The Book as Object

ENGL 245 • TTh 10:20-11:40 • 116MTV Room 102

Instructor: Sam Fallon
sfallon@wesleyan.edu
Office: 285 Court St. #210
Office Hours: TTh 1:00-2:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Look at this paragraph. A decade ago, you would have found it flipping through the pages of a printed course catalog, a book marked with your highlights and dogears. Now you scroll through it on Firefox or Chrome; you click through to check the textbooks; you copy and paste the description in an email to a friend; or else you hit the back button and move on to something better. Is this the same paragraph, and are you the same reader?

This course is an exploration of the material forms in which we encounter the written word— from the scroll and the codex to the word document and the website. Medium matters, and our goal will be to understand how. We will ask how different media technologies shape us as readers and writers; why books have come to mean so much to us as cultural objects; and how moments of media shift (like the rise of the internet) transform our relation to words. Readings will set essays in the history of the book and media studies alongside literary case studies, and projects will engage with textual materiality through the creation of book-objects of our own.

Required Texts
David Finkelstein and Alastair McLeery, eds., The Book History Reader (Routledge, 2006)
Claudia Rankine, Citizen (Graywolf, 2014)

Other readings to be made available on moodle.

Assignments
Library Expedition 20%
Book Biography 20%
Short Presentation 15%
Final Project (8pp. research essay or creative project) 35%
Participation 10%

COURSE SCHEDULE (* indicates reading is available on moodle)
Thurs, 1/25 Introduction

Medium and Materiality
Tues., 1/30 D. F. McKenzie, “The Book as an Expressive Form” (BHR); Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of the Book?” (BHR); Italo Calvino, If on a winter’s night a traveller, ch. 1*
Thurs., 2/1  Walter Ong, “Orality and Literacy” (BHR); John Guillery, “Genesis of the Media Concept”*

Media Shift
Tues., 2/6  MEET IN OLIN LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
Elizabeth Eisenstein, “Defining the Initial Shift: Some Features of Print Culture” (BHR); Adrian Johns, “The Book of Nature and the Nature of the Book” (BHR); Marshall McLuhan, from *The Gutenberg Galaxy*


Is There a Text in this Class?
Tues., 2/13  George Herbert, selected poems*; Randall M. Leod, “Fiat flux”*

Thurs., 2/15  Emily Dickinson, selected poems*; Virginia Jackson, “Dickinson Undone”*

Writing and Reading

Thurs., 2/22  Roger Chartier, “Labourers and Voyagers” (BHR); Michel de Certeau, “Reading as Poaching”; William Sherman, “Used Books”*

Library Expedition due

Reading (cont.)
Tues., 2/27  MEET IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
Thomas R. Adams and Nicholas Barker, “A New Model for the Study of the Book” (BHR)

Thurs., 3/1  N. Katherine Hayles, “How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine”; Michael Warner, “Uncritical Reading”*

Readers and Reading (II)


~~SPRING BREAK~~

Authors and Others
Tues., 3/27  Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” (BHR); Mark Rose, “Literary Property Determined” (BHR); David Kastan, “From Playhouse to Printing House; or, Making a Good Impression”*

Thurs., 3/29  No class: I’ll be at the Shakespeare Association of America conference in L.A.

Editing, Publishing, Selling

** Book Biography due


Book Presentations
Tues., 4/10  Presentation Day 1

Thurs., 4/12  Presentation Day 2

Books and/as Art
Tues., 4/17  Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*; William Blake, from *Songs of Innocence*; Megan L. Benton, “The Book as Art”

Thurs., 4/19  MEET IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Collecting, Scrapbooking, Bricolage


Books in Social Space
Tues., 5/1  Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production” (BHR); Janice Radway, “A Feeling for Books” (BHR)


Conclusion
Tues., 5/8  Anthony Grafton, “The Future of Reading”*

Final Project due Tues., 5/15

*  *  *

**EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES**
**Attendance:** The success of the course depends on our discussions of what we read, so attendance is crucial. You are expected to attend all class meetings and to arrive on time. If you must miss class, please notify me in advance. You will still be responsible for any material or announcements missed: consult with a classmate for notes. Missing four or more class periods will have a negative impact on your participation grade.

**Participation:** This class is a joint effort, and its success depends on all of our active participation. Active participation begins before class: read carefully and take notes as you go; underline words, phrases, and sentences that catch your attention; jot down questions that occur to you and problems you encounter in the texts. (Treat readings posted online the same way. Print them out, mark them up, and bring your hard copies to class when assigned.) In class, be ready to contribute your thoughts to our discussion.

Because computers (and tablets) tend to divert attention from discussion, they will not be allowed in class, unless you have special reason for needing one or unless I specify otherwise. Please speak with me if that is the case, or if you have any questions. Certain days I’ve marked on the schedule when you should bring a computer if able, as we’ll make use of them in class.

**Late Work:** I will accept assignments up to one week after the posted due date, but with a third of a letter grade subtracted for each day that goes by between the deadline and submission (e.g., A- to B+, or B+ to B).

**Office Hours:** I’m always happy to meet with you outside of class, whether to continue talking about readings that you find exciting or to discuss your written work. You’re welcome to simply drop in during my weekly office hours—no appointments necessary—or, if the posted office hours don’t work, just send me an email and we’ll arrange another time to meet.

**Academic Integrity**
All work in this class is governed by the [Honor Code](#). Plagiarism—the unacknowledged borrowing of words or ideas—will not be tolerated. I am always happy to answer questions that you may have about the proper use of sources.

**Statement of Disability Resources**
Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Please also make an appointment with me as soon as possible [during the first two weeks of the semester], so that appropriate arrangements can be made.