The Eighteenth-Century Seminar

Spring 2014
The Newberry Library, Chicago

Saturday, February 23, 2:00 pm

*Time and Cosmos: The Orrery in the Eighteenth-Century Imagination*

Jesse Molesworth, Indiana University

The first modern orrery, a mechanical device presenting the motion of the solar system, was produced in 1704 by the eminent English clockmakers George Graham and Thomas Tompion. Typically driven by a clockwork mechanism and featuring the planets and their moons revolving around the sun, such devices served throughout the eighteenth century as a crucial means of illustrating the new Copernican view of the cosmos. But it is in this capacity that they served the ulterior purpose of demonstrating precisely the smallness of the individual in relation to the vastness of the cosmos. This paper examines the ways in which those living in the eighteenth century—scientists, artists, writers—reckoned with this unwelcome and ultimately terrifying facet of modernity.

Saturday, April 20, 2:00 pm

*Before Anthropology: Enlightenment "Science" and the Category of the Human*

Andrew Curran, Wesleyan University

In this talk, Professor Curran will provide a survey of the main “anthropological debates” in French and European thought during the eighteenth century. He will also examine naturalists’ halting attempts at classifying humans, as well as scholars’ inability to figure out just what classification means within the overall history of race.

These programs are free and open to the public, but registration in advance is required. Register online at:

www.newberry.org/renaissance

Sponsored by the University of Chicago, DePaul University, Northwestern University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago; and organized by Timothy Campbell, University of Chicago; Lisa Freeman, University of Illinois at Chicago; John Shanahan, DePaul University; and Helen Thompson, Northwestern University.