

Carleton University
Fall 2025 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 4115B/ENGL 5402F: Culture and the Text/Studies in 18th Century Literature
The Nature and Uses of 18th Century Book Subscription Lists

Prerequisites: fourth year standing or permission of the department (ENGL 4115)

Instructor: Dr. J.H.C. Reid
Email: hugh.reid@carleton.ca

***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change.
A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course description

This course aims to provide students with the context and nature of subscription lists and give students the opportunity for original research in this field. Initially students will be given a theoretical background to subscription lists and lessons on how the 18th century book trade worked: how paper was made, how was type set, how books were printed and bound, what was the role of bookseller, of publishing congers, etc. The hope is that they will then understand the trade sufficient to deal with book subscriptions. Then each shall pick a subscription list to work on. This kind of work could not have been done at Carleton in the past because the library's holdings in antiquarian books were inadequate. Now, however, we can access almost all the books published in the 18th century by subscription (some 3,000). Students may choose any list. For example, if they are interested in female poets, they might choose Mary Leapor whose work was published posthumously by subscription. In the seminar, they will report on what they have learned and what has evaded them. As each student reports we will discuss how each may progress. There are so many things which we can learn from subscription lists and very little has been done in this field in the past. Some of the topics which may be examined might include the number of female subscribers, the number of people from the mercantile class, the number of members of the aristocracy, or from academia, or the clergy, or other subgroups. How did this subscription list fit into the publishing industry in the eighteenth century?

By the end of the course, the hope is that each student will have done sufficient research (and learned how to do it) to produce a paper worthy of presentation at a conference or as an article in a journal.

Students may also choose to examine the materiality of their chosen book to ascertain how that materiality affects the nature of how one would read the content of the book. They might consider the following kinds of questions about content and form:

- How does the title page present and categorize the book? Is it identified as a novel, or play or poem? If not, how is it described, and why might it be described that way? Does the title page seem to be aimed at a particular audience?

- Does the book have a dedication, or a preface, or an introduction? How does this prefatory material frame the book? What might this framing suggest about the author's or the publisher's intentions for the marketing of the book?
- Does the book have a table of contents? If so, how is it organized? How are the chapters/sections/acts identified, and why? Does this suggest anything about how authors or booksellers expected readers to read the text and use the book?
- Does the book include any advertising information about the titles and/or prices of other books that the publisher sells? If so, what does this suggest about the publisher and their positioning in the market?
- What is the size of the book, and how many volumes is it? What does the size of the book suggest about the publisher's costs or about the potential audience?
- What kind of paper (if known or can be determined) was used for the book? What size and style of print was used? Do these material details indicate quality, time, and expense? What do they suggest about the publisher's expenses and the intended market for the book?
- Are there any illustrations? If so, how many? Where in the book are they placed? Are they signed? What is the purpose or function of the illustrations? What do they suggest about the publisher's expenses and the intended market for the book?
- How many editions of the book were there in the eighteenth century? Does it appear to have been popular?
- Is this text considered an important one by scholars, particularly with reference to histories of that particular genre? Is there much or little criticism on this text? Does its canonical or non-canonical status appear to correlate with the material form of this particular copy?

Text: Hugh Reid. *The Nature and Uses of Eighteenth Century Book Subscription Lists*.

Sources:

- Janine Barchas's book *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* provides a model of ways to integrate material and literary scholarship.
- Carter, John. *ABC for Book Collectors*. 8th ed., revised by Nicolas Barker. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2004.
- Gaskell, Phillip. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*.
- Pearson, David. *English Bookbinding Styles 1450-1800*. London: The British Library; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2005.
- —. *Provenance Research in Book History: A Handbook*. London: The British Library; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1998

Final Grade

There will be 3 forms of evaluation. As the class will be working together and discussing the various bibliographic problems which arise in each student's research, a significant percentage of the final grade will be based on participation (participation may include posting to the discussion

section of Brightspace when appropriate). The rest of the grade will be based on a seminar presentation and a final essay.

- Attendance and Participation: 30%
- Seminar Presentation: 30%
- Final Essay 40%

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.

Participation

Since many of the course requirements are initiated, refined, or completed in class, full attendance at our online sessions and participation in them are expected. Participation in class discussions is also a factor in your attendance mark. Excused absences must be medically documented. Absences for work reasons will not be excused. The participation factor in your grade will be one grade point.