

EN 4/6643: 18th Century British Novel

Fall, 2019: 11am-12:15pm

Professor: Peter DeGabriele

Women Writers and the Rise of the Novel



“Aphra, how do you say your last name?”

“You, Eliza, can say it however you like.”

This course will look at the invention and rise of the novel form as it was produced by women writers. Traditional literary histories of the novel focus on three male writers (Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding), and argue that they produced the novel as a new form of prose literature that was distinguished from more feminized forms of literature such as the romance. To do so, these histories sideline women writers, either by excluding them entirely from the history of the novel, or by denigrating their work as not literary enough or not modern enough to be included in the history of the novel. While this narrative has been challenged and largely overturned by contemporary criticism, it remains interesting and important to examine what kind of history of the rise of the novel is produced when we take women writers seriously. As such, in this class we will read only women novelists and look at what kinds of formal and political questions arise when we take this focus. For instance, is the novel really defined (as it is in the traditional masculinist narrative) by realism and an opposition to romance? Can the novel really be equated (as it is in the traditional narrative) with the bourgeois ideology of individualism? In order to explore these and other questions we will read work by Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen.