

An Inclusive Cultural History of Early Eighteenth-Century British Literature.

By: James E. Evans

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Abstract:

During the late twentieth century the recovery of texts by women authors was an important scholarly project in English studies, which also led to paperback editions and, more recently, hypertexts for instructional use. At my university, which is probably typical, this availability contributed to two types of courses—those focused on early women authors, found in Women's Studies programs as well as English departments, and those still centered on male authors, with added novels, plays, or poems by women. Introducing their anthology *Popular Fiction by Women 1660-1730*, which could facilitate either type of course, Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti ask this question about the selections: "Do they constitute, taken together and separately, a counter-tradition or a rival and competing set of narrative choices to the male novel of the mid-century?" While recognizing that the answer is complicated, they set me thinking about an undergraduate course that would ask their question more generally about various kinds of literature early in the eighteenth century through systematic juxtaposition of texts by previously canonical male authors with works by "recovered" female authors. Juxtaposing *The Rover* with *The Man of Mode* or *The Female Quixote* with *Tristram Shandy*, for example, invigorated my teaching during the past decade; so I hoped that a course designed on this principle would be rigorous and interesting to students.

Keywords: women authors | cultural history | inclusive cultural history | literature | British literature | 18th century

Article:

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Before the Fall Semester of 1999, while I was preparing to teach one undergraduate course on the Restoration and early eighteenth century and another on the early British novel and reading recent criticism, two books encouraged me to pursue this proposal. William B. Warner's *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* brings women's amatory fiction together with the "rise" of male novelists to restore conflicts erased by previous accounts. "Like a garden or museum collection," Warner writes, "literary history turns the strife of history into a repertoire of forms. It does so by taking differences that may have motivated the writing or reading of novels within the specific historical contexts . . . and converting them into differences of a literary kind." If his cultural history prodded me to rethink the juxtaposition of fictional texts, Shawn Lisa Maurer's *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical* pushed me to historicize the construction of the masculine and the feminine in such a course. In her process of "unlearning assumptions" of European thought and feminism, Maurer seeks another restoration: "All too often, then, gender has come to mean 'feminine gender identity,' a classification that not only removes masculinity from the critical gaze but also fails to recognize the dialectical nature of gender formation." As she demonstrates, gender, like genre, is an ongoing cultural construction in early eighteenth-century texts.

Course Description My proposed course selects five pairs of writers for study in these contexts and highlights a set of reciprocally defining terms for scrutiny during students' reading and discussion—gender, class, author, print culture, and literature—terms that were being negotiated in the four decades following the Revolution of 1688, a crucial period in the refashioning of British culture. During the last Stuart monarchies and the first Hanoverian one, amid the contest of aristocratic and bourgeois ideologies and texts challenging patriarchy, the literary marketplace included more women writers and more forms (such as periodicals and novels) competing with poetry and drama for audiences. Students' reading assignments will reflect the variety of literature in the period: two plays, William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) and Mary Pix's *The Beau Defeated* (1700); two kinds of cultural criticism, Mary Astell's *A Serious*

Proposal to the Ladies (1694, 1697) and Some Reflections upon Marriage (1700) and Richard Steele's and Joseph Addison's *The Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1714); the poetry of Alexander Pope and Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, mostly poems from their collections of 1717 and 1713, respectively; two novels, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Eliza Haywood's *The City Jilt* (1726); travel books and poems by Jonathan Swift and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, with emphasis on *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *Turkish Embassy Letters* (written 1716-1718, published 1763).

Part One: The course begins with Congreve and Pix, whom I have paired often in a drama course since publication of the anthology *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies a decade ago*. Their plays, both performed by the company at Lincoln's Inn Fields in the same month, foreground the difficulties of being a playwright at a time when bourgeois ideology threatened theatrical pleasure; their solutions to this problem, one more satiric and the other more humane, demonstrate the directions of comic form at the turn of the century. Their plays also allow students to encounter, in this entertaining genre, issues of libertinism and female agency by contrasting a patriarchal plot with a more feminist one. Pix's active *Lady Landsworth* and passive *Younger Clerimont* usually generate considerable discussion when studied in relationship to Congreve's passive *Millamant* and active *Mirabell*; and the endings of these comedies present ambiguities in regard to the future happiness of various female characters. Finally, since *The Way of the World* soon entered the theater repertory and the literary canon, while *The Beau Defeated* did not, this pairing allows us to bring the canonical/recovery dichotomy and the historical contingency of evaluation into the course as part of students' inquiry from the outset.

Part Two: Following plays that represent marriage and the education of women, we will turn to Astell's more systematic, polemical treatment of these topics; her essays set the agenda for selections from Addison's and Steele's periodicals, which are experiencing a recovery of their own in scholarly interest. By considering the categories "Enlightenment feminist" and "bourgeois public sphere" and the rhetorics of harsh critic and conciliatory personae, students will begin to understand the active social construction of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* and the deconstruction of *Some Reflections upon Marriage*. For example, Bickerstaff's paternalist concern for his half-sister's marriage provides a stark contrast to Astell's view of marital enslavement; her exposure of the sexual contract sets off Mr. Spectator's linking "the fair sex" to the ends of empire. On the other hand, Addison's and Steele's program for reforming the conduct of men, as well as women, complements the Christian austerity of Astell's *Serious Proposal*. Their genres, essays formal and periodical, reflect two ways in which print culture accommodated the desire for reform in post-Revolution Britain.

Part Three: Here we will examine "poet" as the privileged case of authorship in the period and set poems from Pope's collection of 1717 (which includes *The Rape of the Lock*, *An Essay on Criticism*, *Windsor Forest*, *Eloisa to Abelard*, and shorter poems) alongside of poems included in and withheld from Finch's collection of 1713. The intersection of two models of authorship—

coterie and professional—with issues of gender also inform this section. Pope's Preface and confident neo-Horatian Essay distinguish his volume from Finch's divided public and private self-presentations (seen acutely in a poem like "The Introduction"). On the other hand, Finch's poems (such as "Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia," "Friendship between Ardelia and Ephelia," "The Spleen," "The Unequal Fetters") bring into sharp relief the gender ideology of the most celebrated and most often taught poem of the era, *The Rape of the Lock*. Finch's affectionate poems to her husband and her evocation of her secluded life evince an aspect of early eighteenth-century culture not found in these Pope poems. Studied together, the authors demonstrate alternate possibilities for Augustan poetry.

Part Four: Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Haywood's *The City Jilt* provide a case study of the popular literature so despised by the guardians of high culture like Pope, who mocked both of these professional writers in *The Dunciad*. Comparing the novels' protagonists, Moll and Glicera (who are both seduced and abandoned as young women), students will consider the problems of libertinism and money that shape these characters' lives and thus return to aspects of sexuality and marriage with which the course began; in addition, like the texts of Steele and Addison, the novels participate in the refashioning of male manners. As students examine the varying successes and independence of the heroines amid patriarchy, they will also explore the authors' different strategies of representation—Defoe's allegedly true story of Moll, "written from her own memorandums," and Haywood's "secret history" of Glicera, Melladore, and Grubguard. Finally, this pairing will permit discussion of the historical process that later welcomed this genre into the literary canon, even as it excluded women's amatory fiction by Haywood and others.

Part Five: The course concludes with a pair of authors whose best known texts, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, will bring the greater Britain of empire into the course even more fully as students examine the ways in which Swift and Montagu participate in or resist imperialist discourses.

In addition, their forms of publication—pseudonymously on the one hand and posthumously on the other—will allow additional consideration of the relationship of authors and print culture somewhat farther along in the century. The contrast of Swift's disillusioned male narrator with Montagu's voice, "a true female spirit of contradiction," foregrounds uses of rhetoric in their representations of gender ideology, which students will also compare in poems by each, including Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room" and Montagu's "The Reasons that Induced Dr. S. to Write a Poem Called 'The Lady's Dressing-Room.'" (As I was preparing the course proposal, I discovered that both poems appear in two of the most recent literature anthologies; they are printed separately in the new Longman Anthology of British Literature and printed together as additions to the 7th edition of the Norton Anthology of English Literature.)

Student Assignments

Having outlined the five parts of the course, I want to discuss student writing and speaking requirements. I plan to offer this as a writing-intensive course, part of my university's writing-across-the-curriculum program, which requires at least one course in the major and limits class size to 25 students. Students will keep a critical reading journal, which they submit weekly (about 2 pages). During each part of the course they will select one of the recurrent topics—gender, class, author, print culture, literature—as their focus for more specific, informal, and exploratory writing. For example, one student may write about an aspect of gender, such as the representation of widows, in *The Way of the World* one week and in *The Beau Defeated* the next; another student may consider how each play responds to attacks on dramatic literature as immoral through the use of comic characterization. Though I will provide some prompts for journals throughout the semester, students are free to find their own entree into the larger topics, perhaps by identifying a significant or problematic character, scene, or passage for their commentary.

Their journal pieces will subsequently serve as starting points for more formal critical writing, two essays of 4-6 pages each. Following the second and fourth parts of the course, students will submit these essays, which they develop from separate journal pieces on one of the pairs of authors. So the first paper will address texts by Congreve/Pix or Astell/Addison and Steele and the second, texts by Pope/Finch or Defoe/Haywood. Like their reading, students' essays will be comparative, for instance, examining aspects of authorship in Pope's and Finch's poems, such as contrasting the latter's ironic sense of herself as "an intruder on the rights of men" with the former's sense of entitlement to the classical tradition. At the end of the course, the sequenced writing assignments will culminate in a longer paper (10-12 pages), in which students revise and expand one of the previous essays by bringing in an additional pair of authors. For example, a student who had written an essay on gender ideology and the description of husbands in *Some Reflections upon Marriage* and *The Spectator* might develop his longer essay by bringing in aspects of the topic from Defoe's and Haywood's novels or from Congreve's and Pix's plays. Or a student who had written on women and fashion in *The Rape of the Lock* and "Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia" might bring in additional evidence from the Turkish Embassy Letters and *Gulliver's Travel* to expand her discussion of commodification.

The format of the course will include some short lectures, on topics such as the Revolution of 1688, attacks on the stage in the 1690s, and the development of copyright law, but there will be much more opportunity for discussion, as well as invitations for students to read aloud or summarize portions of their journals. Since one of my university's goals is to improve students' oral competency, I also plan to include structured opportunities, primarily in small groups, for students to guide class discussion about one of the topics of inquiry (see instructions in the Syllabus below). Working together, students in each group will select a particular topic, such as class, and then choose aspects of a text like *The Beau Defeated* that interestingly illustrate the topic, such as the resolution of this play (exposing the beau, praising the merchant, intermarrying upper and middle class characters). As part of their presentations, students will also select and

read aloud brief passages that support their interpretations. For instance, if, to present some ambiguities of bourgeois ideology in *The Spectator*, one group decides to contrast the Spectator's rhapsody at the Royal Exchange with the darker story of Inkle and Yarico, they should read excerpts from those numbers of the periodical.

Suggestions and Conclusions

Although the proposed course concentrates on texts from the four decades after the Revolution of 1688, the committee reviewing my presentation at the ASECS meeting asked me to provide other suggestions for courses that might include more of the long eighteenth century. Aphra Behn offers a number of possibilities

in the Restoration. While I have taught *The Rover* alongside of Sir George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* and Behn's poems with the Earl of Rochester's, I would like to pair her later play *The Lucky Chance* with William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and *Oroonoko* with Thomas Southerne's play based on her novel. I have taught Susanna Centlivre's comedy *The Busy Body* with George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem*, and now I want to juxtapose Congreve's *Love for Love* with her earlier play *The Gamester*. There are, of course, numerous juxtapositions available for teaching eighteenth-century novels, such as Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* or Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* with Frances Burney's *Evelina*, pairs which I have taught, and Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* with Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*, *Tom Jones* with Haywood's *Betsy Thoughtless*, Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian* with Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, which I have not. Among my previous pairings of texts from different genres have been selections from Burney's journals with Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* or Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and juxtaposed selections from Hester Thrale Piozzi's *Thraliana* and James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. While I have not experimented as often with poetry, I foresee interesting opportunities in teaching John Dryden's shorter poems with poems by Katherine Philips and/or Anne Killigrew; Mary Leapor's poems with those of another mid-century poet, perhaps Thomas Gray or William Collins; and William Cowper's poems with Charlotte Smith's (though she is more often taught with Romantic poets).

In developing my initial proposal for ASECS presentation, I looked again at Ann Messenger's *His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century literature*, a book of eight essays pairing male and female authors of the longer period (Dryden and Killigrew, Montagu and Gay, Pope and Brooke, and others). Messenger's Introduction, "Restoring the Picture," likens her critical project to that of the art restorer, cleaning "one of those large, busy eighteenth-century paintings": "For the Restorer wanted to see the whole picture: clear figures and dim, great figures and small, colors subtle and true, balance and composition not distorted by accidental highlighting." Sharing her comparatist agenda and applying it to pedagogy, I believe that my students will benefit from viewing the crowded canvas of early eighteenth-century culture with the figures and genres restored in clearer relationships to one another, relationships that do not always follow the museum guides of contemporary theory and criticism. The University of North

Carolina at Greensboro, established in 1891 as a normal school, was, for many years the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina; its founder expressed the public value of educating women in language similar to Astell's *Serious Proposal*. Given this institutional history and my thirty-year association with it, I feel obligated to present a restored picture of early modern British culture to our students. I plan to offer this course for the first time in the Spring Semester 2001.

Syllabus

Course Objectives:

- Experience in reading and interpretation of British literature of the early eighteenth-century;
- Knowledge of varied genres of this literature, including comedy, fiction, poetry, essays, periodicals, and letters;
- Understanding of issues in British culture integral to this literature, especially gender, class, authorship, and print;
- Experience in formal and informal writing about this literature;
- Experience in speaking about and oral interpretation of this literature.

Required Texts:

M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Volume 1, 7th ed. (Norton)
[Students should have this anthology on hand after taking a required survey course for majors.]

Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. David Blewett (Penguin)

Eliza Haywood, *Selected Fiction and Drama*, ed. Paula R.

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Backscheider (Oxford)

Paddy Lyons and Fidelis Morgan, ed. *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies* (Dent)

Erin Mackie, ed. *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator* (Bedford)

Katharine M. Rogers and William McCarthy, ed. *The Meridian Anthology of Early Women Writers: British Literary Women from Aphra Behn to Maria Edgeworth, 1660-1800* (Meridian)

Reading and Writing Assignments:

Week Reading Writing

1 Introduction

Part 1 Comic Drama

2 Congreve: *The Way of the World* journal piece

3 Pix: *The Beau Defeated* journal piece

Part 2 Cultural Criticism

4 Astell: selections from *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies and Some Reflections upon Marriage*

journal piece

5 Addison & Steele: selections from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* journal piece

Part 3 Augustan Poetry

6 Pope: Preface to *Works*, *Essay on Criticism* Finch: "The Introduction," "The Preface," "On Myself," "Fragment," "To the Nightingale," "A Ballad to Mrs. Catherine Fleming in London"

first essay

7 Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*, *Windsor Forest* Finch: "The Spleen," "Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia,"

"Friendship between Ardelia and Ephelia," "Clarinda's Indifference at Parting with Her Beauty"

journal piece

8 Pope: *Eloisa to Abelard* journal piece

Finch: "To Mr. F., now Earl of W.," "A Letter to

Daphnis," "A Nocturnal Reverie," "The Unequal

Fetters," "A Supplication for the Joys of Heaven"

Part 4 Novels

9 Defoe: Moll Flanders journal piece

10 Haywood: The City Jilt journal piece

Part 5 Travels

11 Swift: Gulliver's Travels, Parts I & II second essay

12 Swift: Gulliver's Travels, Parts III & IV journal piece

13 Montagu: selections from Turkish Embassy Letters journal piece

14 Swift: "A Description of the Morning," "A Description of a City Shower," "Stella's Birthday, 1719," "Stella's Birthday, 1727," "The Lady's Dressing Room"

Montagu: "The Toilette," "The Reasons that Induced Dr. S. to Write a Poem Called 'The Lady's Dressing Room,'" "The Lover: A Ballad," "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband"

15 Exam week final essay

Journal:

I expect you to write and submit about two pages during each week of the class, except for weeks excluded on the syllabus. Use this opportunity to focus your thinking about the literature you are reading. Try out ideas that you may want to explore more fully in an essay. You may follow the general suggestions below or more specific prompts provided during the course, or you may write on another aspect of the assignment that interests you. The only requirement is that, in writing about each pair of authors, you consider aspects of the same larger topic, whether gender, class, authorship, print culture, or literature. —Write about a significant or problematic passage, scene, or character.

—Write about a difficulty, resolved or unresolved, for a character, the author, or the reader.

—Write a new episode for a character or write a letter to a character or an author.

Essays:

1. Shorter essays: You will write two critical essays of 1,000-1,500 words (4-6 pages). Each essay will be based on journal pieces from one part of the course. You will submit one essay after the second part of the course (writing about either Congreve/Pix or Astell/Addison & Steele) and the other essay after the fourth part of the course (considering either Pope/Finch or Defoe/Haywood).

While the journal pieces will be your starting point, you do not have to repeat what you said in them. After more reading and discussion, your thinking may have changed or you may wish to highlight different aspects of the works; in addition, the emphasis of the essays should be more comparative. Do not use secondary sources; the thinking and writing in the essays should be your own. Your paper should have a clear thesis and should use evidence from the works, including brief quotations, to support your ideas. I will discuss my criteria for evaluating your papers later in the semester and will schedule conferences prior to your submitting the first essay.

2. Final Essay: At the end of the semester you will revise and expand one of your previous two essays into a longer piece of writing (10-12 pages), by bringing in an additional pair of authors who are pertinent to the topic you investigated earlier. It is not necessary that you already discussed the second pair in your other essay or, if you did, that you discussed them in relationship to the same topic.

Attendance/Participation: I expect your regular attendance and your active participation in class discussion. After four absences your participation grade will be lowered for each additional absence. Occasionally, I will ask you to read aloud or summarize a passage from your journal. While there will be some lectures, you will have a major role in shaping the direction of class discussion.

Group Presentations:

During the first week of the semester I will organize the class into small groups (usually three students), which will guide class discussion several times during the semester for periods of 15-20 minutes. You will receive a schedule of assignments after the groups are formed. Before each of your assigned classes, your group should meet together to select the general topic that appeals to you and to identify some interesting moments in your text (such as key ideas, important actions, significant speeches or descriptions, or passages that cause you difficulty). While you do not have to agree about the meaning of the text or your examples, you should work together in selecting points on which to focus the attention of the class. Your group should read aloud some brief passages, interpret them, and raise questions that involve other members of the class in discussion.

Grade:

Your final grade in the course will be based on the following:
shorter essay, 20% each; longer essay, 30%; journal, 15%;
participation/group presentations, 15%.

Selected Books and Articles on Reserve:

Laura Brown. *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.

Helen Deutsch. *Resemblance & Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

J. Paul Hunter. *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction*. New York: Norton, 1990.

Erin Mackie. *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Robert Markley. *Two-Edg'd Weapons: Style and Ideology in the comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Shawn Lisa Maurer. *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Michael McKeon. "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (1995), 295-322.

Ann Messenger, ed. *Gender at Work: Four Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990.

Ruth Perry. "Mary Astell and the Feminist Critique of Possessive Individualism." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23 (1990), 444-457.

Julie Stone Peters. *Congreve, the Drama, and the Printed Word*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Ellen Pollak. *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Roy Porter. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Penguin, 1982.

Jonathan Swift. *Gulliver's Travels: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Christopher Fox. Boston: Bedford Books, 1995.

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William B. Warner. *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.