



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S9. Writers' Letters

Thursday 31 August: 9.30-11.30am

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This seminar will consider the different aspects in which writers' letters constitute an informal writing laboratory, providing clues as to the creative process from its inception to the finished work. These could include reactions to other authors past or contemporary, the expression of a writer's consciousness of his or her social specificity and awareness of historical determination, the affirmation of an aesthetic position and ambition, the feelings as to one's own writing and its reception as well as the unavoidable fluctuations of thought and feeling and the varying degree of sincerity in their expression.

“From the sheet that endures to the sheet that perishes”: Letters from the Romantic Age

Sylvie Crinquand (University of Burgundy)

During the Romantic Age letters became considered as a minor genre, distinct from poetic creation. The two genres indeed seem to be at cross purposes: where the letter should be spontaneous, firmly grounded in the present, the poem is an artefact, and tries to escape time and mutability. However, one may expect to find some references to poetry in a poet's letter. Focusing on letters written by several Romantic poets, this paper will attempt to assess the status of letters in (or as opposed to) poetic creation. While in some cases the poem only remains present in the letter as an object, in other letters, those of Keats in particular, letter and poem interact, and even, at times, merge together.

Authorial rehearsals: *Kangaroo* and the Correspondence of D.H. Lawrence

Maria Panarello (University of Messina)

D.H. Lawrence's correspondence appears to be a sort of parallel text to the author's narratives. The concern of this paper are the letters written by Lawrence on the stages of his “savage pilgrimage” which contain speculations on and descriptions of places, people and things. In a variety of ways, segments of these letters were included in the narrative or travel texts the author was writing at the time. Texts conceived, planned and written when “the absolute necessity to move” appears to have influenced the artist's choices display more frequently this transfer of spatial representations. The case of *Kangaroo*,

which I shall use to illustrate my point, is an interesting example of this procedure of parallel writing.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' Letters: Questions of Poetics

Irina Popova (Moscow State University)

G.M.Hopkins' letters show his profound interest in questions of poetics and his original poetic thinking. Parts of his correspondence can be regarded as theoretical works on particular aspects of poetry and its techniques. This paper will attempt to show how, while explaining his own poems' formal aspects and their sense or judging other poets' works, Hopkins is always striving to formulate general principles of the art of poetry. His letters dealing with poetic language, sprung rhythm, poetic forms as well as those discussing particular poets reveal consistency of his values.

P.G.Wodehouse's Letters to W. (William) Townend

Valentina Ryapolova (Moscow State University)

The famous humorist's letters to his close friend and fellow-writer covering several decades, from 1920 to 1952, present several points of interest. They show him as a highly accomplished, painstaking and deliberate artist. We can also see that he understands the nature of creative writing as such and so can both appreciate works very different from his own and offer practical advice and constructive criticism. Wodehouse's belief (successfully tested in some most dramatic circumstances) that art is not a direct reflection of its creator's moods or immediate surroundings links him up to the "defence of poetry" tradition.

Writers' Letters: a Novel-writing Laboratory Including Readers?

Ana Vogrincic (Ljubljana Graduate School of Humanities)

The paper will explore letter-writing as an informal novel-writing-laboratory taking into account three different aspects of writers' correspondence in eighteenth-century England. Firstly, their informal epistolary communication with friends and relatives in general, that can be taken as a kind of practice field for the novelistic epistemology of the reader-writer relationship. Secondly, correspondence among the literati themselves, where they comment on the novels they have just read, thereby providing critical commentary on contemporary fiction that represents the closest to what we have in terms of literary criticism of the novel in the early eighteenth century (with examples by the Scriblerians and the Bluestockings); and thirdly, fan-letters to the novelists, whereby charmed readers eagerly discussed characters' behaviour, praised or opposed author's decisions and even boldly suggested plot changes (focusing on the famous letter-exchange between Richardson and Lady Bradshaigh). Each of the three different groups of correspondents stimulates, contributes to and influences the creative process of novel-writing.