

Description:

The core of this seminar will be the great sequences of English love sonnets written by William Shakespeare, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and Mary Wroth. These poems cover an enormous amount of aesthetic and psychological ground: ranging from the utterly subjective to the entirely public or conventional, from licit to forbidden desires, they might also serve as a manual of experimentation with the resources of sound, rhythm, and figuration in poetry. Around these sequences, we will develop several other contexts, using both Renaissance texts and modern accounts: the Petrarchan literary tradition (poems by Francis Petrarch and Sir Thomas Wyatt); the social, political, and ethical uses of love poetry (seduction, getting famous, influencing policy, elevating morals, compensating for failure); other accounts of ideal masculinity and femininity (conduct manuals, theories of gender and anatomy); and the other limits of the late sixteenth century vogue for love poetry: narrative poems, pornographic poems, poems that don't work.

Participation:

You should expect to be present and prepared at all meetings of the seminar; repeated absences will affect your grade. You should also expect to lead the discussion several times during the semester (exact arrangements will depend on class size). Doing this will involve some advance work: you'll be selecting a few poems to focus on and also suggesting some questions or topics for people to think about in preparing for class.

Writing:

Discussion board: I'll be asking you to post a couple of items (comment, question, response) to the Server discussion board each week; details to be worked out depending on class size.

You will also be writing two papers: A 5-7 pp. essay on one or two poems, and a 12-15 pp. essay due on the last day of class. I will meet with participants individually to discuss possible topics

Note on sources:

In addition to the books on course reserve, Hayden has many excellent books relating to our topic; I'd be happy to suggest further reading. Many of the sites listed under "Electronic Texts" also have additional information on authors and their work. Use them if you wish, but be aware of course that on-line sources vary in quality and inclusiveness. If you refer to on-line material for your work, you must credit these sources in your notes

as you would printed work, whether you use the actual language of the text or only its ideas.

It is the policy of the Literature Faculty that students who plagiarise will receive an F in the subject, and that the instructor will forward the case to the Committee on Discipline. Full acknowledgement for all information obtained from sources outside the classroom must be clearly stated in all written work submitted. All ideas, arguments, and direct phrasings taken from someone else's work must be identified and properly footnoted. Quotations from other sources must be clearly marked as distinct from the student's own work. MIT's academic honesty policy can be found at the following link: <http://web.mit.edu/policies/10.0.html>

Grade:

25% work in class (participation, leading discussions, on-line discussion), 25% short paper, 50% seminar paper.