

EARLY MODERN INVENTIONS

Course Outline and Reading List

Pandemic permitting, the convenors will endeavour to carry out the seminars (except for the first one) in collaboration with the relevant libraries and museums in Oxford.

If need be, all texts will be made accessible online if they are not already (click hyperlinked titles).

1. Introductory session: what is early modern invention?

On the basis of the philological digging outlined below (primary reading), we will survey the early modern meanings of invention in rhetoric, artistic theory, and what we came to know as ‘science’ (natural philosophy and the mechanical arts), before envisaging how these meanings also gained currency in the social, political, and theological spheres.

We will also discuss the topics and interests that brought you to this course in line with what you will have sent us before the beginning of term.

Primary reading

Have a look at the definitions of inventor (*invenire*) /invention (*inventio*) /imagination (*imaginatio/phantasia*) /engin (*ingenium*) / in:

ESTIENNE, Robert, Le [*Dictionarium Latinogallicum*](#) (1552)

NICOT, Jean, [*Thresor de la langue francoyse*](#) (1606)

[*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*](#) (1694)

DIDEROT, D'ALEMBERT et cie, L' [*Encyclopédie*](#) (1751-1772)

Le [*Trésor de la langue française*](#).

Secondary Reading

LANGER, Ullrich, ‘Invention’, in [*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume III, The Renaissance*](#), ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.136-144

JEANNERET, Michel, *Perpetuum mobile: métamorphoses des corps et des œuvres de Vinci à Montaigne* (Geneva: Droz, 1997; repr. 2016), Chapter 3: ‘La terre s'altère : Vinci’, pp.69-103

MARR, Alexander and Vera KELLER (eds), ‘[Introduction: The Nature of Invention](#)’, *Intellectual History Review*, 24.3 (2014), 283-6

2. Printing the world (Magdalen College Library)

In this history of book seminar, we will look at the early modern invention of the printed book. How did the mechanical discovery of moveable-type printing have an impact on the early modern culture of inventions? How does the early modern printed book both reflect and affect the epistemic and poetic landscapes of early modernity?

For this seminar, we will envisage the changing relationships between ‘invention’ and ‘memory’ instantiated in the early modern printed book. These can take us down different paths:

- Material history: continuities and changes in layouts, fonts and their significances,
- History of information and encyclopaedism: development and uses of information-retrieval systems: maps, indices, captions, marginal glosses.
- History of text-image relations: emergence of new epistemic and literary genres: the cosmography, the natural history, anatomical flap books and astronomical paper instruments, the emblem book.

Primary Reading:

Dip into these, look at the way in which they are organised, their title pages, layouts, fonts, the relationship between text and image.

SCHEDER, Hartman, [*Liber chronicarum*](#) (Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1493). Accessible online.

CASTIGLIONE, Baldassare, [*Le Courtisan*](#) (Lyon: François Juste, 1538). Accessible online. Look at layout and font.

RABELAIS, François, [*Gargantua*](#), 2nd edn (Lyon: François Juste, 1542). Accessible online. Look at the layout and font.

LA PERRIÈRE Guillaume, [*Théâtre des bons engins*](#) (Paris: Denis Janot, 1544). Accessible online.

RONDELET, Guillaume, [*Histoire entière de la nature des poissons*](#) (Lyon, Macé Bonhomme, 1558). Accessible online.

VESALIUS, Andrea, [*De humani corporis fabrica librorum epitome*](#) (Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1543). Accessible online.

Secondary Reading

BLAIR, Ann, [*Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age*](#) (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2010)

ROUDAUT François, [*Le Livre au XVIIe siècle: éléments de bibliologie matérielle et d'histoire*](#) (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2006)

HOURS Henri, Henri-Jean MARTIN, Maurice AUDIN and Jean TOULET *Le Siècle d'or de l'imprimerie Lyonnaise*, (Paris: Éditions du Chêne, 1972)

3. Literary Inventions

Humanist accounts made rhetorical invention the foundation of *copia*, ‘the abundant style’. Was it an innate ability? Could it be trained, should it? How? The Renaissance focus on *copia* discloses the period’s concern with the powers and pitfalls of eloquence in particular, and language in general.

Yet the question of *copia* and eloquence are only one of the many faces of literary invention and its stakes in the early modern period. This seminar will also envisage it from the perspectives of ‘salt’, pith, wit, and their related genres and styles.

Whether abundant or laconic, expansive or allusive, the literary forms of early modern invention all reflected the evolving roles and stakes of literary fiction, which we will also discuss.

Primary reading

DESCARTES, René, *Le Monde, ou Traité de la lumière* in [*Oeuvres de René Descartes*](#), ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol.11 (Paris: ed. Du Cerf, 1909), pp.4-48. Accessible online. Copy of the posthumous 1664 Clerselier edition.

RABELAIS, François, ‘Comment Grandgousier cogneut l’esprit merveilleux de Gargantua à l’invention d’un torchecul’ in *Gargantua*, ed. Mireille Huchon folio classique (Paris: Gallimard, 2007). But any edition is fine. The Garnier one is accessible online [here](#).

SCÈVE, Maurice, ‘J’ai tendu le las où je meurs’ poem 320 and ‘sous le carré d’un noir tailloir couvrant’, poem 327 in [*Délie, objet de plus haute vertu*](#) (Lyon: Sulpice Sabon, 1544), accessible online.

SCÈVE, Maurice, [*Délie, objet de plus haute vertu*](#), ed. Françoise Joukovsky (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1996) for a modern edition accessible online.

Secondary reading

AIT-TOUATI, Frédérique, 'Introduction' in [Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century](#) (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011). Accessible online.

CAVE, Terence, '[Improvisation and Inspiration](#)' in *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), chapter 4. Accessible online. The whole of part I is relevant to our topic.

4. Mechanical Inventions (Museum of the History of Science)

As well as fuelling the literary inventions of the period (as explored in seminar 2), mechanical inventions were themselves the subject of discussion, debate, and in some cases anxiety, as writers grappled with the moral as well as the technical challenges posed by the manipulation of nature.

How was burgeoning mechanical invention reflected thematically and formally in new literary inventions, and how did poets, inventors of fictions, and erudite travellers reflect on their own experiences of such marvels (or, as they may have seen them, monstrosities)?

Finally, to what extent were mechanical inventions themselves the catalyst for a new printed form, a self-styled technical book that in fact had more to do with firing the imagination than serving as a practical guide to operating mechanical inventions?

Primary reading:

DU BARTAS, Guillaume de Salluste, [La Seconde Sepmaine](#) (1584): dip into this for descriptions and discussion of 'artifices' and inventions understood in relation to the Biblical timeframe of Genesis (the subject of the first [Sepmaine](#)).

RABELAIS, François, [Quart Livre](#), ch. 61-62 (link is to 1552 edition but modern editions such as the folio classique are fine)

PARÉ, Ambroise, '[De l'invention et excellence de la Medecine et Chirurgie](#)', and preface to '[Des Playes faictes par Hacquebutes](#)'

MONTAIGNE, Michel de, *Journal de voyage*, extracts on Italian fountains (e.g. pp. 201-3 in the [Partie en Italien](#) published by Classiques Garnier)

Secondary reading:

ATKINSON Catherine, *Inventing Inventors in Renaissance Europe: Polydorus Vergil's De inventoribus rerum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), selections including 5.2, 'Vergil's human inventors' and 7.3.4, 'François Rabelais's inventors'

DOLZA Luisa and Hélène VÉRIN, '[Figurer la mécanique: l'énigme des théâtres de machines de la Renaissance](#)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 51.2 (April 2004), 7-37

LANGER, Ullrich, '[La poudre a canon](#) et la transgression poétique: "l'Elegie du verre" de Ronsard'; a version was published in English as 'Gunpowder as Transgressive Invention in Ronsard', in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. By Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp.96-114