NOVEL FORMS: Fictions, Factions, Femininities

1680-1800

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This course invites you to reflect on the critical vocabulary that we use to analyse eighteenth-century prose fiction. Authors in the long eighteenth century used a range of terms to describe their prose works: ‘tales’, ‘romances’, ‘memoirs’, ‘confessions’, ‘lives’, ‘stories’, ‘lessons’, ‘histories’, ‘letters’. Later critics found it fruitful to bring together works belonging to these different prose species under the capacious banner, ‘Novel’. What we mean when we use this term in the context of the eighteenth century, however, has been shaped by a tendency among critics to prioritise, start with, or at least include, consideration of works by the same handful of authors: Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Lawrence Sterne. But these (male) authors operated in a climate in which the presence of women both as readers and as authors of prose fiction was so pronounced that for many commentators at the time, the very idea of the novel was indelibly associated with femininity.

This course asks what kind of a critical vocabulary emerges if we take seriously the claim that there might be something feminine about the novel: if we concentrate our reading on works written by some of the many female authors whose experiments in prose, both individually and collectively, contributed to an association between fiction and femininity. If we foreground works written by women, do we find ourselves reaching for the same kinds of classifications that have proved useful for critics of the early novel to date (‘epistolary novel’, ‘sentimental novel’, ‘gothic novel’, ‘romantic novel’, ‘biography’)? Or might such an exercise yield an alternative vocabulary, one that enables us more accurately to characterise the generic attributes of works authored by women, and to perceive with greater clarity the patterns that emerge between such works, and indeed between these works and works authored by men? What does this exercise reveal about the ways in which we have tended to tell the history of the eighteenth-century novel, and what can we take away from it about how we choose to frame that history going forward?

Each session brings together prose texts written at different points in the period 1680-1800, inviting you to draw connections between texts written in different environments and in different contexts, as well as to observe disruptions and discontinuities between them. The structure of the course aims to mitigate against the superficial allure of neat chronologies and tidy linearities. Over the course of the four sessions, we will be seeking better to understand the complexity of the relations between gender, genre and sexuality; the extent to which the gendered identity of the author is a legitimate tool for the organisation of meaning; the extent to which language and literary form are necessarily gendered; the relevance for literature of the relations between gender and sexuality; and the relations between histories of the novel and histories of femininity and of feminism. You are invited to ponder the ways in which literary criticism of recent decades has been altered by feminist and queer interventions – and the ways in which it hasn't.
For each session, please prepare the main primary material stipulated. If time permits, you may wish to read from among the additional primary texts listed, according to your tastes and interests; the additional reading is optional. At the end, I have provided a list of useful secondary reading. You are likely to find the titles in bold particularly helpful as starting points.

**Session 1: CRITIQUE**

The first session will explore some of the ways in which eighteenth-century fictional works authored by women commented on the factual. It will examine the novel's relations with affiliated species of political commentary: satire; journalism; treatises; utopias. It will consider in particular how female novelists in the period marshalled and adapted these forms for the purposes of discussing the condition of being female.

**Main Primary Material:**

Delarivier Manley, *The New Atalantis* (1709)

Sarah Scott, *Millenium Hall* (1762)

**Additional Primary Material (optional):**

Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694-97)

Mary Chudleigh, *Essays upon Several Subjects* (1710)

Eliza Haywood, *Female Spectator* (1744-46)

Elizabeth Montagu, *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760)

Elizabeth Gooch, *Appeal to the Public* (1788)

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman; with Strictures on Moral and Political Subjects* (1792)

Charlotte Smith, *Desmond* (1792)

Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind* (1793)

Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795)

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798)

Mary Hays, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798)

Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798)

Mary Hays, *Victim of Prejudice* (1799)


**Session 2: EMBODIMENT**

This session will reflect on the ways in which female authors wielded fictional prose to represent women’s voices, real and imagined. It will consider the connections between novels and letters; conversations; journals; autobiographies; and confessions.

**Main Primary Material:**

Aphra Behn, *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*, vols 1-3 (1684-87)

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763)

**Additional Primary Material (optional):**

Elizabeth Singer Rowe, *Friendship in Death, in Twenty Letters From the Dead to the Living* (1728)

Eliza Haywood, *Anti-Pamela; or, Feigned Innocence* (1741)

Laetitia Pilkington, *Memoirs* (1748)

Charlotte Charke, *Narrative of the Life of Mrs Charlotte Charke* (1755)

Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Two Novels in Letters. By the Authors of Henry and Frances* (1757–1770)

Elizabeth Griffith, *The Delicate Distress* (1769)

Frances Burney, *Evelina or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778)

Hester Thrale Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (1786)

Charlotte Lennox, *Euphemia* (1790)

Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France* (1790)

Eliza Fenwick, *Secresy, or, the Ruin on the Rock* (1795)
Elizabeth Hamilton, Letters of a Hindoo Rajah (1796)

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796)

**Session 3: SUBLIMATION**

This session will think through the implications of making it up, analysing the relations between novels and romance; fantasy; and science fiction. It will consider what was at stake for female authors in particular as they negotiated the tensions that novel-writing poses between creativity and morality, balancing the demands of the market against the demands of the aesthetic, the claims of desire against the need to conform.

**Main Primary Material:**

Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess; Or, The Fatal Inquiry* (1719-20)

Charlotte Lennox, *Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella* (1752)

**Additional Primary Material (optional):**

Jane Barker, *Love Intrigues or The Amours of Bosvil and Galesia* (1713)

Catherine Trotter, *Olinda's Adventures: Or the Amours of a Young Lady* (1718)

Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina; or Love in a Maze* (1725)

Jane Collier, *Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753)

Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron* (1777)

Sophia Lee, *The Recess* (1783-85)

Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (1785)

Phebe Gibbes, *Elfrida; or Paternal Ambition* (1786)

Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, *Sylph* (1788)

Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (1785)

Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story* (1791)

Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791)

Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796)
**Session 4: TELLING TALES**

The final session will focus on modes of telling, analysing the ways in which eighteenth-century female novelists experimented with different narrative techniques, trialling new kinds of narrators to overcome, circumvent, or capitalise on the condition of the author’s gender.

**Main Primary Material:**

Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744)

Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1800)

**Additional Primary Material (optional):**

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688)

Delarivier Manley, *The Adventures of Rivella* (1714)

Penelope Aubin, *Strange Adventures of the Count de Vineval and his Family* (1721)

Jane Barker, *Patchwork Screen for the Ladies* (1723)

Mary Davys, *The Reform’d Coquet, Or The Memoirs of Amoranda* (1724)

Charlotte Lennox, *The Life of Harriot Stuart* (1750)

Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751)

Frances Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761)

Elizabeth Griffith, *The History of Lady Barton* (1771)

Frances Burney, *Cecilia, Or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782)

Helen Maria Williams, *Julia* (1790)

Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter with Portraits of the Leadenhead Family* (1799)

**SECONDARY READING**

Below is a list of secondary reading that you might find helpful. The first group relates to the eighteenth-century novel and eighteenth-century women’s writing; the second group relates to
the theory and criticism of gender and sexuality. The titles in bold are particularly useful starting points.

I. The Eighteenth-Century Novel and Women’s Writing


**Castle, Terry, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).**


Hitchcock, Tim, English Sexualities, 1700-1800 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).


**Mellor, Anne K., *Romanticism & Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993).**


**Spacks, Patricia Meyer, *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women's Writing* (George Allen and Unwin, 1976).**


**Staves, Susan, *A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660–1789* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).**


II. Gender and Sexuality: Theory and Criticism

Abel, Elizabeth, Writing and Sexual Difference (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).


Anzaldúa, Gloria, and Cherríe Moraga, eds, This Bridge Called My Back (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983).


Bornstein, Kate, Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us (New York: Routledge, 1994).


McIntosh, Peggy, ‘White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack.’

https://nationalseedproject.org/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack

**Miller, Nancy K, *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986).**


