

Distinguished International Visiting Fellowship 2014

Matthew Grenby

'Educating the Emotions: William Godwin, children's books and the teaching of emotional literacy, c.1800'



As part of its international research collaboration, the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions funds outstanding international scholars in the field to visit one or more of the Australian nodes for a period of between four weeks and two months, to work with members of the Centre on a research program of their choice. Visitors are invited to present their work in lectures or symposia, where they will receive feedback from and engage in discussion with members of the Centre, promoting collaborative research.

Matthew Grenby hails from Newcastle University in the UK, where he is a professor of 18th-Century studies, and was awarded a Distinguished International Visiting Fellowship with the Centre in early 2014. His research interests include children's literature and culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in particular the overlap of children's books and political fiction; William Godwin and his correspondence; book history; the Romantic-era novel in Britain; and political fiction of the 1790s and early 1800s, particularly so-called 'anti-Jacobin' writing.

Matthew reflects on his time as a Visiting Fellow with CHE below.

I had the privilege of being an international visiting fellow on the CHE project earlier this year. My time in Australia was divided between the University of Western Australia in Perth (31 Jan.- 18 Feb.) and the University of Adelaide (18-21 Feb.).

My work is on British literature and culture in the long eighteenth century, particularly cultures of childhood (including children's literature and education). The large project I'm currently working on is an edition for Oxford University Press of the letters of the philosopher, novelist, educationalist and publisher William Godwin (vol.3, 1806-15). I had initially applied to the CHE fellowship scheme to continue and test my work on the emotional content of Godwin's letters and his writing for children. But in fact I had the opportunity to present some of this work at a video-linked symposium in Dec. 2013 jointly organised by the University of Western Australia and Newcastle University, my own institution. Because of this I thought it better to start some new work when I took up the CHE fellowship. This looked chiefly at children's friendships in the early modern period, focussing on the representation of friendship in children's literature c.1700-1840.

I presented my work at a public lecture at the University of Western Australia, entitled 'Delight in Friendship: the proprieties of affection in early British children's literature'. The research is continuing, and I hope to publish it in due course as an article in a scholarly journal. One output already is a radio broadcast to which I made substantial contributions: an episode entitled 'Education of the Heart' on the dangers of friendship as conveyed to children in the 18th and 19th centuries, first broadcast on BBC Radio Four on 1 April 2014. This was part of a landmark series entitled 'Five Hundred Years of Friendship', presented by Dr Thomas Dixon. The series provided a history of the changing meaning of friendship. It was broadcast in 15 episodes which ran from 24 March to 11 April 2014 (and it remains available as podcasts: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03yzn9h>).

While at UWA, I also ran a work-in-progress workshop, 'Educating the Emotions', on some more general aspects of children's emotion in the long eighteenth century. I then travelled to the University of Adelaide, where I gave my third and final presentation, 'Feeling anti-Jacobinism: enlisting the emotions in the fiction of the British "War of Ideas", 1790-1805', which drew on existing work that I had re-fashioned as a result of my engagement with the history of emotions:

The value to me of the fellowship at the CHE was substantial. A period of time to devote to new research (on children's friendships in particular) was very precious. So too was the opportunity to use the resources of, in particular, the UWA library. Above all, my research benefitted very much from the advice of CHE colleagues in both Perth and Adelaide. Workshopping my ideas, especially as I developed my thinking on the place of emotions in children's lives (both in reality, and through the literature written for them), was extremely useful. But so too were the insights into the new work being conducted at the CHE that I was able to gain from attending seminars and presentations at UWA. Perhaps even more than this, it was assistance and ideas gained from casual conversations with CHE staff and students that enabled me to develop a new area of my research so quickly. It seems to me that this is exactly this kind of 'knowledge exchange' that a fellowship should enable. I am very grateful for the chance to pursue my research at the CHE. Thank-you for the wonderful opportunity to collaborate.