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21H.931 Seminar in Historical Methods  
Spring 2004

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SEMINAR IN HISTORICAL METHODS  
21H.931

Spring 2004

Prof. Anne McCants  
Wed. 2-4

Subject Description

This course is designed to acquaint you with a variety of approaches to the past used by historians writing in the twentieth century. The books we will read have all made significant contributions to their respective sub-fields and have been selected to give as wide a coverage in both field and methodology as possible in one semester's worth of reading. We will examine how historians conceive of their object of study, how they use primary sources as a basis for their accounts, how they structure the narrative and analytic discussion of their topic, and what are the advantages and drawbacks of their various approaches.

Readings

The following books are available at the MIT Bookstore and on reserve in the Hayden Library.

Caroline Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast  
Natalie Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre  
John Demos, The Unredeemed Captive  
Lynn Hunt, et al., Telling the Truth About History  
James Lee, One Quarter of Humanity  
C.S. Lewis, The Discarded Image  
Shepard Krech, The Ecological Indian

Assignments and Grading

The main written assignment for this course is a substantial research paper, on any reasonable subject of interest to you. These papers should be between 15-20 pages long, and should explore the given topic in substantial depth. History majors may use this paper to explore a possible thesis topic. The paper will be produced in the following stages:

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| February 25 | Statement of topic interest and research proposal |
| March 17    | Annotated Bibliography                            |
| April 21    | Draft   |
| May 14      | Final draft and class presentations               |

You will also be expected to bring to class each week a brief (and informal) commentary on the assigned reading. Each week one student will use his or her commentary as the basis for introducing the class discussion.

Class attendance is an essential component of this course. And participation in class discussion is an important part of the work for the course. Always bring your copy of the reading with you to class so that you can participate fully.

All written work should represent original and individual work. Cases of plagiarism will be investigated fully and reported to the Committee on Discipline at MIT. Plagiarized work will also receive the grade of F.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

|                        |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| Research paper         | 50% |
| Weekly response papers | 20% |
| Seminar participation  | 30% |

### Class Schedule

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| February 4  | Introduction<br><u>A Midwife's Tale</u> – the film version   |
| February 9  | Narrative and history<br><u>The Return of Martin Guerre</u>  |
| February 18 | Narratives and history<br><u>The Unredeemed Captive</u>  |
| February 25 | The <i>Annales</i> School<br>Selections from Braudel's <u>Mediterranean</u> and J. H. Hexter, 'Fernand Braudel and the monde Braudellien', <u>Journal of Modern History</u> , vol. 44 (1972), pp.480-539.<br><i>Extra Reading if interested:</i> "Fernand Braudel," by Olwen Hufton, <u>Past and Present</u> , No. 112. (Aug., 1986), pp. 208-213. |
| March 3     | NO CLASS<br>Individual meetings to review research proposals   |
| March 10    | Gender and history<br><u>Holy Feast, Holy Fast</u> , 1-186, and distribute Part III amongst the class  |
| March 17    | The Middle Ages as Fantasy<br><u>The Discarded Image</u> and Norman Cantor, "The Oxford Fantasists" in <u>Inventing the Middle Ages</u> . Also, selections from J.R.R. Tolkien "Beowulf and the Critics" (manuscript dating early 1930s).  |
| March 24    | NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK  |
| March 31    | The MIT Mix – or how does a history department work?<br>John Dower, Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures," in <u>Japan in War and</u>   |

Peace: Selected Essays, 1993.

Meg Jacobs, "How About Some Meat?" The Office of Price Administration, Consumption Politics, and State Building from the Bottom Up, 1941-1946," J of American History, V 84, n 3, 1997.

Anne McCants, "The Not-So-Merry Widows of Amsterdam, 1740-1782", J. of Family History, V 24, n 4, 1999.

Peter Perdue, "Empire and Nation in Comparative Perspective: Frontier Administration in 18<sup>th</sup> c China", J. of Early Modern History, V 5, n 4, 2001.

Jeff Ravel, "The Coachman's Bare Rump: an 18<sup>th</sup> French Cover-up," unpublished manuscript, 2003.

Harriet Ritvo, "Race, Breed, and Myths of Origin: Chillingham Cattle as Ancient Britons," Representations, V 39, summer, 1992.

April 7 Thinking about doing history

Telling the Truth About History and Charles Tilly, "How and What are Historians Doing?"

April 14 Environment and history  
The Ecological Indian, 9-104, 145-189

April 21 NO CLASS – Drafts due

April 25 **Sunday field trip**  
Excursion to Peabody-Essex Museum to tour the Chinese Merchant's House

April 28 Demography and history  
One Quarter of Humanity

May 5 Culture and history  
Robert Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre" and Harold Mah, "Suppressing the Text: the Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre," History Workshop, V 31, Spring 1991.

May 14 Class presentations

Full Citations:

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. ISBN: 0520063295

Davis, Natalie. *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984. ISBN: 0674766911

Demos, John. *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America*. New York: Vintage Books USA, 1995. ISBN: 0679759611

Hunt, Lynn et al., *Telling the Truth About History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995. ISBN: 0393312860

Lee, James Z. and Feng, Wang. *One Quarter of Humanity: Malthusian Mythology and Chinese Realities, 1700-2000*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. ISBN: 0674007093

Lewis, C. S. *The Discarded Image : An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. ISBN: 0521477352

Krech, Shepard. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000. ISBN: 0393321002