Ohio Five CODEX Summer 2020 Institute
Proposal:

"Reason and Romanticism (CMLT350 Honors):
Reimagined and Re-imaged

Stephanie L. Merkel, Ph.D.
Department of Comparative Literature
Ohio Wesleyan University

Description and Goals:

Before Wikipedia, there was Diderot's *Encyclopedie*; before social media, social networks of letter writers. Before Salon.com, the salons of Madame Necker and Madame Geoffrin. At a time when some bemoan the loss of the instructor's authority in the modern classroom, I believe that a classroom of students equipped with smart phones and laptops is an unprecedented opportunity to put into action what John Stuart Mill described as the ideal relationship between teacher and students: "Knowledge comes only from within; all that comes from without is but *questioning*, or else it is mere *authority*." It is entirely within the spirit of this course that students use technology to pursue intellectual virtues of empathy, humility, courage, integrity, and fairmindedness. "Sapere aude!" ("Dare to know!" as Kant said in his 1784 essay, "What is enlightenment?")

"Reason and Romanticism" is a course devoted to the "long 18th century."
Goals of the course are:
-- To help students inhabit the "drama of Enlightenment thought" (Ernst Cassirer), fostering intellectual empathy and analytical thinking...
-- so that, they can better understand "the break in Western consciousness" (Isaiah Berlin) we call Romanticism.
-- My reading plan foregrounds PARTICIPATION over a nomenclatural approach (whether Goethe is a Neo-Classicist or a Romantic, for example, is less important than understanding the many ways he participated in modes, genres, societies, friendships, debates). In addition to reading novels, plays, poetry, and short stories of Sterne, Voltaire, Lessing, Diderot, Catherine II, Goethe, Pushkin, and Lermontov, I encourage students to draw the connections (international friendships, artistic collaborations, political coercions, love affairs) between thinkers, writers, artists, and monarchs.
-- to emphasize relevance of 18th-century studies for understanding 21st-century problems, questions, and issues. Students are encouraged to look for resonances between 20th- and 21st-century cultural and literary theory and 18th-century literature: "it-narratives" (novels of circulation) and modern Thing Theory; dressing-gown poems and semiotics of fashion; the spatialization of intellectual concepts; the Lockian basis for the liberal art of landscape architecture.

-- to actively seek out under-represented participants and forms of participation, such as female participation in the genre (or is it 'non-genre'?) of letter writing
-- to better understand the development of modes and genres of the long 18th century, including the Rococo, satire, sentimentalism, the friendly verse epistle, and the novels of emergence/non-emergence (Bakhtin).

WHY DIGITAL?
Component #1 of the Proposed Digital Reboot of "Reason & Romanticism":

In the past, I have used the online "The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert -- Collaborative Translation Project" (quod.lib.umich.edu) as a classroom resource. Students were encouraged to look up key concepts and definitions, such as "Taste," "Philosopher," "Enjoyment," and "Liberty." Invariably students commented on the similarities between The Encyclopedia and Wikipedia (cross-referenced entries, collaborative authorship, international cooperation, for example). We used it enough that students began to see the ways The Encyclopedists used their project to spread Enlightenment ideas and values. This digital resource has made the students themselves participants in the "drama of Enlightenment thought," as they move within The Encyclopedia from entry to entry: from "apricot jam" to "sugar," from "sugar" to "sugar plantation," from "sugar plantation" to "slavery," and finally from "slavery" to the entry on "liberty."

Going forward, I'd like to take this to the next level and have the students become "Encyclopedists" through the Wikipedia Student Program. During the CODEX Summer Institute, I'd like to work on designing an assignment that will involve students in writing, research, critical thinking, and media literacy skills. Each student would work on Wikipedia entries related to **Component #2 of the Proposed Reboot of "Reason & Romanticism."**

Component #2 of the Proposed Digital Reboot of "Reason & Romanticism":

In the past, students have had a final project that required them to research, write, and present a public-facing project designed to educate their peers and communicate the relevance of 18th-century studies. Last semester, students collaborated on a project we called "Women's Republic of Letters." Working in pairs, the students researched and selected letters exchanged among a tight network of prominent women: Catherine II, Princess Dashkova, Elise von der Recke, Madame de Stael, Madame Necker, and Madame Geoffrin. Students grappled with issues of gendered subjectivity, epistolary intent, style, self-creation, sociability, and power relations. Students also brought their foreign language competencies to the project, translating letters from German, French, and Russian where needed. The project culminated in a "candlelight dinner" where we dined 18th-century-style and presented our letters in letter-locked form of the original authors. Students also submitted an analysis of the epistolary style of their female letter writer.
Going forward, I'd like for the students to apply research from their work on Wikipedia articles to make the "Women's Republic of Letters" a better researched and executed project. Students had access to the Voltaire Foundation digital project mapping the letters of Catherine II

(catcor-dev.oucs.ox.ac.uk/map/) to correspondents male and female across Europe. I'd like to employ similar digital mapping techniques to show the broader context of female participation in epistolary culture across Europe. Creating a digital map of letter exchanges involving women -- with the ability to isolate particular relationships (ie, Catherine II/Elise von der Recke; Dashkova/Benjamin Franklin; Catherine/Voltaire, etc.) -- will create a rich, more accurate picture of female participation in and contribution to 18th-century culture, than a course syllabus that focuses solely on publications by women.

Relevance to the Curriculum

When "Reason and Romanticism" first appeared among course offerings in the Humanities and Classics Department at Ohio Wesleyan, students still used typewriters and searched the library card catalogue. Personal computers, smart phones, and JStor were the stuff of undergraduate fantasy. The faculty of the Humanities and Classics Department were drawn from the English Department. In the past twenty-two years I have taught the course, the Humanities and Classics Department was reconfigured into a Department of Comparative Literature, whose faculty specialize in world literature, translation, and modern foreign languages. The new Department of Comparative Literature has shown its commitment to promoting digital competencies by creating a digital humanities lab -- the Lit Hatch -- in our building. We have created digital course projects across our curriculum using digital tools such as SCALAR and Twine. The "Reason and Romanticism" digital projects will serve the additional goals of revising long-standing courses to include under-represented contributions of women -- not by creating a stand-alone course on 18th-century women writer, but by creating a more accurate and complex picture of participation alongside their male peers.

Team Members

Stephanie Merkel, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature
-- instructor and course designer
-- elaborate pedagogical goals, interface with Wikipedia Education (create dashboard, monitor student progress), assessment of student work, assist students with digital mapping tools and research)
Eugene Rutigliano
Digital Initiatives Librarian & Curator, OWU Historical Collection
-- support course design and integration of digital tools
-- instruct students in use of digital tools and media literacy
-- assist with design of rubric for assessment of projects

Calvin Cleary
Public Services Librarian, Liaison to Comparative Literature Department, OWU
--research support and collection development to support projects
--instruct students in use of databases, research tools

Timeline

Since a lot of the groundwork for this revision of "Reason and Romanticism" has been laid out in the past two years, I would like to launch the digital projects this fall semester (2020). Wikipedia has support in place for educators, including course dashboards, instructor support for assessment rubrics, etc. The team, myself, Eugene, and Calvin could focus our efforts on matching digital mapping tools and data platforms for the second component, "Women's Republic of Letters."

Experience with Digital Technology

I have participated in the CODEX workshop on SCALAR, and I am currently working on a SCALAR project with a senior CMLT student. Our project is a Chronicle of 19th-Century Russian Literature.

I attended digital workshops at the Modern Language Association meetings in Chicago in January 2019. As a direct result, and with the help of Eugene Rutigliano and David Soliday, I was able to assign an interactive fiction project based on the morphology of the Russian wondertale in my CMLT 110 Myth, Legend, and Folklore course. Students used Twine.

Ethical Considerations

I am confident that Calvin and Eugene will help us to stay within copyright guidelines for any public-facing aspect of the course projects.

Sustainability/Accessibility

The Department of Comparative Literature is in the process of creating an archive where all course projects will be cached. We are also exploring the possibility of assessment for awarding micro-credentials to students who achieve competency with digital tools and platforms.

Assessment

Beyond evaluation of student work, this effectiveness of the course redesign can be assessed by how useful it is to the next group of students who enroll in the course.

Why CODEX?

My attendance at the SCALAR workshop at Oberlin through CODEX directly resulted in the creation of a digital humanities lab, Lit Hatch, the creation of a digital chronology of Russian Literature with my advisee, and a Twine project in my folklore course-- all in the span of six months! I could not achieve these goals for my courses by working alone at my home institution. My entire department is now onboard, and student interest in our department is high.