

Sibylline Leaves:

Chaos and Compilation in the Romantic Period

☞ A Bicentennial Conference ~ Birkbeck College, 20-21 July 2017 ☞

'[Samuel Taylor Coleridge] compresses matter enough for a *handsome* volume into a *two penny pamphlet*, then he lets a friend bury his jewels in a heap of sand of his own; then he scatters his 'Sibylline Leaves' over half a hundred perishable news-papers and magazines; then he suffers a manuscript-poem to be handed about among his friends till all its bloom is brushed off [...] how can such a poet, so managing his own concerns, hope to be popular?'

Review of *Sibylline Leaves*, *Monthly Review* (January 1818)

Keynote Speakers: Deidre Shauna Lynch (Harvard) and Seamus Perry (Oxford)

July 2017 marks the bicentenary of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry collection *Sibylline Leaves* and *Biographia Literaria*, which he had initially planned as an introduction to the poems. For Coleridge the collection included 'the whole of the author's poetical compositions', from those already published in *Lyrical Ballads* to those taken down on 'loose papers and [in] numerous Common-place or Memorandum Books [...] including Margins of Books & Blank pages'. While Coleridge ennobles his poems through an allusion to Virgil's Cumaean Sibyl, their 'fragmentary and widely scattered state' also evokes the cheap materiality of newspapers. For William Hazlitt *Biographia* was no more significant a work than the 'soiled and fashionable leaves of the *Morning Post*' from which it was supposedly composed. From the prophetic to the everyday, through the high and low traditions of flying leaves, this conference focuses on the materiality of Romantic collections.

This conference invites participants to investigate the play of papers between proliferating 'snips', 'scraps', and 'scattered leaves', and the promise of the 'GREAT WORK', complete edition, or philosophical system. We welcome proposals on the metaphorical, material and political implications of the 'leaf in flight', and on the composition, publication and reception of romantic poetry in relation to a diverse range of collections and composite texts: miscellanies, anthologies and beauties, multi-volume or serialised fiction, magazines and newspapers, annuals and albums, common-place books and notebooks, catalogues and guidebooks, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. Revisiting 1817 in 2017 might also involve rethinking the connections between seemingly disparate texts and diverse media in the twenty-first century. How do we read around and make connections within such texts now? How does poetry interact with the paratextual pressures and juxtapositions of these media and genres? What potential do digital tools and platforms offer for representing and reading these collections and tracing connections between them?

Topics might include:

- ❖ The compilation, publication and reception of Coleridge's *Sibylline Leaves*
- ❖ The relation of *Sibylline Leaves* to composite prose works, eg. *Biographia Literaria*
- ❖ 'Flying leaves and penny publications': newspapers, political propaganda and the diffusion of knowledge
- ❖ The 'phantasmal chaos of association': metaphors and materialities of order and disorder
- ❖ Connections within collections: the mechanics of indexing, footnotes, contents pages, errata, advertisements, paratexts, editorial groupings and interventions, text and image
- ❖ Collections, collaboration, and the dynamics of authorship
- ❖ Contested collections: literary invention, literary property, republication
- ❖ Practices of recollection, common-placing, annotation, extra-illustrating and album-making
- ❖ Ephemera, playfulness and popular entertainment
- ❖ Romantic reimaginings of the classical tradition of sibylline leaves
- ❖ Uncollected papers, literary remains, posthumous orders

Please submit a 500 word abstract by 15 October 2016 to sibyllineleaves2017@gmail.com.

Conference Organizers: [Marianne Brooker](#) and [Luisa Calè](#), Birkbeck, University of London.
www.sibyllineleaves2017.wordpress.com