In this talk Amy Garnai examines a particular cultural moment – the reformist engagement with the theatre in the 1790s – and its afterlife within a broader theatre history. She uses as a case study Thomas Holcroft’s The Road to Ruin (1792), which was widely acknowledged as his most successful work. First discussing the play and its original reception, and then tracing the history of its revival as melodrama, nostalgic comedy and later, silent film, Garnai suggests that while the pro-French Revolution message of the play was soon forgotten, the appeal of other universal themes contributed to its surprising longevity. This reception history thus offers a new perspective on the afterlife of the Georgian theatre.

Amy Garnai teaches in the Department of English and American Studies at Tel Aviv University and in the Department of English at the Kibbutzim College of Education. Her research focuses on the eighteenth-century and Romantic periods, with particular interests in women’s writing, the theatre and, more generally, the intersection of politics and literature in the 1790s. Her book, Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald, was published by Palgrave in 2009. Her essays have appeared in journals such as The Review of English Studies, Eighteenth-Century Studies, SEL and Women’s Writing. She has previously held a British Academy Visiting Fellowship at the Center for Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of York, and a visiting fellowship at the Huntington Library. Her current project examines Romantic-era theatre and its afterlives in Britain, America and Australia.