Changing the Subject:

The Literature of the Middle and Later Eighteenth Century

SYLLABUS

January 4: Introduction

January 6: Prelude: Gender, Genre, Artifice, and Artfulness:
Jonathan Swift, “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” (in DeMaria); “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (handout)
Mary Wortley Montagu, “The Reasons that Induced Dr. S[swift] to Write a Poem Called the Lady’s Dressing Room” (in DeMaria)

I. Parodies of Learning and the Form of Reason

January 11 & 13: Printing Madness:
Jonathan Swift, A Tale of a Tub (in DeMaria): please read as much of this difficult text as you can, but concentrate on: (1) the prefatory material; (2) sections 3, 5, 7, and 9; and (3) the conclusion

January 18 & 20: Grub Street’s Anti-Epic:
Alexander Pope, The Dunciad Variorum (1729) and The New Dunciad (selections in DeMaria)

January 25 & 27: Bedlam’s Anti-Encyclopaedia:
Christopher Smart, selections TBA from Jubilate Agno (R = Reserve)

II. Technologies of the Self

February 1 & 3: Ideas of the “Novel” Part 1: “Writing to the Moment”:
Samuel Johnson, Rambler No. 4 (in Norton Anthology)
Samuel Richardson, Pamela (pp. 43-148 + 221-278 supplementary)
Laurence Sterne, brief selection TBA from Tristram Shandy (R)

Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews
February 15 & 17: “Novel” Satire Part 1: Fiction and the Grotesque: 
Frances Burney, Evelina

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February 29: Midterm

March 2 & 7: “Novel” Satire Part 2: Fiction and Romance: 
Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility

III. Subaltern Subjects

March 9 & 14: Literary Contests:
Stephen Duck, “The Thresher’s Labour” (selections in DeMaria)
Mary Collier, “The Woman’s Labour” (in DeMaria)
Oliver Goldsmith, “The Deserted Village” (in DeMaria)
George Crabbe, “The Village” (selections in DeMaria)

March 16 & 21: Foreign Agents:
Phillis Wheatley, selected poems (R)
William Cowper, “The Negro’s Complaint” (in DeMaria)
William Blake, “The Little Black Boy” and “The Chimney Sweeper” 
(both versions) (in DeMaria)
Ignatius Sancho, excerpt from The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, 
An African (R)

IV. Life Writing

March 23: Bio-Graphy:
Samuel Johnson, Rambler, No. 60 (in Norton Anthology)
James Boswell, Life of Johnson (selections in DeMaria)
Frances Burney, Journals (selections in DeMaria)
Thomas Gray, “An Elegy Wrote in a Country Church Yard” (in 
DeMaria), supplementary

March 28 & 30: Literacy and Liberation:
Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative (chapters 1-5 + 10-12 
supplementary)

April 4: Conclusion and Review
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In this course we will read a selection of exciting and significant works of eighteenth-century literature and explore how they contribute to the creation of new literary modes and to the formation of our modern notions of personal identity.

Some of these developments are pretty well known. The eighteenth century is often viewed as the period of the "rise of the novel," in Ian Watt's phrase. Such a view may be debated, but the period certainly is a time of tremendous experimentation in the literary techniques known as "formal realism," and in narrative techniques more generally. Many of the literary devices commonly associated with modernist writers such as Joyce and Woolf were in fact pioneered in the eighteenth century. Other eighteenth-century literary developments have been rediscovered over the last decade or so. For example, this is the first period in which English women writers produce a "literature of their own," especially in fiction, culminating with the outstanding achievement of Jane Austen. Thus after 1740 we can say that the subject of literature changes in a double sense: on the one hand, new notions of the individual are elaborated in literature (especially in fiction); while, on the other hand, members of socially subordinate groups (such as women, labourers, and African slaves) start to exercise--and create--new forms of literary expression. These two trends come together in the literary modes of biography and autobiography, genres that were practised not only by elite male writers such as James Boswell, but by a host of "scribblers" that included plebeian women and former slaves. Politically, these "techniques of the self," to borrow Michel Foucault's phrase, reach a peak with the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789.

Rather than approach our readings through a chronological survey, I have grouped the material we will be studying under four headings: parodies of learning and the form of reason; technologies of the self; subaltern subjects; and life writing. In each case we will be sampling both venerable classics and some upstart contenders to the canon, and considering how common questions and devices serve to organize each of these four textual fields.

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Office: Hagey Hall 257, ext. 2416
Office hours: 1:00-2:00 Tuesday and Thursday, or by appointment

Required Texts:
Robert DeMaria, Jr., British Literature, 1640-1789: An Anthology (Blackwell)
Recommended Texts:
  Donald Greene, The Age of Exuberance: Backgrounds to Eighteenth-Century English Literature (McGraw-Hill)
  Joseph Gibaldi, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 4th ed. (MLA)

Assignments: attendance and active preparation for and participation in class (5%); 2 ID quizzes (5% each = 10%); mid-term or 20-minute presentation on a major writer on the syllabus (your choice = 20%); 7-page paper (25%); and a final examination (40%). As a matter of courtesy to the instructor and the other students, it is important that all students make an effort to have course readings completed, when possible, in advance of class discussions.

The first ID quiz will be held in class on February 8; the second on March 14. For those that choose to write it, the mid-term will be held on February 29. Presentation slots will be limited to 6 pairs of students. The paper is due in class on March 30. Papers must be typed and double-spaced; if using a word-processor, please use a laser printer, and do not use right justification. A page is 250 words. Papers must follow the format for citation and quotation laid out in the MLA Handbook. Papers late without prior permission may be penalized 2% per day. Uncompleted assignments will be graded F-.

NOTE: Please keep a photocopy of any paper you submit, and never hand a paper in by sliding it under (or sticking it to) my office door.