**English S-141**

**The Enlightenment Invention of the Modern Self**

Harvard University, summer 2021

Tuesday/Thursday 8:30-11:30

Leo Damrosch (damrosch@fas.harvard.edu, leodamrosch.com)

**RATIONALE OF THE COURSE:** The course will be devoted to close reading of works, written between the 1670s and the 1790s, by writers who struggled to under­stand the paradoxes of the self at a time when traditional religious and philosophical formulas were breaking down, and who explored fundamental questions that have remained important and troubling ever since. The philos­opher Charles Taylor speaks of “the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being em­bedded in nature which are at home in the modern West.” Yet these convictions coexist with a very different set of assumptions according to which the self is socially conditioned and enjoys neither individuality nor freedom except as consoling illusions. All modern thinkers about psy­chology and society have had to recognize the tension between these two modes of thinking. On the one hand, we share a strong intuition of human indi­viduality and self-sufficiency; on the other hand, we share an equally strong intuition that the self is shaped by exterior forces. Modern theorists have much to tell us about this subject, but rather than permit the interpretation of texts to be controlled by recent theoretical paradigms, the course will go back behind them to consider the seedbed from which such theories originally grew. We continue to live within the con­ceptual framework that was developed during the Enlightenment, and a return to its origins, when ideas competed with ideas and had not yet hardened into systems, can be profoundly in­structive. It is also instructive to look closely at the ways in which literary techniques, under­stood in the broadest sense, do more than merely communicate ideas: they embody and even create them, and it has become increasingly apparent that the experience of the self is best understood in nar­rative forms, whether presented as diaries, auto­biographies, or novels.

**CLASS ATTENDANCE:** you are expected to participate “live” in each class session, except in cases of illness or other emergency. If that should happen, please let me know by a personal email.

During class, please do not use the “chat” feature, which I find distracting. There will be no need to mute your mic so long as people courteously take turns speaking; if you would like to ask a question, please wave your hand so that I can see it on my monitor.

**WRITING REQUIREMENT:**

The grade will be based on **two short papers** (**2-3 pages due July 13**, and **4-6 pages due July 27**) and a **final exam** (**Aug. 5**), which will be open-book, open-notes, and will be taken online (as will be ex­plained more fully during our first class meeting). Suggestions for the papers are given in the PAPER TOPICS page.

Please submit each paper as a **Word document** attached to a **personal email** to me, rather than through Canvas. I will type in my comments in the body of your paper, and return it by email. The short papers, the final exam, and participation/engagement in class will each count for approximately 1/3 of the final grade, but I will also take into account improvement over the course of the summer.

As to formatting, use double space in whatever font you like. There is no need for footnotes when you’re quoting from the text itself – you can just give page numbers in parentheses. If you’re using different editions than the ones listed below, indicate which ones they are.

**Graduate students** will take the exam, but instead of the short papers will write a 12-15 page **term paper** (due date to be determined later). You will develop your topic in consultation with me, in one or more private Zoom conferences.

**Suggestions for paper topics** are given in the folder on the website entitled **PAPER TOPICS**.

**ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES:**

The Summer School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. For more information, visit:

http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/accessibility-services

Please note that since the final exam will be open book and not proctored, you will not need to make special arrangements if you need extra time.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STANDARDS:**

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity (http://www.summer.harvard.edu/policies/student-responsibilities) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Resources to Support Academic Integrity:

<http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resourcespolicies/resources-support-academic-integrity>

There you will find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:

<https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>

and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

 **IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THE READING LOAD:**

Even in abridgment, the reading assignments may be difficult for students with multiple commit­ments. Please be assured that you will not be criticized (let alone penalized) so long as you do **read at least parts of each assignment with thoughtful attention**. The important thing is to read enough to enter into the intellectual and imaginative world views that they embody. In class, we will look closely at specific passages, and that will encourage group engagement with these works, whether or not you have been able to read all of the sections that were assigned for each day.

**TEXTS:** I will be using these editions, which can be ordered from Amazon or (as used books) from Abebooks.com. However, for our Zoom sessions I will show every passage on the screen that I’ll be looking at with you, so if you have different editions, that won’t be a problem.

 Boswell, James, *London Journal* (McGraw-Hill, reprinted Yale; there is also a Penguin edition)

 Diderot, Denis, *Jacques the Fatalist* (Penguin)

Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew and d’Alembert’s Dream* (Penguin)

 Laclos, Choderlos de, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Penguin)

Lafayette, Mme., *The Princesse de Clèves* (Penguin)

 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Confessions* (Oxford – by far the best available translation)

 Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (Penguin)

**website**: **required readings** for some class meetings, on the website in the **ENLIGHTEN­MENT TEXTS folder.**

June

Class 1 Tu 22 INTRODUCTORY CLASS

Class 2 Th 24 Some seventeenth-century religious versions of the self

**website:** **bunyan.text, pascal.text**

Augustine ­on the divided self and compulsive sinning; the body as one’s enemy; externali­zation of unwanted aspects of the self in Bunyan’s allegory; Pascal’s silent universe and “hidden God.”

Class 3 Tu 29 **Lafayette, *The Princesse de Clèves***

**website:** **rochefoucauld.text**

The pre-Enlightenment psychology of *mondanité* (worldliness) as viewed by La Roche­foucauld; love as an affliction and as a power struggle, seen from a woman’s point of view; the potentially de­structive con­sequences of sincerity; problems of interpretation in a novel with a reticent narrator

July

Class 4 Th 1 Empiricist philosophy and psychology

**website**: **hobbes.text, locke.text, hume treatise.text, rasselas.text**

The tension between the ego­tistical self and the social order in Hobbes; Locke’s theory of liberal individualism, based on the self as a *tabula rasa* that is gradually inscribed with data from outside, together with its political implications; in the philo­s­ophy of Hume, the self as a mere fiction, sustained only by instinct and social con­vention.

Class 5 Tu 6 **Boswell, *London Journal*,** in full if possible, but at least 39-161, 250-333

 **website**: **rambler 60.text**

The quest for self-knowledge, but also for pleasure and worldly success, of a well-born young Scot whose main goal is to postpone going to law school; increasing cultural valuation of emotion (“sentiment”); issues surrounding mental illness (“melancholy”).

Please focus especially on these episodes:

 pp. 39-42: Boswell’s plan for his journal, and farewell to Edinburgh

59-62: buying a sword (worn by gentlemen as a mark of status)

83-89, 137-149, 158-61: the affair with Louisa

260: Boswell’s first meeting with Samuel Johnson, who becomes his mentor and friend

263-64: the girls at the Shakespeare Tavern

272-73: Boswell as a “blackguard”

Class 6 Th 8 **Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew*** and ***D’Alembert’s Dream***: at least 33-97, 149-233

The self divided between an idealistic “I” and a cynically role-playing “he;” specula­tions about human experience as reducible to material phys­icality.

Class 7 Tu 13 **Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist***, in full if possible, but at least 21-45, 67-76, 100-203, 249-254

Paradoxes of narrativity, self-presentation, and “truth” in a freewheeling anti-novel, with the implication that people are nothing more than the roles they play, and with a sub­text of deterministic materialism**.**

**FIRST PAPER DUE**

Class 8 Tu 15 **Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*** (67-137 only, excluding Rousseau’s notes)

Rousseau’s groundbreaking essay on anthropology and human nature, placing the blame for man­kind’s problems squarely on society and on the inauthenticity it encourages.

Class 9 Tu 20 **Rousseau, *Confessions***, Books 1-4 (pp. 5-171)

A work of astounding originality, the model for most autobiographies ever since, empha­siz­ing child­hood ex­perience and personal relationships, seeking to explain personal­ity through imaginative recon­struction of crucial formative episodes, and showing how Rousseau’s immensely influential writings were inspired by his own life experience.

Class 10 Th 22**Rousseau,** ***Confessions***, Books 5-7 (pp. 172-338), and the following **excerpts**: beginning of Book 8 (340-49), middle section of Book 9 (404-439 – the wealthy Mme d’Épinay had pro­vided a country retreat for Rousseau and Thérèse at the “Hermitage” near Paris), first page of Book 12 (p. 576 – Rousseau had to flee France when the religious views in his *Émile* aroused official outrage), final pages of Book 12 (621-630)

Class 11 Tu 27**Franklin, Smith, and Casanova**

 **website**: **franklin.text, casanova.text**

Three Enlightenment lifestyles: Franklin the archetypal self-made American, whose en­gaging account of self-invention resolutely ignores inner complexities; Adam Smith’s theory of competi­tive individualism, with implications for both self-awareness and social inter­action; and the highly readable memoir of a Venetian adventurer who lived by his wits, embodying – in a sometimes disturbing way – the Enlightenment ideal of doing what comes naturally.

Class 12 Th 29**Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses***

read as much as possible, but **at least these numbered Letters**: 1-10, 15, 20-23, 38-44, 47-48, 61-66, 71, 79, 81, 84-87, 90-91, 93-106, 113-115, 123-125, 128, 130, 138-139, 141-149, 161-175.

An epistolary novel of seduction, love, and betrayal that becomes an ­abyss of mis­direc­tion and deception, exposing the moral bank­ruptcy of a cynical social world that seems able to defeat any possible alternative.

 Class 13 Tu 3 **Blake**, excerpts from ***Songs of Innocence and of Experience*** and ***The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*** – and, if you have time, look at some of the original “illuminated” versions, combining images with texts, at the (free) Blake Archive, blakearchive.org.

 **website**: **blake.text, hume religion.text**

A profound attempt to rethink the dilemmas of psychology and socie­ty in a symbolic multi-media mode that challenges readers/viewers to new kinds of imagi­native insight. NOTE: in class we will hear several interpretations of Blake songs by the singer/ songwriter Greg Brown. The whole album, entitled *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, is well worth listening to.

 **SECOND PAPER DUE**

Class 14 Th 5 **FINAL EXAM**