
ENGL 3404 - 001: Studies in Popular Texts “The Novel in Letters”

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| Instructor. | Dr. Darryl P. Domingo | Office Hrs. | Mon. / Wed. 11:40 – 12:40 |
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| Office. | Patterson Hall 407 | Session. | Aug. 28 – Dec. 14, 2023 |

Course Description. At a critical moment in *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Samuel Richardson’s eponymous heroine and principal narrator explains in a long letter to her parents that her situation “surely would furnish out a surprizing kind of Novel, if it was to be well told.” Pamela’s words turned out to be prescient, as her letters helped to establish *epistolary fiction* as both one of the most popular and most durable of literary genres. The epistolary novel is a work of prose fiction whose plot is entirely developed through correspondence, whether through an exchange of letters between multiple characters or through the journal entries, diary jottings, or personal recollections of only one character. This section of “Studies in Popular Texts” will survey the novel in letters over approximately 350 years, inviting students to examine the origins of the genre in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the revival and proliferation of epistolary forms in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Students will read a work of amatory fiction, a sentimental novel, a bawdy parody, a gothic thriller, an exchange between an experienced devil and his apprentice, a winner of the Pulitzer Prize, a graphic novel in postcards, a “progressively lipogrammatic epistolary fable,” and a post-modern digest of inter-office e-mails, all in an attempt to understand why letters continue to appeal to authors who wish to tell a good story and to audiences who wish to read one.

Required Reading. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, eds. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford, 2001 / 9780199536498); Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies, Martin C. Battestin, and Thomas Keymer (Oxford, 2008 / 9780199536986); Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford, 2011 / 9780199564095); C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (HarperCollins, 2001 / 9780060652937); Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (Penguin, 2019, 2003 / 9780143135692); Nick Bantock, *Griffin and Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence* (Chronicle Books, 1991 / 9780877017882); Mark Dunn, *Ella Minnow Pea: A Novel in Letters* (Anchor, 2002 / 9780385722438); Rainbow Rowell, *Attachments: A Novel* (Plume/Penguin, 2012 / 9780452297548).