

Romantic Period Seminar

Autumn 2011

Key Voices of the 1790s

Organisers: The Institute of English Studies
The English Department, The Open University

About the Seminar Series:

'Key Voices of the 1790s' is the title of the Romantic Period Seminar for Autumn 2011, to be held on Wednesdays 5.30-7.30 pm, and organized by the Open University at the Institute of English Studies, Senate House, University of London. As the decade in which writing of all kinds – politics, poetry, novels, plays – was transformed by the experience of the French Revolution, the 1790s marks a major turning point in Britain's cultural life. The frequently contested values occasioned by such new writings shaped and even defined many of the concerns of the Romantic period, both politically and subjectively. By exploring some of the key voices of the 'Revolutionary decade' we will provide a forum for graduate students and scholars to revisit and discuss issues and concerns that continue to exercise Romantic period studies today.

The structure of the seminar is a 50 minutes talk followed by questions and answers. We ask speakers to provide some brief key readings for intending participants so as to stimulate a more constructive Q & A session, and these are provided after details of each seminar given below.

Wednesday 21 September 2011

Pamela Clemit, 'Reading *Political Justice* in the 1790s'

Commentary

The publication of *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (14 Feb. 1793) established Godwin as the pre-eminent political philosopher of the 1790s. But how did people read his seminal work? This paper examines contemporary responses to *Political Justice*, drawing on correspondence, memoirs, and printed works. It explores the variety of ways in which *Political Justice* was read—from secular gospel to practical guide to living—and proposes a view of Godwin as intellectual mentor, adviser, and agony aunt to the young radical intelligentsia of the time.

Recommended Reading

William Godwin, *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793 edition preferred): a book to dip into. A good starting point is the extracts in Jon Mee and David Fallon, eds., *Romanticism and Revolution: a Reader* (Blackwell, 2011), 144-90. A full text of the 1793 edition is available in the Online Library of Liberty

<http://oll.libertyfund.org>).

Time and Venue: 5.30-7.30, Room 103, first floor, Senate House, University of London.

Pamela Clemit is Professor of English Studies at Durham University. She is the author of *The Godwinian Novel* (OUP, 1993, 2001), and has published numerous

scholarly and critical editions of William Godwin's and Mary Shelley's writings. Her latest books are *The Letters of William Godwin*, Volume 1: 1778-1797 (OUP, 2011), *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s* (CUP, 2011), and an edition of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (Oxford World's Classics, 2009).

Wednesday 19 October 2011

Jon Mee, 'The Use of Conversation': William Godwin, Mary Hays, and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s'

Commentary

This paper explores the idea of the conversation of culture as it was lived and imagined among the group of London 'Jacobin's' in the 1790s. It understands this particular 'conversable world' in terms of a joint enterprise of 'rational' conversation amenable to what Godwin called 'the collision of mind with mind', but also examines the development across the decade and the differences between participants that emerged in relation to the roles of affect, gender, and the broadening of social participation in the republic of letters.

Recommended Reading

Given the time constraints the most obvious thing to read would be the two essays on politeness in Godwin's *The Enquirer*, but some knowledge of *Political Justice*, Wollstonecraft's *Letters from Norway*, and Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* would be useful. A sense of this particular social world can be gleaned from some browsing in the online version of Godwin's diary <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>

Time and Venue: 5.30-7.30, Room 103, 1st floor, Senate House, University of London.

Jon Mee is Professor of Romanticism Studies at the University of Warwick. he has published a range of essays and books in relation to the Romantic period, most recently *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762-1830* (Oxford, 2011).

Wednesday 16 November 2011

Jacqueline Labbe, 'Charlotte Smith, William Wordsworth and Romanticism'

Commentary

This paper will present Smith and Wordsworth as co-writers of the thing we call Romanticism and will uncover some of the ways in which they go about doing so. It will present some hitherto unnoticed examples of mutual influence and also delve briefly into a discussion of the experimental ethos that underpinned their works in the period 1784-1807.

Recommended Reading

Bishop C. Hunt, Jr, 'Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith', *The Wordsworth Circle* 1 (1970): 85-103; Tayebi, Kandi, 'Charlotte Smith and the Quest for the Romantic

Prophetic Voice', *Women's Writing*, 11.3 (2004): 421-38; Jacqueline M. Labbe, 'Smith, Wordsworth and the Model of the Romantic Poet', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 51 (2008)

<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ravon/v/n51/index.html?lang=en>

Time and Venue: 5.30-7.30, Room 103, 1st floor, Senate House, University of London.

Jacqueline Labbe is Chair of the Warwick Graduate School and Director of its Humanities Research Centre, where she also teaches eighteenth and nineteenth century literature. She is the author of four monographs, the latest of which, *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807*, provides the material for her seminar.