



The Ian Fletcher Memorial Lecture “romantic science and romantic imagination”

Professor **Richard C. Sha** American University

Wednesday, **April 9**, 2014, **5:30 p.m. University Club, Heritage Room**
(UCLUB), Arizona State University, Tempe campus

Romantic poets, scientists, and philosophers saw the imagination as mattering because it was a primary force behind the production of knowledge. The entry under “Imagination” in Rees’ Cyclopaedia, for instance, begins: “Imagination is a power or faculty of the soul, whereby it conceives and forms ideas of things, by means of the impressions made on the fibres of the brain, by sensation.” In Kant, and more generally, the imagination was the ground of perception and new thought. The imagination allows the mind to conceive, but as Plato, Descartes, Kant and others recognized, nothing guarantees the accuracy of its conceptions. Accuracy is the task of reason for Kant or of experimental regulation in science after the middle of the nineteenth century. As Sha will show, the Romantic imagination, even within science, played a key role in the transition from knowledge production to knowledge regulation.



Richard C. Sha is currently working on a book about how scientists understood the imagination during the Romantic period, with chapters covering physiology, neurology, chemistry and physics, midwifery, and psychology. Work on this book has been supported by a year-long NEH Fellowship in 2012-13 and portions of the manuscript have appeared in *Configurations* and *European Romantic Review*. He is also editing a volume of essays with Joel Faflak on *Romanticism and Emotion*, forthcoming from Cambridge UP. With physicist Nathan Harshman, Sha taught an undergraduate seminar on “Bridging the Two Cultures: Science and Literature” in spring 2012 and in fall 2013. He plans to teach a course on “Thinking Emotion: From Physiology to Ethics” with Bryan Fantie (neuro-psychologist) and April Shelford (Enlightenment historian) in 2014.

The Ian Fletcher Memorial Lecture is proudly presented by the
Department of English at ASU and is part of its **2014 Edgework Series**.

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