

ORALITY AND LITERACY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Spring 2005
RH 203
R 7:00-9:45
Office Hours: T-R 2:30-3:30 & by appt
<http://georgehwilliams.net>

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Literary scholar Nicholas Hudson has recently repeated media theorist Marshall McLuhan's assertion that "European intellectuals achieved a clear perception of 'orality' only after their own world had been engulfed in print." In the middle of the eighteenth century, British actor and elocutionist Thomas Sheridan wrote with amazed respect about "the power which words acquire, even the words of fools and madmen, when forcibly uttered by the living voice." For Sheridan, as for many of his contemporaries, the speech of preachers, politicians, actors, barristers, and even everyday people was a threatening and unruly force compared to the presumably ordered presentation of information through writing and print. The spoken word had been an essential part of human communication for thousands of years, yet the advent of the printed word and widespread literacy in eighteenth-century Britain dramatically reoriented attitudes towards speech. Students in this course will consider just how "clear" the perception of orality might have been among literate people in this period as they study developments in oral and literate practice in eighteenth-century Britain. We will learn what scholars have had to say about orality and literacy, and we will read the works of eighteenth-century poets, dramatists, rhetoricians, clergymen, and cultural commentators.

COURSE TEXTS

Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*
ISBN 0521447704
John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*
ISBN 0140432205
Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*
ISBN 0415027969
The Poems of Ossian and Related Works
ISBN 0748607072
Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (Oxford UP: make sure you get this edition)
ISBN 0192829602
Various photocopied readings

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Responses	15%
Annotated Bibliography and Critical Overview	30%
Presentation & Feedback	15%
Prospectus & Final Paper	40%

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Reading Responses: These are your informal, but critical, responses to the readings for the week. You will write 1-2 pages that ask questions of, disagree with, or provide analysis of a scholar's argument, a section of a poem, a passage from a novel, etc. Your responses should be in tune with the aim of the course (refer to the course description above). Bring your paper to class, present it informally, and turn it in at the end of class. You will write three of these. A sign-up sheet will be passed around.

Annotated Bibliography and Critical Overview: You will meet with me to discuss possible research topics, and then you will create a bibliography of 10 scholarly resources related to your chosen topic. You will write a summary and analysis of each item (no more than 1 page each), and you will also write a roughly 3-page overview of your research findings.

Presentation & Feedback: The last two weeks of class will be devoted to oral presentations accompanied by feedback from me and from other members of the class. For your presentation, you may choose to revisit a topic we discussed earlier in the semester, or you may choose to present your research project.

Prospectus and Final Paper: Your final paper may grow out of the research you did for your bibliography. Your prospectus, which describes your projected paper, should be no more than 500 words. Your final paper will be the culmination of your research and thinking this semester.

Further Details about each of these assignments will be forthcoming.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: I keep track of attendance. Your regular attendance and participation are vital to the success of this class. Unless you've arranged otherwise with me, you may miss two classes without penalty. Your final grade for the course will drop half a letter grade for every class missed beyond that.

Format for written assignments: All work done outside of class to be turned in must be typed or produced on a word processor. Buy a portfolio at the bookstore and keep all of your writing in it. Your papers should have the following: no cover page; one-inch margins all the way around the page; text that is 12 point/10 cpi (e.g. typeface of Times New Roman); page numbers on every page; one staple (no paperclips) in the upper left-hand corner. I do not accept papers turned in as email attachments. If I ask you to rewrite one of your papers, you must turn in the first graded version of the paper along with your revision. The first page of each paper must have your name, the due date, the course number, and my name on the first page in the upper left-hand corner, like this:

Chris Student
September 13, 2004
English 550
Dr. Williams

Late papers: If you know an assignment is going to be turned in late, tell me as soon as you know.

Disabilities: If you have any special needs that will affect your performance in this course, please let me know as soon as possible so that I might work to meet your needs. If you have not done so already, you should consider visiting the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities in room 350 of the Administrative Center. 816-235-5696 - <<http://www.umkc.edu/disability/>> - disability@umkc.edu

Academic Dishonesty: Students are expected to be familiar with the code of student conduct printed in the UMKC General Catalog and on the UMKC website. In this course, any act of dishonesty on an assignment automatically earns a student a grade of 0 (zero) for that assignment as well as referral to the appropriate UMKC office.

Email and Internet Access: UMKC provides a free Exchange email account for each student, and I advise you to use this as your account for this class. See <http://www.umkc.edu/exchange-faq> Using UMKC email is not required, but if you use another email service, *you* are responsible for ensuring that this service does not block or filter email from me or the class listserv. In the past, some students using non-UMKC accounts have had problems receiving important information. Remember that UMKC has many computers on campus available for your use. See <http://www.umkc.edu/labs/> Miller Nichols Library is an easy-to-reach location for such Internet access.

COURSE CALENDAR

January 13 Introductions	March 10 Spring Break
January 20 Selected readings: Walter Ong, D. F. McKenzie, Nicholas Hudson, Timothy Clark	March 17 The Scandalous Stage John Gay, <i>The Beggar's Opera</i>
January 27 Ong, <i>Orality and Literacy: Technologizing the Word</i>	March 24 Elizabeth Eisenstein, <i>The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe</i>
February 3 The Elocutionary Movement (handouts)	March 31 Reading, Writing, Literacy (handouts)
February 10 Evangelicalism: preaching and printing the word (handouts)	April 7 Samuel Richardson, <i>Pamela</i>
February 17 From folk art to poetic theory: Ballads, ballad singers, and Wordsworth & Coleridge (handouts)	April 14 Samuel Richardson, <i>Pamela</i>
February 24 Inventing an oral epic poet: <i>The Poems of Ossian</i>	April 21 Presentations and Feedback
March 3 <i>The Poems of Ossian</i>	April 28 Presentations and Feedback