ENGLISH 354 Professor Benedict Fall 2023 Tues/Thurs 10:50-12:05



**The Novel and the Real World**

What is a novel? when and why did the novel appear? This seminar explores the development of the realistic novel in short, eighteenth-century fictions about the quest to discover identity. Readings include Gothic novels with supernatural effects, semi-fictional and entirely fictional travel tales, novels about sex-workers, servants and libertines, tales of seduction, revenge and intimacy, and realistic sketches of city life with fictional narrators and characters by essayists and cultural critics. Through these works, we will trace the development of a genre which centers on the experience of the individual in a world bristling with dangers and adventures and peopled by rogues, fools, heroes and scoundrels as each character forges a unique self. This course fulfills a 1700-1900 requirement for English majors.

Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina, or Love in a Maze* (masquerade novel about sexual experimentation)

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *A Description of a New World, Called The Blazing-World* (one of the earliest science fiction novels)

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* (combination romance and travel tale)

Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (tale of urban survival as a sex-worker)

Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (Gothic fiction about vengeance and inheritance)

Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (sentimental fiction about a sensitive hero in a harsh world)

Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (Irish satiric novel about cultural decay)

Henry Fielding, *Shamela* (a parody of *Palmela,* Richardson’s sentimental novel about a young servant fending off a lascivious master)

William Beckford, *Vathek* (“oriental” fantasy novel about sensual excess and power lust)

Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (novel about lost love rediscovered)

**Excerpts on Moodle or duplicated for you in a Course Packet:** Addison and Steele, *The Spectator;* Oliver Goldsmith, *A Citizen of the World;* Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* and *Moll Flanders;* Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (these contain various excerpts of prostitution, seduction, travel, plague and urban life)

**Course Requirements:**

**1) ASSIGNMENTS:** **All work must be your own and original to this course (unless properly credited to another source); otherwise, you are committing plagiarism and may be expelled.**

\*Class attendance, **daily reading notes and informal assignments**, and participation in discussions. **ALWAYS BRING THE PRINTED TEXT TO CLASS: failure to do so will lower your grade** (4/10). Students are expected to **attend every class** and to **complete the daily reading**, to keep roughly one page of legible **notes** on the themes, symbols, tone, narrative voice, meanings, ambiguities and problems of **every** assigned text (this syllabus provides prompts but you should feel free to write on what you wish), including **questions** about it: sometimes I will collect these, sometimes not. They may ***never***be submitted late or via email. More than **ONE** absence will **lower your grade**.

\* **TWO ESSAYS, 5-7 pp**. (2/10 each).

\* **FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY-EXAM** (2/10)

\* Occasional, ungraded short writing exercises and homework (1/10: grade factored into your participation grade).

**2) ESSAYS:** Although possible topics appear on the syllabus (and are also suggested by the reading assignment questions), students are **urged** to create their own topics, and to consult with the Professor first to ensure the topic’s feasibility. **All essays must be printed out, proofread and stapled**. Include a bibliography, cite sources accurately using either the MLA or Chicago formula (check the library’s reference page or the Handbooks in the library itself). **Plagiarism—using other people’s ideas and/or words, including your own from another course without due acknowledgement, will result in immediate failure and possible expulsion. INFORM YOURSELF OF WHAT CONSTITUTES PLAGIARISM.**

**3) FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY-EXAM:** this is a 7-8 pp. written essay on questions regarding the texts and the main themes of the course: to prepare for this, keep your reading and lecture notes from the entire semester as study aids. You will have about a week to complete the exam.

**4) LATE POLICY**: in-class exercises, reading journals, homework and/or revisions will **never** be accepted late, or “made up”: you must furnish a dean’s or doctor’s note to be exempted from the late penalty for any assignment, including essays. **There are NO exceptions**. Essays are due **at the beginning of class;** they will be docked 1/3 of a grade for every late day, **starting with the due date**. Thus, if you turn in an essay rating a B after class has started, it will receive a B-, as it will at 4:00 p.m. that day. (If you submit the B essay due on Tuesday on Thursday, it will receive a C+.) **DON’T COME TO CLASS LATE BECAUSE YOU ARE FINISHING AN ESSAY; printer problems are *not* an excuse—you should have finished the essay and printed it earlier**. Late entry to class disrupts it, and the essay is already late anyway. Instead, turn it in later that day. **Make sure Ms. Nikolov** or **Ms. Henning** signs and dates late essays to avoid further penalties. Graded essays cannot be returned until all essays have been submitted, so your late essay prevents everyone from receiving theirs back.

**5) REVISIONS:** other than those specified on the syllabus, only essays that were 1) submitted on time, and 2) receive a poor or failing grade (C+ or lower) are eligible for revision. Students must meet with the Professor to determine whether revision is appropriate, and if so, *must submit their original essay* with the revision. Please **visit the Writing Center** for help with revisions.

**6) SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS:** please inform the Professor if you are entitled to Special Accommodations. The Coordinator of Special Accommodations Resources is Joel Copperthwaite, who can help you with any of your needs.

**7) OFFICE HOURS**: by appointment only. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:05-1:30. Please email or speak to me to set up an appointment.

**8) COMPUTER USE:** Please make EVERY EFFORT not to use your computer in class except for Moodle: either obtain the texts from the bookstore or the library or print them out. When you stare at a computer, you cannot fully participate in class discussions, and finding on the computer the precise passage that we are reading from the text wastes a huge amount of time.

**SYLLABUS (subject to change as the term proceeds):**

**September** 5 Tuesday: Introduction.

7 Thursday: Eliza Haywood, Fantomina, or Love in a Maze. **Reading prompts:** what are the gender assumptions in this novella? Is it “realistic” or fantastical or romantic? Why/how? What is the attitude of the narrative voice? Is Fantomina a heroine, a whore, a villainess, something else? Why?

12 Tuesday: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, excerpts from A Description of a New World, called The Blazing-World (distributed and posted on Moodle). **Reading prompts:** what sub-genre is this novella and why? In what ways is it a satire? What does it say about gender, national identity, species identity, and/or political affiliations?

14 Thursday: Numbers 1, 2, 3. 69 and 11 from Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, The Spectator (duplicated for you). **Reading prompts:** how would you characterize Mr. Spectator? Does he seem to you a novelistic character or not? How/why? Are there any other figures in these essays who seem “novelistic” and why/how? What is the significance of the setting?

19 Tuesday: Aphra Behn, Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave. Read the first half through the paragraph beginning, “I had forgot to tell you, that those who are nobly born.” **Reading prompts:** who is the narrator and what is her authority to tell this tale? How is Oroonoko described/characterized? What is his culture like—its values, ideals, weaknesses? How are the white people depicted? What are the racial/cultural assumptions in this novel?

21 Thursday: finish Oroonoko. **Reading prompts:** what is the narrator’s attitude toward the characters she describes and toward her own role? Does the novel have a moral or political point? In what way does this novel seem real? How is it unreal?

26 Tuesday: Samuel Richardson, excerpt from Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded. **Reading prompts**: does the narrator seem to you like a simple servant-girl? How/how not? What are her virtues? Has she any weaknesses or flaws? Do you trust her account? How do you characterize Mr. B? what is the significance of the setting? What is Richardson suggesting about class and identity?

28 Thursday: Fielding, Shamela. **Reading prompts:** how does Shamela as a character parody or satirize Pamela? How is Mr. B characterized? What is Fielding criticizing about Richardson’s novel Pamela? Is this a novella or purely a satire? How/why? **Please note: the reading for next week is (relatively) long so start it early.**

**October** 3 Tuesday: Daniel Defoe, excerpt from A Journal of the Plague Year. **Reading** **prompts:** how is this like/unlike a novel? Do you trust the narrator? What overarching themes do you see? How is the reaction of the plague victims like/unlike our reaction to Covid 19? How does Defoe see human nature?

5 Thursday: Daniel Defoe, excerpt from Moll Flanders. **Reading prompts:** how does Moll Flanders resemble/differ from Defoe’s Journal of the Plague Year? what novelistic elements appear here? How do you characterize Moll—as a heroine, a victim, something else?

10 Tuesday: **Trinity Days; no classes.**

12 Thursday: excerpts from Oliver Goldsmith, Letters from A Citizen of the World. **Reading prompts:** describe the narrative voice: what is the speaker’s perspective? How does he see the English? Is he reliable? Does he have flaws or blind spots? Does this text resemble any others you have read in this course? How/not? **FIRST ESSAY DUE: 5-7 pp. Suggested topics:** 1) compare/contrast the narrators of Oroonoko and The Spectator: how does gender factor in? what qualities do they share? How does each see the world? 2) compare/contrast the protagonists of Fantomina and Shamela or Pamela: how do they see sex? love? money? men? 3) do the worlds of The Blazing World and Journal of the Plague Year have anything in common? How do they differ? How does each text represent the unfamiliar? 4) analyze the realistic aspects of any text or two texts: how does each convince the reader of the truth of the narrative? How does the narrative voice contribute or detract from this realism? How is external reality portrayed? 5) Analyze the ways either of Defoe’s novels compare to other works you have read in this course? Be specific and choose either one aspect of prose fiction or one theme.

17 Tuesday: Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto first half. **Reading notes:** how does this text resemble others we have read in this course? How not? What are the main themes? What symbols appear and what do they mean? how does the novel represent history? society?

19 Thursday: finish The Castle of Otranto. **Reading prompts:** how does Walpole characterize women in this novel? men? human nature? How does the narrative voice function—to increase or decrease the novel’s authority/realism/fantasy? How? Does the novel have a moral?

24 Tuesday: Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, first half (through Chapter 29, “The distresses of a father”). **Reading prompts:** who is the narrator? What is his tone/attitude to the story? Why is this narrative not related in Harley’s voice? What is the point of the “Introduction”? why is it there? What do the episodes have in common? Is Harley a saint? a fool? an adolescent?

26 Thursday: finish The Man of Feeling. **Reading prompts:** what causes Harley’s end? How are women depicted here? What are the values endorsed by the narrative? What themes appear? How does the fractured narrative affect the novel’s ideas or representation of characters?

31 Tuesday: William Beckford, Vathek, first half to “Vathek found himself beneath a vast dome.” **Reading notes:** why is the novel set in Arabia? How does Vathek embody British fantasies of “orientalism”? how are Arabians represented? What are the narrator’s implied values? Why do you think so (provide quotations)?

**November** 2 Thursday: finish Vathek. **Reading prompts:** how does this novel compare to others in the course—in narrative tone, descriptive style, characterization, plot, dialogue (be specific; identify quotations proving your contentions)? Does it have a moral? How seriously/literally are readers expected to take the novel? What larger points might Beckford be making?

7 Tuesday: Maria Edgeworth, Castle Rackrent, first half, including the “Preface,” to “My new lady was young, as might be supposed.” **Reading prompts:** what appears to be the point of the story? How is Ireland represented? Who is the narrator of the Preface? Who is the narrator of the story? Why did Edgeworth choose him as her narrator? Do you trust him? What major themes appear?

9 Thursday: finish Castle Rackrent. **Reading prompts:** what is the moral (if any) behind Sir Condy’s end? What values does Thady endorse? Is this a realistic novel? Why/how or not?

14 Tuesday: **Bicentennial Day. No classes.**

16 Thursday: Watkinson Library visit. **SECOND ESSAYS DUE: 5-7 pp. Suggested topics:** 1) compare/contrast the protagonists of The Castle of Otranto and Vathek: what traits do they share? Who is worse and why? What view of history and/or empire does each represent? 2) Compare/contrast the view of sentiment, feeling, love and emotion in The Man of Feeling and Castle Rackent: how are women represented? How is sympathy/empathy depicted? How does feeling affect morality, relationships and/or survival? 3) How do Vathek and Castle Rackrent represent the past? the relationship between reason and passion? the individual’s responsibility to society? Class relations? 4) how does satire figure in Vathek, Castle Rackrent and/or The Man of Feeling? What feelings are these fictions designed to arouse in readers? How, exactly? (Be sure to discuss what the book does rather than what you, as an individual reader, feel.)

21 Tuesday: TBD.

23 Thursday: **THANKSGIVING DAY. No classes.**

28 Tuesday: Jane Austen, Persuasion, vol. 1. **Reading prompts:** what is the narrator’s tone? From whose point of view is the story told? How do the Elliot sisters compare with one another? What themes appear in the first few paragraphs? What characterizes Sir Walter? Lady Russell? Captain Wentworth? Admiral Croft? What main themes appear? What symbols appear?

30 Thursday: finish Persuasion. **Reading prompts:** how do you evaluate Mrs. Smith? Nurse Rooke? Captain Benwick? Is Anne perfect or not (be specific)? Does she or Captain Wentworth change over the course of the action? What values does the ending seem to endorse—i.e. who and what ideas “win” and who “loses”? does the novel exhibit any moral ambiguity and, if so, where/how?

**December** 5 Tuesday. General Review.

7 Thursday: **FINAL ESSAY QUESTIONS distributed.**

12 Tuesday: **LAST DAY OF CLASS. GENERAL CELEBRATION.**

