The term “aesthetics” was coined in 1735, and initially referred to the science of bodily experience, although its scope of analysis soon narrowed around experience of art, and the standards used to evaluate art, in particular. Philosophers insisted that clear judgment entailed setting aside human need and desire, and so the attention to the body that was at the root of aesthetics was abandoned. But the repressed returns in many forms. The visceral excluded from aesthetics reappears at the heart of the period’s novelistic modes: the satirical grotesque, the sentimental, the realist, the uncanny, the pornographic, and the sublime. This course will examine the dual development of an aesthetics of disembodied judgment and a literature of the flesh. After reading some foundational works in aesthetics (Hume, Burke, Kant, Hegel) and some key critiques of that tradition (Adorno, Eagleton, Bourdieu), we will concentrate on recent criticism that seeks to reinvigorate aesthetics by bringing the body back into play (Armstrong, Rancière, Sedgwick, Ngai, Scarry, Bennett, Starr). This criticism will frame our discussion of a corpus of eighteenth-century fiction: Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year; Haywood, Fantomina; Swift, Gulliver’s Travels; Richardson, Clarissa; Cleland, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure; Burney, Evelina; and Radcliffe, A Sicilian Romance.

This course fulfills the pre-1800 requirement.