

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EUROPEAN IDEAS

Helsinki Congress, 28 July - 2 August, 2008

Web: <http://issei2008.haifa.ac.il/>

Section I: History, Geography, Science

Workshop: Ordinary Writings and Scribal Culture: On the History of Writing in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Chairs: Martyn Lyons and Anna Kuismin

The history of writing as a cultural practice seeks to distinguish and analyse the rituals, conventions and practices determining intimate or 'ordinary' writing, and to arrive thereby at a clearer understanding of the place and importance of the act of writing. The panel organized on this theme at the ISSEI Malta conference was a great success, and as a result an edited volume is forthcoming in 2007. We now wish to consolidate this achievement and we hope to refine the topic a little further. This panel will be concerned with the nature, context and growth of personal written communication in western societies in the 19th & 20th centuries, with particular reference to the writings of European peasants and workers.

We therefore define 'Ordinary writings' or *écritures ordinaires* as the writings of ordinary people who perhaps had not totally mastered written culture. We aim not to provide a textual analysis of the content of such writing, but to investigate what its existence tells us about the act of writing as a cultural practice, and about what writing meant to those who practised it. We need to pay attention to the intended audience of lower-class writers, and the purpose and function of their writing activity. We may investigate how far popular writing received and echoed the nation-building discourse of social and political elites, and how far the 'hidden transcripts of the poor' manipulated or subverted that discourse.

We envisage that about a half of the time allotted to this panel will be devoted to Finnish and Scandinavian themes. Taking advantage of the Helsinki venue, we would particularly like to encourage paper proposals from scholars based in northern Europe.

Possible topics which may be addressed in this panel are:

- the history of postal services
- broadsheets and hand-written newspapers
- the history of learning how to write
- etiquette manuals and instructions on writing
- letter-writing practices of peasants and workers
- letters of emigrants, soldiers and prisoners
- the history of private scrapbooks, commonplace books, account books, livres de famille
- hymns and written prayers for divine assistance or saintly intercession
- petitions and 'pauper letters'
- autobiographies, memoirs and diaries

although this is not an exhaustive agenda.

Papers in this panel may be presented either in English or French.

Selected papers may be eventually submitted for publication (in Spanish) to *Cultura Escrita y Sociedad*.

Please send proposals (max. 200 words or 1500 characters) to both

m.lyons@unsw.edu.au and anna.kuismin@finlit.fi by 31 October 2007.

Martyn Lyons:

I am Professor of History and Associate Dean for Research in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. I have published several books and articles on the history of reading and writing practices in France and Australia. Most recent books include *Readers and Society in 19th-Century France* (Palgrave 2001) and (edited with John Arnold) *A History of the Book in Australia vol.2, 1891-1945* (University of Queensland Press, 2001).

I participated in several ISSEI conferences, and have been a regular reviewer and manuscript assessor for *The European Legacy*. I organised panels in 1996, 1998 and 2006, and at the Haifa Congress in 1998 I gave a keynote lecture. I convened the panel on *Ordinary Writings* at the Malta conference, from which an edited volume will soon appear.

Anna Kuismin:

I am director of the Literary Archives of the Finnish Literature Society (founded 1831) and Adjunct Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Helsinki. Originally interested in literary theory and Finnish literature, my focus has shifted towards cultural history and microhistory. About five years ago I started a multi-disciplinary discussion circle that has grown into a research network 'The Common People', Writing, and the Process of Literary Attainment in Nineteenth-Century Finland. In 2002 I edited an anthology of autobiographies by self-taught common people in nineteenth century Finland (*Karheita kertomuksia*), and in 2005 I published a microhistorical study that is built around a diary of a young country seamstress (*Kadonnut kangas*).