

Proposed Dissertation Topic

I intend to work on the 'literary' radicals – in particular Shelley, Leigh Hunt and his circle – and their varied responses to the ideas of the 'philosophical' radicals and political economists in the 1810s-1820s (particularly Malthus, Bentham, Smith, Ricardo and Godwin). My research will examine the way in which ideas of political economy, class, and labour were contested, scrutinised, or co-opted in the poetics of the 'literary radicals'.

The work in this field by both Clifford Siskin (*The Work of Writing, The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*) and Philip Connell (*Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*) has shown that the opposition between the 'Romantics' and the 'Philosophers' that exists in much literary criticism, and that crystallised around Mill's essays on Bentham and Coleridge, is in need of revision. There was a great deal of intellectual exchange, interaction and cross-fertilisation throughout the period that cannot be justified by political pragmatism alone, and that is exemplified by the inclusion in the Hunts' *Examiner* of both politics and poetry. As such, I wish to examine the way that 'radical' poets' conceptions of their work and their works was impacted upon by the contemporaneous debates over theories of labour, economic class and value. My intention is to focus upon the varying and often plural ways in which authors situated their poet-ideal within or without the economic system of early nineteenth century Britain, and the manner in which they conceptualised poetic labour in relation to this class situation, and their perception of it. Far from looking for a unified theory of 'the Romantic Poet', I believe this research will point up the contradictions and overdeterminations at work in conceptions of the poet and poetry in this period.

A point of departure for such investigation is Shelley's *A Philosophical View of Reform*. In *A Philosophical View* the question of literary copyright forms a part of a wider class and economic analysis in which poetic property is included within a category of property deemed legitimate and 'just', in opposition to 'unjust' property founded on 'usurpation'.

The growing work on the *History of the Book* is transforming our understanding of 'the Romantic Poet', but there is still a great deal to be done. In this respect it will also be important to put to use the work done by William St Clair (*The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*), Tom Mole (*Byron's Romantic Celebrity*) on 'Romantic' authors' practical experiences of the publishing industry, whether it be as product, producer or property owner. Such research should pose important questions in turn about how authors in this period related to their works, and how they envisaged or resisted their roles in the book industry.

Useful in this regard will be the recently published correspondence between Byron and John Murray. Likewise, the substantial holdings of the University Library will be of inestimable use, particularly where access to eighteenth and nineteenth century newspapers and reviews is concerned. Finally, I feel the critical strengths and areas of expertise of the Cambridge English Faculty would especially suit and facilitate my proposed area of research.