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Martha F. Bowden, Karen B. Gevirtz et Jonathan Sadow

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Dialogue, Selection, Subversion: Three Approaches to Teaching Women Writers

Martha F. Bowden
Kennesaw State University

Karen B. Gevirtz
Seton Hall University

Jonathan Sadow
State University of New York, Oneonta

This essay began its life as an Aphra Behn showcase panel, chaired by Michael Rex of Cumberland University, at the combined CSECS/ABS/NEASECS conference at McMaster University in October, 2011. The three writers describe very different courses, taught at different institutions, as the following demographics and curricular descriptions indicate.

Karen B. Gevirtz teaches at Seton Hall University, a diocesan Roman Catholic university with a seminary. The Archbishop of Newark chairs the Board of Regents and presides over the Board of Trustees, which together oversee the university's academic, Catholic, and corporate identities. Seton Hall was founded in the mid-nineteenth century in New Jersey to serve the immigrant Irish community in Newark and still attracts a large Catholic and immigrant population. This course was a graduate seminar in the MA program, which attracts a mix of younger students continuing directly from receiving their BA at Seton Hall and older students, most of whom teach secondary school. This course had eleven women and one man, but normally Gevirtz's graduate seminars are evenly split between the genders. The description for this section indicates a graduate-level survey of eighteenth-century literature; it is, in Gevirtz's words, "a literature course in which gender

plays a role," as opposed to a "dedicated gender studies" class. The problem she addresses is students' perception that a reading list in which half or more of the writers are women is either dominated by or exclusively about women and the anxiety that perception causes. Her response is to insert units into the course in which she demonstrates men and women writers in dialogue about issues that are not gender related.

Martha F. Bowden teaches at Kennesaw State University, a comprehensive university of 25,000 students in the Georgia State University system. Although predominantly populated by students from the local community, the university has a diverse blend of nationalities and ethnicities, and its student body includes many older learners. The political allegiances of the students are as varied as their backgrounds; so is their level of preparation. The context of the course is an undergraduate Gender Studies class that, while part of the English major, attracts students from other disciplines, some of whom are doing the minor in Gender and Women's Studies. While the English majors may have a head start in the disciplinary conventions of writing in an English class, they are no more likely to have any knowledge of eighteenth-century British literature than other students. The concern in constructing this syllabus is that women writers are too often represented solely or primarily by novels, thereby erasing the wide range of genres in which they actually wrote.

Jonathan Sadow teaches at the State University of New York at Oneonta, one of thirteen Master's universities in the SUNY system. It has recently risen in the rankings, in part because it offers a small-campus experience for a much smaller cost than private institutions. However, it is still a regional institution; most students come from either suburban Long Island or upstate New York. Education is one of its largest programs and a majority of English students are dual Adolescent Education Majors or Elementary Education students with an English concentration. There is a small Women's and Gender Studies program, but most of these students are not English or Education majors. Although there have been growing discussions around diversity issues, it is a rural campus and the majority of the students are socially tolerant but apolitical. This undergraduate course has been taught twice at the 200 level. Although the overwhelming majority of the students are female—there has been one male student—most

are also there to fulfill a period requirement and have no background in either eighteenth-century literature or women's studies. Jonathan Sadow writes about an undergraduate course that is overtly about genre theory—the development of prose fiction from romance to the Gothic—as an "adaptive approach." In his course, gender theory is slipped in rather than foregrounded.

While all writers are dealing specifically with problems of representing gender in the classroom, they also confront a more general problem for instructors in eighteenth-century studies: students' lack of knowledge of the history and culture of the period. In many cases, that ignorance can help the course—there are fewer prejudices and assumptions—but makes it all the more necessary that women writers are presented accurately as writers of a range of texts engaging in dialogue with all writers, not just each other, and having a formative influence on the development of popular genres.

As the remainder of this essay illustrates, the competing demands of coverage and course requirements result in quite different decisions on the part of the professors. For example, Martha Bowden is concerned to broaden students' experience of eighteenth-century texts from novels to the full range of writing open to professional writers, while for Jonathan Sadow, a prose fiction class was desirable in order to balance survey offerings. On the other hand, the mix of genres is necessitated by the survey nature of Karen Gevirtz's graduate seminar. Neither Karen Gevirtz nor Jonathan Sadow can choose exclusively women's texts; Martha Bowden's course allows this focus while requiring an emphasis on gender.

For ease of reference, complete reading lists for each course are contained in the appendix at the end of the essay.

Karen Gevirtz: Teaching Women Writers in Dialogue

My experiments with teaching women in dialogue were catalyzed by a recurring event: students complaining that there are too many women writers on my syllabus. When more than half of the authors are female, at least one female student asks, "Why are we only reading women in this class?" These students equate "more than half" with "all," and view "all" as frightening or monstrous in some way. My students have become sensitive to gender representation—they notice

whether or not there are women—but their sensitivity cannot overcome, or perhaps is producing, considerable anxiety about women's presence. University demographics do not explain this reaction: like the syllabi that trigger this question, the Seton Hall student population is more than half female, and the typical English class reflects this imbalance. Nor are students unable to engage with difficult issues close to home: Seton Hall's racially and economically diverse population is, in my experience, comfortable discussing race and class. Certainly no one has complained about reading too many people of color, even in the genre survey course I taught where sixty percent of the readings were by African American authors. Instead, it seemed to me that gender and the way it was presented were catalyzing a particular reaction. Instead of empowerment, my "liberatory curriculum," to borrow a phrase from Jordan Titus, was generating anxiety, which is not an unusual phenomenon; my students' recurring questions therefore should be seen as requests for reassurance rather than information.[1] I began to wonder whether I was accomplishing my goals in teaching women writers, and then to reexamine those goals.

To answer these questions, I stripped myself of all my expectations, values, and experiences that had become my pedagogical position so I could get at the root of why I teach women writers. Then I could decide if I needed a new method for teaching them and if so, what it might be. I realized that I have two potentially conflicting goals in my literature courses:

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1. Jordan Titus, "Engaging Student Resistance to Feminism: 'How is this Stuff Going to Make us Better Teachers?,'" *Gender and Education* 12 (2000): 21–22; Toni King, "'Is This Course Just about Opinions or What?' Scripted Questions as Indicators of Group Development in an Introduction to Women's Studies Class," in *Teaching Introduction to Women's Studies: Expectations and Strategies*, ed. Barbara S. Winkler and Carolyn DiPalma (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 89. For a consideration of forms of student resistance to feminist pedagogy, see for example Delane Bender-Slack, "The Role of Gender in Making Meaning of Texts: Bodies, Discourses, and Ways of Reading," *Feminist Teacher* 20, no. 1 (2009): 15–27; Melanie Moore and Richard Trahan, "Biased and Political: Student Perceptions of Females Teaching about Gender," *College Student Journal* 31, no. 4 (1997): 434–45; Thomas Lee Budesheim and Arlene Lundquist, "Consider the Opposite: Opening Minds Through In-Class Debates on Course-Related Controversies," *Teaching of Psychology* 26, no. 2 (1999): 106–10.

1) I want students to be sensitive to gender: to its impact and construction, to its role in the creation and consumption of eighteenth-century British literature.
2) I want students to find it perfectly normal to talk about men and women writers. The world is co-ed, literature is co-ed, and eighteenth-century British literature is co-ed.

There is plenty of feminist pedagogy to support my first goal. In the field, there are works like Bonnie A. Nelson and Catherine B. Burroughs' *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* or Stephen C. Behrendt and Harriet Kramer Linkin's *MLA Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period*.[2] There are numerous studies suggesting ways of teaching women's texts or gender studies, and an equally large number of resources on feminist pedagogy and multicultural pedagogy.[3]

A great deal of feminist pedagogy assumes the efficacy of adding to course content and of changing classroom management both to be more inclusive and to render differences more visible and accepted. Such approaches tend to assume that, eventually, students will become habituated to and comfortable with difference as underlying grounds for knowing. Some studies support this latter assumption, noting that courses dedicated to diversity or gender issues generally make students more tolerant of difference and less tolerant of inequality.[4] As Karen J.

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2. Bonnie A. Nelson and Catherine B. Burroughs, eds., *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (New York: MLA, 2010); Stephen C. Behrendt and Harriet Kramer Linkin, eds., *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period* (New York: MLA, 1997). See also Anne Williams, "The Horrors of Misogyny: Feminist Psychoanalysis in the Gothic Classroom," in *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: MLA, 2003), 72–83.

3. See for example Gail E. Cohee, Elisabeth Däumer, Theresa D. Kemp, Paula M. Krebs, Sue Lafky, and Sandra Runzo, eds., *The Feminist Teacher Anthology: Pedagogies and Classroom Strategies* (New York: Teachers College, 1998); Carlyn Zerbe Enns and Ada L. Sinacore, eds., *Teaching and Social Justice: Integrating Multicultural and Feminist Theories in the Classroom* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2005); Maralee Mayberry and Ellen Cronan Rose, eds., *Meeting the Challenge: Innovative Feminist Pedagogies in Action* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Lucy E. Bailey, "The 'Other' Syllabus: Rendering Teaching Politics Visible in the Graduate Pedagogy Seminar," *Feminist Teacher* 20, no. 2 (2010): 139–56; Leda Cooks and Chyng Sun, "Constructing Gender Pedagogies: Desire and Resistance in the 'Alternative' Classroom," *Communication Education* 51, no. 3 (2002): 293–310.

4. See for example Kim A. Case and Briana Stewart, "Changes in Diversity Course Student Prejudice and Attitudes Toward Heterosexual Privilege and Gay

Warren points out, however, changing content is insufficient without also transforming a constellation of environmental and pedagogical factors, including methodology. Certainly in my experience, changing the reading and orientation of the course was not producing the results I sought.[5] In the first case, I had already been using methods based in the assumption that the discussion of women's texts should occur within the context of gender sensitivity, but this pedagogy seemed to be producing one kind of conflict while it solved another. In the second case, my courses are literature courses in which gender plays a role, not dedicated gender studies courses.[6] In this regard, my courses differ from those described in this article by Martha Bowden and Jonathan Sadow, which are designed to serve both purposes. Ultimately, Delane Bender-Slack's reflection that "perhaps including gender as a discussion topic is not as important as how our students talk about gender and how it impacts the participants in that discussion" offers a rationale for remaking my pedagogy without jettisoning my values.[7]

So I started from scratch. In spring 2011, I taught a graduate survey of eighteenth-century British literature. This course had never been taught in this form at Seton Hall, and the students had had little or no exposure to eighteenth-century British literature. Without personal and institutional memory to contend with, the course was as clean a pedagogical slate as I was likely to find and, as Jonathan Sadow notes about his course, this approach converted students' unfamiliarity with the

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Marriage," *Teaching of Psychology* 37, no. 3 (July-Sept. 2010): 172–77; Kim A. Case, "Raising White Privilege Awareness and Reducing Racial Prejudice: Assessing Diversity Course Effectiveness," *Teaching of Psychology* 34, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 231–35; Joelle D. Elicker, Andrea F. Snell, and Alison L. O'Malley, "Do Student Perceptions of Diversity Emphasis Relate to Perceived Learning of Psychology?," *Teaching of Psychology* 37, no. 3 (July-Sept. 2010): 36–40; Cyndi Kernahan and Tricia Davis, "Changing Perspective: How Learning About Racism Affects Student Awareness and Emotion," *Teaching of Psychology* 34, no. 1 (2007): 49–51.

5. Karen J. Warren, "Rewriting the Future: The Feminist Challenge to the Malestream Curriculum," in *The Feminist Teacher Anthology*, 51–52.

6. This difference is crucial. Bender-Slack, for example, notes that every discipline has its own conventions for communicating knowledge and developing skills. Brenda R. Weber opens her article by acknowledging the difference between teaching popular culture in a Gender Studies department and in other departments, including English. Bender-Slack, "Role of Gender," 18; Brenda R. Weber, "Teaching Popular Culture through Gender Studies: Feminist Pedagogy in a Postfeminist and Neoliberal Academy?" *Feminist Teacher* 20, no. 2 (2010): 124–25.

7. Bender-Slack, "Role of Gender," 15.

period from a liability into an advantage. Although my course eventually enrolled eleven women and one man, the vast majority of whom were white, in their early twenties, and contemplating careers in teaching, I did not know anything about my class composition when I planned the syllabus. In making the syllabus, I reordered my priorities and adopted new methods to match. Normalizing the presence of women on the syllabus became the first priority, to counter the perception that a certain female presence was monstrous. To achieve this goal, my syllabus sometimes recreated conversations about topics other than gender, by people of different genders, whose positions were not obviously shaped by their own gender. I wanted, in other words, to show students men and women talking together about something that did not have to do with gender so I could re-normalize, so to speak, what it meant to have women on the syllabus.[8] This approach has an additional advantage because historically, eighteenth-century literary culture was to some extent co-ed.[9] Furthermore, like Martha Bowden, who in part two of this article describes her decision to eschew novels, I assigned a wide variety of genres to foster discussion and give students a sense of the richness of eighteenth-century discussion, dissention, and literature.

In selecting readings, I focused on conversations or debates rather than "great texts" or "important writers." I tried to juggle the claims of aesthetics, canonicity, and this pedagogical imperative to establish a co-ed literary eighteenth century, a juggling act complicated by my suspicion of the values and forces that shape aesthetic judgment and literary canonization. On some days, students read a fairly standard text or set of texts and we conducted fairly standard conversations. For example, for our second class meeting, students read Books 1 and 12

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8. Since developing this syllabus, I have found Barbara G. Pace's article which provides a theoretical justification for this kind of pedagogy: Pace, "Between Response and Interpretation: Ideological Becoming and Literacy Events in Critical Readings in Literature," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 49, no. 7 (2006): 584–94. I am indebted to the reader at *Lumen* for recommending Ann Messenger's book, *His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), for its groundbreaking justification of scholarship that takes this approach.

9. As Messenger put it, "in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men and women writers were not cloistered in a monastery and a nunnery at either end of town. Nor were they scattered one by one in remote corners of the kingdom. Their world was relatively small, they knew each other, and for the most part they conceived of literature as public utterance…. It was a community" (*His and Hers*, 7–8).

from *Paradise Lost*. On other days, however, students read sets of texts on a shared topic by men and women. Each set was meant to reveal the variety of views on a topic and either to detach different positions from gender or to complicate those positions' relationship with gender. For this essay, I will focus on two days: February 1, a day on Charles II, and February 15, on the Scientific Revolution, but we also explored debates on other topics, including slavery, race, and poverty. The dialogue between male and female authors took different forms on each of the days so that each day would have its own contribution within the syllabus and so that, taken together, students' sense of a dialogue would be multifaceted.

The discussion on February 1 addressed the complex of feelings about and positions regarding Charles II as a man and as a king. Students read John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, the Earl of Rochester's "Satire on Charles II" and "Impromptu on Charles II," and Katherine Philips' "Arion on a Dolphin" and "On the Fair Weather just at the Coronation." We began with Philips' poems. Since we had encountered Milton's *Paradise Lost* the week before, we briefly compared Milton and Philips' contemporaneous politics and language. Primarily, however, Philips served to set the terms for the discussion of Charles II and royalism.

We explored Rochester's satires next. Their deliberately crude approach to Charles II put Philips' work in a new light. Her ideology and her form became choices with alternatives rather than an endpoint. Students wondered if Rochester were reacting specifically against the kind of admiration and rhetoric characterized by Philips' poetry. One student suggested that Rochester was sexually jealous of the King. Because Rochester's poems are so frank, his sexuality and gender, not Philips', attracted student interest; he was the deviation, not the woman. At the same time, Rochester's politics appeared to be more complicated than Philips': his poem both supported Charles II and brutally criticized his failings as a monarch and as a man. We speculated about how the poets' different social positions—Rochester being at court and an earl, Philips being more distant from the court and not an aristocrat—as well as their genders might enable or affect the poem's form and focus. Between Rochester and Philips, students began to see a range of political stances within royalism, a range of stances created and held by women as well as men.

We concluded with Dryden's *Absolom and Achitophel*, which occupied most of the class meeting. Students heard echoes of Philips' language and politics in Dryden's poem and traced a more elegant and careful expression of Rochester's frustration, amusement, and disappointment. But Dryden's perspective is also his own, not simply an amalgam of those two perspectives, and so we ended the day with three different positions, a sense of the broad vocabulary employed for discussing the King, and a recognition that men and women were involved in the discussion.

For the class meeting scheduled for February 15, students encountered a variety of key texts from the Scientific Revolution in Britain: extracts from Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*, Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis*, and Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*. Although on February 1 we began with a woman, on this day, we started with Hooke's *Micrographia* and then addressed Newton. We discussed each text's priorities in justifying a certain method and epistemology, teased out its defensiveness or anxiety, and considered the rhetorical challenges of writing new ideas and new knowledges. Into this anxious, experimental environment we then put Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*. At home, most students had dismissed Cavendish as crazy or inept. However, as the discussion turned to her in the last third of the class, students used the discussion about the literary challenges facing the experimental philosophers to consider whether or not Cavendish's unusual form was actually consistent with the problems that the male natural philosophers faced. Having started with the anxieties and defensiveness of experimental philosophers, Cavendish's critique of their work appeared consistent with the time rather than stupidly obtuse: her rejection was precisely the sort of thing these men had to address. While *Blazing World* never appeared "normal" to my students, Hooke's and Newton's work stopped appearing "normal." Putting Cavendish in direct dialogue with Newton and Hooke after first establishing how their own texts addressed critiques and skepticism made her work as well as theirs appear very differently and function very differently than it had in other courses when it appeared alone.

Although this approach to the material and to gender worked surprisingly well, I would continue to use it only as an approach within a syllabus and certainly not overall. We are no more in a post-gender or post-feminist moment than the United States is in a post-race moment

after electing Barack Obama. I am not ready to give up sensitizing students to gender, which means that I am not ready to give up all of the usual oppositions—Swift versus Montagu, Collier versus Duck, Pope versus Women—and the questions such debates and assertions provoke. I am also still struggling with questions of canonicity and aesthetic value. Rochester's satires worked well for their purpose, for example, but I did not teach "Upon Nothing," which I think is technically and aesthetically superior to the Rochester poems I assigned. Every semester brings tough decisions, and this method added to their number.

Overall, however, it worked. Balancing days clearly oriented on gender, such as our discussion of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, with days exploring a variety of positions articulated by men and women did help my students see eighteenth-century British literature as a co-ed place. I hope that, in the long run, I have struck a blow against "bean-counting as feminism" and the tendency to see more than half female as all female and monstrous.

Martha Bowden: Not Necessarily Novels: Choosing Texts in a Gender Studies Class

Unlike Karen Gevirtz and Jonathan Sadow, I had considerable latitude in developing my reading list for an offering of the Gender Studies course in the English major at my university. The course is located in the Cultural Studies category in the major and like the other courses in this area has a very general catalogue description that does not make any specific requirements for periodicity, genre, or geographic location; the content of any specific offering is generally developed along the particular research interests of the instructor. I decided to focus on feminist literary history, concentrating on the eighteenth-century professional woman writer, especially what Cheryl Turner calls the "dependent professional writer," defined as an author for whom publication was necessary for survival.[10] I also wanted to focus on professional writing generally and not just novels out of a concern that feminist scholars have attended too much to the novel and not enough

10. Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Female Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1999), 60.

to the variety of texts written by the women writers in the period, few if any of whom would have defined themselves primarily as novelists. Mary Davys, for example, turned to novels at several periods in her life, but I suspect that she really hoped that her stay in London would allow her to launch herself as a playwright in the manner of Congreve and Farquhar, who appear to be among her favourite writers. Thus while I wished to include some novels, I did not want the reading list to be entirely fiction. In other words, I wanted the pedagogy of my course to reflect my own feminist literary theory.

I have been concerned about the concentration on novels for some time. I gave a presentation on the topic at the 2007 meeting of the South Central SECS that responded to some unfortunate experiences in recent literary criticism the summer before. I noted the disturbing tendency to consider all women's writing in a narrow matrix that included only women writers and only their fiction. I had read several essays on Davys that compared her to Behn and Haywood, and sometimes Fielding, but never to the writers to whom she herself actually alludes, which include Congreve, Farquhar, Swift, and Pope. I also read a piece on Oroonoko as hero that would have benefited from some solid consideration of heroic tragedy. This approach limits our discussions of women writers, and is particularly dangerous if it is being replayed in undergraduate courses and graduate seminars across the continent.

Nor was I alone in my concern. At the same conference, Susan Staves gave a short presentation as part of a plenary to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*.[11] The research she had done for her book on women's literary history had led her to the conclusion, as expressed in the published version of the talk, that there "is the still-present temptation to make our history of women's writing a history of women writing novels and the temptation to use novels as the primary source of our imaginative contact with the lives and minds of eighteenth-century women." She insists that it is important for our understanding of these women's lives and minds that we look at other genres, lest our viewpoints become restricted: "Outside of novels, eighteenth-century women often seem considerably less

11. The presentation has been published as "Women Writers ≠ Women Novelists," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 26.1 (2007): 87–95.

abject, more aware of adult sexuality, less sentimental, and more knowledgeable about money."[12] Betty Schellenberg, in *The Professionalization of Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, expresses the same concern; while focusing on "modest" women novelists, she expands the discussion to incorporate the full range of texts they wrote and, dismantling the conventional ideas of public and private spheres, presents these writers, including Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox, and Frances Sheridan, as at the centres of their writing communities, not existing solely on the margins of male-dominated groups.[13]

As a result of teaching the second half of the sophomore survey in British Literature (covering the period from 1660 to the present), I had become aware of two writers, Mary Robinson and Helen Maria Williams, whom I knew I wanted to include. I also wanted to include Behn and Haywood, although I was not sure what works I wanted to teach. I knew that I wanted to teach something from Haywood's *The Female Spectator*, because periodical literature is a critical genre for the dependent professional, but I was uncertain about focusing solely on it. I reluctantly excluded Davys; there are no affordable or adequately annotated editions of her plays and I was trying to avoid an overburden of novels. Essentially, I wanted to have some historical reach across the century and I wanted to include plays, poetry, and didactic and political writing. At the same time, I did not want to include Mary Wollstonecraft because she is in all the anthologies and has become a usual suspect. Mary Robinson and Helen Maria Williams, neither of them as well known as Wollstonecraft, filled in that space at the end of the century.

After consulting with various colleagues, I eventually developed a reading list.[14] Tanya Caldwell's edition of *Popular Plays By Women* came out just in time for the class, which allowed me to incorporate Centlivre and Clive. After participating in a staged reading of Frances Burney's *The Witlings* I settled on that play; the Broadview Literary

12. Ibid., 87, 88.

13. Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11–12.

14. I am especially grateful to Heather Ladd, then a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto. After our conversation, I had a list of texts that was easily twice as long as anything I could fit in a one-semester course. Mary Robinson's *Letter to the Women of Great Britain* is one of her many suggestions.

Texts edition includes her journals and letters, invaluable as a way of looking into the mind and life of a woman who was not a dependent professional. Indeed, while this essay is not meant to be an unpaid advertisement for Broadview, I found myself drawing on their list because of the apparatus, despite my sharing the uneasiness of many of my colleagues with the signature cover photographic artwork. In addition to the primary sources, I assigned several chapters from the critical literature; students accessed them through the electronic reserves. They are not new, but they provide the historical and cultural foundations of the period and introduce students to authors, genres, and critical terms, most of which are foreign to most of my students. It is one thing for me to talk about the recovery of texts but far more useful to hear that term echoed in the critical literature. I was also working against the common assumption that in a Gender Studies class we are reading "feminist" texts, which in the students' definition seems to mean those in which women are generally oppressed and badly treated, especially by men, but are able to prevail and succeed as a result of their innate strength. I wanted them to engage in feminist studies as a process of reading these texts through a specific lens and in particular contexts that the critical works provide. I also suggested that we use the term "constraints" rather than the more prevalent "oppression," not because I think that the constraints under which these women worked were *not* oppressive but because a change of terminology is like a change of scenery: it is helpful for seeing the world anew.

Each writer provided something new to the discussion. Behn's short amatory fictions were the first literary texts we read, and as usual the students, who tend to think that if the Victorians were repressed the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries must have been tied up in knots, were astonished that authors "back then wrote like that!" Her poetry was very helpful in underscoring the public voice of the poet in the period. Students also discovered the value of reading the endnotes; those who neglected to do so assumed Rochester and Waller had to be metaphors for something else, not real people who wrote real poetry, were known to the author, and really died. Reading *Fantomina* caused one student to consider the masks that women wore when they presented themselves as writers. *The Tea Table* and *Reflections on Various Effects of Love*, included in appendices to the main text of *Fantomina*,

provide examples of Haywood's non-novelistic and more direct attempts to define and reform women's lives and behaviour.

Students loved *The Witlings* but were struck that Burney appears to be criticizing women as strongly as she does men. It was useful to be able to discuss satire's reforming intentions, with Burney assuming the role of a public arbiter, or Censor, to use the name of one of her characters, admonishing men and women alike. And Burney presents a very different case from the others. Unlike Haywood or Centlivre, she was not desperately publishing whatever she could in order to supplement the family's income. Yet she suffered constraints brought about precisely because she was *not* an independent woman but was surrounded by a group of friends and family who were as stifling as they were supportive. The students had some difficulty understanding why a twenty-seven-year-old woman would not just defy her family and have the work performed, especially since she had the support of people like Sheridan. But a careful reading of the letters and journals proved as revelatory as it was painful. I suspect that many of my students know something about family pressures, and they were more than capable of identifying the hurt and anger she was attempting to control in them.

Reading Centlivre and Clive drew attention to the theatre as a means of support, but also to the perils of publicity. Robinson, because of her celebrity, the wide variety of genres in which she wrote, and her clear and direct anger in *A Letter to the Ladies of Great Britain*, clarified the position and possibilities for a woman alone; Helen Maria Williams's life as a foreign correspondent made her seem particularly modern. In both the Robinson and the Williams texts, the reviews in the appendices provide a good sense of the context in which the women wrote, and the various tones—condescending, judgmental, or disdainful—in which reviewers evinced their displeasure at both their sentiments and their gender. It was also very useful to have some of Mary Robinson's poetry included in the collection because that was an important locus of her fame and I wanted students to be able to read it without having to buy another book.

I was pleased with the range of texts my students experienced, and especially that I was able to avoid the woman writer = woman novelist trap. I am not sure that the students noticed because of their lack of experience in the period (like Karen Gevirtz and Jonathan Sadow, I

find the *tabula rasa* has its benefits) but that is even better—rather than remediating a misperception, I can tell that I am providing a more comprehensive first look; in Jonathan Sadow's words, there is no need to present this approach as "revisionist."

Jonathan Sadow: Genre Studies: Teaching Women Writers through Literary History, and Vice-Versa

From Romance to Gothic, a class I teach at the State University of New York, Oneonta, was partially inspired by a discussion with a female student about Wollstonecraft. "You can tell this is written by a woman," she said. "It's so manipulative." Suggesting the irony of this statement got me nowhere, and I began to think about a class that would both appeal to students like her and, perhaps, produce a different set of reactions. The result represents an "adaptive" approach to teaching eighteenth-century women writers. By describing the course in this fashion, I acknowledge that it does not necessarily represent the cutting edge of either feminist studies or novel theory. Rather, it is a pedagogy designed for students who, largely, are not drawn towards gender theory. It is successful class, one I offer as a possible strategy for faculty who must adapt in a similar manner.

It does offer a contrast to my colleagues' approaches. However, this is not an ideological difference; it is the result of responding to a specific set of needs. The central concerns of Karen Gevirtz—to teach students to be sensitive to gender, to "normalize" eighteenth-century women writers—are my concerns as well. I, too, believe that the *way* we talk about gender should be a guiding concern of course design, and I echo her admiration of Delane Bender-Slack's conclusions about gender and course dynamics. My situation is somewhat different from Karen Gevirtz's, however, since my course is designed to be cross-listed with our Women's and Gender Studies program. Since the program only has a minor, and those minors represent a small minority of the members of this cross-listed class, my students are not likely to identify themselves as feminists. They are more likely to identify as sorority members, cheerleaders, or simply as students who must complete a period requirement. That does not mean that they are not interested in women writers, but it does present some familiar pedagogical challenges.

My approach in this class is obviously different from Martha Bowden's, though I share her larger concerns about the neglect of forms other than the novel; indeed, my non-gender studies survey class resembles the approaches of both of my colleagues in many ways. This class, though, is an answer to a different question: How best to teach the novel in a way that centralizes women writers instead of marginalizing them? When we *do* teach courses on the history of the novel, those courses should present a historical narrative that reflects contemporary scholarship. Overwhelmingly, the pedagogy behind this class is one answer to a practical question: Can I create a popular course for students that will ultimately draw them–as Karen Gevirtz puts it—into a gendered understanding of the creation and consumption of eighteenth-century literature? This indirect approach is premised on the idea that romance and gothic are initially more likely to interest our students than feminism, and one of the goals of the course is to attract more English students to the Women's and Gender Studies minor.

Due to the nature of our English major, and especially our dual English/Education major and concentration, this course may represent its students' only encounter with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts. So the course must simultaneously introduce students to gender studies and to major developments in literary history. For the English department, this double approach does effectively create a place for a women writers' class in a curriculum that does not otherwise require one; it can comfortably alternate with our more traditional seventeenth- and eighteenth-century offerings. It also means that many students will enter the course without any background—but also without any strong preconceptions about the period. The course title is designed to boost enrollment, but many students are completely unfamiliar with the history and genres they will encounter.

For this reason, my class insists on the centrality of the class readings to the development of literary genres. It is an attempt to demarginalize works of Behn, Lafayette, Haywood, Burney, Sheridan, Radcliffe, and so on, while still retaining an essentially feminist pedagogy. I try to use my students' lack of background as an opportunity to present a historical narrative of the novel with women writers as central figures—a narrative that I view as more accurate in any case. One advantage of an introductory class is the ability to shape students' understanding without presenting such a history as "revisionist."

Although a great deal of scholarly debunking of patriarchal and nationalistic ideas about the novel has been accomplished, it has not prevented those ideas from lurking institutionally on undergraduate syllabi.

Therefore, when I teach Behn and Lafayette, it is through the lens of their participation and innovation in the history of romance and novel. Ideally, this accomplishes several things: it introduces students to the mix of genres that form the early novel, it deals with the relationship between gender and genre innovation, and it replaces a narrative of the rise of the novel that focuses on Defoe and Richardson. My students come away from the class understanding that Behn represents the dawn of eighteenth-century fiction, having written some of the first real novels in English. Of course, a certain inevitable recanonization occurs, but I hope that my approach to genre at least prevents the kind of teleological understanding of literary history that has formerly prevailed in one form or another. I make sure that my students understand that although Behn represents the dawn of the novel in English, she simultaneously—as a translator and adapter of the French romance—represents the novel's transmission to England. By teaching Lafayette, I emphasize the transnational nature of novel innovation (I sometimes try to re-emphasize this fact later in the course by teaching Graffigny or excerpts from Diderot and Rousseau). Needless to say, one can hardly teach either Behn or Lafayette without focusing on the gendered nature of their writing. However, this approach construes a "woman's text" as central rather than marginal concept. I emphasize that it is precisely the gendered encounter with traditional genres that contributes to genre innovation. Moreover—in contrast with the reaction I receive in survey classes where texts that address gender function as a direct response to patriarchal works—my students usually respond positively: "I was telling my roommate about what happens in *The Dumb Virgin*, and she said, 'you're reading that for a *class*?'"

The approach is similar with Haywood, Sheridan, Burney, Radcliffe—again, the popularity and importance of those writers does not need to be "justified" to students as "revisionist" history. I use Haywood's *Eovaai* because it represents the novel in its most piecemeal form: it is simultaneously political satire, orientalist tale, romance, didactic fiction and adaptation; is allegedly translated by a Chinese translator from the language of nature before Adam and Eve; and

contains footnotes by multiple commentators, including a mysterious "Cabal." At the same time, its persistent theme is female persecution, since it includes scenes of molestation by baboons and other forms of masculine sadism. In fact, it is gender that makes sense of the "mixed" genres; as Ralph Cohen points out, a genre mixture subordinated by didacticism is often the way eighteenth-century writers understood their own work.[15] I preface *Eovaai* with excerpts from *The Female Spectator*, and the combination serves as a good way to introduce students to print culture in Augustan England.

We do read Richardson's *Pamela* in whole or in part, since it is difficult to explain critiques of the sentimental novel without it. However, we spend more time with Frances Sheridan's *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* as a work that both represents the sentimental novel and provides a bridge to the gothic. *Sidney Bidulph* is, on the one hand, explicitly Richardsonian; it is dedicated to Richardson. However, I am committed to the notion that the tropes of persecution that characterize so-called "gothic" fiction are firmly embedded in the eighteenth-century novel, and the sentimental novel in particular; therefore, I try to tell that story about the gothic instead of one that involves Walpole and Beckford. One thing that is particularly useful about *Sidney Bidulph* is that it poses as a didactic epistolary novel, but it really presents an endless series of terrors that end with an editorial fragment that suggests that the persecution of Sidney will be unending—as it will also be for her daughters.

Aside from presenting an "alternate" history of the gothic (and, again, it is not alternate for my students), *Sidney Bidulph* suggests that a well-understood subtext of 1790s fiction—that unending female terror is a product of the legal system, the family, and a violent and discriminatory social order—exists as a potential of the didactic, sentimental, and libertine novel much earlier than ordinarily recognized. Wollstonecraft certainly understood this phenomenon in *Maria*, her exposé of the gothic that is also a critique of the sentimental novel. It is equally apprehended by Sheridan, whose "fragmentary" novel

15. Ralph Cohen, "On the Interrelations of Eighteenth-Century Literary Forms," in *New Approaches ot Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Philip Harth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 33–78.

produces the formal representations of inchoate terror that bridge Richardson and Radcliffe.

I have used Fenwick's *Secresy* to end the course, though it is sometimes too vexed a novel for the end of the semester (despite or, perhaps, because of the outer space visitation and the heroine's late-night frolicking with her fawn). *Secresy*, due to its mingling of the didactic, the sentimental, the epistolary, and the gothic, represents a generic mixture that blends well with the course's essential approach. However, I usually finish the class with a double dose of *The Romance of the Forest* and *Maria*. Though archetypically gothic, the *Romance of the Forest* has strong links to sentimental narrative and resonates with *Sidney Bidulph* and *Pamela* in many useful ways. It does triple duty, in a sense, since it also provides an opportunity to introduce my students to eighteenth-century aesthetics in considerable detail. My students encounter aesthetic theory and its gendered critique simultaneously, and the combination of Burke, Radcliffe, Smith, and Wollstonecraft allows them to understand otherwise-abstract concepts like sublimity in a cultural context. By the time we get to *Maria*, my students are, in fact, more or less ready for a direct feminist analysis.

In short, this class seeks to provide a basic—but not reactionary—understanding of developments in eighteenth-century fiction while being a women writers' class. Although this approach does not purely centralize the works as "women's texts," a great deal of the class' agenda is to highlight the way that women writers and gender concerns serve as the engine of fictional development. Even our discussion of *Evelina* places a great deal of stress on Burney's stated project in her introduction: she has read Richardson, Fielding, and Johnson, and seeks both to combine them and to move beyond them, generically speaking. Of course, issues of class, marriage, inheritance, epistolarity, and taste all get their due. In fact, students gain much of the same literary, cultural, and historical understanding in *From Romance to Gothic* as they do in our standard class offerings. They are, of course, more familiar with Haywood than Defoe by semester's end, but I find this to be at least as desirable as the more common reverse outcome.

This "tacit" approach to gender studies works especially well at an institution where even students who take a women writers' class express scepticism towards feminist thought. There are, of course, drawbacks to such an approach. It produces a less "balanced" set of readings than

Karen Gevirtz's dialogue course, and it provides fewer opportunities for readings in gender theory than a more overt approach. It is also true that it fails to address some of Martha Bowden's concerns about prioritizing the novel. But there are advantages, too: all students leave a 200-level eighteenth-century survey class with major gaps in their knowledge, and I find that these students finish the class with a pleasingly up-to-date understanding of eighteenth-century culture and the history of the novel. For better or worse, the novel is the genre most of my students are dedicated to, and a class on the novel's development is certainly worth their time.

My class, though entirely different in form and content, responds to some of the same pedagogical concerns as Gevirtz's and Pace's experience with student resistance.[16] I too seek to re-normalize what it means to have women on the syllabus in an eighteenth-century context. Bender-Slack points out that one of the obstacles to feminist pedagogy includes conventional classroom modes of talking about literature.[17] I have found that this often includes students' cynicism toward conventional feminist discussions that they recognize to be part of the English curriculum. They know what the "correct" classroom response is supposed to be, but, in short, they do not believe it. Among other things, *From Romance to Gothic* is my current response to this problem; it is more a strategy of recontextualization than one of dialogue. By downplaying the expected narrative of marginalization and, instead, focusing on a centralizing set of issues about genre, I find that my students are more likely to ask different kinds of questions; "If Aphra Behn is so important, why have we never heard of her?" comes up more often than "Why is Mary Wollstonecraft so angry?" This approach rests on the assumption that students will be more convinced about the importance of gender studies if links are made in a way that they perceive to be less didactic. Once students understand, for example, the connections between gothic terror and the terror of domestic persecution, there is no need to explain any "contradictions" between the oppositional or marginal nature of women writers and their centrality to our understanding of literary history.

16. Pace, "Between Response and Interpretation," 586.
17. Bender-Slack, "Role of Gender," 18.

Conclusion

Drawing on our knowledge of our subjects and our understanding of the individual characteristics of the student bodies at our respective institutions, we have developed course offerings that, we hope, reflect current pedagogical and scholarly theories while delivering what our students need. We all perform the "juggling act" that Karen Gevirtz describes, as does everyone who teaches eighteenth-century studies in the twenty-first century. We hope that readers of this essay find in it some inspiration for their own teaching—perhaps an offering of the Eighteenth-Century Fiction course that shows female and male writers in dialogue with each other or a decision to include more generic breadth in survey courses. This essay, like the panel that was its genesis, seeks to open a conversation.

Appendix: Typical Course Reading Lists for the Classes in this Essay

Karen Gevirtz: Master's Level Seminar in Eighteenth-Century British Literature

Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 3rd edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.

Behn, Aphra. *The Rover*. Ed. Anne Russell. 2nd edition. Peterborough: Broadview, 1999.

Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews*. Ed. Paul Scanlon. Peterborough: Broadview: 2001.

The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century. Ed. Joseph Laurence Black. Vol. 3. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006.

- Aphra Behn, "The Disappointment" (140); *Oroonoko* (144).
- Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, from *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (6–11).
- Colley Cibber, from *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber* (536).
- Jeremy Collier, from *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (537–39).
- John Dryden, *Absolom and Achitophel* (72–86); "Death of Mr. Oldham" (90).
- Thomas Gray, Sonnet (606); "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (607).

- Samuel Johnson, "Death of Dr. Levett" (565).
- Mary Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (702).
- Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "The Reasons that Induced…" (488).
- Newspaper miscellany: *London Gazette* (120–23); Eliza Haywood, *Female Spectator* (131), *Female Tatler* (715); Addison, *Spectator* (428), *Tatler* (543); Johnson, *Idler* issues (576); *Rambler* issues (565); *Monthly Review* (670, 671).
- Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (443).
- Jonathan Swift, "Lady's Dressing Room" (307); "Description of a City Shower" (304); "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" (309).
- John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, "A Satire on Charles II" (232–33); "Impromptu on Charles II" (241); "Disabled Debauchee" (236); "Imperfect Enjoyment" (240).

Broadview Anthology website:

- John Aubrey, from *Brief Lives*.
- John Boswell, from *The Life of Johnson*.
- William Collins, "Ode to Fear."
- "Colonization and Slavery" unit.
- John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*.

Luminarium (www.luminarium.org):

- Katherine Philips, "Arion on a Dolphin;" "On the Fair Weather Just at the Coronation."
- Isaac Newton, Preface to *Philosophiae Naturalis in Principia Mathematica*; General Scholium in *Principia Mathematica*.
- John Milton, *Paradise Lost* I and XII.

Project Gutenberg:

- Robert Hooke, *Micrographia*. London: Joseph Martyn and James Allestree, 1665.

Martha Bowden: The Eighteenth-Century Professional Woman Writer (undergraduate-level gender studies course)

Primary Texts:

Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko and Other Writings*. Ed. Paul Salzman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Burney, Frances. *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater*. Ed. Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill. Buffalo: Broadview Press, 2002.

Caldwell, Tanya, ed. *Popular Plays by Women in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011.

Haywood, Eliza. *Fantomina and Other Works*. Ed. Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery, and Anna C. Patchias. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004.

Robinson, Mary. *A Letter to the Women of England and The Natural Daughter*. Ed. Sharon M. Setzer. Buffalo: Broadview Press, 2003.

Williams, Helen Maria. *Letters Written in France*. Ed. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser. Buffalo: Broadview Press, 2001.

Secondary Texts:

Ezell, Margaret J.M. "Introduction." *Writing Women's Literary History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 1–13.

Fraser, Antonia. "Petticoat-Authors." *The Weaker Vessel*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984. 333–55.

Medoff, Jeslyn. "The Daughters of Behn and the Problem of Reputation." *Women, Writing, History 1640–1740*. Ed. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992. 33–54.

Rogers, Katherine M. "Introduction" and "The Situation of Women in Eighteenth-Century England." *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982. 1–39.

Turner, Cheryl. "Professional Authorship: The Alternatives for Women." *Living By the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Routledge, 1992. 60–82.

Jonathan Sadow: From Romance to Gothic (undergraduate-level genre survey based on the eighteenth-century novel)

The Athenian Mercury (excerpts)

Astell, Mary. *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (excerpts)

Behn, Aphra. *The Dumb Virgin* (handout) and *The History of a Nun, The Fair Jilt*, and *The Unfortunate Bride* in *Oroonoko and Other Writings*. Ed. Paul Salzman. New York: Oxford World's Classics, 1998.

Burney, Frances. *Evelina*. Ed. Susan Kubica Howard. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Ed Adam Philips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. (excerpts)

Defoe, Daniel. *Conjugal Lewdness; Or Matrimonial Whoredom*, in *Moll Flanders*, ed. Paul Scanlon. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005. 377–83. (excerpts)

Haywood, Eliza. *The Adventures of Eovaai*. Ed. Earla Wilputte. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999.

—. *The Female Spectator*, in *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood II*, vols 1–2. Ed. Kathryn King and Alexander Pettit. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001. (excerpts)

Lafayette, Madame de. *The Princesse de Clèves*. Ed. Robin Buss. New York: Penguin, 1992.

Radcliffe, Ann. *The Romance of the Forest*. Ed. Chloe Chard. New York: Oxford World's Classics, 1999.

Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela*. Ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Sheridan, Frances. *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*. Ed. Heidi Hutner and Nicole Garrett. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011.

Smith, Charlotte. *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*. Ed. Stuart Curran. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

The Spectator. Ed. Donald Bond. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965. (excerpts)

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* in *Mary; Maria; Matilda*. Ed. Janet Todd. New York: Penguin Classics, 1992.