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ENGL: 390:02  
TTH 2:25-4:05, FISH 338  
Office Hours: MW 2:00-4:00

## Unpacking the Bookstore

### Required Texts:

Laura Miller	<i>Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption</i>
Lydia Pyne	<i>Bookshelf</i>
Robin Sloan	<i>Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore</i>

### On Canvas:

Walter Benjamin	"Unpacking My Library"
Lewis Buzbee	<i>The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop</i> (excerpt)
Shaun Bythell	<i>The Diary of a Bookseller</i> (excerpt)
Jorge Carrión	"Athens: A Possible Beginning" and "The Oldest Bookshops in the World"
James Clifford	"On Collecting Art and Culture"
Tim Cresswell	"Defining Place"
Joshua Clark Davis	"Liberation Through Literacy"
Helene Hanff	<i>84, Charing Cross Road</i> (excerpt)
Robert Hutton	"A Mouse in the Bookstore: <i>Maus</i> and the Publishing Industry"
Madge Jenison	<i>Sunwise Turn: A Human Comedy of Bookselling</i> (excerpt)
Archibald MacLeish	<i>A Free Man's Books</i>
Lyndsie Manusos	"The Science and Recent History of Bookstore Design"
Katherine McLaughlin	"The 9 Most Beautiful Bookstores in the World"
Peter N. Miller	"How Objects Speak"
Nathalie op de Beek	"How Bookstores are Bringing Books Within Reach"
Jack Perry	"Bookstores, Communist and Capitalist"
James Raven	"Introduction: The Enterprise of Booksellers"
W.G. Rogers	<i>Wise Men Fish Here</i> (excerpt)
Laurence Roth	"The Storefront ( <i>place</i> )"
Daphne Spain	"Feminist Bookstores: Building Identity"
John Tebbel	"A Brief History of American Bookselling"
Raymond Williams	"Literature"

### Objectives:

This project-based course explores the history and cultural functions of bookstores in the U.S. in order to understand better how they shaped, and continue to shape, public conceptions and meanings of "literature." Using previous students' blog posts as well as my investigation into my father's Jewish bookstore as a model, students this semester will analyze five bookstores that exemplify the issues this course raises, adding their stories to the publicly accessible archive maintained for this course by Susquehanna University.

Over the past thirty years there's been a great deal of press devoted to the dire state of bookstores and bookselling in the U.S. and, conversely, to the bookstore's remarkable resilience. At first, during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the struggle to maintain the bookstore as a culturally and commercially viable retail operation appeared to pit independents against corporate chain bookstores that were accused of valuing profits over literature. After 2011, with the demise of Borders and the rise of Amazon and e-books, the struggle was over the very concept of a brick-and-mortar bookstore wedded to a supposedly obsolete literature delivery system, the book. While neither the bookstore nor the book have disappeared—and in some retail sectors both have staged a strong comeback—the current struggle in the bookstore's evolving history is over its relevance, purpose, and meaning in the digital age and during our contemporary period of intense political and economic turmoil. The cultural, social, and technology conflicts these historical struggles highlight invite the important questions we'll ask in this course about readers as consumers, writers as products, and literature as an *activity*, constituted not only by authors and texts but also through commerce and within social space.

### **Course Requirements/Grading:**

For this course, you'll be divided into five groups corresponding to five independent bookstores that you'll choose to study out of the twelve that I've curated for your consideration (all of which are within three hours or less of travel time from SU). The larger historical, social, and cultural contexts for your analyses will be drawn from the course readings and information about each bookstore is available online through Google searches and through library research. Some of the information you'll need, however, will be best gathered through site visits and interviews with store owners and/or managers, so your willingness and ability to travel to your project bookstore at some point during the semester and to reach out to owners and managers via email or phone is important to your participation in this course.

In addition, as part of the course's experimentation with digital storytelling, I will allow students to employ ChatGPT to create a first rough draft of their blog posts in order to speed the drafting process, gain experience using AI for composition, and to develop AI prompt skills, but with this caveat: Those of you who use ChatGPT must notify me of that use during the drafting stage and provide me a copy of your prompt. You'll then acknowledge your use of AI in a note at the bottom of your submitted blog post that must also offer a brief explanation of how your initial draft was modified and edited for the final draft.

Your grade in the course will be determined by four assignments that ask you to write blog posts and create a final group blog about the bookstore you're researching, and by your class participation. Posts must include visual materials such as photographs, maps, timelines, floor plans, slide shows, videos, and the like, and Richard Simcoe, Hybrid Technology Specialist, will provide IT support throughout the course.

These are the graded course requirements and their grade weight:

*Assignment #1: Place and People, Present (20%):* In this first blog post each of you will provide a brief survey and description of the neighborhood of the bookstore that you're researching, as it presently appears.

*Assignment #2: Place and People, Past (20%):* In this second blog post each of you will create a timeline and provide a brief history of the bookstore that you're researching and of the neighborhood in which it thrives/thrived.

*Assignment #3: Space and Objects (20%):* In this third blog post each of you will describe the interior space of the bookstore that you're researching—incorporating into your post a floor plan that also maps the placement of the store's genre and subject categories—and consider ways of reading that space and the objects contained within it.

*Assignment #4: Space and Place, People and Objects: Final Group Blogs (20%):* In this final assignment everyone will work with their respective bookstore group to reflect collectively on all the information gathered in the first three assignments. Each group will interpret how that information describes the cultural function(s) of the bookstore the group has researched and that bookstore's configuration of "literature."

*Blog Post Reviews/Class Participation (20%):* Your class participation grade will be determined not only by your participation in class discussion of the assigned readings, but also by your active participation in blog post reviews on the days the first three assignments are due and in the class review of the final blog drafts.

### **Respect for Diversity (this statement incorporates language taken from diversity statements developed at the University of Iowa and Whitman College):**

It's my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit.

The topics that we're covering in this class may sometimes be difficult, not just intellectually but emotionally. While I expect there to be rigorous discussion and even disagreement over the course of our class discussions, I ask that you engage in discussion with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. Aim to disagree without becoming disagreeable. In this class we will not shy away from the uncomfortable.

Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that I can make arrangements for you.

**Academic Culture/Personal Responsibilities (students with academic accommodations will be supported as per guidelines from the Office of Disability Services):**

- All texts must be read by the scheduled deadlines and you must be prepared to discuss the texts or materials assigned for class.
- See the separate “Absence/Attendance Policy and Wellness Guidelines” on Canvas for an explanation of policy this semester and resources available to you.
- Assignment due dates are noted on all assignments on the Canvas site. **Any assignment handed in after collection time is late** (documented medical/family emergencies are the only exceptions to this rule). Missing an assignment will lower your grade significantly.
- Assignments should follow all guidelines in the assignment description. Please follow the MLA documentation style. Whether typing into a Canvas field or on a blog post do not use any font larger than 12 point. For any Word documents leave 1-inch margins all around.
- Cell phones and laptops are allowed and encouraged for reading, note taking, and in-class research related to a discussion topic. **However, text messaging, Internet surfing, or doing work for another course during class is not allowed.** Students who continue to do so after a first warning will be asked to leave class and ejection from class will count as an unexcused absence.
- Note: Because this is a project-based course, no incompletes will be given.**

**Disability Services:**

Susquehanna University’s overarching and imperative goal is that learning experiences are as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to begin this conversation or establish accommodations. The ODS can be contacted at: disabilityservices@susqu.edu, or Office Phone: 570-372-4412

**Plagiarism:**

The Department of English and Creative Writing takes every violation of academic honesty seriously. No English or Creative Writing major who has violated academic honesty is eligible for academic honors in the Department. In addition, students in my courses who plagiarize, hand in work composed by AI, or cheat in any way will be severely punished, up to and including failing the class. If you use someone else's words or ideas—whether from a speech, an article, a book, any site on the Internet, or ChatGPT—either footnote it, if the language is yours, or enclose it in quotation marks and acknowledge your source.

**Communications:**

I will always be available during office hours in order to talk, answer questions, or address any difficulties you may have with the course. You can leave messages for me via e-mail, phone, or by dropping a note in my mailbox in Fisher Hall.

**Schedule**

**Week 1**

Tues. 8/29: Introductions; choosing the project bookstores

**Critical Contexts and History**

*What are the meanings of “literature”? How are those reflected in the history and commercial design of bookstores? What impact does location have on a store’s social functions?*

Thurs. 8/31: Williams, “Literature;” Miller, *RC* Chapter 1

## **Week 2**

- Tues. 9/5: Tebbel, "A Brief History of American Bookselling;" Miller, *RC* Chapter 2  
(For your reference, not required reading: Carrión, "Athens: A Possible Beginning"  
and "The Oldest Bookshops in the World;" Raven, "Introduction: The  
Enterprise of Booksellers")
- Thurs. 9/7: Cresswell, "Defining Place;" Highland, "In the Bookstore: The Houses of Appleton  
and Book Cultures in Antebellum New York City"

## **Week 3**

- Tues. 9/12: Miller, *RC* Chapters 4 and 5
- Thurs. 9/14: Roth, "The Storefront (*place*)"  
**Drafting Assignment #1: Using WordPress, blogging as genre, style guidelines**

## **Week 4**

- Tues. 9/19: **Assignment #1 Due: Place and People, Present**  
**Consumers and Communities**

*How do consumers shape the business of bookselling? How do bookstores serve  
the gender, ethnic, and political identities of consumers?*

- Thurs. 9/21: Miller, *RC* Chapter 3; excerpt from Jenison, *Sunwise Turn*

## **Week 5**

- Tues. 9/26: Excerpt from Rogers, *Wise Men Fish Here*; MacLeish, *A Free Man's Books*; Perry,  
"Bookstores, Communist and Capitalist"
- Thurs. 9/28: Davis, "Liberation Through Literacy"  
**Drafting Assignment #2: Guidelines, troubleshooting**

## **Week 6**

- Tues. 10/3: Spain, "Feminist Bookstores: Building Identity;" Hutton, "A Mouse in the  
Bookstore: *Maus* and the Publishing Industry"
- Thurs. 10/5: **Assignment #2 Due: Place and People, Past**

## **Collection, Objects, Politics**

*What role does collection play in bookstores? Are books a special kind of  
consumable object? What is a "citizen consumer"?*

## **Week 7**

- Tues. 10/10: Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library;" Miller, "How Objects Speak"
- Thurs. 10/12: Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture"

## **Week 8**

- Tues. 10/17: **Midterm Break**
- Thurs. 10/19: Pyne, *Bookshelf*

## **Week 9**

- Tues. 10/24: Miller, *RC* Chapters 7 and 8
- Thurs. 10/26: McLaughlin, "The 9 Most Beautiful Bookstores in the World;" Manusos, "The  
Science and Recent History of Bookstore Design;" op de Beek, "How  
Bookstores are Bringing Books Within Reach"  
**Drafting Assignment #3: Guidelines, troubleshooting**

## **Week 10**

- Tues. 10/31: **Assignment #3 Due: Space and Objects**

## Contemporary Representations

*How is the bookstore portrayed in literary and mass cultures? What challenges do these portraits raise for how you'll tell the story of the bookstore you're studying?*

Thurs. 11/2: Excerpt from Hanff, *84, Charing Cross Road*; excerpt from Buzbee, *The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop*; excerpt from Bythell, *The Diary of a Bookseller*

### Week 11

Tues. 11/7: *You've Got Mail*

Thurs. 11/9: *The Bookshop*

### Week 12

Tues. 11/14: *The Booksellers*

**Drafting Assignment #4: Coordinating group work, developing an idea story, troubleshooting**

Thurs. 11/16: *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* 3-137

**Curatorial Plan for Final Group Blog Due**

### Week 13

Tues. 11/21: *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* 138-288

Thurs. 11/23: **Thanksgiving Break**

### Week 14

Tues. 11/28: Conferences

Thurs. 11/30: Conferences

**Rough Draft of Final Group Blog Due**

### Week 15

Tues. 12/5: Conferences

Thurs. 12/7: Conclusions

**Drafting Assignment #4: Fact checking, copyediting, final polish**

### Finals Week

Mon.: Conferences by appointment

Tues.: Conferences by appointment

Wed.: **Assignment #4 Due by 5 PM: Space and Place, People and Objects**

**Note: Schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.**