

Women's Reading in the Nineteenth Century: A Symposium

Thursday 26 March 2009, 10am-4pm

To be held at the Institute of English Studies, University of London

Organised by the Reading Experience Database 1450-1945, the Open University Book History and Bibliography Research Group, and the Institute of English Studies

Confirmed respondents: David Finkelstein (Queen Margaret University Edinburgh), Gill Sutherland (Newnham College, Cambridge)

Confirmed speakers: Christina de Bellaigue (Exeter College, Oxford), Rosalind Crone (The Open University), Ella Dzelzainis (Birkbeck College, London), Katie Halsey (IES, University of London), Naomi Hetherington (London Metropolitan University), Mark Towsey (University of Liverpool)

"Much may be learned with regard to lovely woman by a look at the book she reads in." (Thackeray).

What did women in the nineteenth-century read? How did they read it? What assumptions were made about women's reading at the time? The purpose of this symposium is to consider the different ways in which nineteenth-century female readers reacted to the texts that they encountered, in particular within different institutional and social groups, such as prisons, schools and literary networks. We will discuss the textual matter that women read, and the spectrum of responses to reading that they recorded; these range from compliant devotion to furious resistance. Such responses tell us not only about "lovely woman" herself, but also about the cultural conditions in which nineteenth-century women became readers.

The day will end with a visit to the Women's Library in Whitechapel, including a guided tour of the collections and the exhibition *Between the Covers: the Politics and Pleasure of Women's Magazines*.



Places are limited - please RSVP to Katie.Halsey@sas.ac.uk and R.H.Crone@open.ac.uk by 1 March 2009 to confirm your attendance