

English 630
Course Time: Th 2:00–4:50
Course Location: 448 PLC

Prof. Brent Dawson
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Office Location: PLC 474
Office Hours: F 12-3 or by appt.

Thinking Matter: Early and Late Modernity

Description

In formulating her theory of vital materiality, Jane Bennett claims Renaissance philosophy as a “touchstone.” The desire to return to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been a recurrent pattern in the new materialism and ecocriticism. This course follows the contours of that desire by pairing its focus on early modern literature with contemporary theory engaging materialist ideas. By taking the course, students will gain a sense of the importance of materialism to Renaissance literature, an introduction to important critics and issues in new materialism and related fields, and a sense of how and why studying historical periods can lead to theoretical innovation. Authors include Lucretius, Spenser, Herbert, and Hutchinson; theorists include Bennett, Agamben, Marder, Arendt, and early modern critics engaging materialism and ecocriticism.

Course Texts

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas Roche, Penguin. ISBN 978-0140422078
George Herbert, *The Complete Poetry*, ed. Drury, Penguin. ISBN 978-0141392042
Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, ed. Kate Lilley, Penguin. ISBN 978-0140433722
William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, two text edition, ed. Stephen Orgel, Pelican (Penguin). ISBN 9780140714906

Calendar

Unit 1: Around Lucretius

1/11:

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things* books 1-2

Michel Serres, from *The Birth of Physics* 3-8, 27-66

Jane Bennett, from *Vibrant Matter* 1-38

Louis Althusser, “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” 163-208

1/18:

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, books 3-5
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 1-46

Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things*, introduction and chapter 1
Stephen Greenblatt, from *The Swerve*, preface and chapters 8 and 10
(Paintings to look at: Tintoretto, *Conversion of Saint Paul*; Caravaggio, *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*; Michelangelo, *Conversion of Saul*, Giorgione, *Tempest*, Botticelli, *Primavera*)

Unit 2: Life

1/25:

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, book 2, proem and cantos 4-5, 9, 12
Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* pgs. 1-32

Stephen Greenblatt, "To Fashion a Gentleman" in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*
Anthony Esolen, "Spenserian Chaos: Lucretius in *The Faerie Queene*"
Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body*, introduction

2/1:

Spenser, *Faerie Queene* book 3, proem and cantos 1-2, 5-6, 11-12
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pgs. 1-48; *The Open* 1-4; 33-38

Kathryn Schwarz, *Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*, chapter 4
Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation*, ch. 5

2/8:

William Shakespeare, *King Lear* and *Venus and Adonis*
Laurie Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal*, introduction and ch. 3
Tom MacFaul, *Shakespeare and the Natural World*, introduction

Unit 3: Mind

2/15:

George Herbert, *The Temple* selected poems
Hannah Arendt, from *The Life of The Mind*

Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, ch. 4
Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts* ch. 3

2/22:

Herbert, *The Temple*, selected poems; *Memoriae Matris Sacrum* 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 11, 15, 19
Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking*, introduction and ch. 1

Diane McColley, introduction to *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*
Richard Strier, from *Love Known*

3/1:

Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, selections from *Philosophical Letters* and *Observations*
Karen Barad, from *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

Eve Keller, “Producing Petty Gods”
Mary Baine Campbell, from *Wonder and Science*

Unit 4: Politics

3/8:

Lucy Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder* cantos 1-5; preface to *De Rerum Natura*
William Connolly, “Pluralism and the Universe” in *Pluralism*

Abstract and Biblio due

Reid Barbour, “Between Atoms and Spirit: Lucy Hutchinson’s Translation of *Lucretius*”
John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*

3/15:

Hutchinson, *Elegies*; selections from prose
Andrew Marvell, “Upon Appleton House”; “The Garden”
Carla Freccero, “Queer Spectrality” from *Queer/Early/Modern*

Erin Murphy, “‘I remain, an airy phantasm’: Lucy Hutchinson’s Civil War Ghost Writing”

3/22: **Final paper due**

Assignments

Attendance: Coming to class on time and prepared is expected. Let me know in advance if you need to miss class.

Office Hours Visit: Students are required to visit office hours twice per term. Once should be in the first couple weeks of class, the second around the time they submit their abstract.

Weekly Questions (10%): Each week, students will submit two or three questions about the readings and a couple paragraphs exploring those questions. Think of this as a chance to gather your thoughts about the readings and help shape the week's discussion. Submit the questions and writing to me at least 24 hours before class.

Short Paper (30%): Once per term, you will write a 3-5 page paper on some part of the week's reading that the entire class will discuss. You can choose any section of the reading to focus on and any topic that interests you. Papers should be primarily analytic (attempting to deduce what a text says and how) and open (leaving questions and uncertainties for discussion) rather than evaluative or resolute. All other students will read the paper prior to class and email or hand me and the author a one-paragraph response by class time.

Abstract and Bibliography (10%): In preparation for the conference paper, students will submit a 300-word abstract and a bibliography with at least 10 critical sources.

Conference Paper (50%): Students will submit an 8-12 page paper, modeled on a paper to be presented at an academic conference, on a topic related to the course.

Policies

Accessibility: Please let me know me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoac@uoregon.edu.

Advisory: Be aware that the material we read for this course engages with, and in many cases participates in, histories of violence and exclusion that shape our present world. Our conversations will work through those histories. If you feel you can't participate in discussion around a particular issue, let me know and we can try to design alternative work.

Formatting Papers: Your assignments must be in twelve-point font, double-spaced, and have one-inch margins. Submitting assignments electronically is acceptable, but you need to use .pdf format (not .doc, .docx, .pages, or .odt). If you're not sure how to do that, ask in advance. You can follow MLA or Chicago guidelines for citations, but be consistent. Guides to either format can be found at Purdue's OWL website (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>).

Plagiarism: All work must be your own and written solely for this class. Unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism, so make sure you understand the rules. I encourage you to look at the library's guides for citing sources and avoiding plagiarism (<https://library.uoregon.edu/citing>). The same link will also allow you to access the university's official policy toward academic misconduct; you should read over the policy if you're unclear on what counts as cheating or plagiarism. If you're not certain, ask me.