Changing the Subject:

The Literature of the Middle and Later Eighteenth Century

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 modern notions of personal identity.

Some of these developments are common knowledge. This is the period known for the “rise of the novel,” in Ian Watt’s phrase. It certainly is a period of tremendous experimentation in “formal realism” and narrative technique. Other 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 (especially in fiction); while on the other, members of subordinate groups start to exercise--and create--new forms of literary expression. These two trends come together in the literary mode of biography and autobiography, a genre that was practised not only by elite male writers such as James Boswell, but by a host of “scribblers” that included plebian women and former slaves. Historically, all these “techniques of the self,” to borrow Michel Foucault’s phrase, come to a head 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 textual field.

* * * * *

Office: Hagey Hall 257, ext. 2416
Office hours: 2:30-3:30 Tuesday and Thursday, or by appointment

Required Texts:
Robert DeMaria, Jr., British Literature, 1640-1789: An Anthology (Blackwell)
Samuel Richardson, Pamela (Penguin)
Frances Burney, Evelina (Penguin)
Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (Oxford)
Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings (Penguin)
Recommended Texts:

Assignments: attendance and active preparation for and participation in class (10%); ID quiz (5%); mid-term or 25-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 course readings be completed, when possible, in advance of class discussions.

The ID quiz will be held on February 11. For those that choose to write it, the mid-term will be held on February 25. 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.