
ENGL 7264 / 8264: Eighteenth-Century British Literature News, Novelty, and the Early English Novel

Instructor.	Dr. Darryl P. Domingo	Office Hrs.	Monday 4:30 – 5:30pm
Location.	Patterson Hall 315	Phone.	(901) 678-3458
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Office.	Patterson Hall 407	Session.	Aug. 26 – Dec. 12, 2024

Every thing that is *new* or *uncommon* raises a Pleasure in the Imagination, because it fills the Soul with an agreeable Surprise, gratifies its Curiosity, and gives it an Idea of which it was not before possest.

—Addison, *Spectator* No. 412 (23 June 1712)

Course Description. In this graduate seminar we will examine the development of the newest and most controversial of the many inter-related genres competing for cultural ascendance in England between the late-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century: the eponymous novel. Although it is now difficult for us to think of the novel as something that could ever have been new, during its formative years the genre provoked anxiety among critics who dismissed it as an upstart without classical precedent and who associated novelistic publications with gossip and scandal, low-brow entertainment, and commercial journalism. ENGL 7/8264 will analyze why the early novel was so controversial, how early novelists attempted to legitimize prose fiction by theorizing it, and what caused this theory to be at frequent odds with the actual practice of writing and reading. Our particular focus will be on the surprising intersections of early novels and newspapers, both of which draw attention to the minutiae of daily life and cater to the public desire for contemporaneity—for the latest thing. How does journalism influence the form and content of novels? Why were so many influential novelists also professional journalists? How is “truth” constituted and what does the problem of “fake news” suggest about fictionality? What was *new* about the *novel* and how did writers like Behn, Defoe, Swift, Haywood, Fielding, and Johnson exploit the genre’s *novelty* to divert and instruct readers who were invariably also newsmongers?

Required Reading. *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*, ed. Erin Mackie (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998 / 9780312163716); Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, 2009 / 9780199538768); Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (Norton, 2003 / 9780393978629); Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, eds. Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins (Oxford, 2005 / 9780199536849); Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina and other Works*, eds. Alexander Petit *et al.* (Broadview, 2004 / 9781551115245); Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, eds. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Penguin, 2005 / 9780140436228); and Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford, 2009 / 9780199229970). Additional course materials will be posted on Canvas.

Learning Outcomes. Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Identify basic narrative forms and define literary terms related to the novel as genre.
- Describe the contributions of literary figures associated with the rise of the English novel.
- Distinguish the conventions and characteristics of the various literary and para-literary genres that influenced the development of the early novel, especially journalism.
- Appreciate the vital reciprocal relationship between literary text and cultural context in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England.
- Orally discuss critical issues concerning the development of the novel and write about them in a clear and coherent manner.
- Undertake advanced research, drawing upon the arguments and evidence of critical and literary-historical scholarship to illuminate the texts and contexts of the course.



“The Coffeehouse Mob.” Frontispiece to Edward Ward,
Vulgar Britannicus: or, The British Hudibras (1710), IV.
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