

The Epistolary Novel Spring 2024

Instructor: Huang-hua Chen
Email: chenhh@mx.nthu.edu.tw

Office: Humanities A413
Office Hour: Friday 1-2

In the 2023/12/22 letter, "chenhh" <chenhh@mx.nthu.edu.tw> mentions:

Dear Students,

In this course, we will attempt to answer the following questions: what makes the letter a particularly enticing genre? Why is it that some of the most important early novels like *Pamela* (1740) associate themselves and experiment with this form? What are the sorts of themes and questions that the epistolary novel is concerned with? Overall, if the epistolary novel does evolve through different time periods as we witness in the recent reconsideration of the form in postmodern literature, what would be its corresponding cultural concerns and crises?

We begin by exploring Janet Altman's *Epistolarity* so as to familiarize ourselves with some of the critical jargons. We will then try to work through each novel with an associated literary movement to see if these novels do offer particular vantage points. The required novels are:

Shamela (1741) by Henry Fielding

Lady Susan (1794) by Jane Austen

Pride and Prejudice (1813) by Jane Austen

Frankenstein (1818) by Mary Shelley

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous (2019) by Ocean Vuong

Your grade will be determined mostly by the two essays (a 5-page paper that accounts for 20% of your final grade, and a 10-page paper for 40%) and the two presentations (20%). You are also expected to participate in class discussions (20%).

You are also required to read the materials assigned for each week. We will ask students to provide questions to start each session. Please do follow the reading schedule:

Week 1 2/23: Introduction

The Question of Epistolary Authenticity

Week 2: 3/1: *Epistolarity*

Week 3: 3/8 *Pamela*

Week 4 3/15 *Shamela*

Week 5 3/22 *Lady Susan*

Week 6 3/29 *Lady Susan*

Week 7 4/5 *Holiday*

Week 8 4/12 *Movie Screening (Love and Friendship)*

What Went Wrong with the Letter Genre?

Week 9 4/19 *Pride and Prejudice*

Week 10 4/26 *Pride and Prejudice*

First Essay Due

Gothic and the Letter Genre

Week 11 5/3 *Frankenstein*

Week 12 5/10 *Frankenstein*

Week 13 5/17 *The Miracles of the Namiya General Store*

Epistolarity Now

Week 14 5/24 *Cape No.7*

Week 15 5/31 *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

Week 16 6/7 *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

Sincerely,

Huang-hua Chen

P.S. It just occurred to me that the reading list can be a little bit ambitious even after the initial cut. And I also forgot to mention that one of our major concerns will be to test the limit of the epistolary genre. Perhaps we can make this an on-going conversation as the semester unfolds.