

EN 4/6643: The Eighteenth-Century British Novel
Fall 2011, TR 11-12:15
Professor: Peter DeGabriele

Slavery and the Rise of the Novel



This class will look at the development of the novel form through the lens of its complex and fraught engagement with the phenomenon of slavery. Beginning with Aphra Behn's *Oronooko* we will examine how romance conventions are pushed to their limit when confronted with the brutal reality of chattel slavery, and we will then see how this tension became crucial to Daniel Defoe's development of the realist novel. In the latter half of the semester we will focus on the representation of slavery in the sentimental novel and this genre's diverse and complex engagements with the political and economic realities surrounding slavery. We will see how these novels promoted ideas that would eventually be important to the abolitionist movement, but also how even the sympathy they sometimes generated for the victims of slavery could be converted into justifications of the slave trade, or into a political quietism that refused to definitively stand against the practice. As well as novels by Behn and Defoe, we will read works by Laurence Sterne, Olaudah Equiano, Henry Mackenzie and Jane Austen.

During the semester, you will write bi-weekly reading responses, compose two short essays and take two exams: one midterm and one final.