

Women's Society, 1750-1830
7-8 July 2016
University of Notre Dame Global Gateway,
1 Suffolk Street London

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, Molly Gibson's reputation is compromised when she is seen to consort with a single man on the outskirts of the village. It is only restored when Lady Harriet takes her around the village in a display of her confidence in her. Although written in 1864, it is a scene that might easily have featured in Jane Austen's, or Amelia Opie's novels. The exact boundaries between probity and infelicitous action might vary, but they are boundaries that women are very much responsible for supervising amongst themselves. This is not irrespective of the masculine world of expectation, propriety and power, but it is a distinct domain of self-policing – and, as in other cases, it might sometimes be still more censorious in some areas, or experience greater anxiety, than is the case for that wider masculine world. Moreover, it is clearly not a unified world – conventions and expectations function in relation to particular reference groups, and while no reference group is wholly immune from the deeper societal expectations of conduct and their associated penalties for misconduct, people rate some groups and associations more strongly than others. Amelia Alderson had no qualms about forming a friendship with Mary Wollstonecraft; Elizabeth Inchbald and the Twisses did, once the character of her relationship with Imlay became clear. But none of Godwin's women friends were introduced to Sarah Elwes.

This interdisciplinary workshop will examine three dimensions of the conventions in constructing and representing women's experience across the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe: it will examine the way sources reveal the opportunities and constraints in social relations between women, and women and men; it will consider the way in which novels of the period represent the social conventions of interaction; and it will assess how far there are conflicts between the experience of women and their representation in the world of fiction. The workshop is especially interested in exploring the details of interaction and reconstructing the conventions that seem to have operated, and in examining symmetries and asymmetries between the lives of authors and the lives of their characters. The fictional representation of different social positions and mores also requires setting alongside other evidence of elite practice and that of the middling and lower orders.

We invite proposals for papers from scholars in any discipline that address women's society from the mid eighteenth to the mid nineteenth-centuries. Chronological boundaries are flexibly conceived, and proposals for papers which address earlier and later periods but which overlap with 1750–1830 are encouraged. Similarly, while the central focus of the conference will be on Women's Society in Britain, papers on conventions of behavior in other European countries (or of nationals abroad) are welcome.

Abstracts (max. 500 words) for 20-minute papers should be sent, with a short biography, to **inewman@nd.edu** by **1 May 2016**. For more information please contact the conference organizers Ian Newman (University of Notre Dame) or Mark Philp (University of Warwick), at inewman@nd.edu and Mark.Philp@warwick.ac.uk