

## **English 97r. The Rhetoric of Color in the English Renaissance**

Elizabeth Weckhurst

eweckhurst@fas.harvard.edu

Office hours: tba

### Tutorial Description

When the words “discriminate” and “discrimination” entered the English lexicon in the seventeenth century, they did not specify irrational acts of prejudice as they do today; instead, they reflected the positive value that is often placed on our capacity to differentiate between things in the world – good or bad, true or false, this or that, etc. The observation, description, and moralization of different *colors* in particular was deeply entangled not only with conceptions of race and ethnicity, but also with those of gender, sexuality, and social status. This course investigates the various colorisms caught up in this entanglement through case studies of three colors that were as charged for the early moderns as they are for us: white, black, and green. Organized around classic works of Renaissance literature, these case studies are designed to create a space for students to consider the role of the critic in determinations of aesthetic value. Along the way, we’ll grapple with the following questions: What is the rhetoric of color? What does it mean to talk about color in terms of rhetoric? How are differences naturalized? What role does color play in representations of human nature and the natural world? What is the relationship between art and nature? How do works of art disrupt, reinforce, or otherwise affect cultural norms? How is art different from ideology? Why does this matter?

The primary readings for this course will be light but intense. The secondary readings are another story, but don’t worry – you won’t be responsible for all of them. For the “white” unit, we’ll read the first book of Edmund Spenser’s sprawling allegorical romance *The Faerie Queene* (1590); we’ll look at some portraits of the virgin queen to whom the poem was dedicated; then we’ll read Sir Philip Sidney’s richly recursive sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) and Shakespeare’s disturbingly erotic *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). For the “black” unit, we’ll spend a fortnight apiece on two tragedies: Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1604) and his more experimental *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606). And for the “green” unit, we’ll read a selection of poems by Andrew Marvell alongside René Descartes’s brief treatise *The World* (ca. 1630s). Secondary readings will run the gamut from recent scholarship in the history of philosophy and cultural theory to some more old-school work in anthropology, literary criticism, and aesthetics. Over the course of the term we will also make several trips to the Harvard Art Museums both to broaden our sense of the significance of color in Renaissance art and to think through how color works differently in the visual and verbal arts.

### General 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

Required Texts:

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche Jr. (Penguin, 2003)  
Sir Philip Sidney, *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford, 2009)  
William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford, 2006)  
William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford, 2008)  
Andrew Marvell, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (Longman, 2003)

Assignments:

Library/Research/Houghton visit—5%  
Conference presentation (5 min prepared talk)—5%  
Regular reading & participation—10%  
(3) Response Papers (3-4 pp)—15% (due dates listed below)  
(3) Précis on a scholarly work (1-2 pp)—15% (to be selected by students)  
Prospectus for final paper, with annotated bibliography—20%  
Final Paper (18-22 pp)—30%



The “Rainbow” Portrait,  
c. 1600-02, attrib. Marcus  
Gheeraerts the Younger

**Course Schedule (secondary readings will be posted online):**

8/31 Week 0: Introductions

**Handout:** John Gage, “Colour-Language, Colour-Symbols” (1999)

*Thinking with Color:* Class trip to the Fogg (date/time TBA)

9/7 Week 1: The Rhetoric of Color in the English Renaissance

Shakespeare, Sonnet 98

James Ackerman, “On Early Renaissance Color Theory and Practice” (1991)

Herman Pleij, “Medieval Notions of Color,” from *Colors Demonic and Divine* (2004)

Northrop Frye, “Intoxicated with Words: The Colours of Rhetoric” (2012)

**Recommended:** Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (1973)

**Unit One: White**

9/13 Week 2: Romancing Purity

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book One (cantos 1-6)

James Nohrberg, “Allegoria; or, the Figure of Fals-Semblant” (1976)

*The Spenser Encyclopedia* (1990), ed. A.C. Hamilton, selections

**Recommended:** Patricia Parker, “The Dilation of Being,” “The Defeat of Error” (1979)

Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1988)

9/20 Week 3: The Virgin Queen

**Response paper #1 due**

Spenser, *FQ*, Book One (cantos 7-12)

Elizabeth I portraits (*The Darnley Portrait*, c. 1575; *The Ermine Portrait*, c. 1585; *The Armada Portrait*, c. 1588; *The Ditchley Portrait*, c. 1592; *The Rainbow Portrait*, c. 1600-2)

Mary Douglas, “Ritual Uncleaness,” “Secular Defilement” (1966)

**Recommended:** Lisa Eldridge, “White: The Politics and Power of Pale” (2012)

Farah Karim-Cooper, “Early Modern Cosmetic Culture” (2006)

Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth I: Authority, Gender, and Representation*

*Thinking with Color:* Class trip to the Fogg (date/time TBA)

9/27 Week 4: The Fair (and Far Away) Sex

**Response paper #2 due**

Sir Phillip Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella*, all

Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, all

Nancy Vickers, “‘The blazon of sweet beauty’s best’: Shakespeares’s *Lucrece*” (1985)

**Recommended:** Catherine Bates, “Masochism in *Astrophel and Stella*” (2007)

Roland Greene, “Constructing Character: Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella* as Nominative Fiction”

Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999)

## Unit Two: Black

### 10/4 Week 5: Tragic Identities (I): Race

Shakespeare, *Othello*, all

Emily Bartels, "Making More of the Moor: Renaissance Refashionings of Race" (1990)

**Recommended:** Janet Adelman, "Iago's Alter Ego: Race as Projection in *Othello*" (1997)

Ian Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors* (2009)

Joel B. Altman, "Performing the Improbable Other on Shakespeare's Stage" (2010)

*Thinking with Color:* Class trip to the Fogg (date/time TBA)

### 10/11 Week 6: Tragic Identities (II): Gender

**Response Paper #3 due**

*Othello* cont. (select, reread, and annotate one scene)

Ania Loomba, "Sexuality and Racial Difference" (1989)

Sujata Iyengar, "Heroic Blushing," "Whiteness as Sexual Difference" (2013)

**Recommended:** Richard Dyer, "White Death" (2013)

Diane Miller Sommerville, "Rape, Race, and Rhetoric: The Rape Myth in  
Historiographical Perspective" (2005)

### 10/18 Week 7 Colorful Personalities (I): Antony

Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, all

Marjorie Garber, "Antony and Cleopatra" (fr. *Shakespeare After All*)

**Recommended:** Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (2004)

### 10/25 Week 8 Colorful Personalities (II): Cleopatra

*Antony and Cleopatra* cont. (select, reread, and annotate one scene)

Iyengar, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bride" (2013)

Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (2002)

**Recommended:** Justin E.H. Smith, "Toward a Historical Ontology of Race" (2015)

W.H. Auden, "Making, Knowing, and Judging," from *The Dyer's Hand*

*Thinking with Color:* Class trip to the Fogg (date/time TBA)

## Unit Three: Green

### 11/1 Week 9: Marvell's Green World

**Prospectus/Bibliography due**

Andrew Marvell, "The Garden," "Upon Appleton House," "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Faun," "The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers"

René Descartes, *The World*, aka *Treatise on the Light* (ca. early 1630s)

Justin E.H. Smith, "New Worlds" (2015)

**Recommended:** William Empson, "Marvell's Garden" (1935)

Joanna Picciotto, "Scientific Investigations: Experimentalism and Paradisal Return" (2008)

### 11/8 Week 10: Green Thoughts

Marvell, "On a Drop of Dew," "To his Coy Mistress," "The Mower against Gardens," "Damon the Mower," "The Mower to the Glowworms," "The Mower's Song," "Bermudas"

Bruce R. Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture* (2010)

**Recommended:** A.D. Cousins, “Andrew Marvell’s Mower Poems and the Pastoral Tradition”  
Edward Wilson Averill, “Color and the Anthropocentric Problem” (fr. *Readings on Color* [1997])

*Thinking with Color*: Class trip to the Fogg (date/time TBA)

11/15 Week 11: The Future of Coloring

Marvell, *The Last Instructions to a Painter* (1667)

Charles A. Riley, “Color in Philosophy” (fr. *Color Codes* [1995])

Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy” (1974)

**Recommended:** Stephen Greenblatt, “Racial Memory and Literary History” (2001)

#### **Part Four: Color Theory Today**

11/22 Week 12: More color theories

**Rough draft due**

Herman Pleij, “The Dangers of Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue” (2004)

Mazviita Chirimuuta, *Outside Color: Perceptual Science and the Problem of Color* (2015)

11/29 Week 13: Student presentations

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#### **Course Policies**

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 11:59pm 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 on or 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 get in touch with me.

Email: I’ll use email to distribute important info throughout the semester—from handouts to any adjustments to assignments and/or deadlines, as needed. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis. 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, (Sept. 9). 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.”*