Novel Mediations

1st Meeting: 31 of March 2011
Cards: name, year, other course on rise of novel?, taking course for credit, auditor, or, occasional visitor

Introducing the resource of the website as a matrix for studying the novel (I'm offering a panorama of early novel studies) :

Strategy of this course it to broaden and open out... and offer a panorama of the early novel:

> Traditional course: start with Defoe and end with Austen
> But, there has been an enlargement of context: from text, to literary history, to cultural and media history... from 5 canonical male novelists to several different kind of inclusions: women writers, novels in languages other than English, to texts and issues (like copyright, media events, etc)
> Now include more both before (the French short novel) and after the long 18th century (include Scott and Dickens)... so we get a more comprehensive sense of the history of the novel's emergence as the most influential form of literature in the modern era.
> But also, this course attempts a conceptual dislocation of the rise of the novel narrative: next week, read Latour's actor-network theory so as to increase the number and kind of agents involved in the novel: infrastructure (the post, the writing closet, the public house), formats & genres (small format books, newspapers, critical reviews), associational practices (correspondence, circulating libraries, clubs), and protocols (copyright) → an historically specific tracking of the emergence of novel reading into centrality.

PASS OUT SYLLABUS and show website
The web-site interweaves 3 primary elements: schedule (with title pages), links to first editions, links to .pdfs of critical essays that we'll be reading. → thus, it functions as an **online reader**.
Explain a blind link: please don't link to this site from your Facebook page or some other website. You can share it with others in the department, but not with those off campus.

Preliminary discussion:
what is a novel?
What is *not* a novel?
Is the novel a genre of literature?
Counters: prose → Sydney's Arcadia; love → adventure;
Conceptual vectors for study of the novel (use Venn diagram) emphasizing its relation with other forms of Literature or literature.
PASS OUT VENN DIAGRAM

Mimesis, representation, realism, verisimilitude, probability (Auerbach, Watt)
Mimesis (Gk: 'imitation', from which we get mimic}; Heidegger: "in order for consciousness to be present to being in the mode of truth, that which is (being, reality) must be repeated by language."
BUT note: the judgment that the representation is truthful, accurate or realistic is a judgment of the observer.
For those tendering the realist claim for the novel, novels gain their distinct superiority to other forms of literature from their more 'realistic' account of social life: but note the way this claim is sometimes attributed a) to the exact detail; b) to achieving a contemporary relation to everyday; c) to its winning a powerfully inward psychological account of the mind.
[Potential problem: this gives novels an instrumental role—of allowing us to know the real; novel criticism can become a branch of epistemology]
Question: *are there certain novels and novelists in the long history of novels that lend themselves to this approach to the novel?*
Examples: 18th century novels of Richardson ('writing to the moment') and F; Jane Austen's representation of social life; 19th century social novels (Balzac, Dickens, Zola, Eliot; James and Howells—the subtitle of George Eliot's Middlemarch, "a study of provincial life"), Joyce or Faulkner's modernist stream of consciousness;…

Entertainment, enchantment, absorption, illusion (Ortega,)
By this account, novels gain their power by creating a consistent and pleasurable world that is compelling to enter, one that enchants, entertains, and amuses the reader. [The word "amusement," so often used in the 18th century draws upon Horace's famous advice to an author: ""Amuse the reader at the same time that you instruct him"] Seeing the novel as a form of entertainment emphasizes the magic and wonder of fictional worlds, the power for example, to make characters like Elizabeth Bennett seem as real (or more real) than living people.
Question: What are the exemplary instances of novels that most clearly reflects the impulse to entertain: romances of the Renaissance, the gothic fiction of late 18th century, the exotic Eastern tale, fantasy and s/f.

Prose, rhetoric, dialogism (Bakhtin, Booth)
This approach to the novel starts with the insistence that the novel is, like all other literature/Literature, *a form of language*. It then attempts to isolate what distinguishes novelistic language from other genres of literary language (poetry, drama, epic) or non-literary language (memoir, biography, history, autobiography, etc). Key traits: a) prose; b) the language of everyday life (where dialogue in novels a sound transcription technology; but also the heteroglossia of many different kinds of language); c) acceptance of the low as well as high life (link with realism); d) an opportunistic adoption of various genres (letters, memoir, biography, diary, etc); e) through its inclusiveness it anticipates cinema, TV, etc.
Question: are there particular novels that lend themselves to this understanding of the novel? [While all novels could be approached this way, I think of experimental novels like Tristram Shandy… Joyce's Ulysses, modernist experimentation that seeks consciousness to go beyond]

Why a Venn diagram: as we'll see it is impossible to prevent these distinct approaches from bleeding into one another: for example, at times, certain kinds of language (colloquialisms, free indirect discourse) are assumed to produce a more powerful realism; sometimes enchantment is seen as incompatible with realism, sometimes as something that makes realism more powerful. [the use of dreams in Clarissa]

BUT: there is something wrong with this analytical perspective on the novel: it is profoundly anachronistic. It assumes the institution of literary departments with specialists on the history of the long history of novel, who debate its nature, and compare it with epic, drama, poetry.

So let's historicize and pose this question, *how would those who lived in the long 18th century see the novels that began to circulate so powerfully in their society?*
How can this course develop a genealogical perspective on the emergence of novel into centrality (as representation, as entertainment, as language)?

→ Strategies to historicize:
1: Question/ issue: *should we consider the novel a form of capital L-literature?*
[This turns out to be a crucial point…because unless we broaden our understanding of 18th century novels, we won't be able to understand the breadth of 21st century novels.]
Initial point: in the 18th century, literature is small l: it means writings of all kinds
(**1.** Acquaintance with 'letters' or books; polite or humane learning; literary culture.
Now *rare* and *obs.*)
Therefore novels were not yet classified with the literary genres (epic, drama, poetry,…), but with most printed texts and various forms of narrative: travels, memoirs, histories, …

2: Question of origins: *from where does the novel come?* (many places) what are its closest ancestors?
History: The novel has **a morally dubious genealogy:** to critics in the 17th century it appears to be descended from romances. By most accounts the short novel or novella breaks off from romance in the 17th century, it continues to transmit many of its characteristics: an idealized world; the experience of wonder, shipwrecks and caves, characters more noble than the people we know, surprising coincidences, disguise and discovery of a noble lineage for the novel's central character.

3: Question: are novels a form of fiction? Or can they be part fiction, part reportage? Why are so many 18th century novels labeled 'histories' (CL, TJ, ..) The texts we'll read show how this is a defensive posture: moralists kept condemning the novel as based on ***lying and untruthfulness.*** This was the special worry of severe Protestant type: it is simply wrong to tell lies and that is what stories of what never happened appear to be. There is also a Lockean psychology at work here: since the brain comes into the world as a blank slate, the more false impressions you get, the more

it will shape your brain, your knowledge, your morals. [So early novelists are constantly trying to expand the sense of what truth is, so it could emerge through fiction.]

4: Question: *how is the novel's modern success linked to the expanding market in print?* The expansion of the print market gives the unauthorized genre of the "novel" a new power to attract readers → but this media efflorescence is also part of the problem: **as novel reading spreads, many worry about the effect this new practice—novel reading for entertainment—is having on the morals of youth.**

5: The previous three points (link to romances, the worry about lying, the expansion of cheap print) suggest why novel writers and novel critics who want to legitimize novels do so by linking them with drama or epic.

Open question: are there other ways for us to historicize our approach to the novel?

It might be fun to flash through the orthodox canonical account of the novel on the PP. It's main message is based on canonical literary history as developed by Ian Watt, J. Paul Hunter and Micheal McKeon. (I've downloaded it; but better to go through it on-line]
http://www.slideshare.net/ciaffaroni/the-rise-of-the-novel
Question: what is limiting about this account of the novel?
(too linked to the realist claims of and for the novel; too masculine and traditionally canonical)

Pair with "The History of Science Fiction":
What do you think?
It does what the other lit history does: generic classification (with typical or touchstone texts)
and attempting to define relation of kinds to each other
      either through *lineage*
      or *dialectical opposition*
      or in a more *purely analytic ways*
What makes this image powerful and useful for rethinking the origins of the novel?
(inclusive, tangled, the history of s/f as a vital organism…. In some sense the opposite of the father-mother-child tree diagram of a genealogy)

For next week: plunge in with 2 chapters from Ian Watt, Bruno Latour, and the introduction to the "This is Enlightenment" written by Cliff Siskin and myself.
Any volunteers to do a short presentation on Ian Watt?