

English 9184 (full year) *The 1790s and Their Afterlives: The Godwins and Shelleys*

Wed. 12:30- 3:30. UC 4415

Prof. Tilottama Rajan. Office: University College 2423; E.mail: trajan@uwo.ca. Office hours: after class or by appointment.

Course Description

Finding its centre of gravity in the Godwin-first family of writers, this course will also be more broadly concerned with the revolutionary energies of the 1790s, the darkening of their claims to enlightenment in the 1790s themselves, and the complex survival of these energies and their resistances into the more conservative period of the Regency. In addition to texts by William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley, the course will therefore also include work by William Blake and Mary Hays (and will allude to other texts). The texts of the core Godwin-Shelley group are characterized by an unusual density of self-allusion and self-analysis, as well as by their discarding, repetition and working through of figures of each other, across the period from the 1790s to the cusp of the Victorian period. A loose envelope for the course is thus my own in which writers project and revise themselves and other intimates as part-subjects and part-objects, in such a way that the issues they traverse in this psycho-analytic process remain under ongoing negotiation between and within their texts. However, the aim here is not to reduce the texts studied to a family romance. The family of texts studied here is best conceived as an open rhizome of intellectual and generic connections; the point of this course is precisely not to specify a topic that forces us to read for a single theme. Those connections include revolutionary politics, world history, the relations between prose and poetry and an experimentation with their boundaries, and the survival of the 1790s and Romanticism as a form of *dissensus* into the Regency as a form of consensus, and beyond that into our own time.

Readings (ordered at the bookstore)

William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (Penguin) [I ordered this edition because it was the cheapest, but there

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