

History 116

Studies in Narrative: history, fiction and storytelling

This course examines the fraught relationship between historical and literary narratives, two inter-dependent but often opposed forms of story-telling. It will look at works that raise the issue of veracity and story-telling, including fictions like Graham Swift's *Waterland*, films such as Kurasawa's *Rashomon* and Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties*. It will also investigate in some detail the works of American, French and Italian historians who have tried to solve this problem by turning to so-called micro-history.

Winter 2008

Professor John Brewer

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Class times: Wednesdays, 7-10pm

Secretary Sabrina Boschetti sabrina@hss.caltech.edu

Requirements:

2 take-home examinations, one at mid-term and one due at the end of classes.

The mid-terms will consist of two essay answers to a number of questions. Each essay should be eight to ten pages.

Students can substitute a paper for one of the examinations with the consent of the instructor

Week 1

9 January

Introduction

Screening: Kurasawa, *Rashomon*

Week 2

16 January

Discussion – *Rashomon*

<http://www.willamette.edu/~rloftus/film/rashoreview.html>

Discussion: *Graham Swift, *Waterland*

Vintage, 1992

ISBN 0679739793

Week 3

23 January

Discussion: Swift, *Waterland*.

Screening: Roberto Rossellini, *Paisa*

Week 4

30 January

Rossellini, *Paisa* and Realism

Discussion: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

Week 5

6 February

Screening: Dead Certainties

Discussion: Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties, (Unwarranted Speculations)* Vintage Books; Reprint edition (June 1992)

Week 6

13 February

Microhistory:

David Bell on microhistory – handout

Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe

by Edward Muir (Editor), Guido Ruggiero (Editor), Eren Branch (Translator) Johns Hopkins Univ Pr; (September 1991)

ISBN: 0801841836

B. Gregory, 'Is Small beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday life' *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), pp. 100-10.

Week 7

20 February

Screening: *The Return of Martin Guerre*

Week 8

27 February

Discussion: Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* Harvard Univ. Press; Reprint edition (September 1984)

Discussion: John Brewer, *A Sentimental Murder*

Week 9

5 March

Discussion:

A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812 by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich Vintage Books; Reprint edition (June 1991)

ISBN: 0679733760

Discussion: *A Midwife's Tale*.

Week 10

12 March

Conclusion