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Issue 5 - September 2002 Challenging the Boundaries of Categorization



Dr. Michael Owen

The breadth and depth of the scholarship of Brock University's faculty members is astounding. In the Humanities, faculty members have engaged in research that challenges the boundaries between disciplines and genres.

In this issue of *Research Reporter*, Erin Kaipainen interviews, Dr. Herbert Schutz, a senior scholar, and Dr. Martha Nandorfy, a relatively junior scholar.

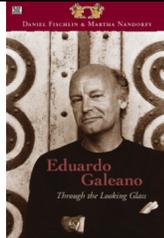
Dr. Schutz has devoted his career and considerable energies in a long-term program of research that focuses on the historical and cultural transformations of central Europe in the period 850-1500 AD. By combining a rigorous interrogation of extant printed materials, much of which was until recently inaccessible to western scholars, with an insightful analysis of geographical and archaeological artefacts, Dr. Schutz has re-interpreted and brought to our attention, the rich interplay between material culture, geography and social, political and religious life in the vast Central European region.

Similarly, Dr. Nandorfy's scholarship challenges the boundaries of literary genre and disciplines in her study of Eduardo Galeano. The work of Galeano resists compartmentalization – either as literature or as political thought, as fiction or as non-fiction. The analysis of Galeano by Nandorfy and her co-author, Daniel Fischlin, contests the boundaries of history, politics, and literature and the ways in which literature and scholarship inform our political and social thought.

Schutz and Nandorfy are only two of the many Brock scholars whose research contests the canons of literature or contemporary thought, challenging us as citizens and as scholars to reconsider our perception of the world in which we live. Brock's scholars require that we re-examine our understanding of social and political movements in Canada and elsewhere, of connections between religion, education and ethnicity, or of the physical environment. By requiring us to examine our knowledge or understanding of these phenomena, among others, we are better able to engage the political, social and economic world in which we live.

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Eduardo Galeano:
Through the Looking Glass

Addressing the Political and Social Urgency of Eduardo Galeano

Eduardo Galeano has been described as being “one of the most important literary voices to come out of Latin America in the last few decades in relation to human rights” and yet, he has been largely ignored by historians and literary critics alike. *Eduardo Galeano: Through The Looking Glass*, written by Martha Nandorfy and Daniel Fischlin is the first full-length book in either English or Spanish to deal with the life and work of Galeano. The book has received international recognition by such prominent writers as Elena Poniatowska, liberation theologian Enrique Dussel, and historian and novelist Ronald Wright.

Nandorfy, an Associate Professor with the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures, and her co-author, Fischlin (University of Guelph, School of Literatures and Performance Studies in English), felt obligated to recognize Galeano as a major literary and political figure. The lack of attention given to his work, Nandorfy explains, “represents an inexplicable neglect on the part of literary critics and historians.” Until recently, his work has been overlooked, “primarily because it resists categorization and as a result, people do not know what to do with it. In terms of history, Galeano is very suspicious of historical accounts that are written in one voice and that claim to be objective.” Similarly, Nandorfy explains, “literary critics are tied to categories of genre, and Galeano's work just does not conform to their categorizations.”

“His narratives,” Nandorfy explains, “are painfully real. They deal with very big, real issues and incorporate a lot of testimony from his friends and fellow Latin Americans. Because his work is neither fiction nor non-fiction, it tends to fall through the cracks.”

“Literary critics,” she continues, “tend to shy away from highly politicized texts just as much as historians do.”

Nandorfy and Fischlin provide an extensive commentary on literary culture and human rights, and suggest that the two cannot be separated, especially in contemporary Latin American Studies. In the second chapter of the book,

“Literary Culture and Human Rights Theory,” they compare rights discourses with literary production and discuss how the two address human rights in different ways. Nandorfy goes so far as to argue that “human rights and the tumultuous historical events of Latin America are often more accurately represented in literature than they are in the legislative and legalistic documents that serve to protect those rights.” Widely studied Latin American novels by authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar are fictional, and yet their narratives contain elements of historical truth. “At the time they were written,” Nandorfy suggests, “novels by many Latin American writers addressed current political and social issues, in addition to addressing the results of the Conquest, colonization, and subsequent neo-imperialism.”

Despite being primarily fictional, Nandorfy strongly believes that literature has the power to enact change as a result of the way it “challenges and demands participation from its readers.” Literature that addresses political and social situations, Nandorfy suggests, “cannot be passively consumed.” On the other hand, legalistic documents designed to protect human rights are often well organized, but if they are not enforced, or if the political climate does not even allow for those laws to be enacted, then their ability to improve current situations is compromised.

Another part of the problem historians and literary critics have had with Galeano's work is his elusive style, which resists categorization by virtue of its simultaneous poetic and political power. Nandorfy and Fischlin describe this style as “a composite” in which “the pastiche and collage of the wildly dissimilar produce a fractured whole.” In order to do justice to Galeano's writing, Nandorfy warns, “you can't approach his work from one narrow path.

Galeano has exploded the boundaries on writing, and those who address his work have to deal with and address the aesthetic of his work, as well as his political and social urgency, and his criticism of issues such as globalization,

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continued slavery, and historical amnesia.”

Nandorfy’s most recent research program deals with the cinema of Spanish filmmaker, Pedro Almodóvar.

“At first it is hard to see the connection between this research and the book on Galeano, but my take on Almodóvar is that he is a real Utopian; he has this incredible faith in non-patriarchal communities, so in a weird way, this work does connect with human rights and Galeano’s prophetic vision.”

Similarly, the work of both artists has a history of being sidelined, despite the fact that Almodóvar won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2000 for *All About My Mother*. Nandorfy explains that, “his work is very often trivialized because of its fantastic elements and visually idiosyncratic quality, and people can’t get beyond that to see the ideological power of his films.” Like Galeano, Almodóvar crosses

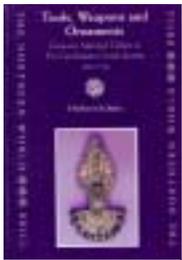
and subverts generic boundaries. His films depict an imagination of radical alternatives to existing societies and Nandorfy explains that through her current research project, she hopes to show “how conventional spectatorial expectations are frustrated by the unpredictable nature of actions in which utopian and realist elements collide.”

Nandorfy’s other publications include *The Poetics of Apocalypse: Federico García Lorca’s Poet in New York*, which is due to be released in the Fall. While her co-authored book on Eduardo Galeano is the first full-length text to recognize the Uruguayan writer as an important literary and political figure, Nandorfy estimates that “this book is only a drop in the bucket of what is to come in Galeano studies and we now have it in our minds that this is only the first book of a trilogy.” Nandorfy and Fischlin have already begun work on the second book, tentatively titled, *Human Rights and the*

Ethics of Literary Production, which will deal with several different writers, revolutionaries, and social activists. The third book in the collection will be an anthology of edited essays of those working in the field of human rights and literature.

Through the Looking Glass actually began as a film project but when Fischlin had trouble finding funding, he and Nandorfy set to work on a manuscript. They have since returned to the planning of a documentary with a Montreal-based director and producer. Fischlin and Nandorfy will co-write the screenplay, but Nandorfy warns “it will not be the typical ‘talking-heads’ documentary on the life of Eduardo Galeano; instead, it will be like a diving board for plunging into the issues of globalization and the organization of alternative communities in the Americas.”●

Article by Erin Kaipainen



Tools, Weapons, and Ornaments

A Career-Long Passion for Central-European Cultural History

Dr. Herbert Schutz's career-long interest in Central European cultural history has culminated in the publication of four books, and the near completion of another manuscript, which extends the study of early medieval civilizations. *Tools, Weapons and Ornaments: Germanic Culture in Pre-Carolingian Central Europe 400-750* (2001) is Schutz's most recent book in the series, all of which stem from research funded by a SSHRC grant that allowed him to travel to Central Europe between 1988 and 1991. At that time, Schutz prepared a "computerized, cross-referenced index of the pertinent inventories of all the major and many minor museums, collections, churches and other sites in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Holland, Italy, Poland, and Switzerland dealing with the socio-cultural history of this period."

Schutz, from the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures, takes an interdisciplinary approach to this work, combining elements of history, art, architecture, and archeology while building upon the scholarship of others in these fields. However, Schutz suggests that previous material on the early history of Central Europe is incomplete because it has relied solely on historical texts while it has excluded the authority of historical artifacts, frequently referred to by Schutz as "significant objects." This introduces the unique approach taken by Schutz. His published books all rely heavily on photographic evidence collected while he

was in Europe. He claims that the originality of his work lies in his "innovative synthesis of significant objects and significant texts." Instead of relying entirely on historical texts to draw conclusions about Early Medieval civilizations, Schutz compliments

these texts with a close, descriptive study of the archeological evidence.

Schutz argues that neither text nor physical archeological evidence should take priority over the other. Rather, he suggests that they should be complimentary. "In my own research," Schutz explains, "I attempt to bring the two together so that they speak a common language."

His published works are in effect, translations of the language of the recovered artifacts. Too often, he suggests, scholars rely only on the written word and overlook the cultural productions of a society. "Even the most mundane artifact," Schutz ventures, "expresses a human quality about those who made and used it. Scholars just have to know how to read these artifacts."

Not only does Schutz's work translate the "language" of Early Medieval objects into a language accessible to other scholars and students, but Schutz also recovers existing research from the German language and reformats it in the English language. Much of the existing analysis of archeological evidence of this era and region is available only in German. Schutz describes himself as a "middle-man" making the inaccessible, accessible, thereby allowing those unaccustomed to German the option of studying the cultural history of Central Europe. "German," Schutz begins, "is a language which is becoming ever less assessable to scholars and others not equipped to work easily with the academic German language."

Dr. Herbert Schutz recently retired from Brock University. Over the course of his tenure at Brock, he published *The Prehistory of Germanic Europe*, *The Romans in Central Europe*, *The Germanic Realms in Pre-Carolingian Central Europe 400-750* and *Tools, Weapons and Ornaments*. He is currently looking for a publisher for his manuscript entitled, *The Carolingians, Their Arts and Architecture: A Cultural History of Central Europe 750-900*.●

Article by Erin Kaipainen

Sample of other books recently published by the Faculty of Humanities

Anderson, Mark. *Pancho Villa's Revolution by Headlines*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.

Anderson, Jennifer and **Elizabeth Sauer**, eds. *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*. Afterward by Stephen Orgel. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

Driedger, Michael. *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Atong during the Confessional Age*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2002

Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David. *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001.

Seeber, Barbara K. *General Consent in Jane Austen: A Study in Dialogism*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.

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