

Paperwork:

Materials and Technologies of Literature

LIT 231A-01
Winter 2020
W 5:20-8:20 PM
Hum 1 620

Instructor:
Martin Devecka
mdevecka@ucsc.edu
Cowell 226
Office Hours: MWF 2:00-4:00 PM (or by appointment)

This course treats literature as a marginal use-case of a technology—writing—that has predominantly worked as an instrument for accounting, organizing and governing. We'll explore the history of the material conditions under which this technology has operated and the social or cultural conditions under which it has spread.

Focusing on ancient and early modern examples, we'll get to know some exemplary “non-literary” genres of writing. We'll situate each of these diachronically, in a history of documents, as well as synchronically, within a contemporary field of the written. We'll study some examples of modern paperwork and try to place them within this context.

We'll also read a series of canonical “literary” reflections on the materiality of writing, which we'll try to situate on a continuum with more documentary uses. What theory or ideology of the document does each text propose? What happens when we turn that theory back on the literary text itself?

Finally, we'll try to understand how this range of applications of writing technology works as an enabling or intensifying tool for the organization of political societies. Is writing a precondition for states and empires which creates hierarchies and power relations? Or is only an instrument that governments employ? In that case, does writing have an emancipatory potential?

The aims of the course are, first, to help you think about your own research projects in terms of their materiality; second, to give you new tools for interpreting non-literary documents; and, third, to encourage fine-grained analysis of the role played by writing in articulating social power. You will be asked to write a term paper that brings these methodologies to bear on your own research interests.

Required Texts:

Plato, *Phaedrus* (Hackett: Nehamas and Woodruff trans.)
Codex Borgia (Dover)

Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Spivak trans., any edition)
Melville, *Billy Budd, Bartleby and Other Stories* (Penguin)
Kafka, *The Trial* (Schocken, Muir trans.)

All other required readings will be published via canvas and in a reader available at Bay Tree
“Bookstore.”

Requirements

To be discussed and decided during first seminar meeting.

Tentative Reading Schedule

Part 1: Scripts

Wednesday, 1/8.

M. Mignola, *The Amazing Screw-On Head*. C. Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (selections).

Wednesday, 1/15

D. Schmandt-Besserat, *How Writing Came About*: introduction, ch. 5-7. Bischoff, B. *Latin Paleography*: B.I. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*: pp. 1-73. Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology*: ch 2.

Part 2: Media

Wednesday, 1/22.

Qur'an (selections). Bloom, J. *Paper Before Print*: ch. 1 and 4. Bagnall, R. *Everyday Writing*: ch 6.
Bischoff, B. *Latin Paleography*: introduction. *Of Grammatology*: pp. 74-140.

Wednesday, 1/29

Codex Borgia. Mignolo, W. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*: ch. 2. Boone, E. *Writing Without Words*: introduction. Yates, F. *The Art of Memory*: ch. 1, 2, 6.

Part 3: Literacy

Wednesday, 2/5

Plato, *Phaedrus*. Alcidamas, “On those who write speeches.” Thomas, R. *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*: ch. 3-4. Derrida, J. “Plato’s Pharmacy.” Goody, J. *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*: ch. 10.

Wednesday, 2/12.

Plutarch, *Peri polypragmosynes*. P. Saenger. *The Space Between Words*: ch. 1-2. R. MacDonald, “Literacy in an Oral Environment.” H. Youtie, “Bradys Graphon.”

Part 4: Production

Wednesday, 2/19

Shihab-ud-din an-Nuwayri, *The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition* (selections). Vismann, C. *the File*: ch. 2. R. Kaster, *Guardians of Letters*: ch. 1-2.

Wednesday, 2/26.

Melville, H. *Bartleby, the Scrivener. Benito Cereno*. Gitelman, L. *Paper knowledge*: ch. 2. Darnton, R. *The Great Cat Massacre*: ch. 2. E. Eisenstein, *The Print Revolution in Europe*: ch. 1, 2, 5.

Part 5: Paperwork Society

Wednesday, 3/4

Poe, E. "The Purloined Letter." A. Sellen and Harper, R. *The Myth of the Paperless Office*: ch. 1-2. Weber, *Economy and Society*: ch. 11. Raman, B. *Document Raj*: ch. 5-6. Baker, N. *Double Fold*: ch. 6.

Wednesday, 3/11.

Kafka, F. *The Trial*. Kafka, B. *The Demon of Writing*: ch. 1. Graeber, D. *The Utopia of Rules*: ch. 1. Timpanaro, S. *The Freudian Slip*, ch. 1-3.