

Information about PhD

Name: Crystal Biggin

PhD: English Literature

Thesis Title: Reading and Reviewing the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Novel

Thesis Description:

My thesis aims to explore the complex dialogues that take place across literary and non-literary works about the novel and its reception, primarily in relation to Samuel Richardson and his circle. In print, these exchanges are generally evident in overt references made to other authors and/or their associated writings; re-appropriated literary devices borrowed from an earlier work or body of works; conversations about novel readers within the confined textual space of a particular work; as well as more polemical statements about the impact of said fictions (or, more often, specific *kinds* of novelistic writing) in opening chapters, accompanying prefaces, and other paratextual materials. Outside of print, Richardson's intricate epistolary networks enabled him to prompt as well as encourage readerly evaluations and revisions of his fictional writings, while also offering feedback and advice to aspiring women writers. Despite the fact that discussions about his own creative choices would appear to dominate Richardson's extant correspondence, these letters actually provide us with important insights into the novel's status, more broadly, as a highly contested and developing form of extended prose fiction across the eighteenth century.

In mapping and analysing the significance of discursive interactions between a specific male novelist and his readers, and focussing upon women writers/readers like Sarah Fielding who sought to emulate his achievements in fiction in the 1740s and 1750s, my research looks to re-examine the extent to which women, in particular, apparently responded to and understood the ways in which Richardson aimed to control or manage his own reception.

Supervisors and Institution(s):

Dr Kate Loveman (University of Leicester)

Dr Felicity James (University of Leicester)

Research Interests:

Epistolarity; the novel in letters; women writers and readers; canon formation and popular forms of reading matter (like sermons and conduct books); life-writing; notions of literary collaboration in the long eighteenth-century; domestic reading habits.

Publications (please include full details with page nos. or web links):

None to date

Scholarly / Public Engagement Activities:

None to date