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H-105: The Bible and Histories of Reading  
11–16 June, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### **Narrative Course Evaluations**

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. Pre-readings were helpful. I especially enjoyed LF and PS's articles and the suggestion of the de Hamel book. As someone without a lot of prior knowledge of the topic, I found de Hamel very useful as an overview.
2. The pre-reading courses were useful for giving students an orientation prior to the course starting, but the instructors did not seem to presume any prior knowledge, even that which would have been gained from the readings. I don't mind this at all—I am happy I completed the readings but also found it nice that the course was so introductory.
3. We did not get to discuss the pre-course assignments and weren't asked questions on them. The assigned introductory text (de Hamel) was indeed useful but not essential to efficiently follow the course's various topics. I would definitely recommend adding a more thorough and detailed introduction to Biblical exegesis, given that most of the course focuses on material aspects of reading the Bible. I do feel like it is difficult to understand how people in early modernity would read the Bible without having a clear idea of how exegesis had been working for the centuries beforehand.
4. Very helpful. I read all the sources pre-circulated by the instructors but I gather that many of my classmates didn't (largely due to time constraints, they said—as a graduate student with a full month of summer break before my RBS course, I decided to keep busy!) and it didn't impact our course experience at all. I think if there was a reading along the lines of a literature review that covered the evolution of the field of book history in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries and some of the major players, contributions, and ongoing overall debates that was distributed to all RBS participants, it might help to quickly orient those of us who don't study/teach book history as our primary pursuit.
5. Yes, the reading load is manageable and interesting. {private response}
6. Yes, pre-course readings were tremendously useful. I would like to see more theoretical and academic readings added.
7. Mostly, though it was strange to see so many passages from the Bible. Some of the Bible passages were explored in depth in class, while many of them seemed unaddressed. The Christopher de Hamel book should be required reading. It was well-written and thoroughly useful. The Hugh Amory book, which was on a previous year's syllabus,

was also helpful.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. We jumped around a lot in the workbook, so I haven't had a chance to review it all closely, but I do think it will be helpful. It provides examples of themes we discussed that I can refer back to before teaching a class, for example.
2. This material was very useful! The workbook was a combination of key excerpts and explanations, and the Google Drive/Dropbox folder had all the Powerpoints and other helpful readings. I have already downloaded a lot of this material and will refer back to it during years to come.
3. The workbook was definitely useful and I will keep it and study it in the future. The materials are organized in a rather messy way, so one has to make sure to take notes on what is going on in every section.
4. Very good. Clearly LF and PS put a ton of work into assembling everything. I will be following up on many of the citations they gave.
5. The detailed syllabus and the guiding questions for in-class activities helped me dig into each session's topic. The material in the workbook is interesting and very thorough, if a bit overwhelming ... would it be possible to add a simple table of contents with page numbers?
6. Workbook was useful and well designed. I will continue to refer to it well after the course's conclusion.
7. The workbook and course materials distributed in class were generally helpful and at the right level of expertise. I will refer to the workbook again.

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. I really appreciated PS's "decoding" of images and textual decisions made by printers, and how they often tie into visual/written traditions dating back centuries. I also appreciated how LF peeled back the layers of nineteenth-century Bible manufacture and marketing. I will be able to use what they both shared in teaching undergraduates with Bibles in our collection. I am truly excited to return to work and look at our collection with fresh eyes!
2. Hearing PS take us down his rabbit holes was honestly the most exciting, if esoteric, element of this course. It was an amazing model of sharp, narrow scholarly inquiry that he generously invited us into. But these moments of narrow insight were balanced well with big-picture lectures and opportunities to do fairly open-ended searches through printed and manuscript Bibles.

3. In my future project plans, I will definitely incorporate a new, sharper understanding of how the very acts of Biblical interpretation throughout the history of Christianity were strongly dependent on the physical and material aspects the books presented.
4. I particularly liked seeing items from the collections at Penn, which are quite different from what's available at my home institution. I have many ideas for self-directed reading over the next few months based on our class discussions.
5. The concepts of scattering and gathering, or of continuous vs discontinuous reading: These terms not only clarify the history of Bible-reading, but also will help me frame my current writing project. I also appreciated the deep-dive into the liturgical calendar and visual traditions. The guest lecture on Jewish reading practices was a highlight.
6. Working hands-on with objects was the most useful and relevant! I am leaving the course with several potential project plans as well as a wealth of knowledge about the subject.
7. The Bible is a vast subject, so it was very helpful to have the expertise of PS and LF as guides. The idea that the Bible, as we know it in English, is only a product of the medieval period's consolidation of manuscripts and printed text into a pandect.

4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. I absolutely did. The "histories of reading" aspect of the course is wonderful and helped me understand how, and why, various versions of the Bible were produced and consumed.
2. Yes, all that and more!
3. Definitely.
4. Yes.
5. Yes, it's largely an accurate description. I'd say that there's less focus on typological reading (perhaps one to two sessions) and more focus on features that encourage discontinuous reading, as well as a strong emphasis on visual counter-texts. {private response}
6. Yes, instructors did a phenomenal job. I learned a great deal more than what I had hoped to learn. This course was a true treasure.
7. Looking at the rare Bibles and other printed materials—and working through them with fellow students—was definitely a highlight of each day's sessions.

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. In teaching undergraduates, primarily, via visits to the university special collections library. I am looking forward to sharing what I have learned with our faculty (especially art history and theology), as I know they are eager for more special collections learning opportunities for their students. My learning will also help me understand our

collection better and be able to make wise purchasing decisions to complement what we already have.

2. I plan to integrate many of the exercises in my future teaching (this was, implicitly, a masterclass on pedagogy, as PS is a one-of-a-kind teacher). As for my research, both the questions posed about the material text \*and\* the insights (and inspiration!) I leave with, when it comes to reading Bibles themselves, will be central to my study of authors' own engagements with the Bible.
3. I will use the skills and knowledge acquired to refine my understanding of ways of producing theological arguments in the seventeenth century, which is a substantial part of my dissertation project.
4. To continue to read/study by myself about the impact of Luther's writing on Christian religious practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a person who usually works academically on late medieval liturgy and professionally on modern institutional archival records, my knowledge of/time to learn about the Reformation is sparse and I am excited to learn more by following up on some of the threads we discussed in class.
5. I am eager to pull out our collections' Bibles and liturgical books again. I know I will see them with new eyes, which will in turn influence how students and visitors experience the books. I'm also interested in applying course questions to my research.
6. The skill and knowledge gained in this course will be useful for my research as well as for teaching students.
7. I will utilize the skills and knowledge to better understand the Bible collections in the special collections library where I work.

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. Certainly, special collections librarians like me, who have responsibility for managing collections with Bibles!
2. Everyone! But if I must be specific: more graduate students should consider taking the course, especially those in early modern (including early American) studies. I name this particular group because: (a) not enough students in this group have a sufficient understanding of Bibles and the histories of reading them in their own period (this is also probably true of profs already in the profession too though!), and (b) I imagine, on the other hand, that many scholars of medieval Europe might find this course a bit introductory at times — but that doesn't mean there wouldn't be a LOT of wild and wonderful things for them to gain too. It's also worth noting that this course engaged most deeply with Bibles through the seventeenth century and in Western Europe. Not a complaint at all—there was more than enough material—but worth noting.
3. Ph.D. students with a strong interest in the history of religion (not just Christianity), and curators interested in the peculiarity of the history of the material Bible.
4. Those who never took a history of Christianity course and now have reason to work with Christian records from before 1800.

5. Librarians or collectors who have Bibles or liturgical texts in their collections, but have a gap in knowledge in this area, as well as academics focusing on a period heavily influenced by the Bible, especially the early English translations.
6. Anyone! But in particular, students and junior faculty.
7. Individuals without much experience with medieval or Reformation era knowledge of book history. Entry-level expectations.

7) *If applicable, what were the most powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*

1. There were many moments like this! I think, in general, having the meaning behind certain choices in type, text, and image that I would otherwise have glided over without question was amazing. I learned that there is truly a hidden world of history, religion, politics, and place in every Bible, book of hours, &c. that can be revealed through closer study.
2. I loved the attention to visual traditions. Honestly the most memorable moments may have been thinking about representations of the Father/Son/Holy Spirit—as well as (yes) the ox and the ass!—in visual art. David Stern's lecture was a highlight; I appreciated how his and Theodor Dunkelgrün's lectures reminded us of the centrality of Hebrew in the humanist tradition.
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. Identifying the politically-motivated choices in the printing of early English Bibles; discerning the significance of "you" and "thou"; examining ephemera from nineteenth-century subscription/publishing culture; the visual tradition relating to the Trinity and to Moses. But overall, I loved spending time with and learning from PS and LF. They are a powerful and delightful teaching team!
6. The connection between visual culture and textual interpretation was particularly striking and changed how I look at illustrations in bibliographical objects.
7. The art history examples and fun tests of visual imagery were very delightful and memorable.

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. {no response}
2. I liked when we received very specific lists of questions to guide our hands-on work with material texts (like the list of questions on the Day One syllabus for Genesis)—more guided activities like that would be great.
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. It's impossible to fit everything into a course like this... but consider reading more Bible

passages in class, to see how the four levels of reading work in practice. {private response}

6. N/A
7. Put the evaluations at the end of the week—I can't remember as well, after merely a week's passing.

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1–10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 10
2. 10
3. 9
4. 8
5. 9
6. 10
7. 8

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhance the course experience?*

1. Our guest speaker certainly enhanced the course, offering a complementary view of Torah printing and manuscript, and I very much enjoyed the evening lectures as well.
2. The guest lectures were excellent, especially David Stern's.
3. Yes, absolutely. They were integral to the course.
4. Yes! David Stern on Jewish books was a great session; I only wish we had spent more time discussing Jewish perspectives on the Bible throughout the week.
5. The Jewish Reading Practices guest lecture was fantastic. A few of us went to the museum of art after class on Friday, and this dovetailed perfectly with what we learned in class. Perhaps there's a way to fit a museum visit into the class itself, if it's coordinated with the sessions on visual counter-texts?
6. N/A
7. Yes, the talk by David Stern was useful, though I would have enjoyed spreading out the information about the Torah and Jewish Bible practices throughout the week. The section on the Pastorius commonplace book was interesting, but less relevant to the course subject (the Bible) and could be dropped in future.

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. I would highly recommend it! PS and LF gave us an entertaining, informative week and I definitely feel that it was time well spent for me.
2. It is lecture-heavy, but that is good. Too much discussion would have been a distraction or time-suck from the astounding influx of information and knowledge delivered by the instructor. Also, go to the evening events, lectures, any opportunities for dinner/drinks!
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. Bring warm clothing in case it's cold in the building...
6. N/A
7. If you're looking for a course grounded in late medieval and early modern English Bible, this is a good one. Of particular emphasis is the period from the 1500s to the 1700s, from the Great Bible, the Bishops' Bible, the King James Bible, and the beheading of Charles I. If you're looking for a course about the international history of the Bible in various cultures and languages, this wouldn't be the course for you.

12) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or a haiku, what would you say?*

1. Looking at the Book / anew, a sense of wonder / a new world within.
2. You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.
3. {no response}
4. It says that? Laughing / as we turn leaves carefully. / Show me the next one.
5. Intense learning and fellowship with lovers of rare books.
6. The best lessons from some of the best scholars on the planet.
7. Brassy sass Stallybrass / Shares infectious wit and laugh / With well informed Farrington / A fine class for anyone.