

Binghamton University

COLI 535S/ LACS 535S/ COLI 480A/ ENG 450L spring 09 LT 1506 W 4:40-7:40
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Silence, Clues, and the Whole Story: The Assumptions of Literary History

The steady broadening of the canon in the past twenty years raises far reaching questions about literary history as a field of inquiry. By calling attention to the neglected works of women writers, to the rich literatures of postcolonial countries, or to hybrid texts that used to be considered marginal, scholars have repeatedly brought into question the specific silences of literary history. A forgotten or overlooked text may serve as the clue that prompts the revision of long accepted narratives. Alternately, texts that used to be excluded from consideration, such as travel narratives or journalism, often enrich our understanding of more canonical work and thereby change our understanding of the history of literature.

This seminar takes these widespread changes on literary scholarship as a starting point to reflect on the assumptions of literary history. On what terms is it possible, or desirable to construct such narratives now? In what ways does attention to cultural or historical contexts inflect literary history? How does a newly conceived literary history grapple with the problem of aesthetic value?

Required Texts:

David Perkins, Is Literary History Possible?
Carlo Ginzburg, History, Rhetoric and Truth

Recommended Texts:

Linda Hutcheon, Rethinking Literary History
Marshal Brown, The Uses of Literary History

Requirements:

1. **Oral presentation** on one of the assigned readings
2. **Term paper:** 15 page paper due 5/11. Please choose the topic in consultation with the instructor.

Schedule

- Week 1** 1/28: Introduction
- Week 2** 2/4: Walter Benjamin, “Task of the Translator”; Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues”
- Week 3** 2/11: Departmental lecture: David Damrosch
We’ll meet for one hour after the lecture.
- Week 4** 2/18 David Perkins, Is Literary History Possible?
- Week 5** 2/25: David Perkins, Is Literary History Possible?
- Week 6** 3/4: Carlo Ginzburg. History, Rhetoric and Truth
- Week 7** 3/11: Carlo Ginzburg. History, Rhetoric and Truth
- Week 8** 3/18: Stephen Greenblatt, “Towards a Poetics of Culture”; Hayden White, “New Historicism: A Comment”
- Week 9** 3/25: Stephen Greenblatt, “The Touch of the Real”; Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description”
- Week 10** 4/1: Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Contingencies of Value, chapters, 1,2, and 7
- Week 11** SPRING BREAK
- Week 12** 4/11: Richard Rorty, “Solidarity or Objectivity?”; “On Ethnocentrism”
- Week 13** 4/22: Departmental lecture: Sandra Bermann
We’ll meet for one hour after the lecture.
- Week 14** 4/29: Linda Hutcheon, “Rethinking the National Model”; Homi Bhabha, “A Personal Response”
- Week 15** 5/6: Workshop on term paper
- FINAL PAPER DUE: 5/11**