

ENGLISH 527 / HISTORY 385
HISTORY OF THE BOOK
Prof. Garth Bond

Assignment 1: Bibliographical Reports and Study Groups

For the first six weeks of the course, you will also have to submit 5 short written reports that offer a bibliographical analysis of a book, designed to give you some experience with older books and to stimulate your thinking in anticipation of your final project for the course.

#	due	Assignment
1	9/18	Select a book from your own library and discuss its paratextual elements.
2	9/25	Select a book from the Nelson collection and discuss how its author is (or is not) presented.
3	10/2	Search for and select one pre-18th Century book from the Milwaukee-Downer or the Nelson collection.
4	10/9	Search for and select one 18th Century book from the Milwaukee-Downer or the Nelson collection.
5	10/16	Search for and select one 19th Century book from the Milwaukee-Downer, Nelson, or Lincoln Room collection.

Although I will be grading your bibliographic reports separately as formal assignments, I will also be asking you to meet in study groups of 3-5 students while examining books from our Milwaukee-Downer collection for these reports. Working in groups will allow Jill Thomas to meet with each group and consult with you individually about the books you have selected. In addition, working together will significantly increase your exposure to those older books lead to more thoughtful and engaged thinking about them, deepening the impact that your reports can have on our class discussion and collective thinking about book history. You might think of it as a kind of independent lab section for the course. These meetings will probably be scheduled for Thursday or Friday of each week, in consultation with group members and with Jill Thomas.

These reports are not full-blown bibliographical descriptions of the books—though if you are interested in what such a description would entail, you might consult Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford, 1972), p. 321-35. Instead, they are more like interpretive essays designed to highlight the bibliographically interesting elements of the book in question. By “interesting,” I simply mean “interesting to you,” though obviously the goal should be to communicate your interest in a way that will also make these elements interesting to a reader. The more difficult word is “bibliographically,” and probably the best thing to say is that what I have in mind are the aspects of the book that relate to the ideas we will be discussing in class. This will certainly include any and all paratextual elements of the book (a concept we will be discussing before your first report is due), but especially the ones that seem to be serving a surprising or interesting function.

My evaluation of your report will be based first on a sense of the thoroughness with which the book has been considered, and secondly on the degree to which the report's comments succeed in generating my interest in the account of the book. In order to do this, the report should seek to tie its account of the book to the ideas we have discussed in class, showing how those ideas can illuminate our understanding of the book, or conversely how the book may require us to revise the ideas we have formulated in class. I should note that, to a certain extent, the book that you select will have an impact on the ease of developing interesting comments about it. This does not mean that you need to find the most bizarre or exotic books possible, as there are quite interesting things to say even about fairly ordinary books. But it does mean that part of the thoroughness component of the assignment means taking the time to find a book that YOU can say interesting things about (which in most cases, I suspect, will not be a problem provided that you also take the time to really look for the interesting elements of the book you are thinking about working with).

Reports are typically due on Monday (the exception is the week of reading period), and should be submitted to the appropriate forum on the course Moodle site. The reports should only be about 2-3 pages double-spaced (500-750 words, which is significantly shorter than it sounds), so in some cases you will need to focus in on the most interesting elements of your book. Though I would encourage you to write and save your reports using a word processor of some sort in order to have a back-up copy, you will need to enter the text directly into the Moodle interface (you can cut-and-paste the text from your file to the interface).