Fall 2015, English 618 “Readings in Eighteenth-Century Literature”
Wednesdays 12:40-3:40 LAAH 504
Satisfies post 1660 requirement

Course description: This course is designed to provide an opportunity to read very widely in British literary texts written and performed during the “long 18th Century,” defined for the purposes of this class as 1658 to 1790s. It will also give a general overview of the dominant critical issues that have been / are being raised by the study of this period, introduce students to basic archival research, and give a general overview of authors and topics that one might use for teaching an undergraduate course on the period. Authors to be read may include Margaret Cavendish, George Etherege, Aphra Behn, William Wycherley, Delarivier Manley, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Alexander Pope, Penelope Aubin, Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson, Clara Reeves, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

It will be organized in to four sections – Restoration (1658-1685), Revolution I (1685-1714), Expansion (1715-1770), and Revolution II (1770-1790s). We will be looking for changes and developments in literary forms and practices, but also what continued and flourished. The course will be historicist in orientation, engaging such issues as material culture, performance studies, the formation of national and regional identities, conflicting religious cultures, and gender identity, but it will also seek to strengthen students’ abilities to read texts for their formal and aesthetic values. Assignments will be focused on improving students’ critical reading, writing, and research skills in preparation for more advanced independent research work in future specialist classes. To these ends, the seminar will also be making extensive use of the Cushing Library’s holdings in eighteenth-century texts, and members will acquire over the semester basic paleography for work with manuscript materials from this period, as well as work current involving Digital Humanities projects within the department.

Course Objectives: students who complete the course should gain a broad overview knowledge of representative texts of and critical discourses about the “long 18th Century,” and should enhance the skills necessary for more focused and advanced research projects in areas of particular interest to them.

Weeks 1-4: Introduction and Restoration. Theatrical cultures, public, political, and commercial; oral/ vernacular literate cultures; creating intellectual property, literary and scientific; forms of literary entertainment, fictions, sermons, and interactive periodicals

Weeks 5-7: Revolution I. The development of party politics and political literatures; the new morality and domestication of the arts; making “news”; women writers and commerce

Weeks 8-11: Expansion. Consolidating property, literary, scientific, and human (slavery); novel entertainments and changing tastes; consumer literary culture; satiric voices and the power of translation

Weeks 12-15: Revolution II. the rights of man, woman, child, animal; challenges to national identity and politics of the domestic; the “new novels” and poetics