

**Carleton University  
Fall 2015  
Department of English**

**ENGL 5900F: Selected Topic in English Studies  
*The History of Reading: An Introduction***

**Thursday / 2:35-5:25pm**

**Location: *Please confirm location on Carleton Central***

**Instructor: Prof. Jody Mason**

**Email: [jody.mason@carleton.ca](mailto:jody.mason@carleton.ca)**

**Office: 1903 DT**

**Phone: 613-520-2600 x8907**

**Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00-2:00pm**

Reading is an activity that is charged with meaning, but it is also very difficult to study, despite its omnipresence in human life in all parts of the world. In her 2004 assessment of the emergent history of reading, Leah Price notes that there is no agreement about what the history of reading is; it has been understood to “encompass enterprises as various as the social history of education, the quantitative study of the distribution of printed matter, and the reception of texts or diffusion of ideas” (304).

In this course, we will consider both case study and theory as a means of understanding the basic contours of the history of reading as a field. Since reading is a practice “embodied in acts, spaces, and habits” (Chartier, 1994), we will examine it in various historical periods and using various media (the early codex in imperial Rome, the school reader in nineteenth-century Bengal), in diverse physical locations (medieval monasteries, shopping malls), and as it practised by a wide range of historical actors (a male scholar in Renaissance Europe, newly emancipated African-Americans). As students of literature, we want to know what the study of reading can tell us about our discipline; what we find out may challenge many of most dearly cherished assumptions. And yet this is also a field that engages historians and sociologists; what do their insights have to tell us about the study of literature, and what do ours have to tell them about the history of reading?

### **A. Required Texts**

Readings marked with an asterisk can be found in the anthology *The History of Reading: A Reader*, Ed. Shafquat Towheed, Rosalind Crone and Katie Halsey (New York: Routledge, 2011, ISBN: 978-0-415-48421-3). You can purchase this at Octopus Books (116 Third Ave. location, octopusbooks.ca). A copy of this book has also been placed on reserve at MacOdrum Library. All other readings can be found on CU Learn.

## **B. Course Requirements / Assignments**

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Short Response (25%)

Seminar and Article Summary / Analysis (25%)

Final Research Essay (35%)

Participation (15%)

### **Short Response (25%: 5% oral summary and 20% written work): Thurs, Oct. 8 (Option 1) and Thurs., Oct 15 (Option 2)**

Choose one of the two options below and prepare 5-7 pages in MLA format on your question. You may conduct secondary research for this assignment but it is not necessary. Be sure to cite in MLA format whatever secondary materials you use. In addition to your written response, you will be graded on a five-minute oral summary of your work.

Option 1. Read Jorge Luis Borges's story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." In this story about a fictional author, Borges offers a theory of reading. What is this theory? How might one relate this theory of reading to the literary and cultural movements he is associated with—surrealism, magic realism, modernism, postmodernism?

Option 2. Read Alice Munro's story "Carried Away." What might you say about the representation of reading in this story? In this story about a librarian, a library, and the act of reading, what does reading *mean*? According to Munro, is reading good for us? Is Munro activating historically and/or culturally specific conceptions of reading in this story?

### **Seminar and Article Summary / Analysis (25%)**

On the first day of classes, students will sign up for weekly seminar presentations. Each student will facilitate class discussion for forty-five minutes. I expect you to read the assigned material for the week, to conduct further research if necessary, and to create a presentation that will guide the class through your article. To this end, you should:

- a) help the class to summarize the main ideas of the assigned articles
- b) offer ideas about the relevance of the articles to other themes, readings, concepts explored in this course
- c) offer ideas about the significance and / or potential limitations of the claims you encounter in the week's reading

A good strategy for stimulating discussion is to isolate particular passages from the text(s) in question. Remember that you are facilitating a discussion and not delivering a conference paper; *please don't read a paper*. On the day of her presentation, each student

is responsible for handing in a five-page summary / analysis of the week's reading (in MLA style / format, with Works Cited if necessary).

**Final Research Essay (35%): Thurs., Dec. 10**

All three options are research essays (15 pages in MLA format). Your research paper should have a clear thesis, should consider the relevant scholarship, and should provide evidence of independent critical thinking. It should conform to academic conventions: i.e., it must follow MLA format and have correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. On Thursday, November 26th, be prepared to discuss your research with the class. This paper is due one week after our last class, on Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup>.

Option 1: This option has two components. First, use a reading database, such as the RED or *What Middletown Read*, to consider how such a resource might enable the study of reading. What are the different ways in which the database might be used? What different kinds of information might be gleaned from it? What are the limitations of the resource? How might this database be compared with a similar database of reading, such as *What Middletown Read*? Second, choose an author whose work is known to you and who is listed in the database as both “author” and “reader” (e.g., Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, John Keats, Sir Walter Raleigh, Samuel Richardson). What might you say about your author's reading preferences? How does the author's reading shape her writing and vice-versa?

Option 2: What is a mass reading event and what can such events tell us about (in Rehberg Sedo and Fuller's words) the “social practices of contemporary literary culture”? Choose a contemporary mass reading event (The Oprah Book Club, CBC's “Canada Reads,” Facebook, etc.—see a list of possibilities at <http://www.beyondthebook.bham.ac.uk/links/>) and analyze its treatment of the book and of the act of reading.

Option 3: Develop your own final research project in consultation with me. The deadline for discussing this option with me is the end of fall break (Oct. 30<sup>th</sup>)

**Participation (15%)**

This is a discussion-based seminar; accordingly, you must be present and active. Students who have more than two undocumented absences will receive a grade of 0 for participation. In order to contribute meaningfully to each seminar discussion (and to thus gain full marks for participation), you must be prepared to share your ideas about the readings with the class, to pose questions for the seminar facilitators, and to otherwise actively contribute to classroom discussion.

**C. Expectations**

**Email and Office Hours:** Please use class time and office hours for questions relating to lectures, readings, and assignments. You may also communicate with me through the email, but these communications should be brief.

**Assignments and Late Policy:** (NB-Seminar notes and response papers may not be submitted late.) Assignments must be submitted in class the day they are due. Late assignments may be handed in up to five days late with a penalty of 1% per weekday (this includes the day they are due if they are submitted after class) and a grace period over the weekend; the maximum penalty is 5%. Essays will not be accepted after this period unless proper medical or other documentation is provided. You must hand in a printed copy of your work. Late assignments must be left in the essay drop-box at the English Department, Dunton Tower, 18th floor: they will be stamped with the date and deposited in my mailbox. Please keep a backup copy of all your assignments.

**Plagiarism** means passing off someone else's words or ideas as your own or submitting the same work in two different academic contexts (self-plagiarism). The consequences of plagiarism are severe and are issued by the Dean and the University Senate. In order to avoid plagiarism, you must correctly attribute the sources of the ideas you pick up from books, the internet, and other people. For additional information, consult <http://www2.carleton.ca/studentaffairs/academic-integrity>.

## **D. Academic Accommodations**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the Student Guide <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/academic/students/>

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the Student Guide above.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

## **E. Syllabus**

### **Week One: Introduction**

**Thurs., Sept. 10**

Introduction to course and sign up for weekly seminars

### **Defining the Field**

**Thurs., Sept. 17**

\* “General Introduction,” pp. 1–11

\*Robert Darnton, “First Steps Towards a History of Reading,” pp. 23–35

Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, “Introduction,” *A History of Reading in the West*, pp. 1–36

### **History of Literacy**

**Thurs., Sept. 24**

\*Carl F. Kaestle, “Studying the History of Literacy,” pp. 171–79

Michel Verrette and Yvan Lamonde, “Literacy and Print Culture,” *History of the Book in Canada*, Vol. 2, pp. 452–58

Brendan F.R. Edwards, *Paper Talk: A History of Libraries, Print Culture, and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada Before 1960* (Chapter 1: “Contexts and Foundations,” pp. 1–20)

### **Readers and Marginalia**

**Thurs., Oct. 1**

\*Stephen Colclough, “‘R R, A Remarkable Thing or Action’: John Dawson as a Reader and Annotator,” pp. 353–60

H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (Chapter 2: “History,” pp. 44–80)

### **Representing Reading**

**Thurs., Oct. 8**

**Short Response (Option 1) Due (oral summary in class)**

Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*,” *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*, pp. 58–65

Yvan Lamonde, “The Representation of Reading.” *The History of the Book in Canada*, Vol. 2, pp. 465–72

### **Representing Reading**

**Thurs., Oct. 15**

**Short Response (Option 2) Due (oral summary in class)**

Alice Munro, “Carried Away,” *Open Secrets*, pp. 1–58

### **Reader-Response Theory**

**Thurs., Oct. 22**

\*Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” pp. 80–92

\*Stanley Fish, “What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?” pp. 99–108

**FALL BREAK: Oct. 26-30**

## **Individual Readers**

### **Thurs., Nov. 5**

\*Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” pp. 327–46

DeNel Rehberg Sedo, “Case Study: A Victorian Immigrant’s Reading: Introducing Margaret McMicking,” *The History of the Book in Canada*, Vol. 2, pp. 470–81

4-5:30pm: Research Talk, M. Kamari Clarke (English Lounge)

## **Mass Reading Communities**

### **Thurs., Nov. 12**

\*Anindita Gosh, “Contesting Print Audiences,” pp. 231–242

\*William St. Clair, “At the Boundaries of the Reading Nation,” pp. 220–30

\*Anne E. McLaren, “Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China,” pp. 203–19

## **Readers and Clubs**

### **Thurs., Nov. 19**

\*Elizabeth McHenry, “‘An Association of Kindred Spirits’: Black Readers and Their Reading Rooms,” pp. 310–22

Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*. (Chapter 6: “Reader,” pp. 205–44)

## **Reading as Pleasure / Reading as Labour**

### **Thurs., Nov. 26**

Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapter 3: “The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction,” pp. 86–118)

Nicole Shukin, “The Hidden Labour of Reading Pleasure,” *English Studies in Canada* 33.1–2 (March-June 2007): 23.

## **New Directions / Methods**

### **Thurs., Dec. 3**

*The Reading Experience Database, 1450-1945*: <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/>

\*Rosalind Crone, Katie Halsey, Mary Hammond, and Sahfquat Towheed, “The Reading Experience Database, 1450-1945 (RED),” 427–36.

\*Paul C. Gutjahr, “No Longer Left Behind: Amazon.com, Reader-Response, and the Changing Fortunes of the Christian Novel in America,” pp. 389–401

\*guest lecturer: Chris Doody, PhD candidate, Department of English, Carleton University

## **Supplemental Reading:**

For a concise bibliography of the history of reading, see: Chartier, Roger. “Histoire de la lecture: Sélection bibliographique.” *Octavo* 3 (Spring 1993): supplement.