

ENGLISH 630: DONNE/HERBERT/MARVELL
“SEXUALITY, SUBJECTIVITY, & THEOLOGY IN 17TH CENTURY POETRY”
SPRING 2015
PROFESSOR BEN SAUNDERS

Office: 366 PLC
Hours: Wednesdays, 2pm-5pm
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Description

In the England of 1601, politics, philosophy, science, medicine, law, and literature had yet to separate themselves from the master discourse of theology. By 1701, however, the human and the natural sciences had begun to emerge in something like their modern disciplinary forms, while (at least in theory) religious sectarianism had started to give way to the Liberal principle of toleration. The century between was marked by terrible violence, extraordinary social upheaval, and urgent intellectual inquiry. Religious radicals had challenged the ancient authorities of crown and church in a Puritan revolution, and been challenged in turn by a monarchist backlash. Political structures, sexual mores, and philosophical paradigms had shifted, and then shifted again, as new and disturbing questions had emerged. For example: If kings did not rule by divine right, what other forms of political authority might be imagined? If religious disputes could not be settled with certainty, what forms of certain knowledge might be found? Could the concept of an immutable nature — or an immutable God — survive the discoveries of science? Should we denigrate bodily desire as sinful, regard it neutrally as the manifestation of an amoral reproductive instinct, or elevate it to the peak of human experience? What was the relation of the body to the mind, of the mind to the self, and of the self to others? Modern western secular identity originates in these intellectual crises of seventeenth-century European thought; to understand the period is therefore to understand something about where we “moderns” come from. In this course we will read four writers who grappled with the questions above to produce some of the most difficult and daring poetry in English literary history. We will focus particularly on the issues of theology, sexuality, and self-knowledge explored in their work.

Required Texts

John Donne	<i>The Complete English Poems</i> <i>Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions/Death's Duel</i>
George Herbert	<i>The Temple</i>
Andrew Marvell	<i>The Complete Poems</i>
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester	Selected Poems

Donne, Herbert, and Marvell texts are available at the UO Textbook store. All other readings supplied in photocopied form or as PDFs via Canvas.

Method of Assessment

Grades will be based upon:

- One short essay (6-8 pages or so), due in class on the Monday of week VI (May 4).
- A formal research paper (12-15 pages), due by 10 am on the Monday of Week XI (June 8).

Grades will breakdown as follows:

- Shorter Essay: 40%
- Research Paper: 60%

Mandated Description of Outcomes and Expectations

Anticipated Learning Outcomes

Assuming you are able to devote yourself fully to the readings and assignments, by the end of the class you should have acquired a deeper knowledge of lives and work of four major English writers. You will have a more nuanced understanding of the historical contingency of both sacred and sexual values, and will have a better sense of the origins of modern western identity in the intellectual crises of seventeenth-century Europe. In addition, you will have gained experience and proficiency doing the following activities:

- Reading and responding to difficult poetic texts with a view to better understanding their conventions.
- Reading and responding to contemporary critical writings about these texts with a view to improving the quality of your own analytic practice.
- Performing formal analyses of complex and demanding rhetorical forms and arguments.
- Employing creativity and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.

Caveat Emptor

- Some of the material that we will read this quarter is of an **explicitly sexual** nature. Rochester's work in particular contains language and situations that you may be surprised to find outside of modern "adult" genres. Obviously, you are not required to like everything that you read — indeed, I hope for a more complicated response than that — but if you are likely to be disturbed by such material you should reconsider taking this class.
- Late papers will not be accepted without a valid excuse (documented illness or a family emergency, for example).
- Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade, at the rate of 1/3 a letter grade (e.g. from A to A-) for every unexcused absence. Certain absences may be considered "excused" (again, in the case of documented illness, a family emergency, or travel on university business). Please contact me either before or (in the event of an emergency) as soon as is reasonable after the class in question if you believe your absence should be excused.
- To use anyone else's actual **or** paraphrased words without appropriate and full citation, whether from a textbook, work of criticism, or Internet source, is to commit plagiarism. **Plagiarism will result in automatic failure of the course.**

If you have any questions about any of the above, feel free to ask. That is why I am here.

Sequence of Readings

Week I

April 3

I: Information and Identity in the 17th Century.

N.B. THIS CLASS TO BE HELD IN THE RARE BOOKS ROOM AT KNIGHT LIBRARY.

II: In Bed With John Donne.

Elegy 19 in m/s, print, and criticism.

Week II

April 10

John Donne: The Bad Boy Pose.

Elegies: paying special attention to The Bracelet, The Perfume, The Comparison, The Expostulation.

Songs and Sonnets: Farewell To Love; The Flea; The Indifferent; Confined Love; Community; The Dream.

Satires: 1 and 2.

Essay: Fish, "Masculine Persuasive Force".

Essay: Carey, "Apostasy".

Week III

April 17

John Donne: Priest of Love.

Songs and Sonnets: paying special attention to Air and Angels; The Canonization; The Ecstasy; Lover's Infiniteness; The Good Morrow; Negative Love; The Undertaking; The Sun Rising; The Relic; A Valediction of Weeping; A Valediction Of My Name In the Window.

Elegies: The Expostulation, and Sappho To Philaenis.

Essay: Empson, "John Donne The Space Man" (recommended).

Essay: Greteman, "John Donne and Bodily Presence" (required).

Essay: Saunders, "Difference and Indifference: Fantasies of Gender" (recommended).

Week IV

April 24

Donne: Losing and Finding Religion.

Satire 3.

Divine Poems: all Divine Meditations; The Cross; the final three "Hymns."

Essay: John Carey, "The Art of Apostasy".

Essay: Shami, "John Donne, Religion, and the Critical Tradition".

Week V

May 1

Donne: Denial and Acceptance in the Signifying World.

Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions (entire).

Essay: Arshagouni, "Politics of Devotions".

Week VI

May 8

I: Descartes — What Does Thinking Prove?

Meditations One and Two.

II. Herbert — The Impossible Gift.

The Temple: from pp. 1 to 95, paying special attention to: The Altar, The Sacrifice, The Thanksgiving, The Reprisal, The Passion, Easter I & II, Easter Wings, Nature, Sin, Affliction I, Repentance, Prayer I, Love I & II, The Temper I, Jordan I, The Quiddity, Denial, Affliction IV, Submission, Misery, Jordan II.

Week VII

May 15

I: Herbert — The Impossible Surrender.

The Temple: from pp. 95 to 187, paying special attention to Home, Sin's Round, Confession, Love Unknown, Man's Medley, Divinity, The Holdfast, The Bag, Claspings of Hands, The Pulley, The Cross, The Flower, Aaron, The Forerunners, The Poesy, Doomsday, Heaven, Love III.

II: Herbert — Speaking for Oneself (Is Very Hard To Do).

Essay: Goldberg.

Week VIII

May 22

I: Marvell — Disappearing In Public.

Complete Poems, Bate's Intro. and pp. 21-52, paying special attention to: Mourning; The Gallery; The Unfortunate Lover; The Definition of Love; To His Coy Mistress; Eyes and Tears.

II: Marvell — The Green Refuge.

Complete Poems: The Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers; Young Love; The Mower Poems; Bermudas; The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Faun; Music's Empire; The Garden.

Essays: Ricks and Berger.

Week IX

May 29

I: Marvell — The Prismatic Landscape.

Complete Poems: Upon Appleton House.

Selections from Robert Watson's *Back To Nature*.

II. Marvell — Taking Sides.

An Elegy Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers; Tom May's Death; The Character of Holland; Horation Ode.

Essays by Brooks, Komorowski.

Week X

June 5

Rochester: The Poetry of Obscenity.

Selected Works: Fair Chloris in a Pig Sty Lay; The Imperfect Enjoyment; A Ramble In St. James's Park; Love a Woman? You're An Ass!; Upon His Drinking Bowl; Signior Dildo; A Satyr on Charles II; A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind; The Disabled Debauchee; On Mrs. Willis; By All Love's Soft, Yet Mighty Powers; Happy, Chloris, Were They Free; Absent From Thee, I Languish Still.

Week XI

June 8

All final papers due, 10 am, 366 PLC.

ENGLISH 630: SEVENTEENTH CENTURY POETRY & PROSE ASSIGNMENTS

I: The Shorter Essay

Select one poem by Donne (not be a poem we have discussed at length in class) and two critical analyses of that poem (at least one of which must be drawn from sources other than the criticism I will assign). Write an essay responding both to the poem and the readings it has inspired. What methodologies do your chosen critics employ (“historicist,” “formalist,” “feminist,” “Derridean,” “psychoanalytic,” “queer,” etc.)? Do they offer complementary or contradictory readings? What assumptions do they share? What are their blind spots? What critical desires do they display? What aspects of the primary text do they overlook or even repress?

The purpose of the assignment is to provide practice entering into the (extended and always ongoing) critical dialog around these much discussed texts, and to help you find your own voice by grounding your response in the details of your chosen poem.

II: The Research Paper

The requirements for this assignment probably speak for themselves, but just to be clear: you are welcome to write upon any aspect of the course that intrigues you. I will expect a fully elaborated research paper, in dialogue with some portion of the critical literature already extant on your author or topic, and perhaps also with a key contemporary work of critical or cultural theory. I am happy to offer advice and input during office hours or via email if you require any further help selecting and approaching your topic.

Mandated Boiler Plate

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