ENGL7264 / 8264: Eighteenth-Century British Literature
“Leisure and Literature in the Long Eighteenth Century”

Instructor. Dr. Darryl P. Domingo
Location. Patterson Hall T.B.A.
Time. Monday 5:30-8:30
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The present Age seems pretty well agreed in an Opinion, that the utmost Scope and End of Reading is Amusement only; and such, indeed, are now the fashionable Books, that a Reader can propose no more than mere Entertainment, and it is sometimes very well for him if he finds even this in his Studies.

—Henry Fielding, The Covent-Garden Journal No. 10 (4 February 1752)

Course Description. This course will examine the ways in which leisure is represented in the literature of the “long” eighteenth century (1660-1800), paying close attention to the complex effects of secularization, urbanization, and commodification both on mass entertainment and on pervasive trends in publishing. It will survey conceptions of entertainment during a particularly dynamic period of English cultural history, a period in which leisure and literature were being produced in entirely new ways and consumed on a thoroughly commercial basis. While showmen and impresarios actively catered to the eclectic and often eccentric desires of England’s pleasure seekers, professional authors looked for innovative ways to gratify a reading audience increasingly avid for entertainment. This course will ask how, on the one hand, the reading of literature came to be seen during this period as an important leisure activity and why, on the other hand, commercialized leisure emerged as a popular subject in commercial literature that alternately celebrated and satirized the notion of literature as leisure.