

Humour and Satire in British Romanticism

Durham University, 13-14 September 2019

‘*Humour*, in its sense of “a natural or accidental disposition of the temperament of the mind”, or whatever way in which Lexicographers care to define it, is a word as changeable and iridescent as the thing it signifies.’ With this line Mario Praz opens the Introduction to his 1924 Italian translation of the *Essays of Elia*, capturing the difficulty of attempting to pin down a word and a feeling so mercurial and ambivalent. Samuel Johnson gives eleven definitions in total for the term, and a further three for ‘humorous’ (which range from ‘pleasant; jocular’ to ‘full of grotesque or odd images’). This conference will explore how Romantic writers navigated these various and often contradictory understandings, focusing both on their perceptions, and their uses, of humour.

A reappraisal of satire, ‘a mode with which we do not as a rule associate the Romantic period’ (as Marilyn Butler has put it), runs parallel to this aim. The conference intends not only to consider comparatively neglected satirists like the ‘obscene beastly Peter Pindar’ (as Lamb called him), but also to contemplate satirical strands in better-known Romantic writers. In this regard we are particularly, but not solely, interested in satirical pieces relating to the 1819-2019 bicentennial. Papers on everything from P. B. Shelley’s *The Mask of Anarchy* to William Hone’s *The Political House that Jack Built* are very much encouraged.

We welcome the submission of **250-word abstracts** for **20-minute papers** from academics at all levels, as well as Romanticists and humour specialists outside academia, which explore a wide interpretation of the theme. Topics may include (but are by no means limited to) the following:

- **Humour in translation and across cultures**
- **The politics of humour: seditious jokes and political satire**
- **Gender and humour/satire**
- **Romantic readings of classical satire**
- **Romantic readings of Augustan satire**
- **Puns and linguistic ambiguity: Romantic conceptions of language**
- **Notions of formality and sociability: the appropriacy of humour**
- **Scientific understandings of laughter and humour**
- **Humour, comedy, and the theatre**
- **Topical humour/satire relating to the bicentennial of 1819**

Please email proposals to romantichumourandsatire@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions is **Monday, 20 May 2019**.