THE RENAISSANCE BODY

Fall 2007

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Office hours: Th 3-4 PM or by appointment

Class: M 2:15-5:05. Location: 260-003
Course website: http://renaissancebodyproject.stanford.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

If the Renaissance is famous for discovering unknown continents and ancient texts, the body too was a new territory of conquest. How did literature respond to the rise of an anatomical gaze in the arts and in medicine, and how did it stage the aesthetic, religious, philosophical and moral issues related to such a promotion, or deconstruction, of the body? Does literature aim at representing the body, or does it use it instead as a ubiquitous signifier for intellectual, emotional and political ideas?

The locus of desire, pleasure and disease, the body also functions as a reminder of human mortality and is caught in the web of gender issues.

The class will use a new website designed specifically for the course, with a collective blog, private e-diary, an archive of 16th century images and texts, and a creative interface where students have the option to publish online essays or multimedia projects.

Texts from prose fiction (Rabelais), poetry (Scève, Ronsard, Labé, D’Aubigné), essays (Montaigne) and emblem literature. Extra documents include music scores, tapestries, paintings, blazons, and anatomical plates from medical books.

Readings and class discussion mostly in French.

TEXTS

Please make sure you have the same edition by verifying the ISBN number. All books are available at the campus bookstore.


Additional readings on course website.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS:

- participation and attendance: 20 %
- weekly questions on blog 20 %
- presentation 10 %
- e-diary 10 %
- final research project: 40 %

One (and only one) absence per quarter is admitted.
ORGANIZATION

This research seminar is experimental and collective in nature. It relies on all and everyone.

Attendance and participation

Readings and class discussion will be mostly in French. Readings: always start with the preface, then the book or the passages assigned, then only the critical text handed out. Critical texts are in no way “the’ right interpretation of the texts but examples of possible methodologies, theories and readings.

Weekly questions: collective BLOG (AGORA)

Every week, post at least 24h before class 4 questions that came up while reading the texts assigned for the week + 1 comment to someone else’s questions. The questions should be divided approximately into

1) comprehension questions (meaning of a word, syntax, historical context, of the whole text)
2) interpretative questions (raising a bigger issue: what is the role of women here, why choose this poetic form, what kind of hermeneutics is promoted in the text?)

There will sometimes be an assigned image to comment upon online.

E-diary (STUDIO)

Every week, in your personal e-diary [or in a journal specifically designed for the class], write an entry about a body experience you have had (past or present) and the insights, questions or thoughts it provoked regarding your identity, others, nature, life and how you can convey this experience through words.

You can write in prose or verse, reflect or create, question or celebrate, confide or analyze.

Some topics might include: self-image, sensations, food and digestion, body fluids (blood, tears, etc.), control or loss of control of the body, specific body parts, mortality, change, pleasure and pain, self-recognition in representations of your body, representation of men and women’s bodies in our culture, attraction or revulsion to others, symbolism (the heart, the inner eye…), etc.

All journals are private and personal and will serve as an experiment. Everyone will share as much or as little as they wish at the end.

Length: 2-3 posts a week.

Presentation

Everyone will be given the opportunity to choose and present one text of the reading list (a poem, a chapter, a couple of pages from one of the books) or a document from the ARCHIVE. This short presentation (10-15 minutes) will serve as an introduction to our discussion of the author of the week through a close reading of a relevant passage.

Stages:
- choose one text you would like to discuss
- email it to me at least 48 hours before class
- present in class why you chose that text: what major topics and issues (stylistic, cultural, political, etc.) this given text raises for our understanding of the author and our theme.
- Conclude by opening up the discussion to the class by proposing a couple of questions to discuss.

The purpose is not to provide answers, but real questions and try to analyze why they trigger our interest or perplexity and what we could learn from them.

Final paper

In the course of the quarter, you will be working on a final research paper addressing topics, images and authors relevant to the seminar.

Papers shall be original and personal. See the Honor Code regarding plagiarism and students Fundamental Standard (http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/index/html).
SCHEDULE
Check the website for updates and a list of additional online documents for each week.
Note: Les lectures complémentaires sont optionnelles.

WEEK 1:
09/24: Introduction : les sens et le sens
Documents: Vitruve, Vinci, Tory, Descartes.

WEEK 2:
10/01: RABELAIS – Le corps hyperbolique
- Le texte comme corps et le corps comme signe (”Prologue”; ch. 9-10).
- Du corps tout-puissant au corps discipliné (ch.1-6; 13-24).
Lectures: Prologue de l’auteur; chapitres 1-24.

WEEK 3:
10/08: RABELAIS – Corps utopique vs. corps littéral
Lectures : ch. 25-38; 39-45 ; 46-50; 52-58.
Documents: Alberti; Saint-Gelais; Texte critique : Jeanneret.

WEEK 4:
10/15: Les Blasons du corps féminin: anatomie de la poésie
Documents: “Blasons” et “Medical Books” in the ARCHIVE, specifically Vesalius (on course website).

WEEK 5:
10/22: SCÈVE – Sémiologie du corps amoureux
Lectures : Délie, veu, D. 1-27; 41; 49; 56; 59; 66; 76; 80-82; 100 et 161 et 173; 102; 112; 115-119; 121; 125-127; 129; 142; 144; 149; 155; 157; 164; 165; 172-173; 182; 188; 226-227; 229-230; 233; 243-246; 279-281; 289-291; 297; 300; 310; 313; 344; 347; 349; 364; 372; 378-380; 388; 394; 397; 406-408; 413; 415; 417-419; 424; 434-435; 445-449. [en priorité dizains en gras]
+ les 50 emblèmes et le dizain qui les suit immédiatement.
Présence et absence : 49; 129; 138; 144; 215; 270; 352; 363; 403.
Documents : Alciat, Emblemata; Scève, portrait et emblèmes de l’édition originale

WEEK 6:
10/29: RONSARD, LABÉ – Le corps érotisé
Lectures : Ronsard, Les Amours de Cassandre, sonnets 1 à 52; 58-63 ; 75-81; 92; 94-96; 100-104; 107-110; 116-118; 135-138; 140-144; 151-158, 176 ; 178-179; 189; 193; 208; 216; 221; 225-227; baiser ; élegie à Cassandre (p.142); élegie à Janet (p.150); sonnet 229.
Labé, préface, sonnets 2, 7-14, 18, 20-21, 23-24.

Documents: Chansons de Ronsard; Portrait de Ronsard et Cassandre

WEEK 7:
11/05: D’AUBIGNÉ. Du corps amoureux au corps politique SANG
Lectures: D’Aubigné, Hécatombe à Diane (1571-73); Les Tragiques (extraits)
Film: La Reine Margot
Email a tentative topic for your research paper

WEEK 8:
11/12: MONTAIGNE – « tout entier et tout nu »
II, 37, « Que les fils ressemblent aux pères » (Xerox)
Lectures complémentaires : vol. I, p. 127-129 ; p. 377, etc.
Documents: exemplaire de Bordeaux annoté; Jean de Léry, Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil
Edit and Publish a couple of logs from your e-diary. Post a blog on the process of publishing it.

No class 11/19-11/25

WEEK 9:
11/26: MONTAIGNE – « Des essais en chair et en os »
First draft of research paper due by email: introduction and detailed outline

WEEK 10:
12/03: Bilan. E-diaries.
Assignement: bring one object that triggers physical sensations

FINAL PAPER DUE by December 11

TERM PAPER due by email as a Word [for MAC] or PDF file by December 11 at 8 p.m. Please make sure I can open your document.
4,000 words (at 400 words/page, this would be approx. 10 pages max.).
Late papers will not be accepted.