2nd week (25 January)

Nathan Waddell (University of Nottingham)

‘Moonlighting: Beethoven, Literature, and the First World War’

Beethoven’s so-called ‘Moonlight’ sonata was as popular a century ago as it is today. Nathan Waddell explores the implications of that popularity in relation to the modernist writings of Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Rebecca West, and Virginia Woolf, with a particular focus on the composition’s ability to evoke feelings of sorrow, melancholia, mourning, and deathliness.

*We will be playing a recording of the ‘Moonlight’ Sonata from 4.30pm – all welcome.

4th week (8 February)

David Dwan (University of Oxford)

‘Orwell and Happiness’

‘Can socialists be happy?’ Orwell posed this question in Tribune in 1943 and he remained preoccupied with it for much of his life. He was far from convinced that socialists could or, indeed, should be content in a corrupt world and he both asserted and denied that happiness was the ultimate goal of socialism. This paper examines the reasons for Orwell’s mixed feelings and considers to what extent happiness was a meaningful political value in his work.

6th week (22 February)

Julia Jordan (UCL)

‘Accidental Texts: Error and Experiment in the 60s and 70s Avant-Garde Novel’

‘I start by sorting the bits of paper, seeing which bits go with other bits, exactly “dot-to-dot”, it’s a good image. Accidents, like the order in which the bits got thrown into the folder, often dictate juxtapositions which weren’t there by design.’ So writes B. S. Johnson, one of the best known British experimental novelists of the 60s and 70s. This paper will explore the ‘aleatory novel’ of the era, drawing parallels between contemporary writers’ interest in the new(ish) science of uncertainty and the indeterminacy conjured by many of the experimental novels published in Britain between 1960 and 1980.

After the seminars, up to ten graduate students are very welcome to join us for dinner with the speaker in Hall at Harris Manchester. If you would like to attend dinner please email kate.mcloughlin@ell.ox.ac.uk: the first five graduate students to sign up will be free, and the cost thereafter will be £10 each (payable online – details when you email). Please note that the deadline for signing up for dinner is two days before each event.