

Comparative Literature Seminar Programme

Semester 2, 2010/11

Wednesday 16 February 2011

Comparative Literature Research Seminar Series

Prof Susanne Kord (University College London)

'Women' and 'Work': Female Peasant Poets in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Germany
at 4pm in Buchanan room 216

Susanne Kord is Professor of German, Comparative Literature and Film Studies at UCL. She has written two books on gender images in Hollywood films, various books on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women (on women and violent crime; 'peasant' poetry in England, Scotland and Germany; female playwrights; anonymity and pseudonyms, and books dedicated to individual authors) and articles on many aspects of women's literary history and reception. She has edited four collections of plays and translated three dramas into English. She has published poetry in several anthologies and journals, read her poetry in numerous venues, including the German Embassy in Washington, D.C., and received numerous awards for her writing. She has served as editor of *The Lessing Yearbook* and *The German Quarterly*, guest-edited *German Life and Letters*, and is currently the Editor of the *Publications of the English Goethe Society*.

During the Age of Enlightenment, the terms 'work' and 'education' were re-defined, especially in reference to women. These changes are most clearly visible in writing by and about lower-class women writers. These documents not only provide us with ideal test cases for the changing ideas on 'women' and 'work,' they also illustrate the degree to which women accepted or contested these ideas and in which context(s) they chose to do either. The talk focuses on the portrayal of work and education in the poems of lower-class women writers from England, Scotland and Germany, touching on the related themes of nature inspiration, middle-class patronage of lower-class authors, poverty, gender differences in portrayals of the rural worker, and issues of canon-formation and aesthetic value.

Wednesday 23 February 2011

Comparative Literature Research Seminar Series

Prof Edith Hall (Royal Holloway University of London)

Greek and Roman Classics between European Birthright, Colonial Curse, and World Literature
at 4pm in Buchanan room 216

Edith Hall is Research Professor and Director of the Centre for the Reception of Greece & Rome at Royal Holloway University of London. She has previously held posts at Cambridge, Reading, Durham, and Oxford, where she co-founded the Archive of Performances of Greek & Roman Drama, of which she remains Consultant Director. Her twenty books include *Inventing the Barbarian* (1989), *The Theatrical Cast of Athens* (2006), *The Return of Ulysses* (2008), and *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (2010).

Classics between European Birthright, Colonial Curse, and World Literature

The Greek and Latin Classics formed the curriculum of European imperialism, and have faced a serious challenge from the postcolonial critique of the 'Western canon'. This paper surveys the history of Classical Scholarship's relationship with other literary disciplines, and uses Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris* to argue that the ancient Greeks and Romans can and must play a central role in third-millennial *Weltliteratur*.

Wednesday 9 March 2011

Comparative Literature Research Seminar Series

Dr Suzan van Dijk, (University of Utrecht/ Huygens Institute, The Hague)

Comparative Literature and Digital Humanities

at 3pm in Buchanan room 216

Dr Suzan van Dijk is currently an invited researcher at the [Huygens Institute](#), Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, The Hague. Since her PhD on the presence of women in the francophonic eighteenth-century press she has been studying women writers and their reception, with special attention to Madame de Graffigny, Madame de Riccoboni, Isabelle de Charrière and George Sand. Combining research on the history of literature with digital humanities, she has led several research projects, such as *The International Reception of Women's Writing in the Netherlands* (University of Utrecht, 2004-2007) and *NEWW: New approaches to European Women's Writing (before 1900)* (2007-2010), both funded by N.W.O. Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research. The NEWW project has been instrumental in preparing the European COST-Action [Women Writers in History: Toward a New Understanding of European Literary Culture](#), an international research network dedicated to the gendered study of literary history and the development of a virtual collaboratory (2009-2013). Dr van Dijk has widely [published](#) on European women's writing.

WomenWriters is a database compiled by a large international network researching women's role in the pre-1900 European literary field. Given that the women authors considered have been reading each other and were important for each other regardless of national frontiers, they have been grouped together – in terms not only of their names and biographical information, but also their works, and most importantly data concerning the reception of these works.

On the basis of our research material concerning the production and reception of hundreds of authors per country, the following lists and inventories can be compiled:

- of authors per country or per period,
- of women's works per genre or per publisher,
- of reception traces – be they translations or comments in private letters.

In the long term, this will also allow representing 'networks' that have existed between these authors, or generating maps indicating the flow of women's literary communication during particular periods. Most importantly at the present moment, the *WomenWriters* database also allows for texts to be delimited and subjected to comparative analysis. Indeed, the whole enterprise was born out of the need for comparative analysis: the notion of women's writing presupposes a comparison to the work of men.

Examples of comparative analysis between texts from the following categories will be discussed:

- (women's) narrative texts and their rewritings (in most cases by male critics),
- narrative texts written by women and those by men,
- narrative texts by different (categories of) women.

The point is of course that comparison between complete narratives is difficult to undertake. A solution will be proposed.

Wednesday 16 March 2011

Comparative Literature Research Seminar Series

Prof Elisabeth Ladenson (Columbia University, New York)

The Novel of Inertia: Fictional Immobility from Melville to Proust

at 4pm in Buchanan room 216

Elisabeth Ladenson teaches French and comparative literature at Columbia University. She is the author of *Proust's Lesbianism* (which has also been

published elsewhere as *Proust lesbien* and *Lesbianismo en Proust*), and *Dirt for Art's Sake: Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita*, and has contributed articles on a variety of subjects to publications including the *London Review of Books* and the *Magazine littéraire*.

“The Novel of Inertia: Immobility in Fiction from Melville to Proust”

A prominent vein of modern literary fiction has been characterized by a steadily decreasing rate of activity on the part of its characters, a trend that begins separately in different national literatures in the mid 19th century and continues apace into our own era. This paper will trace the genealogy of the modern novel of inertia—that is, fiction centrally characterized by a negative relation to movement—from its prehistory in Cervantes and Sterne and the sudden outbreak of unrelated inertia stories in the 1850s by Melville and Goncharov, through Flaubert’s career-long devotion to effective paralysis in various forms, to the apogee of the genre in Proust’s 3000-page exploration of writer’s block.

Thursday 24 March 2011

Comparative Literature Research Series

Ben Hutchinson (University of Kent)

From Pure Style to Purely Style? Modernism and the "Absolute Manner"

at 5.15pm in Buchanan room 216

‘What I should like to write is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style’. Flaubert’s ambition to produce work reduced to a kind of non-representational, intransitive style – a style that is ‘about nothing’ but itself – is one of the enduring impulses of modernist literature. Yet if it marks the beginning, it also marks the beginning of the end of the ‘absolute manner of seeing things’. Concentrating in particular on examples taken from high modernist prose (Mann, Proust, Joyce, Woolf), this paper will argue that modernism is driven by this double movement, oscillating between the move towards ‘pure style’ on the one hand and the suspicion of ‘purely style’ on the other.

Ben Hutchinson is Head of German, Co-Director of the Centre for Modern European Literature, and Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Kent. He has published widely on European literature, including the monographs *Rilke’s Poetics of Becoming* (2006), *W. G. Sebald. Die dialektische Imagination* (2009), and the forthcoming *Modernism and Style* (2011). He is also the editor of an English edition of *Rilke’s The Book of Hours* (2008), and the co-editor of the forthcoming volumes *A Literature of Restitution: Critical Essays on W.G. Sebald* (2011) and ‘Archive’, *Comparative Critical Studies* 8: 2-3 (2011).

Wednesday 13 April 2011

Comparative Literature Research Seminar Series

Prof Guido Iacoli, (University of Parma, Italy)

Celati and Parody

at 4pm in Buchanan room 216

Giulio Iacoli is Lecturer at the University of Parma, where he currently teaches courses in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature. He has widely written on the XXth Century fiction (Buzzati, Calvino, D’Arzo, Natalia Ginzburg, Siti, Perec, Queneau, Guibert, DeLillo, Philip Roth) as well as on theoretical issues, cultural and queer studies – often seen from a geographical perspective (space and landscape, maps and mapping; the JFK assassination; Bergman, Susan Sontag, Almodóvar; the image of the city in Italian contemporary cinema and fiction). He is the author of two books, *Atlante delle derive. Geografie da un’Emilia postmoderna: Gianni Celati, Pier Vittorio Tondelli* (Diabasis, 2002), and *La percezione narrativa dello spazio. Teorie e rappresentazioni contemporanee* (Carocci, 2008). He has recently coedited a book on the languages of obscenity (*Verba tremula. Letteratura, erotismo, pornografia*, with Nicola Catelli and Paolo Rinoldi, Bononia University Press,

2010). Among his present projects are a collection of essays on Gianni Celati, and a theory and history of the representations of school life in literature.

The multifaceted parody: Gianni Celati between emulation and satire

According to Linda Hutcheon (1985), parody is to be seen as a struggle over authority, the result of a commitment with intertextual play, by means of which a text (B) alludes to an older one (A), while signalling a progress, a critical absorption and recreation of A into its own form and content.

This theory of parody in form of a theory of influence may prove congenial to the work of Gianni Celati (b. 1937): since his influential collection of essays, *Finzioni occidentali*, which came out in 1975 – devoted to such issues as the role of the parodic double in literature, the coexistence between novel and romance, gags and comical repetition from the silent period of cinema to the work of Beckett, the *objets trouvés* popping up from a modern, mobile archaeology of the city –, Celati has been searching for a personal answer to the questions of authorship and the relationship to tradition, trying to cope with the modern and High-modern art system he describes. His fiction may elucidate as much the complicated process of both assimilation and subversion of the literary codes, which stems from his first book, *Comiche* (1971), a highly experimental novel, scattered into pieces, devoid of any recognizable voice.

The process of fictional reconstruction which takes place in the following decades, still deals with the possibilities of playing with form: parody regains a prevailing tone, by reinstalling its ancient, strictly comical meaning in such books as *Avventure in Africa* (1998), a mocking reportage dominated by the satire of Occidental predatory style of thought and modes of representation, and *Fata Morgana* (2005), a brilliant fictional interpolation of anthropological observations, disguised as a collection of diaries, above an extraordinary, unknown land, in the wake of Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.

At the peak of a career lasting more than forty years, we may look back at the path we readers shared with this excentric author, and then retrieve parody, in his work, as a persistent, multifarious narrative device: Celati's personal, disenchanting and witty stance towards the anxieties of literary and editorial system of our days.

Wednesday 27 April 2011

Comparative Literature Research Seminar Series

Prof Shane Weller (University of Kent)

Towards a Literature of the Unword: Kafka, Beckett, Sebald

at 4pm in Buchanan room 216

Shane Weller is Professor of Comparative Literature and Co-Director of the Centre for Modern European Literature at the University of Kent. His principal publications include *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism* (2005), *Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity* (2008), *Literature, Philosophy, Nihilism: The Uncanniest of Guests* (2008), and *Modernism and Nihilism* (2011). He is the editor of the Faber edition of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (2009), and co-editor of *The Flesh in the Text* (2007), a collection of essays on the body in French literature. His current research projects include a bilingual genetic edition of Beckett's *L'Innommable/The Unnamable*, and a monograph on the writing of the negative in modern European literature. In his 1953 essay on Franz Kafka, Theodor Adorno claims that 'According to the testimony brought by Kafka's work, in a world caught in its own toils, everything positive [...] helps increase that entanglement'. In support of this claim, Adorno cites one of Kafka's 'Züräur' aphorisms of 1917-18: 'Our task is to do the negative – the positive has already been given us.' Commentators have often remarked upon the negativity to be found in the content of Kafka's works, but, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in this paper, Kafka's writing of the negative is also enacted in various ways in his prose style, and intensifies in his later works. Having outlined the principal characteristics of Kafka's writing of the negative, and especially his use of 'unwords', I shall turn to the oeuvres of two later European writers, Samuel

Beckett and W. G. Sebald, who, in their different ways, engage in a writing of the negative that is indebted to Kafka's and exhibits a similar intensification. In the final part of the paper, I shall consider the extent to which these three writings of the negative fit with one another and with Adorno's conception of 'radically darkened art', and how they have fared in translation.

Monday 9 May 2011

Comparative Literature Research Seminar Series

Prof Susan Bassnett (University of Warwick)

Workshops on Comparative Literature: 9-5pm, Buchanan Building