In the England of 1601, politics, philosophy, science, medicine, law, and literature had yet to separate themselves from the master discourse of religion. By 1701, however, the human and the natural sciences had emerged in something like their modern forms, while (at least in theory) sectarianism had started to give way to the Liberal principle of religious toleration. The century in between was marked by terrible violence, extraordinary social upheaval, and urgent intellectual inquiry. Religious radicals challenged the ancient authorities of crown and church in a Puritan revolution, and were challenged in turn by a monarchist backlash. Political structures, sexual mores, and philosophical paradigms shifted … and then shifted again. New and disturbing questions emerged. 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 of an immutable God — survive the new discoveries of science? What were the moral and social implications of such knowledge? For instance: 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 ideal relation of the body to the mind, of the mind to the self, and of the self to others? And so on.

Contemporary secular Western identity originates in these great crises of seventeenth-century European thought; to understand the period is therefore to understand 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 on issues of theology, sexuality, and self-knowledge, particularly as they pertain to the transformation of religion from a public concern to a matter of private conscience, and to the problem of man’s place in nature.

**Texts:**

John Donne  
*The Complete English Poems*  
*Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions/Death’s Duel*

George Herbert  
*The Temple*

Andrew Marvell  
*The Complete Poems*

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester  
*Selected Poems*

All are available at the UO Textbook store. Additional readings will be supplied in photocopied form.

**Method of Assessment:**

Undergraduate Student grades will be based upon one short essay (4-6 pages), due on the Friday of week VI **AND** a formal research essay (10-12 pages), due on Monday, Dec. 5, **OR** a creative final project of your choice (see below). “Reading comprehension” tests will also be given periodically throughout the semester at the beginning of class. **No further warnings** about these tests will be given.

Graduate Student grades will be based upon one short essay (4-6 pages), due on the Friday of week VI, a formal research essay (10-12 pages), due on Monday, Dec. 5, **and** a final presentation of your choice; this may take the form of a conventional 10-15 minute academic paper (to be delivered to the class on Monday, Nov. 28), or a more creative final project (see below, also due Monday, Nov. 28).
In the case of the Short Essay:

Try to think of this task not as a hoop you must jump through, but as an opportunity to develop your skills as a CLOSE READER. Avoid windy introductions, sweeping assertions about human nature or history (unless you are feeling very inspired), and anything that smacks of waffle. Instead, select no more than one or two poems (or a short passage of prose) to write about in detail, and jump right in. Choose your text because you find it engaging, infuriating, sexy, disturbing, sublime, appalling, or otherwise compelling—not just because you find it easier to understand (talented English Majors like ambiguities, and can write speculatively about what a writer might mean, so difficulty should not put you off). Ask questions about the speakers and settings. For example, do you think this the “real” poet talking, or a persona? Why? If it is a persona, is it male or female? How do you know? What is the tone of voice? How do you know? Who is the imagined audience? How do you know?

Attend to and put pressure upon the language; free associate; think creatively; have fun being clever. You may use our class discussions as a jumping off point, but you should also extend, qualify, or complicate these observations by returning to the text. Focus upon your author’s specific vocabulary, and analyze the ways in which his choices work to produce artistic effects and emotional or intellectual responses in the reader/audience.

No critical readings are required for these essays, although you are advised to consult them (with suitable skepticism). I also strongly encourage you to expand upon what are often skimpy editorial annotations by consulting the Bible, or a reference work such as the OED, or a dictionary of classical mythology, or an encyclopedia of religion, or at least Google, where necessary. Ask a reference librarian about the whereabouts of these items in the library if you don’t know already. (Please note: I expect that this work will observe the basic rules of English grammar, and will cite all sources appropriately, including Internet sources, according to MLA or Chicago style guidelines; sloppy writing will not be rewarded.)

In the case of the Formal Research Paper:

You are welcome to write upon any aspect of the course that intrigues you. All the above guidelines apply, but in addition I will expect a fully elaborated research paper—in dialogue with the critical literature extant on your author or topic, or engaged by some other aspect of contemporary critical and cultural theory. I will be happy to discuss your research topics with you once you have thought a little about what you are interested in writing about. Just come and see me during office hours, or send me an email with your thoughts.

In the case of the Final Projects:

Instead of writing a second paper, you may work in groups (of 2-6) to produce a performance based final project (10-15 minutes in length) for the rest of your classmates to watch. (Video projects are also permissible, but please be aware that technology can create as many problems as solves. Unless your creative idea absolutely dictates a pre-recorded performance, I urge you to “go live.”) The basic idea is that performances/creative projects can function as instructive interpretations, just like an essay.

For example, you could write an original play based on a poet or group of poems or even a single poem; you could write a play using lines from the poems for dialogue; you could have the poets meet in a fictional setting; you could write a seventeenth-century style “masque,” complete with music and dance, with each character representing a poet or even a different form of literary theory or criticism; you could combine any of these suggestions, or you could come up with something else. As long as the projects tell me something about the poets and poetry that we have been reading, you are only limited by your imaginations.

Students should meet with me by the beginning of week VIII to discuss the form of this project. If I have not heard from you by this time I will assume that you are opting for the research paper.

Final grades will therefore breakdown as follows:
Undergraduate

Shorter Essay: 30%
Final Project/Research Paper: 40%
Class Participation: 10%
Reading Comprehension Tests: 20%

Graduate Students

Shorter Essay: 20%
Research Paper: 40%
Final Presentation/Project: 30%
Class Participation: 10%

Buyer Beware

• 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 or offended by such material you should not take this class.
• Late papers will not be accepted without a valid medical or dean’s excuse.
• Attendance is mandatory. Three or more 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 after the second. No further warnings will be given. Courteous students will contact me about their unavoidable absences, either before or (in the event of an emergency) as soon as is reasonable after the class in question.
• 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. In certain cases it may also result in suspension and/or dismissal from the university. It is not worth the risk.
• Always bring a text to class. Students without books will be asked to leave. Without a book, you can’t even pretend to be interested.

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

*Please note: on occasion I will be forced to cancel my office hours for departmental/committee meetings, graduate student examinations, and other significant administrative duties. When this happens I will endeavor to reschedule my hours, and to inform you all in advance, but this will not always be possible. Your patience and understanding is appreciated.
A NOTE ON SECONDARY READING

Countless books and articles have been published on the poetry that you will read this semester (a whole course could be devoted to the secondary material on Donne alone), but no amount of secondary reading can substitute for real familiarity with the poetry itself. You should not be tempted to consider critical texts as a short cut to understanding. Read the poetry first.

Having said that, the idioms of seventeenth-century English poetry can be particularly demanding, especially if the literary conventions and formal topoi of the period are new to you. For this reason, I recommend the following as useful guides:

Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry, by Isabel Rivers. This book provides a wealth of valuable contextual information. It has recently appeared in a second edition and there should also be at least one copy in the library.

Rhymes Reason, by John Hollander. This witty and clever book provides introductions to all the major poetic forms, with the added bonus of being very short and easy to read. Hollander provides descriptions that are themselves examples — you really have to see it to believe it. Also available at the library.

The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (2nd Edition). This compendious reference book provides excellent entries on poetic genres (Epic, Pastoral, Lyric, etc.), forms (Sonnet, Sestina, Villanelle, etc.), technical terms and concepts (metaphor, allegory, iambic pentameter, etc.) and so on. By the end of this course you should all be able to employ these terms with facility and confidence; this book is the place to start. A copy is available in the reference section of the library — simply ask at the reference desk.

The Twelve Volume Oxford English Dictionary. The meanings of words are neither historically nor semantically fixed; they can vary over time, as well as according to immediate context. The 12 volume OED will provide you with usages lost to the modern reader, significances and valances that can change the interpretation of a line or even of an entire poem. Remember, putting the right pressure on a well-chosen word can generate whole essays, and the OED is a marvelous tool for doing just that. You should know the location of the OED in the library. If you don’t, now is the time to find out. Again, just ask at the reference desk.

The OED is also available online, and free to all UO students, through the Library Homepage. Look under “Electronic Resources” for dictionaries.

Finally, if you want stylistic models for the close reading of poetry, you can’t really go wrong with any of the following critics (although you should bear in mind that their assumptions about the status of “literature” and the function of criticism diverge widely, are hotly disputed, and in the case of some of the older critics, widely discredited): Harry Berger, Heather Dubrow, T. S. Eliot, William Empson, Rosemond Tuve, Cleanth Brooks, Rosalie Colie, Elizabeth Harvey, Christopher Ricks, Helen Vendler, Paul de Man, Stanley Fish, Frank Lentricchia, Patricia Parker, Barbara Harmon, John Carey, R. I. V. Hodge, Victoria Silver.
ENGLISH 440/540: SEVENTEENTH CENTURY POETRY & PROSE  
“RELIGION, SEX, & SELF-KNOWLEDGE FROM DONNE TO ROCHESTER”  
WINTER 2009  
PROFESSOR BEN SAUNDERS

Week I
Sept. 26  Introduction  Turning Points:  
Thomas Browne’s Elegy & Donne’s “Show me, Dear Christ ...”

Sept. 28  Donne  Elegies: paying special attention to 1-4, 8, 11, 19.  
Songs and Sonnets: The Indifferent; Confined Love; Community.  
Satires I & II  
Fish  “Masculine Persuasive Force” (first 7 pages)

Week II
Oct. 3  Donne  Songs and Sonnets: paying special attention to Air and Angels; The Canonization; The Ecstasy; Farewell To Love; The Good Morrow; Love’s Alchemy; The Dream; The Sun Rising; The Relic; A Valediction of Weeping; A Valediction Of My Name In the Window.  
Fish  “Masculine Persuasive Force” (to end)  
Carey  “Apostasy.”

Oct. 5  Donne  Songs and Sonnets: paying special attention to; The Dissolution; Lover’s Infiniteness; Negative Love; The Undertaking.  
Also: Elegy 10 (The Dream); Elegy 15 (The Expostulation); & Sappho To Philaenis.

Week III
Oct. 10  Donne:  Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions.  
Oct. 12  Donne  Satire III: Divine Poems Divine Meditations (pp. 309-316); The Cross; Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward; the final three “Hymns.”  
Carey:  “The Art of Apostasy.”

Week IV
Oct. 17  Descartes  Meditations I & II.  

Week V

Week VI

Oct. 31:  Herbert  The Temple revisited: Excerpts from Anthony De Mello.

Nov. 2:  Marvell  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.

Nov. 4:  First Essay Due, 3.30 pm, 366 PLC.

Week VII

Nov. 7:  Marvell  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.

Essay by Ricks.

Nov. 9:  Marvell  Complete Poems: Upon Appleton House.

Week VIII

Nov. 14:  Marvell  An Elegy Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers; Tom May’s Death; The Character of Holland; Horation Ode.

Essay by Brooks.

Nov. 16:  Rochester  Selected Works, Intro., and pp. 3-44, with special attention to: 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; How Happy, Chloris, Were They Free; Absent From Thee, I Languish Still.

Week IX

Nov. 21:  Rochester:  A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind; The Disabled Debauchee; On Mrs. Willis; By All Love’s Soft, Yet Mighty Powers.

Nov. 23:  NO CLASS  Happy Thanksgiving

Week X

Nov. 28:  Grad Student Projects.

Nov. 30:  Performance Projects.

Week XI

Dec. 5:  All final papers due.