**ENAM 225: Eighteenth-Century Literature**

Ryan Kaveh Sheldon (he/him/his)

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| Meeting Information | Instructor Information |
| Fall 2021  Monday and Wednesday, 12:15 – 1:30 PM  Axinn 229 | Office: Axinn 244  [rsheldon@middlebury.edu](mailto:rsheldon@middlebury.edu)  (802) 443-3622  Office hours ([Zoom](https://middlebury.zoom.us/my/rksheldon)):  Monday, 2:30 – 4 PM  Wednesday, 5 – 6 PM  and by appointment |

*This preliminary syllabus is subject to change at instructor discretion.*

**Course Description**

British society, politics, and culture shifted dramatically over the course of the long eighteenth century (1660 - 1830) in response to the ascendance of an empowered mercantile bourgeoisie, the expansion of empire, and increasing British involvement and investment in the transatlantic slave trade. In this course, we will consider how writers and thinkers of this period grappled with these economic, social, and political transformations by reading novels, plays, poems, and essays.

While our exploration will be ranging and adventurous, we’ll return to a cluster of core questions over the course of the semester. When, how, and why does commerce—considered as a set of mercantile practices and as a concept or ethos—emerge as an organizing framework for understanding society or its politics? How does this frame align with or interrupt more longstanding ideas about virtue, civic belonging, and liberty? How does the new commerce prompt engagements with ideas about vice or violence? How do Britons square notions of English liberty with the burgeoning economic importance and cultural salience of racial slavery? What kinds of social perspectives are enabled by “mobility” of certain kinds of people and the displacement and dispossession of others? What literary forms, modes, and genres were especially suited to taking on these questions, and why? Finally, how can addressing these questions in the context of the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world help us think through related issues in our contemporary moment?

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, students will:

* Develop and sharpen close reading skills
* Learn methods and techniques for analyzing and interpreting eighteenth-century literature
* Familiarize themselves with long eighteenth-century genres and forms
* Learn the outlines of the political and cultural history of long eighteenth century
* Construct analytical and interpretive arguments on the basis of textual evidence
* Develop an understanding of the relationship between literary writing, public discourse, and politics in the long eighteenth century
* Develop working theories about the importance of commerce and cosmopolitanism in the eighteenth-century cultural landscape
* Think critically about the histories of race, gender, and class in eighteenth-century culture
* Consider the relevance of eighteenth-century literature and thought to contemporary political and social questions

**Course Materials**

Required Texts

Anonymous, *The Woman of Colour* (ed. Lyndon Dominique)

*The Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Volume 3: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*

Susanna Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*

Henry Fielding, *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great*

Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*

All other readings will be available online, or through Canvas, library reserve, and the library databases.

NB: Students must purchase *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature* (Volume 3: *The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, second edition) and *The Woman of Colour: A Tale*. I is highly recommended that students purchase the listed editions of our remaining titles; however, alternate editions of all of these (*Bold Stroke for a Wife*, *The Interesting Narrative*, *Jonathan Wild*, and *A Sentimental Journey*) are available for free through Google Books, Project Gutenberg, and/or Eighteenth-Century Collections Online ([ECCO](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.middlebury.edu/ps/start.do?p=ECCO&u=vol_m58c)). Note that these editions will differ in pagination and may lack supplementary resources. If you choose to work with these editions, you should consult with me (or your peers) ASAP to identify common section breaks.

You should keep a physical notebook dedicated to this course.

**Major Deadlines**

* Essay 1: 10/2
* Midterm (take-home “exam”): 10/30
* Essay 2: 11/20
* Final Project: 12/17

All materials due in electronic copy by 11:59 PM on the dates listed.

**Assignments and Evaluation**

Your final grade in the course will be calculated according to the following rubric:

* Short Essays: 40 points\*
* Midterm: 15 points
* Weekly online discussion (questions and short, informal responses to peers): 10 points
* Engagement and participation (see below): 15 points
* Final Paper/Project: 20 points

\* You may revise less-than-successful short papers (“C” or below) for a new score at any point before the last week of the semester.

Short Essays

What should the short essay accomplish? For my purposes, this is a three- to five-page paper that poses an important (and debatable) question about one or more of our shared literary texts; offers an original thesis in response to that question; uses textual evidence to make a case for that “reading” of the text; presents that argument in an organized fashion; and does all of this in complete sentences. These papers will often draw on our class discussions, as well as the scholarship and theoretical writing we will read alongside the literature, but they should not simply rehearse arguments that we have encountered as a group. These characteristics define a successful paper (“B” range and above).

Formal (Graded) Writing in This Course

Developing as a literary scholar—and, for that matter, as a writer—takes time and practice. I recognize that students come into classrooms with varying levels of writing proficiency and experience in literary analysis. As I evaluate student work, I will, of course, bear in mind the criteria enumerated above in assigning grades to formal pieces of writing. But I will award grades that honor effort and engagement with our shared project (the study of literature focused on social and political crisis), as well as individual development, as much as writerly craft or analytical rigor. This is true for essays as well as writing on “exams” or projects. Good papers take risks! They extend questions or possibilities that we haven’t gotten to yet; they take on texts that you’ve struggled with (productively); they contemplate (and explain) *why* the argument is worth making in the first place; they demonstrate consideration of feedback you’ve received from me and your peers. “A-level” papers will accomplish one or more of these.

Less successful papers (“C-level”) often fail to pose a meaningful question (they are working with the text effectively enough but are not engaged with the themes of the course or the techniques of literary study we’re learning about) and do not reflect a sense of critical intention; it’s not clear why the author made this specific argument. Others *do* have a point to make, but do not draw from the text in question to demonstrate that the point is supportable or meaningful. Others do so in a disorganized fashion that makes the paper’s argument difficult to follow. Unsuccessful papers (“D-level”) do not include the minimal characteristics of a successful paper (see above) and are not engaged with course materials and discussions. “F-level” papers simply do not exist, or have been plagiarized.

My focus in evaluating your written work is providing you with feedback that will help you write your *next* paper. I will assign letter grades to short essays, the midterm, and the final. I am always happy to explain why you’ve received a particular grade.

Informal Writing

Our course will require you to engage actively in online and in-class discussions. For the first three weeks of the semester, you will respond online to discussion questions that I will pre-circulate. After this point, you will pose questions to each other in advance of each class meeting via Canvas. Each week, you will pose at least *four* questions (two per class meeting) and respond to at least one of these with a two-paragraph sketch (200 – 400 words). These activities are designed to prepare you for upcoming class discussions and to generate a living record of our work together as a course. You can think about them as opportunities to test ideas that you might develop in one of your formal papers. While your questions and responses might be written in a casual style, they should take shape in full and complete sentences. They should be specific, and, whenever possible, refer to particular moments in the text in question. I encourage you to quote the material directly to scaffold your questions and/or your responses.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will require you to respond in writing to several prompts. You’ll be able to choose from several options. This is a take-home exam; you may consult your class notes, discussion forums, and our shared texts. You should not assist each other with the completion of the exam or conduct outside research.

Final Projects/Papers

This course culminates in an act of original, research-based scholarship on a text (or set of texts) and topic of your choosing. It is guided by meta-critical questions about the nature of our collective work (and your individual efforts as a scholar): Why should we read the eighteenth century *now*? What does the study of eighteenth-century literature and culture allow us to understand about the world we live in today? Do the texts that we’ve examined as a class (or which you’ve read independently) speak to facets of our political, social, economic, and cultural lives? *Can* they do so in multiple ways, if they’re read against the grain or “contrapuntally”? You do not have to *answer* these questions, nor do you have to make any one of them the focus of your final, but you do need to bear them in mind when deciding on your topic.

Students who wish to write traditional papers should aim to produce a “conference paper”: a six- to ten-page paper that engages with current scholarship on a literary text (or texts) to make an original argument. Students who do *not* wish to write traditional papers are invited to submit “texts” that make use of other forms of writing or projects in other media altogether. You can, for example, make a zine, a Youtube video explainer, or a podcast episode. Such projects must be accompanied by a one-page statement explaining *why* the argument has taken its specific form. Finally, students wishing to produce creative work (poetry, fiction, or a lyric essay) for the final are invited to do so, provided they consult with me first. Creative projects will need to be accompanied by a three-page rationale.

On Participation

My expectation is that you will come to class ready to contribute your questions and ideas—even if those stem from feelings of stuckness, frustration, or boredom—and to respond sensitively to those of your peers. You should prepare for these discussions by taking notes, in whatever form you like, on our shared texts for each meeting. I recommend that you keep a reading journal for detailing your response to the reading as you’re doing it; this will make it easier to participate in discussions (whether in class or online) and keep track of ideas that you’d like to expand in our formal assignments.

Some of us are quieter than others—and there’s nothing wrong with this. You should make sure that you are communicating your engagement with the reading and our course of study, even if you aren’t especially vocal in the classroom. Ways of doing this include writing additional informal responses to your peers that take up points from class discussion and indicate what you think we, as a group, ought to consider in future meetings and/or sharing your class notes with me during office hours.

In the final analysis, class participation is about helping to create and sustain a space of shared inquiry. It is not about responding to every question or responding to every comment that your peers make. When it comes to class discussion, try to: consider and respond thoughtfully to questions or prompts, whether they’re posed by me or your peers; converse with your peers when you’re building off of their points (using their preferred names and pronouns); indicate when you’d like to change the course of the discussion; make space for others to talk if you’ve already contributed substantially to a given class discussion; voice disagreements respectfully; let me know if you’re feeling lost or confused, so that we can get things back on track.

If you prepare for class, engage the material and our conversations about it thoroughly, and cultivate a sensitivity to our shared space, you’ll earn a high participation grade (A). As the semester goes along, do not hesitate to send me email about concerns or questions you have about your participation.

**Weekly Workflow**

What does the course look like on a weekly basis? Here’s a generic breakdown of how you might approach the day-to-day work of the course, starting with the weekend before class:

Saturday – Sunday: read and annotate a set of shared texts; pose original questions on the texts to your peers; draft/develop/revise formal essays or projects

Monday: attend class; take notes toward essays/projects based on class discussion

Tuesday: respond to peer questions; read and annotate shared texts; pose new questions

Wednesday: attend class; take notes toward essays/projects based on class discussion

Thursday: respond to questions (if you have not already written an informal response this week); take notes towards essays/projects

Friday: reserve time for drafting, developing, and revising formal writing; read… (repeat)

**On Difficult Material**

The long eighteenth century witnesses the emergence and/or consolidation of many of the historical forces and systems that continue to structure our world: imperialism and settler colonialism; racism and anti-Blackness; capitalism; cisheteropatriarchy as a modern formation. Many of the texts that we’ll read examine—and sometimes reflect or even reiterate—the violence that defines these systems. Our work in this class involves examining these problems and crises critically; we want to think about how studying cultural history can help us to better understand and combat them in the present. You can assume that much of the reading will be “difficult,” in the sense that it will prompt us to confront themes, issues, and histories that are deeply uncomfortable and upsetting to grapple with. Slavery, dispossession, acts of gender-based violence, murder, and incarceration figure in several of our course texts.

I recognize that some of this material may be too difficult for some students to engage with, in that doing so would pose a risk to emotional and psychological well-being. I will do my best to flag material that is “difficult” in this sense. Discomfort can be productive. Distress is not! Because everyone comes into the class with different experiences and histories, it is up to you to determine where “discomfort” ends and “distress” begins. You are not obligated to attend class discussions that you feel will cause you undue stress or harm—I simply ask that you do me the courtesy of letting me know you’ll need to miss class, as you would for any other absence. You are also free to *leave* a class for this reason; in this case, send me a note later.

Because we are dealing with texts that are hundreds of years old—and often written from an imperial majoritarian perspective—we will encounter language that is violent. Racial, ethic, and gendered slurs should never be vocalized in class, even when reading from a shared text. This policy is designed to keep our classroom as safe as possible for discussion. See also the note on community building below.

**Academic Integrity**

As an academic community devoted to the life of the mind, Middlebury requires of every student complete intellectual honesty in the preparation and submission of all academic work. Details of our Academic Honesty, Honor Code, and Related Disciplinary Policies are available in [Middlebury’s handbook](http://www.middlebury.edu/about/handbook/ug-college-policies/ug-policies/academics/acad-honesty).

**Attendance**

If you need to miss class, please let me know as early as possible. Strictly speaking, there is no penalty for missing multiple classes. Bear in mind, however, that missing class frequently will make it difficult for you to satisfy the participation requirements and test out ideas that you’ll develop in your formal writing. The foundations of this course are student ideas—your presence and participation (as detailed above) matter! If you suddenly find yourself in a situation that requires you to miss several classes, talk to me ASAP, and we’ll figure out a way to get you on track (or, if necessary, call on College resources to help you navigate a more extended absence period). This is especially important given the reality of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

If you are feeling unwell, *do not come to class*! This will keep everyone as safe as possible.

**Late Work**

It is important that you turn in formal and informal writing according to our scheduled deadlines. Our course moves quickly—for that reason, it is in your interest to submit work on time, so that it doesn’t pile up as the semester goes on. If you need me to extend the deadline for one of our formal essays or projects, please let me know as far in advance as possible *via email* and let me know why you’d like the extension; note that *you are responsible for proposing a new deadline*. Because informal writing is linked to our class discussions, I don’t grant extensions on weekly writing/questioning work. If you are pressed for time and cannot complete an informal writing assignment, feel free to make it up later in the week or over the weekend—just make sure that you do so within a week of the original deadline. You cannot participate effectively in the course if you complete all of the informal writing at the end of the semester.

**Community Building**

For the duration of the semester, our classroom is a community. You are all—temporarily, at least—eighteenth-centuryists. Congratulations! One of our goals is to build and sustain an environment that allows us to learn and grow as critics, writers, and people. To do so, it is important that we maintain a space for conversation that is as open, inviting, and safe as possible. Here are some guidelines:

* Participate actively and considerately. Sometimes, participation means making space for others to contribute, offering connections between other points, and asking follow-up or clarifying questions.
* Address your fellow students as they’ve asked to be addressed.
* Be courteous and respectful, even in disagreement. Healthy debate is welcome; remember that we are here to debate texts and ideas. We are not here to debate anyone’s humanity.
* Be generous and patient with each other.

**Honor Code Pledge**

The Honor Code pledge reads as follows: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment." It is the responsibility of the student to write out in full, adhere to, and sign the Honor Code pledge on all examinations, research papers, and laboratory reports.

**Disability Access/Accommodation**

Students who have Letters of Accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact me as early in the semester as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For those without Letters of Accommodation, assistance is available to eligible students through the Disability Resource Center (formerly called Student Accessibility Services). Please contact Jodi Litchfield or Michelle Audette, the ADA Coordinators, for more information: Michelle Audette can be reached at maudette@middlebury.edu or 802-443-2169 and Jodi Litchfield can be reached at litchfie@middlebury.edu or 802-443-5936. All discussions will remain confidential.

**Land Acknowledgment**

Middlebury College sits on land which has served as a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Western Abenaki are the traditional caretakers of these Vermont lands and waters, which they call Ndakinna, or “homeland.” We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure. We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it.

**Classroom and Email Etiquette**

You may use personal devices in class to read course texts, take notes, and do group work. Please do not text, email, use social media, or do work for other classes on your device. If you are experiencing a personal emergency, you may take a call outside the classroom. You are free to check the time on a phone. Per Middlebury College COVID-19 policies, you *must wear a mask* at all times in our classroom.

I invite you to email me early and often with questions and concerns. Please begin your message with a salutation (“Hi Ryan” is fine) and include a subject line. I’ll do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours. If your issue is urgent and you haven’t received a reply in two days, feel free to send a follow up. Try to send your messages before 9 PM and during the workweek (Monday – Friday). I will not check my institutional email as frequently on weekends and may not respond to weekend messages until Monday morning.

**Additional Resources:**

**Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research**

The CTLR provides academic support for students in many specific content areas and in writing across the curriculum through both professional tutors and peer tutors.  The Center is also the place where students can find assistance in time-management and study skills. These services are free to all students. For more information on how to get the help you need, go to<http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/resources/ctlr/students>.

**Disability Resource Center\***

The [DRC](https://www.middlebury.edu/office/disability-resource-center) provides support for students with disabilities and facilitates the accommodations process by helping students understand the resources and options available and by helping faculty understand how to increase access and full participation in courses. The DRC can also provide referrals for students who would like to undergo diagnostic testing. Students who are on financial aid and have never undergone diagnostic testing can apply to the CTLR for support to cover the cost of off-campus testing. DRC services are free to all students.

\*(formerly called Student Accessibility Services)

**Middlebury Writing Center**

“The [Middlebury Writing Center](https://www.middlebury.edu/office/teaching-learning-research/student-resources/writing-center#about) offers free writing support by trained student and professional tutors. We care about your ideas and your development as writers and invite you to check out our resources even before you have a paper due for a class (or for your personal writing needs). Students are also welcome to bring in creative projects and other non-course-based writing.”

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1**

9/13 — Course intro and overview

9/15 — Eugenia Zuroski, “[This Ship We’re In](https://the-rambling.com/2020/08/07/issue9-zuroski/)”; [Portsmouth Treaty of 1713](http://www.1713treatyofportsmouth.com/treaty1.cfm) (1-3); [Dummer’s Treaty](http://caid.ca/Treaty1725.pdf) (Treaty of 1725); James Thomson, “[Rule Britannia!](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45404/rule-britannia)”; Phillis Wheatley Peters, “[To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47706/to-the-right-honorable-william-earl-of-dartmouth); “[On Being Brought from Africa to America](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45465/on-being-brought-from-africa-to-america)

**Week 2**

9/20 — Wheatley Peters, “[To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47706/to-the-right-honorable-william-earl-of-dartmouth); Edward Said, “Empire, Geography, and Culture,” from [*Culture and Imperialism*](https://janeaustensummer.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/culture_and_imperialism.pdf) (pp. 3-14); Jonathan Swift, “[A Modest Proposal](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1080/1080-h/1080-h.htm)”; Samuel Johnson, “[The Vanity of Human Wishes](https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/content/vanity-human-wishes-0)” (pp. 761-765 in Broadview)

9/22 — Bernard de Mandeville, [*The Fable of the Bees*](https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/846/0014-01_Bk.pdf) (pp. 3-58)

**Week 3**

9/27 — Susanna Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (Dedication through Act III—in the Broadview edition, pp. 40 - 95) [Also available on [ECCO]](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.middlebury.edu/ps/start.do?p=ECCO&u=vol_m58c)

9/29 — Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (Act IV - end, pp. 95 - 141

**Essay #1 due 10/2**

**Week 4**

10/4 — Joseph Addison, [*Cato, A Tragedy*](https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/1229/0714_LFeBk.pdf) (through Act 3)

10/6 — Addison, *Cato*, Act 4 – end; *The Spectator*, no. 55; Julie Ellison, “Cato’s Tears” (optional)

**Week 5**

10/11 — Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (in Broadview)

10/13 — Behn, *Oroonoko*; Richard Steele, *The Spectator* No. 11 (“Inkle and Yarico”); Catherine Molineux, “[False Gifts/Exotic Fictions: Epistemologies of Assent in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*](https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.middlebury.edu/docview/1424323901/fulltextPDF/E8617CB800434639PQ/2?accountid=12447)”

**Week 6**

10/18 — No class

10/20 — Henry Fielding, *Jonathan Wild,* Books I and II (in the Oxford World's Classics edition, pp. 7-84)

**Week 7**

10/25 — Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*, Book III (Oxford, pp. 85-124)

10/27 — Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*, Book IV (Oxford, pp. 125-181); “Fielding after Mandeville: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundation of ‘Good Nature’ ” (optional)

**Take-home midterm distributed 10/27; due 10/30**

**Week 8**

11/1 — Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (Oxford ed, pp. 1-63—through the "Starling" chapter)

11/3 — Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (pp. 63-105)

**Week 9**

11/8 — Ignatius Sancho, *Letters* (excerpts); Ramesh Mallipeddi, “English Subjects, African Slaves: Laurence Sterne and the Politics of Punishment”

11/10 — Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (Chapters 1-3: in Broadview, pp. 39-91)

**Week 10**

11/15 — Equiano, *The Interesting* *Narrative* (Chapters 4-6, pp. 92-145); Sal Nicolazzo*, “*Surveillance and Black Life in Equiano’s Atlantic”

11/17 — Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (Chapters 11-end, pp. 214-253); John Bugg, “[Equiano’s Trifles](https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.middlebury.edu/docview/1470423291/abstract/7D1E8E7490524E68PQ/1?accountid=12447)” (optional)

**Essay #2 due 11/20**

**Week 11**

11/22 — Anonymous, *The Woman of Colour* (pp. 51-127)

11/24 — No class

**Week 12**

11/29 — Anonymous, *The Woman of Colour* (127-189)

12/1 — Helen Maria Williams, *Peru* (ECCO)

**Week 13**

12/6 — Hannah More, “Slavery”; William Cowper, “The Negro’s Complaint”; Patricia Matthew, “[Serving Tea for a Cause](https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/serving-tea-cause)”; Lynn Festa, “Humanity without Feathers” (optional)

12/8 — Cowper, *The Task*, Books I, III, and IV; Samson Occom, from *A Short Narrative of My Life*

**Final Meeting**

12/13 —Nicolazzo, “Another 1987, or Whiteness and Eighteenth-Century Studies”; M. NourbeSe Philip, from *Zong!*

**Final Papers/Projects due 12/17**