John Finkelberg (Ann Arbor): “Transnational Dandies, Exquisites, and Lions: The Transnational Language of Masculinity in France and Britain, 1815-1830”

Abstract

"Transnational Dandies" offers an interdisciplinary study of the visual and textual cultures of clothing and masculinity in France and Britain between 1815 and 1830. This study investigates the ways in which clothing and practices of self-fashioning were imbricated in the process of constructing masculinity in growing imperial economies. The focus is on representations of masculine dress and fashion in popular visual and textual ephemera, and more specifically on the various meanings ascribed to male dress and bodies in satirical caricature. A comparison of French and British images and texts produced by Louis-François Charon, Charles Philipon, and the English brothers George and Isaac Robert Cruikshank suggests that men were encouraged to participate in an expanding consumer economy between 1815 and 1830; simultaneously, viewers and readers were warned about the dangers of over-styling the masculine self and endangering the male body. I argue that French and British illustrators, draftsmen, authors, and publishers, shared a transnational language of masculine self-fashioning with their audiences. This shared language, which circulated between Paris and London, included several fashionable male "types," namely "the dandy", "the exquisite," "the incroyable" "the ruffian," "the lion," and "the merveilleux." Such "types" highlight a cross-cultural exchange focused on masculine dress and male bodies, and informed internal discourses in both countries regarding proper practices of sociability, national gendered identities, and how to participate in growing imperial economies. Thus, the transnational language of self-fashioning and masculinity intersected with local political discourses to produce visions of both idealized and compromised masculinities in France and Great Britain.