Changing the Subject:  
The Literature of the Middle and Later Eighteenth Century

SYLLABUS

January 5:  Introduction

I. Parodies of Learning in an "Age of Reason"

January 7:  Reprise:
Rochester, "A Satyr Against Mankind" (T=Tillotson)

January 12 & 14:  Grub Street's Anti-Epic:
Pope, The Dunciad (selections in T)

January 19 & 21:  Bedlam's Anti-Encyclopaedia:
Smart, Jubilate Agno (selections in K=Kinko's)

January 26 & 28:  The Book of Digressions:
Sterne, Tristram Shandy (selections)

II. Subjects of Criticism

February 2 & 4:  Augustan Controls:
Pope, Peri Bathous (T)

February 9 & 11:  Athenian Excesses:
Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful

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III. "The Rise of the Novel" and the Techniques of the Self

February 23 & 25. "Uppity" Women and "Writing to the Moment":
Richardson, Pamela (selections)
Fielding, Shamela

March 2 & 4: "Uppity" Men and the "Comic Epic in Prose":
Fielding, Joseph Andrews

March 9 & 11: Fiction and the Rights of Woman:
Wollstonecraft, Mary

March 16 & 18: Fiction and the Wrongs of Woman:
Austen, Northanger Abbey

IV. Changing the Subject

March 23: Men with a View:
Boswell, Life of Johnson (selections)

March 25: "Hyenas in Petticoats":
Charke, Narrative (K)

March 30 & April 1: Ethnographic Subjects:
Equiano, Narrative (selections)
Jewitt, Narrative

V. Poetry and the Subaltern:

Home Study: Augustan Statements and Counter-Statements:
Pope, "On the Characters of Women" (T)
Johnson, "Vanity of Human Wishes" (T)
Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village" (T)
Gray, "Elegy" (T)
Crabbe, "The Village" (T)
Collins, "Ode on the Poetical Character" (T)
Leapor, "An Essay on Woman" (K)
Duck, "The Thresher's Labour" (K)
Collier, "The Woman's Labour" (K)
Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (K)
Barber, "Written for My Son" (K)
Baillie, "A Mother to her Waking Infant" (K)
anon., "Epitaph on a Child Killed by Procured Abortion" (K)
Barbauld, "The Rights of Woman" (K)
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 late 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 well known. For example, this is the epoch that has long been thought to have invented the form of prose fiction known as the novel. It certainly is a period of tremendous experimentalism 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 women writers in English produce a "literature of their own." Thus after 1740 the subject of literature changes in a double sense: on the one hand, new notions of the individual are elaborated by the fiction of the day; on the other, members of subaltern groups start to exercise—and create—forms of literary expression. These two trends come together in another literary mode: (auto)biography. The eighteenth century virtually invents biography and autobiography, as we now understand it, and the genre was practised not only by Boswell, but by a host of "scribblers" that includes plebian women, African slaves, and demented conservatives. 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 the period by way of a chronological survey, I have grouped the material we will be reading under four headings (plus one for home study)—parodies of learning; subjects of criticism; the rise of the novel; and the changing subject of (auto)biography (for home study: the conflict between hegemonic and minority values in poetry). In each case we will be sampling both venerable classics and upstart contenders to the canon, and considering how common questions and devices serve to organize each textual field.

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Office: Hagey Hall 254, X2416
Office hours: 2:00-4:00 Thursday, or by appointment

Required Texts:
Richardson, Pamela (Penguin)
Fielding, Joseph Andrews and Shamela (Oxford)
Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (Oxford)
Sterne, Tristram Shandy (Oxford)
Boswell, Life of Johnson (Penguin)
Wollstonecraft, Mary and The Wrongs of Woman (Oxford)
Equiano, Narrative, in Gates, Jr., ed., The Classic Slave Narratives (Mentor)
Austen, Northanger Abbey (Oxford)
Jewitt, Narrative, in White Slaves of the Nootka (Heritage House)
Kinko's Course Reader

Recommended Texts:
Tillotson, ed., Eighteenth-Century English Literature (HBJ)
Gibaldi, ed., MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (MLA)

Assignments: attendance and active participation in class (10%); panel presentation (10%); 10 page paper (40%); and a final exam (40%).

The paper is due in class on March 11. Papers must be typed and double-spaced; if using a word-processor, laser print 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. 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.