

Early Modern English Devotional Poetry

שירה דתית אנגלית בעת החדשה המוקדמת

BA Seminar

Dr. Noam Reisner

Course no.: 6262388401, Fall term 2019, 4hr credit for BA

Monday and Thursday, 12-14, Webb 401

Reception hours: Monday, 14:00-15:00 or by appointment, Webb 506

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Course prerequisites: Students must have completed successfully Introduction to British Culture part 1 and 2, Poetry Analysis, Intro to Theory and Proseminar

Seminar Description

The period 1500-1660 was one of immense cultural and intellectual change in Europe in general and England specifically. Marked by the rise of what we now term, rather loosely, 'Renaissance and Reformation', every single concept about man and his creative faculties was radically redefined and re-negotiated. While this was indeed the age where, in many respects, the modern self was born, this was not yet a secular age. The renaissance self was always a deeply religious one and contested religious habit of thoughts stand at the heart of the great intellectual struggles that defined the Reformation and Counter-Reformation crises and the many wars of religion that followed, both on the battlefield and through the printed word. The central premise of this seminar is that the renaissance self discovered in much of this period's most celebrated poetry was a deeply divided religious self, and that the key to understanding much of this period's poetry lies therefore in uncovering the various devotional and religious habits of thought and their related rhetorical structures which give much of the poetry in this period its distinctive appeal and power. We will examine in this seminar a wide range of Early Modern English verse that can be defined in the broadest possible sense of the term "devotional" – from early Tudor paraphrases of the Hebrew Psalms, through seemingly secular sonnets steeped in religious imagery and feeling, to religious satires and metaphysical devotional poems of prayer and agonizing repentance. Throughout, we will combine close textual reading with rhetorical analysis and wider reflections on the various religious, philosophical and theological concerns that shaped the "devotional" voice in the period, and through it the shape and trajectory of English poetry itself.

Seminar Reading

A wide selection of poetry from the period to be posted on the course website.

Seminar Requirements

Attendance: Attendance is compulsory. Students who accumulate more than 3 unjustified absences will lose 5% of the final grade per absence. Students who miss more than 30% of the classes, regardless of circumstances, will not be able to complete the course.

Active class participation and preparation: Class discussion will require all students to read texts in advance of class and always to have a text in class for reference.

Take-home midterm assignments (30% of grade): there will be two short midterm take-home assignments, posted through the moodle website. See schedule below.

- Annotation assignment (10% of grade)
- Unseen poetry analysis paper (20% of grade)

IMPORTANT: it is not possible to complete the seminar with failed or incomplete midterm grades. Further information about the assignments will be given closer to the time on moodle and in class.

Final seminar paper (70% of grade): The deadline for submitting final papers follows the dates and guidelines as published in the Yedion. As per faculty regulations, all papers must be submitted on or before the stated deadline through the designated moodle page.

Late submissions will not be accepted. Requests for extensions must be processed through the proper channels before the expiration of the deadline.

I must approve all topics for final papers (see schedule below). I will not accept papers whose topics I did not previously approve.

Detailed Schedule

Introduction

- 28.10.19 – Is a religious poem a special kind of poem?
- 31.10.19 – The early modern "self" in Re-formation
- 4.11.19 – The genres of early modern religious discourse
- 7.11.19 – The early modern public uses of private devotional verse

Theological and Theoretical Background

- 11.11.19 – Numinous poetics: showing the unsayable
- 14.11.19 – Sacramental poetics: sacred image and ritual
- 18.11.19 – Sacred rhetoric: rhetorical figures in devotional use
- 21.11.19 – Overheard by God: theorizing devotional poetics

The Early Tudor phase - poetic reformers

- 25.11.19 – Metrical and religious innovation in Tudor paraphrases of the Psalms
- 28.11.19 – Religious themes and imagery in the poems of Wyatt, Surrey and their contemporaries
- 2.12.19 – Religious themes and imagery in the poems of Wyatt, Surrey and their contemporaries continued. **Annotation assignment handed out.**

The Elizabethan phase - apostates and martyrs

- 5.12.19 – The poems of Robert Southwell
- 9.12.19 – The poems of Robert Southwell – **Annotation assignment due in.**
- 12.12.19 – The poems of John Donne: religious motifs in the songs
- 16.12.19 – The poems of John Donne: religious motifs in the songs
- 19.12.19 – The poems of John Donne: Holy sonnets and devotions
- 23.12.19 – The poems of John Donne: Holy sonnets and devotions
- 26.12.19 – Select religious poems by Fulke Greville and William Alabaster

The later seventeenth century - the metaphysical and baroque phase

30.12.19 – George Herbert and the poetic structure of prayer

2.1.20 – George Herbert and the poetic structure of prayer

*** Unseen poetry analysis midterm handed out**

6.1.20 – Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne and the Herbertian legacy

9.1.20 – John Milton, Robert Crashaw and the Protestant baroque

13.1.20 – John Milton, Robert Crashaw and the Protestant baroque

*** Unseen poetry analysis midterm due in**

16.1.20 – The early modern female voice and God: Aemilia Lanyer

20.1.20 – The early modern female voice and God: Aemilia Lanyer

23.1.20 – The early modern female voice and God: Mary Astell

* Final paper topic abstracts (one paragraph) due in on the final class of term. I will set up a consultation with students to discuss their final paper topics in the week immediately after term ends

Bibliography