

STUDIES IN HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION – WINTER 2011

CLMD 6106/HISTORY 5906/ENGLISH 5900

HISTORY, NARRATION, AND MEDIATION: PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL DISTANCE

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(Please consult the History Department's Website for class schedule information.)

This course takes a deliberately broad view of issues of historical representation as they arise in a variety of historically-minded genres, including history "proper," biography, historical novel, and history painting. Students are encouraged to extend this range still further in their term papers. (See below.) The focus of our common readings is on narrativity and historical distance as exemplified in the historical thought of the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th. Our starting point will be the idea that history is essentially a mediatory art and therefore that a central issue for historical representation (whatever the genres or media) is the problem of what we will call "historical distance." Drawing on a variety of theoretical discussions as well as primary readings in history, biography, fiction, and art theory we will explore the idea of "distance" as a tool for analyzing structures of historical representation in a number of different kinds of narrative – including historiographical, philosophical, fictional, and visual.

Please note: though the course readings will focus on historical and fictional narratives of the Enlightenment and Romantic-period, students will also be invited to extend the analysis of "distance" and historical mediation to other genres and media, or to other eras of historical description, when these are appropriate to their own fields of study. In the past students have chosen to write their research papers on issues of historical distance as they arise in biography, film, and fiction, as well as in historiography itself.

