

Writing Medieval and Early Modern Women
Anna Kelner
annakelner@g.harvard.edu
Office Hours by appointment, Barker 029
Spring 2019

How and why did women write during a time when they were often understood as the irrational, embodied counterparts to masculine reason? How did those women understand the intersection between their gender identity and their work as writers? This course focuses on a variety of poems, prose texts, and plays written by women in medieval and early modern Europe (mainly in England, with several excursions to France). We'll also explore the different ways that literary critics have thought about issues of gender and sexuality over the past several decades, with particular reference to the tension between the influence of psychoanalysis on formulations of gender identity across time and the competing impulse to historicize this body of women's writing. Through three separate units, we'll explore the representations of gender and sexuality in relation to theories of desire, embodiment/materiality, and authorship.

General Tutorial Goals

To introduce the discipline and practice of English literary studies at an upper-division level, & to write 20–25pp research paper in preparation for an honors thesis. You will be able to:

- Design a research question
- Develop a critical bibliography around that question, including diverse methods and viewpoints
- Put secondary criticism in conversation with a your own ideas and with other criticism
- Write with greater clarity and precision

Course Specific Goals

The course will prepare students to write junior papers that consider issues of gender and sexuality in medieval and early modern England. You will be able to:

- Make a persuasive argument about a text written by a woman from medieval or early modern England of your choice
- Engage thoughtfully with criticism on gender and sexuality on the literature from these periods
- Consider how to attend to modern critical categories, in this case “gender” and “sexuality,” in medieval and early modern literature in their historical contexts

Assignments

- **Short Essay (Week 5, 15%):** A 5-6 page paper; a close reading of one of the texts on our syllabus, considering some issue related to the representation of gender and/or sexuality
- **Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography (Week 7, 15%):** 2-page prospectus of the project before you begin working on it. An annotated bibliography of 8–10 scholarly sources (see above for what counts as a scholarly source) should accompany the prospectus. The bibliography should reproduce in a few sentences the main argument of the work you intend

to make use of. It should also include, in a few sentences, how you plan on engaging with the thesis of the work you have summarized. While this assignment is graded, you will also have the opportunity to revise your prospectus and bibliography if you choose (due by the end of week 8).

- **Final Paper (May 1, 40%):** 20–25 page paper on some aspect of the representation of gender and/or sexuality in a medieval or Renaissance literary work of your choosing, incorporating 8–10 critical articles.
- **Participation & Preparation (20%):** A small seminar like this one thrives only when students participate actively and offer informed, thoughtful contributions to class discussion.
- **Minor Assignments (5%):**
 - 2 Response Papers (deadline TBD): approx. 250–500 words making an argument about the primary text read for that week. It can be helpful to focus on one particularly rich passage (or even a single sentence or two) and unpack it, linking the motifs or stylistic choices you see there to larger themes. This may, but does not have to, incorporate some of the secondary material on the syllabus. Deadline to be agreed upon with Anna; if you have written a response paper that week, you will informally present it to start seminar, with the presentation taking no longer than 5 minutes. Please email your response paper to Anna for comment (but not a letter grade) by the start of class.
 - 2 Critical Reading Presentations (deadline TBD): A 5-minute presentation summarizing the methods, conclusions, and flaws of a critical article read for that week. Deadline to be agreed upon with Anna.

Required Texts (NB: these editions are recommended (and will be on order at the COOP), but not required; you are free to select your own edition):

- Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, the Rover and Other Works* (Penguin, 1992), \$12.68
- Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Sara Mendelson (Broadview, 2016), \$15.95
- Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Library of Medieval Women, 2006), \$23.21
- Julian of Norwich, *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Denise Baker (Norton, 2004), \$19
- Christine de Pizan, *The City of Ladies*, ed. Rosalind Brown-Grant (Penguin, 2000), \$12.88
- Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen Babinsky (Classics of Western Spirituality, 1993), \$18.46
- Claire Waters, ed., *The Lais of Marie de France* (Broadview, 2018), \$15.95

Week 1: Framing Medieval Women and The Debate on the *Roman de la Rose*

- Christine de Pizan, “The God of Love’s Letter” (pdf)
- Jean de Meun, *Romance of the Rose* (selections) (pdf)
- criticism (women’s studies/historicism): Roberta Krueger, “Towards Feminism: Christine de Pizan, Female Advocacy, and Women’s Textual Communities in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford U Press, 2013)

...desire

Week 2: Psychoanalyzing Courtly Love

- Marie de France, *Lais* (selections)
- criticism (psychoanalysis): Sarah Kay, "The Virgin and the Lady: The Abject and the Object in Adgar's *Gracial* and the *Lais* Attributed to Marie de France," from *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford U Press, 2001)
- theory/methods (psychoanalysis): Jacques Lacan, "Courtly Love as Anamorphis," in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (pdf)

tutorial group meeting (mandatory, time TBD)

Week 3: Mystical Love, Courtly Love

- Marguerite Porete, the *Mirror of Simple Souls*
- criticism (gender studies/literature and religion): Barbara Newman, "La mystique courtoise: Thirteenth-Century Beguines and the Art of Love," in *From virile woman to womanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) (pdf)
- theory/methods (psychoanalysis): Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XX* (selections) (pdf)

Week 4: Feminizing Courtly Love

- Mary Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (selections) (pdf)
- Philip Sidney, *Astrophil to Stella* (selections) (pdf)
- criticism (gender studies/book history): Jeff Masten, "'Shall I turne blabb?': Circulation, Gender, and Subjectivity in Wroth's Sonnets," in *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Gary F. Waller (University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

tutorial group meeting (mandatory, time TBD)

Week 5: Queering Desire

- Katherine Philips, "On the Death of my First and Dearest Child," "To Mrs Mary Awbrey at Parting," "A Retired Friendship: To Ardelia," "To My Excellent Lucasia on Our Friendship," "Friendship's Mysteries: To My Dearest Lucasia," "Content: To My Dearest Lucasia," "Orinda to Lucasia, Parting, October 1661, at London," "Orinda to Lucasia" (pdf)
- criticism (queer studies/historicism): Valerie Traub, "'Friendship So Curst': Amor Impossibilis, The Homoerotic Lament, and the Nature of Lesbian Desire," in *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2002)

short essay due Friday, midnight

...embodiment and materiality

Week 6: Library session

As you begin work on your paper prospectus and bibliography, we will meet in Widener Library with Odile Harter, the English dept library liaison. After our meeting with Odile, we will move to Child Library, where students will informally present their working paper ideas in progress to the group. This week is also an opportunity for you to read ahead in the syllabus if you think you'd like to write on a text covered in the second half of term.

tutorial group meeting (mandatory, time TBD)

Week 7: Christ's Passion, Women's Bodies

- Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love* (selections)
- criticism (gender studies/embodiment studies): Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Zone, 2012) (pdf)
- theory/methods (psychoanalysis): Luce Irigaray, "La Mysterique" (pdf)

paper prospectus + bibliography due Friday, midnight

Week 8: The Body as Text

- *The Book of Margery Kempe*, book I
- criticism (gender studies/embodiment studies): Karma Lochrie, "The Body as Text and the Semiotics of Suffering," from *Margery Kempe and the Transmission of the Flesh* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) (pdf)

optional: revised paper prospectus + bibliography due Friday, midnight (see syllabus)

Week 9: The Book of Christ's Body

- Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (selections) (pdf)
- criticism (gender studies/history of reading): Femke Molekamp, "Regarding the Passion: Aemilia Lanyer, Constance Aston Fowler, and Elizabeth Delayal" from *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing* (Oxford University Press, 2013) (pdf)

Week 10: From the Body to Matter

- Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*
- criticism (new materialism): Lisa Sarasohn, "The Politics of Matter," in *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Johns Hopkins, 2010) (pdf)
- theory/methods (gender studies/embodiment studies): Judith Butler, "Bodies that Matter," in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (Routledge, 1993)

10 pages of final paper draft due to Anna, Friday midnight

...authorship

Week 11: Female Authorship, Female Authority

- Christine de Pizan, *The City of Ladies*
- criticism (gender studies/historicism): Rosalind Brown-Grant, “The ‘Livre de la Cité des Dames,’” in *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge U Press, 1999)

full final paper draft due to Anna, Friday midnight

Week 12: The Female Author in the Marketplace

- Aphra Behn, *The Rover*
- criticism (gender studies/historicism): Catherine Gallagher, “Prostitute and Playwright in Aphra Behn,” in *Nobody’s Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (University of California Press, 1994)

circulate full final paper draft to Anna and classmates by Friday, 5 pm

Week 13: Paper Workshop

Students will come to class prepared to offer constructive comments on their colleagues’ papers-in-progress (circulated by Friday, 5 pm of the previous week) and discuss their projects.

The Fine Print

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person’s ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS’s Honor Code: “*Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.*”

Collaboration: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others’ work. In individual assignments (which may include midterm or term papers, short writing assignments, homework or reading questions and responses, or take-home exams), academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Attendance: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole; so is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. I will allow each student a “free” tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, being late

really disrupts the work we're doing together: 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have attenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due by midnight on the date listed in the schedule. Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. If, well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

Email: I'll use our course listserv to distribute important info throughout the semester—from emailing you handouts to adjusting assignments and deadlines. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis Monday–Friday. I regularly check my email Monday–Friday during regular business hours (9–5); outside those hours and during weekends, I cannot guarantee a response. If you have a question that you need to ask me by email, be sure to give me at least 24 hours, or you may not get a response until it's too late. Also, please let me know if you'd like to use a non-Harvard email address.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: *“Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”*