Novel Genres: Prose Fiction in Eighteenth-Century Britain

What is a novel? The answer to this question depends on who and when you ask. The full titles of Eliza Haywood’s works classified many of them as novels, but in the first decades of the eighteenth century “novel” was used almost interchangeably with “romance.” Samuel Richardson denied that his novels were novels at all; so too did Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding. In addition to romances, literary historians have associated what we can only uncomfortably call the eighteenth-century “novel” with other forms of literature including newspapers, secret histories, and conduct manuals. As we discuss the historical, cultural, and political circumstances out of which this long-lived and multifaceted form of prose fiction emerged, we will also interrogate the form itself by examining its changing features and functions over the course of the eighteenth century. What kinds of knowledge did different novelistic forms value? How did different novelists represent and organize that knowledge? What are the advantages of those forms? What are their limitations? The answers to these questions will inform our understanding of what critics have variously termed the novel’s origins, elevation, history, and rise.

Course Objectives

To develop analytical acumen and evaluative approaches to primary texts and critical arguments
To develop a greater understanding of the “novel” as a literary kind with its own history/histories
To develop knowledge of key examples of eighteenth-century prose fiction as well as the generic relationships among them

Assignments

Short Papers (3 x 15% each)
3-4 pages (900-1200 words). Each of these short papers calls for a concise, focused, analytic response to a specific aspect of the text. Prompts will be provided in advance, but need not necessarily be used; alternatives may be discussed with me in advance. These papers are intended to provide an opportunity for further concentrated critical consideration of issues that have come up during discussions in class and/or during your reading. As space is at a premium in these papers, you will want to avoid overarching introductions to the text or extended summaries; presume your audience is familiar with the text and quickly pursue your analysis of a chosen moment or passage and suggest its relationship to your broader critical interpretation of the text as a whole.

Grammar and stylistics will be taken into consideration as part of your grade. The word-count floor and ceiling are hard boundaries; make sure you land within them! Late papers will be subject to a grade reduction of 1/3 of a letter grade per day; papers more than five days late will automatically receive a failing grade. Papers should be submitted on paper and electronically in double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman with 1” margins and the appropriate information in
the header (your name, paper title, class, and date). Whenever possible, save your files as .doc (Microsoft Word) documents and in the following format: lastname-paper#.doc. For example: Rudy-paper1.doc.

Research Proposal (10%)  
2-3 pages (600-900 words). Each of you will present to the class their proposed topic for the research paper. These brief presentations will outline your argument or area of inquiry, the primary text or texts upon which you will focus (as well as any specific passages), and the key critical or secondary texts with which your examination will engage. Scholarly inquiry is a collaborative effort, even though writing and research are sometimes solitary. This will give you the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge and responses of your peers in advance of completing the research paper.

Research Paper (25%)  
10-12 pages (3000-3600 words). A brief list of potential topics will be distributed in class, but you are strongly encouraged to submit for approval a topic of your own choosing provided you do so in advance during office hours (or by appointment). This essay explicitly requires the use of multiple secondary sources and appropriate citation; using these sources will strengthen your skills as a researcher and improve your ability to perform the crucial scholarly work of engaging with and evaluating existing critical arguments and debates about your text(s) and area(s) of inquiry. Again, you may presume your audience’s familiarity with the primary text(s). The word-count floor and ceiling are firm; papers significantly below or above them will be subject to grade reductions. Papers of less than six full pages will automatically receive a failing grade. Grammar and stylistics will be taken into consideration as part of your grade. Late papers will be subject to a grade reduction of 1/3 of a letter grade per day; papers more than five days late will automatically receive a failing grade. Papers should be submitted on paper and electronically in double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman with 1” margins and the appropriate information in the header (your name, paper title, class, and date). Whenever possible, save your files as .doc (Microsoft Word) documents and in the following format: lastname-paper#.doc. For example: Rudy-paper1.doc.

Exams

Final Exam (10%)  
The final exam will consist of terms from our discussions and passages from the assigned texts in addition to one or two essay questions. These questions will require you to identify and/or discuss several of the works we have read in class.

Participation

Participation (10%)  
Your in-class participation is crucial to the success of the course; therefore, you should come to each class prepared to discuss the day’s readings. Contributions should be thoughtful and
substantive; your comments and responses will supply evidence of your having done the reading until further evidence is required in the form of graded reading quizzes that may be introduced at my discretion. You should always come to class prepared to speak to a specific passage in the text drawn from your reading and may be asked to do so at any time during our discussion. You can advance arguments, ask questions, introduce new topics, or make connections to ongoing and prior conversations by pointing the class to a passage or moment in the text. This will allow our discussions the freedom to develop as they may while keeping our critical approach grounded in textual analysis. Speak early, speak often, and always bring the text!

N.B. Eighteenth-century prose fictions often present different sets of unique and fascinating challenges to the modern reader. The differences and similarities of our selection of texts to later and perhaps more familiar works, though, is what makes the eighteenth-century “novel” such an interesting and rich field of study. We are reading only a small selection of works from the period, but that reading is nonetheless substantial. Please refer to the schedule frequently and try very hard not to fall behind.

You are of course also encouraged to make use of my office hours or make an appointment to speak with me at any point during the semester to ask questions about or discuss any aspect of the class. Email is the best way to reach me at all other times.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken in each class. You may miss up to two classes without penalty or explanation; further unexcused absences will result in a final grade reduction of one-third of a letter grade possibly failure of the course. Three instances of significant tardiness will count as an unexcused absence.

Intellectual Honesty

Please familiarize yourself with the terms of the Rhodes College Honor Code. All written work must be your own. Intellectual dishonesty of any type or degree will not be tolerated, and consequences for infractions may be severe. If you are ever uncertain whether you are violating the code, please contact me or another faculty member. Rhodes College will have access to turnitin.com this semester and we will utilize it for this class.

Classroom Decorum

Please refrain from eating in class. Beverages are permissible where circumstances allow. Please turn off cellular telephones and other devices. If you are unable to take notes without a laptop, you may use one in class; however, web browsing and checking email during class is absolutely prohibited.
Academic Accommodations

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services at x3885 as soon as possible.
Department of English
Expectations and Policies

A college course is more than simply a set of assignments; it is an intellectual process, one which requires active engagement from beginning to end in order to achieve its intended results. With this in mind, the Department of English has formulated a number of expectations and the policies that support them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to the syllabus for a particular course, you should address them to the instructor.

**Attendance:** The success of a course depends to a significant extent upon the presence of students alert and prepared to address the subject under discussion. Unavoidable absences should be discussed with the instructor, ideally before they occur. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of grade, in some cases to an F.

**Deadlines:** Writing assignments, test, etc., are carefully scheduled as stages toward the fulfillment of the course’s goals and cannot be indefinitely deferred without frustrating those goals. Brief extensions for good reasons may be permissible with the instructor’s prior approval; otherwise, late assignments will be penalized and may result in their not being accepted for credit.

**Submission of all work:** All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

**Intellectual honesty:** All work is assumed to be the student’s own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor’s prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher.
Syllabus

**Required Texts***

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
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<tr>
<td>Defoe, Daniel</td>
<td><em>Roxana</em></td>
<td>Oxford UP</td>
<td>0199536740</td>
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<td>Haywood, Eliza</td>
<td><em>Fantomina and Other Works</em></td>
<td>Broadview</td>
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<td>Penguin</td>
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<td>0199536996</td>
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<td>Sterne, Laurence</td>
<td><em>Tristram Shandy</em></td>
<td>Oxford UP</td>
<td>0199532896</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austen, Jane</td>
<td><em>Northanger Abbey</em></td>
<td>Longman</td>
<td>0321202082</td>
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*These texts are available at the bookstore. Any texts on the syllabus not listed here will be made available electronically or as handouts.

Week 1  
R, Aug. 26  
Introduction. The Eighteenth-Century “Novel”

Week 2  
T, Aug. 31  
Defoe, Daniel. *Roxana; or, the Fortunate Mistress*, Preface - 108  
R, Sep. 2  

Week 3  
T, Sep. 7  
Defoe, Daniel. *Roxana*, 221 - 330  
R, Sep. 9  
Haywood, Eliza. *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze*, 41 – 71; *The Tea-Table; or, a Conversation Between Some Polite People of Both Sexes*, 73 - 106

Week 4  
T, Sep. 14  
Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, Preface – 125  
R, Sep. 16  
PAPER 1 DUE  
Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela*, 126 - 250

Week 5  
T, Sep. 21  
Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela*, 251 - 376  
R, Sep. 23  
Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela*, 376 - 503

Week 6  
T, Sep. 28  
Fielding, Henry. *Shamela*, 1 - 44  
R, Sep. 30  

Week 7  
T, Oct. 5  
R, Oct. 7  

Week 8  
T, Oct. 12  
R, Oct. 14  
PAPER 2 DUE
| Week 9   | T, Oct. 19 | FALL RECESS – NO CLASS |
| Week 10 | T, Oct. 26 | Sterne, Laurence. *Tristram Shandy*, Volumes 3 and 4 |
| Week 11 | T, Nov. 2  | Sterne, Laurence. *Tristram Shandy*, Volumes 7, 8, 9 |
|         | W, Nov 3   | Screening, *A Cock and Bull Story*; Barret 034 @ 5:00PM, SHARP |
|         | R, Nov. 4  | *A Cock and Bull Story* |
| Week 12 | T, Nov. 9  | **PAPER 3 DUE** |
|         | R, Nov. 11 | Reeve, Clara. *The Progress of Romance* (HANDOUT) |
|         |            | **Research Paper Proposal Presentations** |
| Week 13 | T, Nov. 16 | **Research Paper Proposal Presentations, Cont’d** |
| Week 14 | T, Nov. 23 | Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*, 66-120 |
|         | R, Nov. 25 | THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS |
| Week 15 | T, Nov. 30 | Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*, 121-198 |
|         | R, Dec. 2  | **Final Review** |
| Week 16 | T, Dec. 7  | **Final Exam – PAPER 4 DUE** |