The Effect of the Self:

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 and African 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 the period by way of a chronological survey, I have grouped the material we will be reading under four headings--group identity and the subaltern subject; science fictions; technologies of the self and "the rise of the novel"; and life writing and "the effect of the real". 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 257, X2416
Office hours: 2:30-3:30 Tuesday and Thursday, or by appointment
Required Texts:
Katherine M. Rogers and William McCarthy, eds., The Meridian Anthology of Early Women Writers (Meridian)
Samuel Richardson, Pamela (Penguin)
Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews and Shamela (Oxford)
Frances Burney, Evelina (Penguin)
Ann Radcliffe, A Sicilian Romance (Oxford)
Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey (Oxford)
Alexander Pope, Poems (Yale)
Christopher Smart, Poems (Penguin)
James Boswell, Life of Johnson (Penguin)
Olaudah Equiano, Narrative, in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., The Classic Slave Narratives (Mentor)

Recommended Texts:
Donald Greene, The Age of Exuberance: Backgrounds to Eighteenth-Century English Literature (McGraw-Hill)
Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century, revised ed. (Penguin)
Gibaldi, ed., MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (MLA)

Assignments: attendance and active participation in class and text questions (10%); mid-term or class presentation (your choice = 20%); 7 page paper (30%); and a final exam (40%).

For those that choose to write it, the mid-term will be held February 16. The paper is due in class on March 21. 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.