English 451: Eighteenth-Century British Fiction

Dr. Chandler

The novel as we think of it today gained marketability in the eighteenth century, mixing and matching the flavor-profiles of several older kinds of fictive narration and drama. This course will concentrate on fictional texts with a raconteur’s or storyteller’s sensibility: those that posit a perfect chain-reaction of events in a person’s development – that hold people hostage to a suppressed family back-story – or that use theatrical conventions to stage the telling and hearing of stories by characters. (Courtrooms and taverns are among the recurring venues.)

This thread will lead us toward confessional, Gothic, and comic fiction, and to a variety of critical approaches involving narrative theory, social philosophy, theater history, and popular culture. Four of the novelists I’ve chosen for this course were also playwrights.

The format of the course will be lecture-and-discussion. Students will be expected to purchase the print editions listed here, with the single exception of Tom Jones (see note below). A few other e-texts will be used as supplements (for example, The Iron Chest, a stage adaptation of Caleb Williams).

Assignments: brief response/quiz writings, critical essays, and two exams.

Required texts:


Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*. Penguin, ed. R.P.C. Mutter. ISBN 0140430091. For this one novel, you may substitute a complete, unabridged e-text of your choice as long as you can guarantee your own access to it during class discussions. The book is long, but its chapters are short, clearly numbered, and easily located. We will be skipping certain chapters and dividing the work (seminar-style) on some sections.


