

**EN248: The History of the Book**  
Spring 2020  
MW 2:30-3:45  
Lovejoy 202 and Miller Library Special  
Collections

**Instructor: Megan Cook**  
**E-mail: [mlcook@colby.edu](mailto:mlcook@colby.edu)**  
**Office: Miller Library 219**  
**Office Hours: Monday, 9:30-11:00;**  
**Thursday, 10:30-12:00; other times by**  
**appointment (send an email or talk to**  
**me in class)**

Textual scholar DF McKenzie famously asserted that “forms effect meaning.” What does this mean? That the physical form that a text takes— whether a manuscript, a printed book, a newspaper, an advertising flyer, a webpage, an inscription in stone— contributes to and is in fact an integral part of what that text means. The discipline or subdiscipline of book history is predicated on the idea that, to understand what a text *means*, we also need to consider what it *is* at a material level.



In this class, we'll explore what this relationship looks like in practice through an overview of book production in the European West, focusing on the medieval and hand press (early print) eras. Through a mixture of scholarly perspectives, primary sources (both those in Miller Library's Special Collections and digitally in other archives), and hands-on lab work, we'll explore the connection between the form and content of books in a variety of historical and media contexts.

**Course goals and objectives**

1. In this class students will explore the complex dynamic interplay between textual objects and the material, technological, cultural, and ecological forces that shape them. This class will focus on early books in the West, but we will also consider the textual cultures of Mesoamerica and East Asia. We will give special attention to issues of archives, conservation, and remediation, and discuss the ways in which these impact our understanding of the material text.
2. Students will become comfortable working with primary source materials while using appropriate handling methods. Class readings will expose students to major themes in theoretical and historical scholarship on the history of the book, and class discussions and laboratory sessions will help students build proficiency applying these ideas to specific textual objects. Students will demonstrate their ability to apply these ideas independently in a semester-long blogging project, as well as through a mid-term exam.
3. Students will explore the ways in which critical bibliography can serve as the foundation of engagement with a host of literary and historical questions. To that end, students will

develop an “unessay” project that explores a topic related to the class, conduct independent research on that topic, and present it in a compelling and original way.

4. Over the course of the semester, students will become familiar with key reference sources and scholarship in critical bibliography. In their writing, students will learn to evaluate, use and cite secondary research sources appropriately and effectively.

All work in this class will be graded on an A-F scale. The semester grade will be calculated as follows:

Pet book project: 30%

Midterm exam: 20%

Final unessay project: 30%

Participation, attendance, and in-class work: 20%

Pet book project (30%): During the first week of class, you will select a book or similar object from Special Collections that you will research and analyze over the course of the semester. As you do so, you will prepare a series of four 750-1000 word blog posts to our class website, <http://web.colby.edu/bookhistory2020/>. You will be given a Wordpress login which will allow you both to post to the site and add pictures and other media to your posts. Further details will be distributed in class.

Midterm exam (20%): A 75-minute open book essay exam that will ask you to demonstrate your mastery of the major concepts and themes of the course. You will have a choice of two essay questions that will be made available at the beginning of the class period.

Unessay (30%): Rather than a final essay, for this class you will prepare an *unessay* that asks you to explore a topic related to the class that is of interest to you, and to present your research in a compelling and effective way. The unessay can take many forms, and we will discuss it further in class. I’ve taken the idea of the unessay from Ryan Cordell of Northeastern University, who has more to say about the format here: <http://f14tot.ryancordell.org/assignments/unessays/>

Participation and attendance (20%): To receive full credit for this component of the grade, you must attend class regularly, contribute actively to our class discussions, and participate fully in the work of the class. This means that you must arrive on time, having read the assigned material, and with a hardcopy of the day’s reading in hand. I also expect you to be sufficiently rested and/or caffeinated to remain alert throughout class and **to refrain from checking your cell phone**.

In addition, the course of the term, you will lead the class for one or two very short periods. Dates for these will be assigned in the first week of classes.

- Epilogue or “Coming Attractions”: The student providing the epilogue has the floor for the last five minutes of class. They are responsible for having already read the assignment for the next class meeting, and for connecting that reading with our current class’s discussion. What themes will continue? Are there significant differences in the way upcoming readings engage with course themes? The “Coming Attractions” presenter might also choose to highlight prospective difficulties with the upcoming reading—might students want to read it with a dictionary close to hand? A Bible? A strong cup of coffee?

Your participation grade may also include short quizzes on the day's reading.

### **Readings and Textbooks**

*The People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks and *The Colors of the New World* by Diana Magaloni Kerpel are both available via the Colby Bookstore and the usual online sources. Other readings will be made available online (if a link is included in the syllabus), or via the course Moodle website.

### Attendance policy

Students are expected to be present and prepared for all class meetings. If you know you will be absent for an athletic contest, religious observance, or other obligation, you must inform me via email during the first two weeks of the semester. Students will generally be allowed one excused absence per term; beyond that, absences will be excused at my discretion. I reserve the right to require documentation.

### Late work

I expect you to submit all written work for the course in a timely fashion, and will apply a penalty of one grade (e.g., A- to B+) for each day a paper is late. I also realize that this is a writing-intensive course, and that as Colby students you are balancing a variety of academic obligations that may become more acute at certain times of the semester. Because of this, I grant students **two free late days** per semester. You may use these either consecutively or for two different assignments, but once they are gone, a retroactive penalty of one grade per day will kick in. Thus, under this policy, an A paper turned in within 48 hours of the due date would still receive an A, but at 49 hours past the due date, it would receive a B.

### Academic Honesty

The word plagiarism derives from the Latin word for "kidnapping." Intellectual kidnapping may take many forms. It can be as self-consciously deceitful an act as the stealing of someone else's work and passing it off as one's own. More often, though, it is the result of inattention and carelessness, such as the failure to properly document someone else's words or ideas by setting them off within quotation marks and citing the source. Depending on the nature of the offense, penalty will range from failing the assignment and failing the course to disciplinary action from the Office of the Dean of Students. As a rule of thumb, err on the side of safety and cite your sources. If you are ever unsure about how or when to do so, just ask!

### Screens

Your phone, iPad, and laptop should all be muted during class. You are welcome to use a laptop for notetaking during lecture portions of the course, and you will need access to one for several of our assignments. However, I expect you to close it during course discussion periods and stay off of the internet for non-course-related purposes during class. I will make presentation materials (PowerPoint, etc.) available via a shared Google Drive folder.

### **ADA Accommodations**

Any student requiring accommodation over the course of the semester should contact me in order to make arrangements.

### **Sexual Misconduct/Title IX Statement**

Colby College prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct (including, but not limited to sexual assault and sexual harassment). If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact Colby Counseling Services (207-859-4490) or the Director of the Gender and Sexual Diversity Program, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093). Students should be aware that faculty members are considered responsible employees (aka “mandated reporters”); as such, if you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a faculty member, they have an obligation to report it to Colby’s Title IX Coordinator. “Disclosure” may include communication in-person, via email/phone/text, or through class assignments. To learn more about sexual misconduct or report an incident, visit <http://www.colby.edu/sexualviolence/>.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Please note: on dates marked SC, we will meet in Special Collections at Miller Library. You are responsible for keeping track of these dates.**

### **Part 1: Foundations**

Wednesday, February 5: Close Looking

Read (or listen) before class: George Thomas Tanselle, “A Bibliographer’s Creed” (Houghton Library, 2014) (audio available online here: <https://soundcloud.com/rarebookschool/tanselle-g-thomas-a-bibliographers-creed-28-july-2014>)

Monday, February 10: Tools of the Trade (SC)

Read before class: Geraldine Brooks, *The People of the Book*, 1-127

Wednesday, February 12: What is the History of the Book?

Read before class: D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 9-77

Monday, February 17: Close Looking (SC)

Read before class: Geraldine Brooks, *The People of the Book*, 128-258

**Due before class: Pet Book Project Part 1, Introduction to your book**

Wednesday, February 19: no class

Monday, February 24: Reading the Material Text

Read before class: Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” *Dadalus* (1982): 65-83; Roger Chartier, “The Press and Fonts: *Don Quixote* in the Print Shop” from *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century* (Penn, 2008), 28-45, George Herbert, “Easter Wings” (<https://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Easterwings.html>)

Wednesday, February 26: The Peoples of the Books

Read before class: Geraldine Brooks, *The People of the Book*, 259-368.

### **Part 2: The Manuscript Book in the West**

Monday, March 2: Writing Like a Scribe (SC)

Read before class: Erik Kwakkel, *Books Before Print* (ARC Humanities, 2018), 1-46; Geoffrey Chaucer, "Adam Sciveyn".

Wednesday, March 4: Manuscripts and Handwritten Things

Read before class: Erik Kwakkel, *Books Before Print* (ARC Humanities, 2018), 57-71, 208-248; Johannes Trithemius, "In Praise of Scribes".

**Due before class: Upload Pet Book Project Part 2.1, Origins**

Wednesday, March 9: Ecologies of Early Books (SC)

Read before class: Sarah Kay, "Legible Skins: Animals and the Ethics of Medieval Reading," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 2.1 (2011) 13-32 and Joshua Calhoun, "The Word Made Flax: Cheap Bibles, Textual Corruption, and the Poetics of Paper," *PMLA* 126.2 (2011), 327-344. Browse "Medieval to Early Modern Manuscripts: Some Ink and Pigment Recipes" ([https://travelingscriptorium.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/scopa-recipes-booklet\\_web-june-2014.pdf](https://travelingscriptorium.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/scopa-recipes-booklet_web-june-2014.pdf)).

Wednesday, March 11: The Book in the New World

Read before class: Diana Magaloni Kerpel, *The Colors of the New World: Artists, Materials, and the Creation of the Florentine Codex* (Getty, 2014).

### **Part 3: Printed Books**

Monday, March 16: Printing, Tools and Technologies (SC)

Read before class: Sarah Werner, *What is a Book? The Study of Early Printed Books* (Wiley, 2019), 1-78.

**Due before class: Upload Pet Book Project Part 2.2, Additions**

Wednesday, March 18: Taking Stock

No class, but an open-note mid-term. Studying for this exam the night before will not help you, but paying attention throughout the semester will.

### SPRING BREAK

Monday, March 30: The Unacknowledged Revolutions (SC)

Read before class: Kai-wing Chow, "Reinventing Gutenberg: Woodblock and Movable-Type Printing in Europe and China," in *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (University of Minnesota, 2007), 169-92; selections from Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*; Bulliet, Richard W. "Medieval Arabic Ṭarsh: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of Printing." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 3 (1987): 427-38; John Foxe on the history of printing.

Wednesday, April 1: Comparative Study: Book Collecting in Qing China and Plantagenet England

Read before class: Sun Ts'ung-T'ien and Achilles Fang, "Bookman's Manual" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 14 (1951), and selections from Richard de Bury, *Philobiblion*.

Monday, April 6: Size Matters (SC)

Read before class: David Kastan, "Size Matters," *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2000), 149-153 and Peter Blayney, *The First Folio of Shakespeare* (Folger, 1991)

<http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/printedbooksNew/index.cfm?textID=blayney&PagePosition=1>

**Due before class: Upload Pet Book Project Part 2.3, Audience**

Wednesday, April 8: Binding and Assembly

Read before class: Aaron T. Pratt, "Stab-Stitching and the Status of Early English Playbooks as Literature," *Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 16.3 (2015), 304-328.

Monday, April 13: Used Books (SC)

Read before class: selections from William Sherman, *Used Books* (University of Pennsylvania, 2007)

**Due before class: 1-page proposal for unessay**

Wednesday, April 15: Illustration (SC)

Read before class: Michael Twyman, *Printing, 1770-1970: An Illustrated History of its development and uses in England* (Oak Knoll, 1998), 18-110.

#### **Part 4: Beyond the Book**

Monday, April 20: Selling the Early Printed Book

Read before class: selections from Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade*; selections from Adam G. Hooks, *Selling Shakespeare: Biography, Bibliography, and the Book Trade*.

**Due before class: Upload Pet Book Project Part 2.4, Decoration and Use**

Wednesday, April 22: Viral Texts

Read before class: Ryan Cordell, "Reprinting, Circulation, and the Network Author in Antebellum Newspapers," *American Literary History*, 27.3 (2015), 417-445.

Monday, April 27: Ephemera (SC)

Read before class: Agatha Beins, "A Revolution in Ephemera: Feminist Newsletters and Newspapers of the 1970s," in *This Book Is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics* (University of Illinois, 2016), 46-65 and Lisa Gitelman, "Print Culture (Other Than Codex): Job Printing and Its Importance," *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 183-197.

Wednesday, April 29: Archives

Read before class: selections from Joshua Hammer, *The Bad-ass Librarians of Timbuktu: And Their Race to Save the World's Most Precious Manuscripts* (Simon & Schuster, 2017)

Monday, May 4: Digital Futures (SC)

Read before class: Siân Echard, "House Arrest: Modern Archives, Medieval Manuscripts." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 1 May 2000; 30 (2): 185-210 and Matthew Kirschenbaum and Sarah Werner, "Digital Scholarship and Digital Studies: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 17 (2014): 406-458.

**Due before class: Upload Pet Book Project Part 3, Afterlives**

Wednesday, May 6: Wrap-up and conclusions

**Unessay due by 12 noon on May 18**