

ENG425W: English Seminar
Literature and the Technologies of Textual Production

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Fall 2009; TuTh 11-12:15
Burgess 303
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Office hours: Monday 11-12, Tuesday 9-11, Thursday 2-3

Course Description

In studying literature, we often take for granted the basic technologies of textual production—the form of the book, the means of publication, a certain naturalized idea of who “the audience” for a literary text might be. But methods of producing texts for audiences have changed drastically from the ancient period to the modern day, with significant implications for how literature is written, for whom it is written, how authors conceive of their audiences, and how audiences conceive of authors. Examining the variation between ideas of authorship and audience, the scope of the reading public (who is actually reading), distribution of and variation between editions of texts, electronic vs. print vs. manuscript culture, and the transition from orality to literacy can help us to get at the intersections between literature and its social, economic, and political contexts.

In this course, we will consider some of the above-mentioned ideas, focusing in particular on how authors have responded to and addressed different ideas of the reading public. We will explore issues from Anglo-Saxon poetry written in the transitional period from an oral to a literate culture, through the reactions to widespread publication, to the question of how “the digital revolution” has changed habits of reading and writing. Readings will be from literary texts, scholarly criticism, book history, and literary and cultural theory.

Course books

Calvino, Italo. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Trans. William Weaver. Orlando: Harcourt, 1981.

Drabble, Margaret. *The Seven Sisters*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2002.

Finkelstein, David, and Alistair McCleery. *An Introduction to Book History*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pale Fire*. New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Additional readings will be available through Melick Library's On-line Reserve System. **Please print out all readings and bring them to class.**

*Bede's introduction to *Caedmon's Hymn* and the poem *Judith* are in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 1 (The Middle Ages). Please let me know if you do not have a copy of *NAEL*.

Assignments and Expectations

I expect you to come to class on time. Frequent tardiness will affect your attendance record.

Absences: If you must miss class for any reason, let me know as far in advance as possible, preferably via email. More than three absences will adversely affect your grade. **Missing 20% (6 or more) of the class meetings will be grounds for failing the course.**

Participation: This class is the culmination of your English experience at Eureka, and as such, a high degree of scholarship and engagement is expected. I expect everyone to speak frequently in class and to participate actively in discussion. Please prepare for class by doing all of the assigned readings and writing assignments, reflecting and making notes on the discussion questions that are posted on the blog, and noting issues that are of interest to you throughout the semester.

Assignments for this course will include the following:

- **A presentation and write-up.** Your 15-minute presentation will report on a scholarly study related to book history and be accompanied by a five-page write-up, which should be developed directly from your presentation notes. The write-up will be handed in no later than one week after the presentation.
- **Discussion questions and blog participation.** During the course of the semester, you will need to submit at least five discussion questions (I will issue a number of “calls for questions”; you may choose which five to heed) and five substantive blog posts reflecting on the readings and discussions. In addition, a percentage of your grade will be based on “blog participation”: commenting on others' posts, submitting additional posts or questions, and generally participating in the on-line life of the course. All students should create a Wordpress account as soon as possible. The course blog can be found at <http://barreng425fall09.wordpress.com>.
- **A short paper** explicating a theoretical text (due October 13). We will be reading some difficult theoretical works in this class, and while we will be discussing them together, there is always more to be said. Your assignment for this short paper (four to six pages) will involve providing a detailed explication and analysis of a part of a theoretical work. I will give you more specific instructions for this assignment later in the semester.
- **A final paper.** Your ten-page final paper will be on a topic of your choice. For example, you might write about an issue in book history, a theoretical issue that arises in class, or a study of a genre or type of literature, or you may produce an interpretation of one or more of the literary texts that we will read in class. Additional guidelines will be distributed later in the semester.
- **A Capstone presentation** (in the Gammon room, date TBA). This is a formal presentation of an abridged version of your final paper (about 10 minutes, or 4-5 pages).
- Submission to and presentation at the **English Language and Literature Conference** at the University of St. Francis in March. Although there are no points for participating in the conference, it is a required component of the course.
- **English Major summary paper.** This is a reflective paper in which students will review their work as an English major at Eureka; details of the assignment will be discussed later in the semester.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty constitutes a major breach of the trust that exists between the instructor and the student. It includes passing off another's ideas as one's own, any attempt to gain information about a test or exam prior to the test or exam date without the instructor's consent, and providing unauthorized assistance on a test, exam, paper, or other assignment to another student. Copying text directly off of the Internet, or rewriting materials found on-line in one's “own words” but without proper attribution, constitute cheating. **Cheating on any assignment—no matter how seemingly trivial—will result in a failing grade for this course.** Students who fail for academic dishonesty will not have the option of withdrawing. If you are in doubt about what plagiarism means, or about how to appropriately document

sources in your work, please contact me; I will be happy to help.

Grades for the course will be determined according to the following rubric:

Presentation (in-class component)	10.00%
Presentation write-up	10.00%
Discussion questions	5.00%
Blog posts	5.00%
Additional blog participation	5.00%
Theory paper	20.00%
Final paper	30.00%
English major summary paper	5.00%
Participation	10.00%

Learning Center/ADA Statement

The Learning Center, located on the first floor of Alumni Hall, provides academic services to all Eureka College students. Consultations are available in the areas of math and writing. Study groups, individual academic counseling and course-specific tutoring are also available by contacting Jason Zimmerman at x6520 or jzimmerman@eureka.edu. *I highly recommend that you use the Writing Tutors at the Learning Center (a free service offered to Eureka students).*

Any Eureka College student with a disability or other special circumstances requiring accommodations or other consideration in order to successfully complete the requirements of this course is requested to identify himself/herself to the instructor and discuss the matter privately. This disclosure should be made within the first week of the course so proper accommodations can be made.

Course synopsis (subject to change)

Th 8/27	Introduction: Course overview and a very short history of the book
Tu 9/1	What is book history, and why is it important? Readings: Ch. 1 and ch. 2 from <i>Old Books, New Histories</i> ; Isak Dinesen, “The Blank Page,” Jorge Luis Borges, “The Library of Babel”
Th 9/3	Transcribing oral culture Readings: <i>IBH</i> chapter 2, “From Orality to Literacy”; Walter Ong, “Orality and Literacy”
Tu 9/8	Readings: Bede, excerpt on Caedmon's “Hymn”; <i>Judith</i>
Th 9/10	Manuscript culture Reading: Marcel Thomas, “Manuscripts”

Tu 9/15	Reading: Chaucer, <i>The House of Fame</i>
Th 9/17	Reading: <i>House of Fame</i>
Tu 9/22	The development of print culture Reading: IBH chapter 3, “The Coming of Print” Brief discussion of implications of change from scribal to print culture <i>Presentations 1-3</i>
Th 9/24	Reading: Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” <i>Presentation 4</i>
Tu 9/29	Readings: IBH chapter 4, “Authors, Authorship, and Authority”; Barthes, “Death of the Author” <i>Presentation 5</i>
Th 10/1	Reading: Foucault, “What is an Author?” <i>Presentation 6</i>
Tu 10/6	Readings: David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”; <i>The Onion</i> , “Girlfriend Stops Reading David Foster Wallace Breakup Letter at Page 20”
Th 10/8	Readings: Jorge Luis Borges, selected stories Theory explication paper due
Tu 10/13	Readings: IBH chapter 6, “Readers and Reading”; Margaret Drabble, <i>The Seven Sisters</i> , pp. 3-162.
Th 10/15	Reading: <i>The Seven Sisters</i> , pp. 162-end.
Tu 10/20	Reading: Nabokov, <i>Pale Fire</i>
Th 10/22	Reading: <i>Pale Fire</i>
Tu 10/27	Readings: <i>Pale Fire</i> ; Rabinowitz, “Truth in Fiction”
Th 10/29	Reading: Calvino, <i>If on a Winter's Night a Traveler</i>
Tu 11/3	Reading: <i>If on a Winter's Night a Traveler</i>
Th 11/5	Reading: <i>If on a Winter's Night a Traveler</i>
Tu 11/10	New technologies: Books and the Internet Readings: IBH chapter 7, “The Future of the Book”; Paul Duguid, “Material Matters”
Th 11/12	Reading: Web-based publication TBA Topic proposals due

Tu 11/17	Rethinking the book: Digital media and the graphic novel Reading: TBA
Th 11/19	Rethinking the book: The book as art form (guest lecture by Meda Rives and/or Rhea Edge; class time may be changed to accommodate lecturer's schedule)
Tu 11/24	Annotated bibliographies due; brief research presentations
Th 11/26	Thanksgiving – No class
Tu 12/1	Workshops
Th 12/3	Workshops
M 12/7	Capstone presentations, Gammon room (tentative date—in any event, they will be this week)
Tu 12/8	Book-making workshop and party

Final papers and English summary papers due in my office by 3 pm on Friday, December 11.