ATW 2012 WORKSHOP PROPOSAL

Title: "Imagined Exchanges: Positioning Early Modern Women in Post-Modern Popular Culture"

Organizers: Naomi Miller, Professor, English and the Study of Women and Gender, Smith College, and Naomi Yavneh, Director, University Honors Program, Loyola University New Orleans

Contact person: Naomi Miller [48 Hillcrest Drive, Florence, MA 01062 (preferred mailing address); C: 413-210-8750; H: 413-584-5496; njmiller@smith.edu]

Summary: Positioned in relation to the plenary session on “Exchanges,” this workshop offers an opportunity to explore two sets of cultural exchanges and comparative crossings: first, some of the ways in which early modern women have come to serve as figures for an imagined Renaissance proto-feminism as well as femininity through 20th or 21st century representations in popular culture, including books, movies, and popular websites; and second, the ways in which popular representations of early modern women can speak to us about ideas of women during the time that specific contemporary books or films are created.

Complete Description:
This workshop offers an opportunity to explore two sets of cultural exchanges and comparative crossings: first, some of the ways in which early modern women have come to serve as figures for an imagined Renaissance proto-feminism as well as femininity through 21st century representations in popular culture, including books, movies, and popular websites; and second, the ways in which popular representations of early modern women can speak to us about ideas of women during the time that specific contemporary books or films are created (for example, different film versions of Elizabeth I, as portrayed by Bette Davis vs. Judi Dench vs. Cate Blanchett, or contrasting portraits of Elizabeth I in 21st century novels by Miles and Weir). Subjects for examination might include the multiple film versions of Queen Elizabeth's reign (drawn from the range of Elizabeth films and miniseries, and such cinematic vehicles as Shakespeare in Love), as well as historical fiction novels about a range of early modern women, from novels about women who figured in the lives of major male figures to novels about early modern women themselves, including artists, authors, and imagined historical women in society (see suggested readings/viewings, below).

Workshop participants are encouraged to engage with at least one visual or film representation of an early modern woman, as well as with at least one fictional and/or historical representation of an early modern woman, from the list of suggested readings/viewings below, to support their conclusions about patterns of cultural exchange accomplished through popular cultural representations of early modern women.

Workshop participants are also encouraged to identify additional sites of popular culture, from websites to board games, in considering the implications of the popularity of early modern women in post-modern contemporary culture.

Finally, workshop participants are encouraged to engage with at least one critical source about contemporary representations of early modern women in popular culture, either from the list below or from a source they bring to share with the workshop.
Major questions to consider:

- How do popular culture representations of early modern women, in books or films, work to establish an imagined Renaissance proto-feminism that connects to 20th or 21st century women’s concerns?
- What do popular culture representations of early modern women, in books or films, reveal about 20th or 21st century views on women, pertinent to the socio-cultural climate in which they were created?

To situate the discussion, each of the workshop coordinators will provide a brief overview of one of the two questions, of no more than 10 minutes. Naomi Miller will survey the diverse range of representations of early modern women in popular novels, while Naomi Yavneh will focus the group first in considering the representation of Henry VIII’s second wife as “madwoman” in Donizetti’s bel canto opera, Anna Bolena (1830), in order to underscore the ways in which “historic figures” are continually re-envisioned for contemporary usage. The workshop will continue with a comparison of filmic representations of Queen Elizabeth (Bette Davis, Glenda Jackson, Judy Dench and Cate Blanchett) with fashion images from the same time periods.

Suggested reading/viewings/critical sources:

**Women figuring in the lives of famous men**


FILMS: The Other Boleyn Girl (2008)

**Women artists/authors**


**Historical women**


Although the primary focus will be 21st – and 20th- century representations, participants might also wish to listen to or view Donizetti’s 19th-century operatic renditions of Tudor and Stuart history, Anna Bolena, Maria Stuarda and Roberto Devereux.
Critical texts


Pidduck, Julianne, *Contemporary Costume film: Space, Place and the Past* (British Film Institute, 2004)

Sanders, Julie, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Routledge, 2006)

Semenza, Greg Colon, ed., *The English Renaissance in Popular Culture: An Age for All Time* (Palgrave, 2010) [see esp. essays on representations of Elizabeth]