

The Novel in England and Ireland, 1749-1949: Samuel Richardson to Elizabeth Bowen

Overview:

Today, the novel is taken for granted as the vehicle for prose fiction. But the origins of what we now call 'novels' can be traced to England in the mid-eighteenth century, where the idea of 'fiction' (as distinguished from falsehood or untruth) was still in the process of developing. The novel has since gone through many changes of dress, and although the 'death of the novel' has been predicted more than once, the form remains alive and well. This course will focus on a selection of moments over two hundred years in the life of a literary form, tying generic innovations in novel-writing to the broader political, cultural and personal contexts which shaped their composition: from how early writers of the novel grappled with the expectations and possibilities of the new form, to how the experience of war fed into the differently experimental novels of Elizabeth Bowen and Virginia Woolf.

Each class will begin with a brief talk on the topic at hand, in the style of a lecture, offering biographical, geographical, political or historical context. This will be followed by an analysis of excerpts from the texts under discussion, in the format of a Cambridge practical criticism class, and further discussion of the kind usually conducted in a seminar. Texts and passages to be considered will be supplied during the sessions. Students might wish to read or look at the works of some of the novelists mentioned in advance, but there will be no expectation that anyone has already read widely in any of these areas of literary history.

Outline:

1.	Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne	The mid-eighteenth century and the 'rise of the novel'
2.	Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, Sheridan Le Fanu	The Gothic novel
3.	Charles Dickens and George Eliot	Realism and the nineteenth-century novel
4.	Oscar Wilde and Henry James	The Fin de siècle novel
5.	Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen	Modernism and the novel

Dr Imogen Free recently received her PhD in English from King's College London. Her doctoral thesis examined the politics of sound in late modernist women's writing and she is interested more widely in the connection between the sensory and social politics in 19th and 20th century literature. Her work can be found in the *Edinburgh Companion to Literature and Sound Studies* (2024) and *Women: A Cultural Review* (2020). Imogen is also a dedicated and enthusiastic lecturer with experience teaching across periods and forms at Anglia Ruskin University, King's College London and Queen Mary, University of London.