

English 410
Senior Seminar: Writing Renaissance Women
Fall 2002

M-W, 3:30-4:50
Hoover 105

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The title of this course is ambiguous--even slightly "punny"--in that it refers to two things at once. Most obviously, this is a course about women writers working in England between about 1550 and 1700. But you will notice that a number of important male writers are represented as well. That is not because there are not enough women's works to fill a whole semester; on the contrary, texts have so proliferated over the past decade that I have had to be very selective. I have included such important male writers as Petrarch, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton because they are central to the story of writing women in the Renaissance.

Why are these men so central? They are central because of the way literature both reflects and, in turn, influences--even re-invents--life. Due in part to social factors, in part to the power of their vision, these male poets have indelibly shaped the way men have imagined and represented women, as well as the way countless female readers have imagined and represented themselves. Thus, even when writing for others of their own sex, women have had to write in *response* to male voices, male pens, male images of female identity.

Some recent critics have argued, in fact, that if people write history, they are also "written" by it. Each of our lives, they say, is a kind of fiction, written in collaboration with the social forces that shape our lives. And, especially in the early modern period, those forces tended to privilege the male perspective. The Renaissance was a period of enormous change and upheaval, in which a relatively unified and stable medieval world-view gave way to what would become the Enlightenment. It was a period in which men (at least an elite of outstanding and privileged men) were involved actively in a reconstruction of identity, a reconstruction Stephen Greenblatt has called "Renaissance self-fashioning."

Women, too, were engaged in this "self-fashioning" enterprise--but with a difference. Less free to begin the enquiry from "scratch," they engaged in the process under the jealous eye of a patriarchal society that saw them, essentially, as passive members--valued above all, as Suzanne Hull has noted, for three traditional virtues: chastity, obedience, and silence. Even as they wrote, then (and many did write), they were also "being written"--by male writers, and yet more profoundly by the social conventions that shaped both male and female roles.

Thus we will need to keep two key questions in mind in our reading (and writing) this semester. First, we need to keep asking ourselves about the context of the literature we read: what were the social conditions under which it was produced? (These social conditions finally take into account every branch of history--social, intellectual, and economic--as well as theology and its manifold nuances.) But we also need to read each *text*--closely and with open minds--in order to see the extent to which Renaissance writers, male *and* female, were "written" by the context in which they wrote; and to see, conversely, the extent to which they managed to "re-write," or "refashion" themselves and one another.

All semester we will see both phenomena--the writing and "being written"--occurring again and again. But the best criticism, to my mind, uses theory to *illuminate* texts--not to reduce them to evidence for a particular point of view or ammunition for a particular agenda. Thus, our story will not be a "neat" one. Different writers will reveal a different mix of freedom and constraint, originality and conventionality, patriarchal bias and impulse toward gender equality. Our verdict will differ, I suspect, from writer to writer, from text to text--and from person to person.

But, whatever our conclusions (and however tentative those conclusions may be) each of us, by the end of the course, will also have "written" Renaissance women to some extent. In fact, if things go really well, we may end up writing a corporate history that does not now exist. In any case, you should know at the outset that the questions we engage this semester are live questions for me--not questions to which I have clear and settled answers. *I too* want to know how women were written in the Renaissance--and how they in turn rewrote it.

Required Texts:

Fitzmaurice, James et al., eds. *Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000 (MWW).

Maclean, Hugh, ed. *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*. New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1992.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. (Any edition is ok. An inexpensive paperback is available in the bookstore with our other course materials.)

Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. New York: Pelican, 1987.

Stortoni, Laura Ann, ed. *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance*. New York: Italica P, 1997.

Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan. New York: Norton (New Mermaids series), 1998.

Wynne-Davies, Marion, ed. *Women Poets of the Renaissance*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

A small packet of readings, seen in the schedule as *Renaissance Writings (RW)*.

Several essays on reserve in Wardman Library. (See below in schedule.)

Required Work:

1. Reading assignments to be completed *before* the day for which they are assigned (i.e. in time for class discussion), and attendance at all class sessions (including two evening films, Feb. 18 and Mar. 11).

2. A portfolio, which by the end of the course will include the following:

- a. Six short response papers (2-3 pages) dealing with some aspect of the reading for each unit of the course.

- b. One 2-3 page introduction to a woman writer in the course--to be submitted in advance, then revised and duplicated in time for class discussion of that writer.
- c. One longer paper (7-10 pages), placing the work of that writer (or another chosen from a list of options) in a larger historical context.
- d. An oral report (about 10-15 minutes, accompanied by an annotated bibliography and appropriate hand-out) summarizing your research for the longer paper.

3. A comprehensive final exam.

Note: Late work will be accepted, but will be marked down one half grade for each school day (not *class* day) after the due date. Under extraordinary circumstances, I will consider an extension without penalty-- provided that I am consulted in advance and that the circumstances seem serious enough to warrant such an extension.

Grading Factors:

1. Attendance, preparation and discussion	20
2. Portfolio and oral report	60
3. Final exam	<u>20</u>
	100%

Grading Options: A to F only.

Manuscript Style:

Papers are to be typed double-space in a 12-point font (this syllabus serves as an example), and printed on a laser-quality printer. They should be handed in on separate sheets of 8 1/2 X 11 bond paper, stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Margins should be one inch; paragraphs are to be indented five spaces. Spaces should not be skipped between paragraphs. Notes and bibliography must follow the *MLA Handbook*, copies of which are available in both the library and the bookstore.

Always keep hard-copies of all your work. Documents can get lost--both from my desk and from your disk, whether hard or floppy. Should this occur, I will expect you to be able to produce a copy immediately; otherwise, I will be forced to count the paper as late beginning with the day of your failure to do so. (See above for general policy on late papers.)

Note: Electronically submitted work will not be accepted. It is your responsibility to leave enough time to submit a clean hard copy for evaluation.

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism occurs whenever the true author of a piece of prose, of an idea, or of a line of thought is not the person who claims to be the author. Plagiarism can occur in varying degrees, and will be penalized--in this class as in all others at the College--in proportion to its severity. Papers in which plagiarism is sufficiently serious will receive an F, and student's name will be turned in to the Dean of Students. A repeated act of plagiarism will result in an automatic F in the entire course, in addition to any action taken by the Office of Student Life (which can include

suspension from the College). A number of such serious sanctions have been imposed in recent years.

A particularly common and egregious form of plagiarism is the down-loading of materials from papers posted by others on various web sites. Please be aware that faculty have the tools to identify any work unfairly borrowed from the web--as well as other sources.

If you are in doubt about the need for documentation of borrowed material, please feel free to consult me or any other professor on campus. Also be sure that you have mastered the material in the 2001-2003 *College Catalog*, 25-28. Ignorance of this material will not be regarded as an excuse.

ADA Policy:

If you have any disabling condition that may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements, please begin by contacting the Office of Learning Support Services. I will be happy to provide any accommodations regarded by the Director as appropriate, but am not in a position to offer such accommodations independently. Short of actual accommodations, however, please feel welcome to talk with me about anything I can do to help you succeed in the course.

Projected Schedule (subject to change as necessary):

I. Introduction: Renaissance self-fashioning and the fashioning of woman.

Sept. 9 Introduction to the course, to the period, and to some images of women in art--allegorical, erotic, political, and theological.

11 Petrarchanism and the male gaze: sonnets of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), selection in *RW*.

16 Petrarchanism and the female predicament: sonnets of Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547) and Veronica Franco (1546-1591), Stortoni, 54-75, 174-207. Also read pp. ix-xxvi.

18 Female Petrarchans (2): Gaspara Stampa (1523-1554), Stortoni, 134-59 and selections in *RW*. Response paper #1.
7:30 p.m. Film: *Dangerous Beauty*. Media Center.

II. Elizabethan England: The virgin queen and the romance of chastity.

23 (A) The Sonnet and Lyric: Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), selection in *RW*; and Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), the *Amoretti* (1595),

Sonnets 1, 13, 16, 17, 21, 22, 28, 34, 37, 39, 45, 57, 60, 63, 64, 67, 68, 69, 75, 76, 79, 84, 88, 89. Maclean, 587-623 (inclusive). On reserve: Clark Hulse, "Stella's Wit: Penelope Rich as Reader of Sidney's Sonnets," in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers.

25 Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) and Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621). Read selections in Wynne-Davies, 11-15; 59-98 and in *RW*. On reserve: Beth Wynne Fiskens's "Mary Sidney's *Psalmes*: Education and Wisdom," and Margaret P. Hannay, "'Your virtuous and learned Aunt': The Countess of Pembroke as Mentor to Mary Wroth," from *Reading Mary Wroth*, ed. Naomi Miller and Gary Waller.

30 Lady Mary Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthes* (1623), selection in Wynne-Davies, 183-228. Also read Wynne-Davies' Introduction, xix-xxix and the biographical note in *MWW*, 109-13. On reserve: Nona Fienberg, "Mary Wroth and the Invention of Female Poetic Subjectivity"; and Jeff Masten, "'Shall I turne blabb?': Circulation, Gender, and Subjectivity in Wroth's Sonnets," in *Reading Mary Wroth*, ed. Naomi Miller and Gary Waller. Response paper # 2.

Oct. 2 (B) Romance: Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book III, cantos I-IV, Maclean, 231-92. On reserve: Lauren Silberman, "Singing Unsung Heroines: Androgynous Discourse in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*," in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. Ferguson, Quilligan, and Vickers.

7 Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book III, cantos V-VIII, Maclean, 293-347.

9 Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book III, cantos IX-XII, including alternate endings, Maclean, 347-400. **7:30 p.m. Film: *Elizabeth*. Media Center.**

14 Discussion day. Response paper # 3.

III. Jacobean England: Gendering the lyric muse.

16 (A) Patriarchy, patronage, and retreat: Ben Jonson (1573-1637), "To Penshurst" (*RW*), and Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645), "The Description of Cooke-ham," *MWW*, 23-26; 38-43. On reserve: Barbara K. Lewalski, "Re-writing Patriarchy and Patronage," in *Silent But for the Word*, ed. Margaret Hannay; and Elaine Beilin, "The Feminization of Praise: Aemilia Lanyer," in *Redeeming Eve*.

21 (B) Varieties of devotion: Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), Wynne-Davies, 99-148; and John Donne (1572-1631), selected devotional lyrics (*RW*). On reserve: Lewalski, "Of God and Good Women," in *Silent But for the Word*.

23 Jacobean Poetry continued. Response paper # 4.

IV. Renaissance drama: Re-writing the heroine.

28 William Shakespeare (1564-1616), *As you Like It* (1599/1600).

30 *As you Like It*. **7:30 p.m. Film: *Shakespeare in Love*. Media Center.**

Nov. 4 John Webster (1580?-1625), *The Duchess of Malfi*. (1614).

6 *The Duchess of Malfi*. On reserve: Mary Beth Rose, "A Waste of Shame: The Heroics of Marriage in English Renaissance Tragedy," in *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama*.

11 Elizabeth Cary (1585/86-1639), *The Tragedy of Mariam the Fair, Queen of Jewry* (1613), *MWW*, 47-104.

13 *The Tragedy of Mariam*. On reserve: Sandra Fischer, "Elizabeth Cary and Tyranny, Domestic and Religious," in *Silent But for the Word.*, ed. Hannay. Response paper # 5.

V. The Problem of Eve: the Bible, Milton, and female subjectivity.

18 Read Genesis 1-3. Then read Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, ll. 1-26; Books IV and VIII.

20 *Paradise Lost*, Books IX and X; Book XII, ll. 375-649.

25 Rachel Speght and Ester Sowernam. Read selections in *MWW*, 373-84. Response paper # 6.

VI. Writing women: Women poets of the later Renaissance and Restoration

27 Katherine Philips (1631-1664), selections *MWW*, 177-208.

Dec. 2 Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle ((1623-1673) and Anne Kingsmal Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661-1720), selections in *MWW*, 151-73 and 333-67, plus "Petition for an Absolute Retreat," in *RW*.

4 Seminar reports. Annotated bibliography and hand-out due.

6 Final paper and revised portfolio due in my office by 3:30 p.m.

Dec. 13 (Friday), 1:00-3:00. Final Examination.