

John M. Wing Lecture Series on the History of the Book
What Is a Letter?

Thursday, October 12, 2017

Peter Stallybrass

6 pm

**The Newberry
60 W. Walton St., Chicago**

Peter Stallybrass begins with a very simple proposition—with some surprising implications—that the vast majority of letters written between the 1530s and the 1920s consist mainly of blank paper—and that they are designed to do so. To put his proposition at its bluntest, letters throughout Europe and America for about four centuries were designed to waste as much paper as possible. Why? Because the more paper you waste, the shorter the letter you have to write. He argues that letters, despite the endless rhetoric about the significance of long letters, usually aspired to be telegrams, postcards, or emails.

A reception will follow the program.

Peter Stallybrass, Annenberg Professor in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, will deliver our inaugural John M. Wing Lecture on the History of the Book. Dr. Stallybrass has written extensively on early modern printing and manuscripts.

The Wing Lecture: The year 2017 marks the centenary of the death of John M. Wing, the remarkable and eccentric collector whose bequest founded the Newberry's John M. Wing Collection on the History of Printing. Over the last one hundred years the collection's curators have amassed an extraordinary group of materials ranging from incunables to modern artist's books to everything in between. Together they represent one of the world's best known collections related to the history of the book and the book arts, used by all manner of readers: academics, students, printers and other book artists, calligraphers, designers, and general readers simply interested in seeing and learning about books and manuscripts.

