

Teaching Book History at Texas A & M

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At a time when a number of universities are introducing courses in book history, we are fortunate at Texas A&M University to be launching a number of courses and programs on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Like politics, all book history is local, drawing on the staff and resources that happen to be found in a given place at a given time. Some of what we are doing here, however, is unusual, and some of it is easily replicable, so we thought it would be useful to share what is going on in College Station with those outside our own community.

Good teaching, of course, begins with good teachers, and we are blessed with an abundance of riches here. The largest concentration of faculty in book history, bibliography, and textual studies is found in the Department of English, which has eleven people, or approximately twenty percent of the tenured and tenure-line faculty, spread across almost every period of the printed book in England: sixteenth century (Douglas Brooks, James Harner, and Craig Kallendorf), seventeenth century (Donald Dickson, Margaret Ezell, Gary Stringer, and Paul Parrish), eighteenth century (Robert Griffin), nineteenth century (Terence Hoagwood and Maura Ives), and twentieth century (J. Lawrence Mitchell). To these faculty, the Department of Hispanic Studies adds six specialists, almost half their tenured and tenure-line faculty: three in Spanish Golden Age (Victor Arizpe, Hilaire Kallendorf, and Eduardo Urbina), two working on colonial texts in the western hemisphere (Nancy Joe Dyer and Brian Imhoff), and one in nineteenth-

century Spanish literature (Stephen Miller). Finally, there is the special collections librarian, Steven Escar Smith, who also holds an adjunct appointment in English.

It would be nice to say that all this was planned, but it wasn't. In fact a group of faculty, led by Maura Ives, quite literally awoke to consciousness one day and realized that we have an extraordinary resource here and that we really ought to do something with it. The first step was for the faculty to organize. This we did, under Maura's leadership, into a 'Textual Studies Working Group', which includes most of the people mentioned above, along with a good number of temporary faculty and graduate students (see the group's website at <http://www-english.tamu.edu/tsg/>). Once we were organized, we obtained a small amount of funding from Texas A&M University's Glasscock Humanities Research Center, which in turn allowed Maura to broker deals in which other units on campus also contributed enough money to allow us to invite a series of speakers. Over the past couple of years, the working group has brought Robert Fleck, Noel Polk, W. Speed Hill, John Bryant, Fernando Plata, and David Gants to campus. Other recent lecturers have included Matthew J. Bruccoli, Terry Belanger, Paul Needham, Michael Winship, Henry Petroski, Ezra Greenspan, Thomas Palaima, Tom Staley, Anthony James West, Al Lowman, and Randall McLeod. For the future we are also planning a number of other events, ranging from panels on graduate student research and the book trade to The Digital Textual Studies symposium (19-21 October 2006) and (we hope) a Society for Textual Scholarship mini-conference in spring, 2008.

What does this have to do with teaching? Everything, we have found, for our classroom initiatives have come directly from discussions in the working group and from the momentum that was launched there. Two of the themes that will recur in this report

emerge here. The first is that teaching is hard to separate from research, so that one of the best ways to launch a successful classroom program is to get a group of faculty doing research in the same area together. Nature will take its course, and proposals for new classes will follow quickly. A second theme is that some level of organization is necessary. While we may have an unusually large number of faculty working in this area, in our experience it is typical for even a handful of book historians to be dispersed into several administrative units on most campuses. Everyone in academic life is busy, and in the end nothing gets done unless there is at least a loose structure (and ours is loose) with occasional, but regular meetings.

Almost from the beginning, the Textual Studies Working Group has had an eye on course development. The English Department has offered for many years a graduate course that serves as an intensive introduction to the tools of the scholarly trade and to the history, production, and reception of manuscript, print, and electronic books (more about this later), but until a couple of years ago, this was it.

When it came time to build, we decided to begin on the undergraduate level. The biggest obstacle we face here is that most undergraduates simply don't know what book history is or why they should be interested. To solve this problem, we resorted to subterfuge: we had a new course on book history listed as a senior seminar through the English Department. Every student must take a senior seminar to graduate, and the director of undergraduate studies is careful not to schedule more sections than the students in the pipeline will fill, so lo and behold, the first time the course was offered (fall, 2003), it filled, as it did the second time (fall, 2005). The students confessed on the first day of class that they were not sure what they would be doing, but once they got the

five-minute explanation, they were reassured and headed gamely into cuneiform tablets and Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The first time the undergraduate book history course was offered, it was taught by an assistant professor of Hispanic Studies (Hilaire Kallendorf) and the head of special collections (Steven Escar Smith) under the auspices of the Department of English. Quite properly, it was presented as a course with an international focus, since it had been prepared under a curriculum development grant that was designed to internationalize our undergraduate course offerings. Here is another point worth remembering: course development tends to follow the money, and book history can offer surprising opportunities to enterprising faculty. The focus was on manuscripts, with a deliberate effort to place the Greek and Roman materials on which one might be tempted to concentrate into a larger context by devoting an equal amount of time to the book in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Holy Land, and the Arab world. The students found it interesting enough, but this version was never designed as the core course in the area.

That core course is the one that was taught by the two of us for the first time in fall, 2005. We'll begin with the syllabus, then explain what we were attempting to do:

ENGL 481: HISTORY OF THE BOOK

Dr. Craig Kallendorf / Dr. Steven Smith

The course: This is a senior seminar on the history of the book, with a focus on how this information can deepen appreciation of literary and rhetorical texts for English majors. We shall consider how the concept of the book has evolved from clay tablet to illuminated manuscript to printed volume to computer text. Since this evolution is difficult to grasp in conceptual terms only, we shall refer regularly to items from the rare book collections in the Cushing Library, which also contains the resources for students to print a sample book on an historically accurate hand press. The course is team-taught, with Dr. Kallendorf having the principal responsibility for theory and Dr. Smith for

practice, but both of us will participate in both areas.

Texts:

1. J. Carter and N. Barker, *ABC for Book Collectors* (most recent edn.)
2. S. H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing* (most recent edn.)
3. Michelle Lovric, *The Floating Book: A Novel of Venice*
or
Ian Caldwell and Dustin Thomason, *The Rule of Four*
4. Course packet, on electronic reserve (ER)

Grades:

- Midterm Exam = 20%
Final Exam = 20%
Hands-on Project / short presentations = 20%
Research paper = 40%

This is a “W” course, which means that we shall devote considerable attention to the preparation of the research paper. Class time will be devoted to the paper from the beginning, with parts of several class sessions devoted to planning the project, critiquing its progress, and revising drafts. No late papers or projects will be accepted, and a passing grade on the writing component is necessary for a passing grade in the course.

Work schedule:

Aug. 31

What’s a book and what is book history?

films: *The Making of the Renaissance Book* and *The World Inscribed*

Sept. 7

1. The ancient ‘book’

read: Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, pp. 1-73, 102-15 (ER)

2. bookbinding history and structures

Sept. 14

paper and papermaking

Sept. 21

manuscripts and manuscript illumination

read: Avrin, *Scribes, Scripts and Books*, pp. 205-59 (ER)

film, *The Parchment Makers*

Sept. 28

1. the invention and spread of print: incunables

read: Chappell, pp. 59-83; Steinberg, pp. 3-16

2. illustration history and processes

Oct. 5

punches and typesetting

Oct. 12

the spread of printing in the sixteenth century

read: Chappell, pp. 84-110; Steinberg, pp. 17-73

Oct. 19

type and type setting

Oct. 26

1. the era of consolidation, 1550-1800

read: Chappell, pp. 111-70; Steinberg, pp. 74-135

2. the nineteenth century, part 1

read: Chappell, pp. 171-203

Nov. 2

printing

Nov. 9

field trip to Southern Methodist University, to see “A Heavenly Craft: The Woodcut in Early Printed Books,” from the Library of Congress

Nov. 16

1. the nineteenth century, part 2

read: Steinberg, pp. 137-69

2. the twentieth century

read: Chappell, pp. 204-44; Steinberg, pp. 170-249

Nov. 30

1. the history of reading: enlightenment versus censorship

read: Cavallo and Chartier, *A History of Reading in the West*, pp. 1-36; Manguel, *A History of Reading*, pp. 279-90; Guilemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 10-29 (ER)

2. collecting books

read: Rees-Mogg, *How to Buy Rare Books*, pp. 9-51 (ER)

Dec. 5

1. the romance of the book: discussion of Lovric and Caldwell-Thomason novels

2. presentation and critique of student projects

Dec. 9

final exam (7:30-9:30 am)

In addition, students will be expected to attend a lecture by Dr. Lilian Armstrong (Wellesley College) on illustrated books, scheduled for October 13.

Each sentence in the “course description” turns out to be important, so let’s take

them one by one. First, our course is designed for English majors, who bring certain needs and expectations to class, and these are the things we attempt to build on. Most of our students chose an English major because they like to read, so we indulge that by including two novels that capture something of the romance of old books. The first is Michelle Lovric's award-winning *The Floating Book: A Novel of Venice*, which tells the story of how John and Windelin of Speyer rescued and printed the poems of Catullus, in competition with another great Venetian printer, Nicolas Jenson. The Venetian plot parallels one from ancient Rome that focuses on Catullus, and both are quite graphic, so we direct the squeamish readers in the group to Ian Caldwell and Dustin Thomason's *The Rule of Four*. This is a recent bestseller that focuses on the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, one of the most famous, and enigmatic, books of all time. It gives us a way to bring Aldus Manutius to life, as well as to remind our students that the authors of this second novel were students just like them a couple of years ago, in Anthony Grafton's book history class at Princeton. They find this encouraging.

Our course is titled 'history of the book,' and we resist the temptation to indulge any postmodern hesitations about grand narratives in order to tell a story they don't know in a traditional, chronological order. In fact most students at Texas A&M do not take any sort of world history course, and the current requirements for our English major are deemphasizing the sophomore-level survey courses that once gave them a basic grasp of cultural history. The result is that before they take this class, most of our students would be hard pressed to date 'Hellenistic' or 'Enlightenment' with any degree of precision, which would make a more topical presentation of our material difficult and confusing. We have responded by making a virtue of necessity, emphasizing, for example, how

various forms of medieval book hands evolved from one another over time, then how printed books first copied manuscripts, then developed according to their own internal logic.

In our experience it is difficult to convey these points with facsimiles and pictures only. We are therefore very fortunate in having several substantial collections within the Cushing Memorial Library that provide actual examples of everything from cuneiform tablets to modern examples of fine press printing. The first of these is a collection that was formed by Loran L. Laughlin (a 1926 graduate of the university) with the express purpose of illustrating the history of books and printing by providing one or more examples of many different book formats and artifacts, beginning with clay tablets from ancient Mesopotamia and extending into the twentieth century. Two years ago Texas A&M also obtained the Robert Dawson Collection, a major cache of some 18,000 items that covers the full range of book history in France, beginning with medieval manuscripts and extending through twentieth-century drama, focused on the Enlightenment but containing fascinating sub-collections of pamphlets from the French revolution and clandestine printings. The Al Lowman Printing Arts collection is also utilized for its many examples of modern fine press printing. Other items have been added to the special collections library over the years to complement these collections, so that, for example, we have a sixteenth-century Herodotus that shows how censorship works, a seventeenth-century Virgil whose handwritten marginalia contest the political sentiments carried by the printed commentary, and a copy of Peter Koch's *Parmenides* that allows an extended discussion of modern fine press printing and how books like this are produced today. We have a seminar room in the English department, which we use occasionally, but we meet

most of the time in the special collections library so that we can see and touch the artifacts themselves.

In the same way we feel that students really need to be able to see and touch an incunable to understand what makes it special in terms of paper, ink, design, and binding, so we feel that the best way for the students to appreciate the products of hand press technology is for them to participate in making them. Steven Smith has obtained the necessary equipment over the years and learned how to use it, so that in the course of the semester our students make paper, cast and set type, print a small pamphlet on the Cushing Memorial Library's hand press, and stitch it together in a way that would have been appropriate in the eighteenth century. During the class breaks, the cell phones come out so the students can report on what they are doing to their parents and girlfriends, so we know they enjoy these 'lab' days. And from the quality of the discussions back in the seminar room, we also know that they have a better understanding of Baskerville's achievements than they would get from lectures alone.

No one has everything necessary to do a course like this, so an integral part of what we do is to build links with other rare books collections around the state and to invite lecturers with complementary expertise to campus to talk to the class, and to anyone else from the Textual Studies Working Group who cares to attend. For the fall, 2005 session the entire class drove up to Southern Methodist University (180 miles away—this is Texas, after all) to see the exhibition there of the early illustrated books from the Rosenwald Collection at the Library of Congress. They also heard a lecture by Lilian Armstrong from Wellesley College on early Venetian printed books with hand-painted illuminations. This enriches the learning experience for the students, but it also

allows us to make connections with other institutions and scholars, for the benefit of everyone.

As we said at the outset, all book history is local, and our course takes advantage of the resources we have. We do not have the resources of the special collections in Princeton's Firestone Library, for example, but we do have a more-than-adequate teaching collection of artifacts that ranges through hundreds of years of book history. We also have faculty with both broad historical expertise and deep, hands-on understanding; our course is special, we believe, for its ability to combine the two. Our students bring into the course an interest in belles lettres, which we encourage them to indulge in, for example, a term paper on the Kelmscott Chaucer that helps them learn about the medievalism of William Morris's day in a way that they could not do if we did not have a copy of the book for them to use in their research. They take away a different perspective on the books they read, but they also derive some interesting side benefits: this is the first time that many of them have taken any sort of course with a broad chronological sweep, so at least on the eve of graduation, they finally get a grasp of the basic periods of western cultural history. And when a young lady who was active in her sorority and worked in College Station's only upscale women's clothing store told us that she had asked her mother to track and buy for her on ebay an older edition of Jane Austen for Christmas, we knew that what we were doing had registered. This was confirmed when we received the student-generated teaching evaluation scores, which gave the course a perfect 5.0. Needless to say, we'll be doing it again.

Another significant part of the teaching program in book history at Texas A&M is our 'undergraduate research opportunity program' (UROP). This program pairs interested

students with faculty members who agree to involve them in their ongoing research, with an independent study course when appropriate, with the research work carrying a \$500 stipend for the student. UROPs are open to the entire faculty in the English department, but the members of the Textual Studies Working Group regularly receive a greatly disproportionate share of the awards: for fall of 2006, for example, Craig Kallendorf will be working with a student on an enumerative bibliography of the early printed editions of the Roman poet Virgil; J. Lawrence Mitchell will be exploring how the same books are presented in different ways when published in both the U.S. and the U.K.; and Gary Stringer will be introducing someone to early manuscripts and printed books, computer collation, and digitalization in connection with his ongoing work on the Donne Variorum Project. These, we should note, are three of the four projects funded, and will be an invaluable experience for the students involved.

Much of what we have actually done so far has been at the undergraduate level, but much of our planning involves graduate education, so we should say something about that. A version of the undergraduate course described earlier, suitably upgraded, is scheduled for its first offering on the graduate level in spring, 2007; this time the class will visit the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, and guest lectures will be presented by Anthony Grafton, Princeton University (on the ancient library at Caesarea) and Giancarlo Abbamonte, University of Naples (on the reading practices of Italian Renaissance humanists). The graduate program in English offers ‘concentrations,’ clusters of courses in a particular area that provide coherent coverage of that area and allow the students to specialize in meaningful ways. Concentrations generally involve four courses, and we are about ready to prepare a request for a concentration in

bibliography, textual studies, and book history, which will include the introductory course mentioned earlier, the graduate book history course we just described, a new course on textual studies in the digital age to be taught in fall, 2006 by Maura Ives, and a rotating topics course that will allow different subjects to be treated in depth. Stay tuned for further details.

A second graduate concentration, this one interdisciplinary and intercollegiate, draws on the extensive work in humanities informatics being done at Texas A&M University. This initiative is being led by Eduardo Urbina, who has collected over \$2,000,000 in grant support, much of it with Richard Furuta in computer science, for a variety of projects focused on Cervantes, ranging from an annual enumerative bibliography to a comprehensive digital library of illustrated editions of *Don Quixote*. But Texas A&M is also home to the World Shakespeare Bibliography (James Harner) and the Donne Variorum (Gary Stringer), both of which are firmly anchored in the computer age. All of these projects have used graduate student interns, which provides a close mentoring experience that in many ways parallels the UROPs, but a committee has also drafted a proposal, now under consideration, that would draw on faculty and resources from the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Engineering, Education and Human Development, and the Library to apply information technology in the context of research and practice in the humanities. The proposal would establish a ‘Digital Humanities Certificate Program,’ to give graduate students the training they need for careers that focus on computer-aided textual resources, the digital expression of archival collections, and the development of software for humanities research projects. Again, stay tuned for further details.

We mentioned earlier the printing press and other tools used to provide ‘laboratory’ instruction for our undergraduate course. These tools are also used in the unique week-long workshop offered at the Cushing Library on the history of books and printing. In the course of the week, students strike and justify a matrix, cast type, set type, make paper, print on a full-scale replica of an English common press, undertake binding projects, experience all the major processes of producing illustrations, and engage in many other activities. The idea behind the workshop is that the care and understanding of books, particularly those of the hand press period, can be improved by exposure to as many aspects as possible of book production. We are not training printers or other tradesmen, although some of our students may go on to pursue these activities and even achieve a high degree of skill in them. Rather, our goal is critical and historical. We use ‘hands on’ exercises to teach the technical processes that give birth to texts so that we might better understand how these processes bear on textual form, meaning, transmission, and reception. Now in its fifth year, over 100 students have matriculated through the workshop. They have come from institutions around the United States as well as Mexico and Canada, including the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Yale University, Princeton University, University of Washington, Catholic University, St. John’s University, Queen’s University (Ottawa), the University of the Americas in Puebla, the University of the Arts (Philadelphia), Capital University (Columbus, Ohio), University of Michigan, Florida State University, Arizona State University, Boston Public Library, the Library of Congress, Louisiana State University, Miami University, and most of the major Universities in Texas (Texas A&M, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Texas at Arlington, Rice University, the University of Houston, Texas Tech University,

the University of North Texas, and the University of Houston). The participants have come from a variety of backgrounds – professors; archivists; librarians; booksellers; private collectors; and graduate students in English, Library Science, Computer Science, and Graphic Design.

As you can see, teaching in the various areas of textual studies, bibliography, and book history, on both the undergraduate and graduate levels, is alive and well at Texas A&M University. We hope that what we are doing here might prove helpful to others who are planning, or already teaching, in these areas, and we in turn would be pleased to hear of things you are doing that we might take advantage of here.