

Canon Fodder: Assignments and Grading

The goal for the course is to allow you to evolve projects that present case studies in the after-life or genesis of a canonical figure, movement, text, etc.-- a case study in how something in your field becomes a "standard," "classic," or "canonical" (with the latter being especially appropriate for elite culture. Note, too, that you need not deal only with an author or book: a "movement," or "ideology," or "known cultural interest" might be your case study (a good example of the latter: *Down from Olympus*, a book tracing Germany's "canonical field" of classical philology).

The class assignments thus involve research assignments in material culture -- in those facets of infrastructure, ideology, hegemonic practices, etc., which are the mechanisms through which aspects of culture become or remain canonical.

Each of you will be responsible for transferring the LOGICS of the analyses presented into the class reading onto your own case study in your own field. Some aspects of the examples will apply directly; others will need some rethinking to apply, especially if you pick canonical figures/elements from earlier centuries -- the media and publicity mechanisms are different, although they have existed as long as texts have been in the service of cultural and political ideologies.

The case studies will be shared on the class Blackboard site; you are all strongly encouraged to read and comment on each others' postings, as part of a peer editing circle, although I will not require this activity. I also expect each of you to be cultivating a relationship with your appropriate reference librarian -- shoddy research will not be tolerated. To deal with texts in a new historical/positivist mode, you have to know where information is stored.

The assignments are structured in the approximate order that a scholar would work through the issues involved, but broken down into guided stages that may or may not be critical to each case study in the class. Most of them do not have fixed lengths; you will need simply to do the job involved. It is understood that the prose here need not be polished, and that sometimes a chart or list might be the most appropriate form for your research to be presented in.

GRADING:

9 assignment postings = 5 % each = 45%

1 class presentation = 5 %

2 Précis (critical reading of individual text) = 5% each = 10 %

Final paper: 40%

PRÉCIS: See attached description

Note that the "implication" section should be geared toward identifying what methodological and ideological assumptions about the status of texts/cultural artifacts are.

POSTED ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 1: Defining Canonicity

Identify

- 1) the major reference book/history overview in your field now;
- 2) an equivalent from at least two decades ago; and

3) the "standard" biography, bio-bibliography, and/or overview of the life and works summarizing your figure (text, movement, etc.).

This project requires you to locate your candidate for canonization and to identify him/her/it in preliminary terms; characterize what makes him or her canonical or "standard," as well as any shifts that have taken place over two decades.

This means you will have to do some library research: find your field's standard reference book (the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* online is not a bad place to start for one entry for literary candidates; philosophers or artists will need to be identified as part of an overview or standard history); then find what is arguably the important biography (check reviews -- ask the librarian how to find reviews; Lexis/Nexis will get you some of them); then find if there is a volume summarizing the scholarly work on the artist/writer (this is often cited in the dictionary and biography; it may be somewhat out of date, but it is often a monographic bibliography).

On the class Blackboard site, post no more than 500 words summarizing what makes the figure canonical.

Include proper bibliographic references to the sources consulted. Post your work as a new thread.

Assignment 2: The Status of the Objects to be Canonized

The readings for this week talk about *textualities* -- about how a cultural artifact takes on the question of establishing and transmitting a text. Bourdieu talks specifically about how a "work" becomes a cultural product; Bassnett, about how that "work" is imported across (in this case) language lines -- what decisions need to be made in defining what a "work" actually is, and what aesthetics issues particularly arise.

This assignment means that you have to look up *what your figure really did* -- what kinds of texts/artifacts/ etc. s/he produced, versus what is presented in the "standard accounts" you found last week. That is, you will have to identify *the standard edition(s) of the works* (edition, complete catalogue, authoritative list of publications) and

Post on the class Blackboard site a brief statement about what *textual* status your canonical author presents for your work. That is, identify what kinds of works from the complete *œuvre* or field of possibilities are privileged (and possibly what has changed, if there are gaps). This posting will require you to identify the "standard edition" or "catalogue," and write it down in correct bibliographic format.

Assignment 3: The Status of the "Author," "Text," or "Cultural Product" (External History)

Each "author," "text," or "cultural product" is defined by his/her/its status in the "field of cultural production." That is, by assumptions about what kinds of cultural practices define them as particularly worthy of canonization ("significant," "influential"), about what dispositions make them worthy, and about what kinds of cultural position they occupy (e.g. why they are deemed to be canonical, standard, or necessary).

An approach to determining what the status of the artifact in your case study is, start with the biography or history of its genesis: what is the original position of the author/text/artifact, and what kinds of processes are identified as central in its production, distribution, and canonicity. This is, in another sense, a request that you take a materialist approach to *Geistesgeschichte*, not only taking on why your author/text/artifact is canonical in terms of the ideas they present, but also what of

their activities, successes, failures, etc., mark them to their contemporaneous audience as worthy (or to the first audience who recognized them/it). How did the audience recognize the author/text/artifact was *necessary, important, path-breaking*, etc.? What discourse markers are attached to that success (e.g. tortured genius, teacher, leader of atelier, exemplar, indirect reference for subsequent definitions).

Post on the class Blackboard site a brief statement about what *historical-cultural status* your author/text/artifact had in its moment of first emergence as canonical. This will require you to set it into its proper cultural historical and historical settings; this may require you to move somewhat beyond biography to *Historical Abstracts* to find supporting material on the who, what, when, and where involved. The idea here is not to tell the finished story, but to identify what agents, cultural forces, and mechanisms are involved in the original, transmission, and evaluation of your object of study. Include complete bibliographic entries for the sources you used.

Assignment 4: Status of the Text or Artifact Involved (Internal History)

This assignment follows up on the previous one by asking you to specify *the status of the text or artifact involved*. Does it exist today in the form in which it was "created," do we know what that form is, is there an edition or reconstruction problem or cabal?

Generally, this will require you to research the text history: its editing, printing, intertextuality, and reception. Often, this material is contained in the historical-critical edition(s), and, in more recent decades, in editorials or reviews of those editions. This is, therefore, the research on the "authenticity" and "mediality" of the artifact in question: what was/is it, what was it designed to do in its original context (i.e. what cultural processes was it cut to fit). This is thus part of the work needed to do reception history.

In literature and other high culture situations, this will also require you to do genre history -- check things like if the genre is canonical, if it is under attack at the time, etc.

Post on the class Blackboard site a statement about what formal/material issues your text/author/artifact presents. Include complete bibliographic entries for the sources you used.

Assignment 5: Financials -- Who "Invests" in the Artifact

Research the financial history of the main text/artifact you are studying. This may include grants, sponsorship, patronage, costs for printing, sale prices, and other profit/loss facts which enabled the artifact to emerge (or not), be circulated or suppressed, and to come to public notice/public use (or not). Don't forget indirect costs, like when a prince employs someone as "librarian" but lets them take time for their own writing.

Post on the class Blackboard site a statement about what financial/infrastructure issues your text/author/artifact presents. Include complete bibliographic entries for the sources you used.

Assignment 6: Status of the Text Reader/User

Research the status of the reader/user group for which the artifact is intended. This might include issues like:

-the history of rhetoric -- how the skills required to use the artifact are taught and valued

-literacy -- what level is the user "expected" to be at (e.g. piano composers in the 19th century needed to provide music for the amateur piano player for home use)

-sociology -- who are the users? How many? Where? Why does this artifact get used or rejected by this group?

Such information is critical to assess what factors may have complicated an artifact's reception. This is, therefore, the second part of reception history -- factors from the horizon of expectation *outside* the artifact, pointing to issues like its ideological impact and its sheer difficulty of use.

Post on the class Blackboard site a statement about what audience issues your text/author/artifact presents. Include complete bibliographic entries for the sources you used.

Assignment 7: Find the Location of "Originals" and Who Controls Them, and What Impacts that Has

This is a straightforward question of control: who owns the artifacts, what accessibility, control, user, and publication issues condition a scholar's ability to question the received image of the artifact. This will include issues like which originals have been destroyed and only exist in reproduction, which have disappeared into private collections, which have shady legal status, which may or may not be reproduced for credit, which copyrights are prohibitive, which are online (a very critical move influencing "edition status"), accessed by the public, etc.

Post on the class Blackboard site a statement about what access and control issues your text/author/artifact presents. Include complete bibliographic entries for the sources you used.

Assignment 8: Institutional Support for the Artifact's Afterlife: Vested Interests, Resisting Change, and Perpetuating Hegemony.

This assignment asks you to identify the "guilds" or "priesthoods" that control the artifact, and its vested interests, as well as what tools/events/etc. have been used to impose or challenge these orthodoxies. You will here be required to trace significant factors in controlling the after-life and continued cultural value of your chosen case study.

Look for evidence of how cultural value is sustained in things like:

-author societies and their conferences

-anthologies, standard textbook and testing situations, cheap editions

-reviewing

-"benchmark" conference proceedings/exhibitions, etc. that produce proceedings volumes, publicity, and catalogues (and that provide benchmarks for the current scholarship)

-anniversary celebrations (birth, death, first publication, etc.)

Post on the class Blackboard site a statement about who "owns" your artifact, and what form(s) of control are exercised over it. Include complete bibliographic entries for the sources you used.

Assignment 9: Afterlives, 2: What Public Issues Put Your Artifact "In the News"

This assignment asks you to check for any *popular culture* or *public* factors have influenced the afterlife of your case -- what forces come from *outside the academy* that influence its life and value. One example: Jane Austen got into the literary canon in no small part because a successful film "taught" the audience to see her particular humor as majorly social-critical. Mini-series helped make Trollope; Vivaldi and wine commercials have invidious connections. Chairs made architects household names . . .

Post on the class Blackboard site a statement about what other factors have influenced your case study, explaining the "events" (etc.) and what they meant for the status of the work. Include complete bibliographic entries for the sources you used.

FINAL PROJECT:

The final paper will capitalize on the work done in the various assignments, by taking the form of a critical report on the status of your case material that brings the parts together into an overview. The goal of this paper is parallel to that which is found in a good bibliographic overview to an author (the Metzler volumes, or some of the MLA's "how to teach X" volumes do this job, or any well-constructed bibliographic monograph on a single topic/author/text that tries to summarize what has been going to up to the point of its publication (attempting to eliminate the need for future scholars to recreate wheels by summarizing the known).

Your goal is to set up a grid of what issues condition the ideologies of production, transmission, reception, and valuation of your author. It is very likely that you will have to set up "eras" or "sites" which represent larger, persistent nodes where evaluations are produced and maintained. It is very likely that the first of these sections will be a statement of how the original author/site performed" its original identity in order to enact its own cultural authority at a chosen site or set of sites. Later sections will describe what kinds of spin are likely to be encountered in criticism, histories, etc. written at particular times and places -- readers' guides to critical consumption of the secondary literature.

Note that this is very like what needs to be done somewhere near the front of every dissertation: a critical review of the literature (*Forschungsbericht*), against which *your* original project emerges as necessary (given the ideological, material, scholarly, etc. shortcomings of what has been done in the past) and wildly innovative. It is thus NOT A SUMMARY, it is a critical laying out of the landscape, of the factors which render *any* scholarly or popular evaluation of a text subject to historical and social forces of various statuses.

Length: 15-25 pp. MLA (or LSA or Chicago) style, including a complete bibliography and notes (where needed /appropriate).

Due on the date of the official final for the class: Saturday, 14 May, noon.