

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
Department of History

Semester II Year 82

<u>COURSE NO.</u>	<u>COURSE TITLE</u>	<u>INSTRUCTOR</u>
572-001	Undergraduate Seminar in European History	Gargan

COURSE DESCRIPTION Topic: Places and Persons: Contemporary Approaches to Biography and Psychohistory

The word biography is of recent usage. In English literature it first appears in the seventeenth century. The great novelist, Sir Walter Scott, in 1803 considered "Biography the most interesting perhaps of every species of composition." In our day historians regard biography as useful, but not as a central part of the historian's art. Recent studies of historiography in France consider the importance of cooking but ignore biography. American and English historians are uncertain about biography's place in historical inquiry. They are attracted and disturbed, however, by the implications of the psychoanalytical approach to biography and history. The vast claims and vulnerable accomplishments of psychohistory have forced traditional historians to respond to this kind of history and biography.

This seminar will attempt to join this often unseemly debate and to propose its own judgements on biography and history. The term's discourse will have as a unifying concern the question: "How is it possible to think about the individual in history?" To ask: "What is a woman and what is a man?" are questions of unfathomable difficulty. It is no less trying to ask: "How do individual men and women enter History, and how do they leave it?" Finally, the places where the exalted and the meek act out their humble and famous lives will be reflected upon as the particular spaces where individuals and societies fashion their common and uncommon destinies.

COURSE WORK Each week from January 28 to April 1 the seminar will be discussing the required reading on the theory and practice of biography. The members of the seminar will be asked to participate fully and to lead portions of the discussion. From April 8 to May 13 each week two assigned members of the seminar will present biographical essays of modest length. These essays will focus on a significant period in the life stages of the woman or man whose biography the student investigates. All participants will then offer constructive criticism of each other's work.

GRADING SYSTEM

discussion 50% essay 50%

READINGS

Erik H. Erikson. Life History and the Historical Moment
Rudolph Binion. Soundings
Gordon Wright. Insiders and Outliers: The Individual in History.
Yvonne Kapp. Eleanor Marx, vol I
Niegel Hamilton. The Brothers Mann
Helen Stierlin. Hitler: A Family Perspective
Robert C. Tucker. Stalin as Revolutionary 1879-1929 a Study in History and Personality
Laura Fermi. Mussolini