencing in Louise Erdrich's 'Fleur' | Marci Heatherly (Pittsburg State University, KA) |
| 78 | A littoral rubicon betwixt and between | Ann Conmy (Technological University of the Shannon) |

14:55 - 15:55 *Parallel Session: Panels 15 and 16*

15 Mariners and merfolk

Eliot Room

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| 7 | Remaking the mermaid: Comparing nineteenth-century depictions at sea and ashore | Dr Karl Bell (University of Portsmouth) |
| 16 | Mignonette: The last voyage of <i>The Mermaid</i> and the cannibal erotic | Dr Emma Dee (Early Career Researcher) |
| 29 | When enchantment is made flesh: An exploration of the Steller's Sea-ape | Dr Charles Hoge
(Metropolitan State University of Denver) |

16 Folklore, fairies, and fish-people

Dickens Room

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| 35 | Dis/enchantment and Enlightenment: Fish-men, folklore and fact in eighteenth-century Spain | Alex Judkins (University of Sheffield) |
| 39 | Changelings in the water: Folktales, folk beliefs and a literary afterlife | Scarlette-Electra LeBlanc (University of Hull) |
| 42 | Into the depths: Reading queerness in the water-horse tradition | Rachel Martin (Harvard University) |

19:00 - 21:00 *Conference Dinner*

8 September 2025 British Library

08:30 - 08:50	Registration - tea and coffee	Eliot Room
08:50 - 09:50	Parallel Session: Panels 17 and 18	

17 Nation and nature

Eliot Room

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| 20 | The <i>Nykur</i> : An Icelandic water spirit in folklore and cultural memory | Mariateresa Esposito (University of Iceland) |
| 21 | <i>A Mari Usque Ad Mare</i> : Phyllis Brett Young's <i>Undine</i> and the female grotesque in the popular Canadian imaginary | Dr Kathryn Franklin (University of Toronto) |
| 76 | The transgression of boundaries: Urban's <i>Hastman</i> between folklore and eco-Gothic | Valentýna Žiškóvá (Charles University/Sapienza Università di Roma) |

18 Aquatic romance 2

Dickens Room

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| 44 | Submersive subversives: Encoded sexual fluidity in Hans Christian Andersen's other mermaid story | Helena McBurney (King's College, London) |
| 46 | Exploring female sexual expression through merfolk encounters in <i>The Cruel Prince</i> and <i>A Court of Silver Flames</i> | Deborah Moumane (University of Hertfordshire) |
| 68 | '[O]h, love, at last!': Dangerous nereids and deadly encounters in George Horton's <i>Aphrøessa: A Legend of Argolis, and Other Poems</i> (1897) | Georgia Toumara (Independent Scholar) |

09:50 - 10:50	Plenary 4: Mermaid glitter: Fish scales, queer plastic and vibrant femininities	Eliot Room Prof. Catherine Spooner (Lancaster University) Introduced by Sam George
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10:50 - 11:00	Tea/Coffee Break	
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11:00 - 12:00	Parallel Session: Panels 19 and 20	
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19 The divine and monstrous feminine

Eliot Room

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| 5 | The metaphysics of Melusine: A tale of alchemy and initiation, reclaiming the Goddess | Allison Allen-Byrd (Independent scholar) |
| 13 | The Sirens' silence: Uneasy matriarchy in Lucile Hadžihalilović's <i>Evolution</i> | Dr Maria-Silvia Cohut (Brunel University London) |
| 14 | Water nymphs in Polish Romanticism: Pagan justice and feminine power | Agnieszka Łowczanin (University of Łódź) |

20 Mermaids of poetry

Dickens Room

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| 24 | The Romantic Lamia and Anne Bannerman's 'The Mermaid' (1800) | Jane Gill (University of Hertfordshire) |
| 33 | Undulant shapes of murderous femininity: Tennyson's aquatic creatures | Dominique Ionnone (University of Salerno) |
| 14 | We heard the sweet bells over the bay': What links Matthew Arnold's 'The Forsaken Merman', Robert Rampling's landscape art and the legend of Jinny Greenteeth? | Dr Ivan Phillips (University of Hertfordshire) |

12:00 - 12:45 Session: Panel 21 (2 papers)

21 Water-women of Japan

Eliot Room

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| 14 | ‘The girl whose eyes were like the ocean’: yuri manga and queer monstrosity in <i>This Monster Wants to Eat Me</i> | Dr Joseph Crawford (University of Exeter) |
| 47 | ‘A girl who came from the bottom of the sea’: Gothic and feminist aspects in Hiroko Katayama’s Tanka poetry | Dr Izumi Nagai (Osaka Metropolitan University) |

12:45 - 13:30 Lunch

13:30 - 14:30 Parallel Session: Panels 22 and 23

22 Oceanic postcolonialism

Eliot Room

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| 2 | Transgression And transformation: Mer-human relationships in the tales of Ruth Manning-Sanders | Shabnam Ahsan (University of Hertfordshire) |
| 37 | Indian ocean studies: Transoceanic memory in postcolonial Gothic sea fiction | Shahrukh Khan (The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad) |
| 60 | An impossible outsider: Singaporean mermaid in Amanda Lee Koe’s <i>Siren</i> | Dr Maria Szafrńska-Chmielarz (University of Warsaw) |

23 Selkies and ecocriticism

Dickens Room

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| 9 | The constant selkie and the changing sea: Fluid queer identities, interspecies kinship and ambivalent seascapes in Molly Knox Ostertag’s <i>The Girl from the Sea</i> | Dr Tina Burger (Heinrich-Heine University of Düsseldorf) |
| 66 | Selkies and adolescence: An eco-Gothic reading of anxieties in <i>Tides</i> | Harley Tillotson (University of Hertfordshire) |
| 70 | Merfolk and the beach: Resisting dualisms with tooth and scales | Marion Troxler (University of Bern) |

14:30 - 15:30 Parallel Session: Panels 24 and 25

24 Ambivalent selkies

Eliot Room

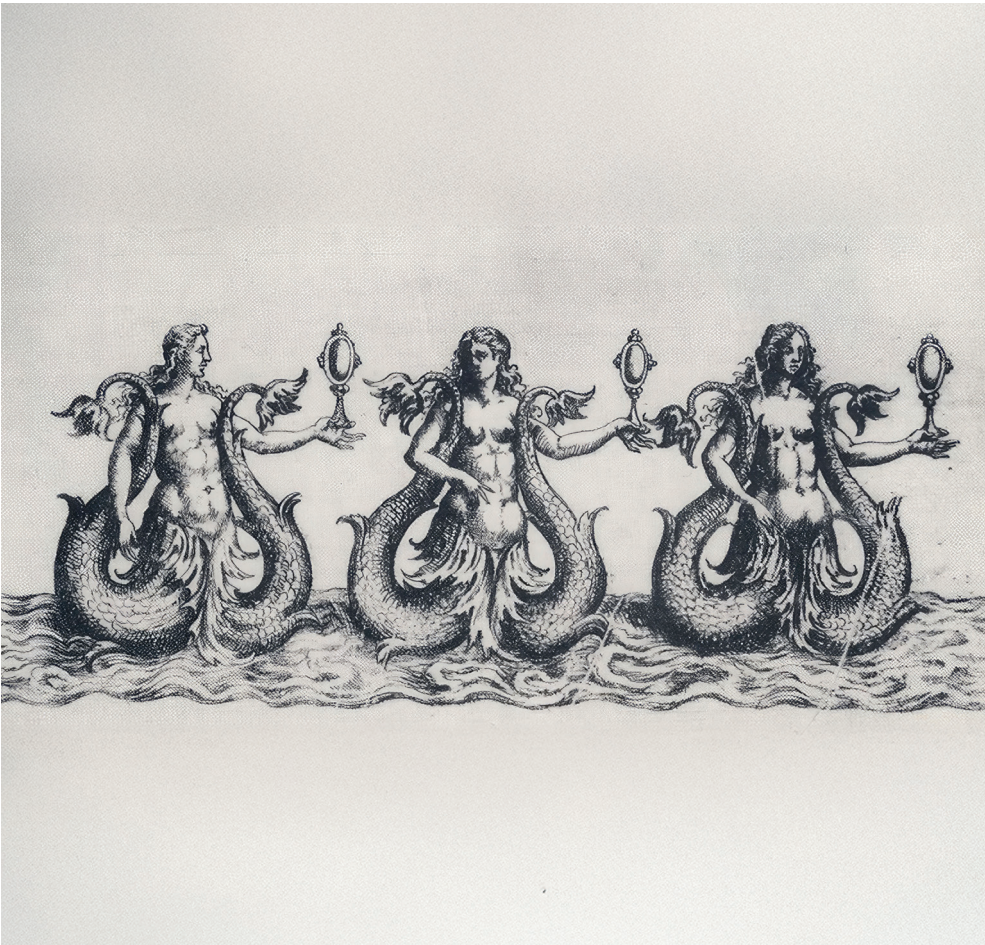
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| 23 | ‘Becoming with Seal’: Mourning, separation, and kinship in contemporary selkie soundscapes | Dr Monica Germanà (University of Westminster) |
| 31 | Genre and gender in contemporary selkie fiction: Patriarchy, utopia, instrumentalism, enchantment | Dr Bill Hughes (Open Graves, Open Minds Project) |
| 72 | Selkie without seal skin: Mythmaking and storytelling in Fiona Macleod’s rewriting of selkie tales | Heru Wang (Lingnan University) |

25 Traumatic water-folk

Dickens Room

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| 36 | Slipping off the sealskin: Examining the nuances of intimate partner violence in selkie mythology | Alexa Keough (University of Hampshire) |
| 62 | Dead in the water: Narrating trauma through Tolkien’s dead in the marshes and Rowling’s Inferi | Stefanie Tegeler (University of Münster) |
| 77 | Wet brown graves: Irish Gothic bog bodies in Seamus Heaney and Miranda Carr | Claire Cunningham (Lancaster University) |

15:30 - 15:40	Tea/Coffee Break	
15:40 - 16:40	Session: Panel 26	
26 Mermaids, Undines and the Arts		Eliot Room
19	Burne-Jones's <i>A Sea-Nymph</i> and the displaced mermaid	Dr Andrew Elfenbein (University of Minnesota)
32	The fantastical narratives of Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué and Richard Wagner, featuring undines, illustrated by Arthur Rackham. Are those ealms of enchantment under threat?	Victoria Hurtado (Independent scholar)
56	Mermaid ballets in the twentieth century	Dr Francesca Sawaya (College of William & Mary)
16:40 - 16:55	Closing Remarks	Dr Bill Hughes (Open Graves, Open Minds Project)





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The Open Graves, Open Minds Project began by unearthing depictions of the vampire and the undead in literature, art, and other media, then embraced werewolves (and representations of wolves and wild children), fairies, and other supernatural beings and their worlds. The Project extends to all narratives of the fantastic, the folkloric, and the magical, emphasising that sense of Gothic as enchantment rather than simply horror. Through this, OGOM is articulating an ethical Gothic, cultivating moral agency and creating empathy for the marginalised, monstrous or othered, including the disenchanting natural world.

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#GothicMermaids #SeaChanges

We are very grateful for support from the University of Hertfordshire, the International Gothic Association, the British Association for Romantic Studies, and the British Association for Victorian Studies, which has made this conference possible and, in particular, has enabled us to give some assistance to postgraduates and ECRs.

