Title: Getting Time on our Side: A Pedagogical Experiment

Our workshop for the conference “Attending to Early Modern Women: It’s About Time” engages with the Pedagogies subtopic, as it specifically focuses on time as a pedagogical tool. Interdisciplinary and comparative in its aims, our workshop proposes to examine three literary and art objects from a limited time frame, the year 1621, in order to perform a pedagogical time experiment.

Organizers:
- Alena Buis, Art History, Langara College (Vancouver, BC)
- Christi Spain-Savage, English, Siena College (Loudonville, NY)
- Myra E. Wright, English, Queens College, CUNY (New York, NY)

As a group of junior scholars, we are interested in how a perpetual shortage of time affects our methods in both teaching and research. Given this year’s theme, we’d like to take the opportunity to be frank about our hurried practices, and to ask whether there might be ways of viewing time limitations as fruitful intellectual challenges. Our workshop is therefore both experimental and highly participatory—we invite other teachers to join us in candid conversation about how we can get time on our side.

This workshop asks whether a delineation of historical time chosen at random—like the year 1621—can be a starting-point for interesting and productive work in both the classroom and the archive. We wondered how, with limited time, we could each develop short studies (also viable as lesson plans) that would relate to one another in useful and surprising ways. Could there be benefits to singling out a particular temporal frame and studying three different cultural objects that emerged within it? A decision to narrow our field of inquiry to 1621 is clearly a way to save time. One of our questions is whether this arbitrary decision can lead to rigorous scholarly work and dynamic classroom teaching. We also ask if it is possible to use the undergraduate classroom as one forum for our own very specialized research, without putting our educational needs before those of our students. With little time to work on conference papers and articles, we find ourselves having to choose between: either a stack of essays that need to be graded, or a proposal for a workshop; either a detailed lesson plan or a stint in the library. Can we find ways to make our research contribute to our classroom work, and vice versa?

This line of inquiry is particularly apt for academics early in their careers who are often faced with the daunting task of teaching survey courses, or introductory level classes with a very broad chronological or geographic range of subject matter. Indeed our decision to focus in or to narrow down may seem counter-intuitive, but many teachers are now wondering if new methods of close, limited analysis might help us deliver broadly defined curricula. For example, the idea of “skipping centuries” in favor of a more “object-centered” approach is proposed in a recent blog post by Olivia Powell, Associate Museum Educator for Academic programs at the Frick Collection and part-time Lecturer in the Department of Art History & Archaeology at Columbia University. In “The Art of Skipping Centuries,” Powell describes Columbia’s Art Humanities course, as an appended form of the canon which, rather than cramming centuries of art into a single semester, focuses on three or four key images, with an emphasis on visual analysis rather than historical context. In order to do so, Powell calls for instructors to “flip the classroom,” a model in which instructors are encouraged to “trade the lectern for the roundtable and facilitate critical dialogues.” From a pedagogical perspective, the flipped classroom is learner-centered and drastically increases student engagement.
One of the drawbacks, however, is that while forsaking the “sage on the stage” role in order to be the “guide on the side,” instructors need to budget more time for preparation.

Keeping such pedagogical considerations in mind, we are interested in performing time experiments. Our workshop will ask questions that address how close reading and object-centered approaches in literature and art history can help us not only better value the time and education of our students but also better utilize and manage our own academic time. Abandoning our usual fantasies about devoting plenty of time to scholarly work, we have made a commitment to spend only a few hours on the studies with which our session begins, and to work with materials that are relevant to our own research. Each of the three facilitators will present a ten-minute lesson on a single text or image, and the discussion that follows will address the following questions:

1. Did the time frame of 1621 emerge as a significant connection between these various cultural objects? Are there other points of convergence that seem more compelling?
2. Why does a date of publication or composition matter (if it does)? What do we tell our students about the scholarly conventions of dating texts and images?
3. Imagining ourselves as undergraduate students, what information and methods do we gather from each of these lessons, and from their presentation as a triad?
4. Does an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to teaching allow us to do more with less time? What are the specific benefits of sharing the classroom in these ways?

List of Readings:


Wroth, Mary. *The Countesse of Montgomeries Urania.* 1621. (selections)

Images:

Buytewech, Willem Pietersz. *A Poultry Market in a Dutch Town* (1621), The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [View]