

EN 4/6643: The Eighteenth-Century British Novel
Fall 2017, 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. It will also look at the way the novel helped produce categories of race that made slavery possible, and that remain a part of our social fabric. Beginning with Aphra Behn's *Oronoko* 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. Later in the semester we will focus on the representation of slavery in the sentimental novel and this genre's complex engagements with the political and economic realities of slavery. We will see how these novels promoted ideas that were 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. We will read novels by Behn, Defoe, Laurence Sterne, Olaudah Equiano, Henry Mackenzie and Jane Austen; and philosophy by Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Hume.

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