

Course Number and Section: ENGL 423A 001

Course Title: “Gender, Narrative, and Political Thought in 17th-Century English Culture”

Credits: 3

Term: 2020-2021 Term 2 (Winter: January to April)

Schedule: Mondays 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Course Description:

This course examines the gendering of political thought in fictional, historical, and philosophical narratives of the early modern period (1500-1700) with a focus on the seventeenth century (1600-1700). We will study how gender inflects some of the core concepts in political thought of this period, such as patriarchy and royalism, analogies between the family and the commonwealth, republicanism and masculinity, the sexual and racial contracts embedded within early modern social contract theory, and the gendering of early modern utopias (including those by Thomas More and Margaret Cavendish).

A second critical perspective will be comparative: we will explore the extent to which the narratives of (and in) early modern political philosophy as well as in historical writing function as forms of representation analogous to that of fiction as written during the early modern period. By invoking conventional tools of literary analysis as well as the critical historiographical methods of Hayden White, we will consider the relationship between various forms of political narratives--fictional, poetic, historical, and philosophical--as modes of representation. We will examine how these writers used narrative as a medium through which to comment on the various crises that reshaped the political contours of the English nation during the Stuart reigns (from 1603 to the early eighteenth century).

A third important focus will be that of the extent to which early modern political thought is relevant to contemporary debates, especially the changing political dynamics around recent moves towards authoritarianism and natural rights in Western democracies. For example, we will consider how seventeenth-century writers (dramatists, fiction writers, historians, and political philosophers) participate in discussions over the rights, prerogatives, and responsibilities of early modern monarchs and republican leaders during the Commonwealth period. These are issues that were hotly debated (occasionally with extraordinary violence) in seventeenth-century England during the mid-century civil wars and regicide as well as after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. We will consider how such political debates are relevant to recent discussions about the nature of democracy and shifts towards autocratic governance in a 21st-century Western context.

Our goals in this course include developing a refined ability to read seventeenth-century prose with a critical, informed, and perceptive eye; understanding the social, political, and literary cultures of the seventeenth century; and considering the extent to which seventeenth-century social and political thought is relevant to contemporary social and political discourse.

The class will be run as a seminar meeting once per week. Emphasis will be placed on class members' engagement in thoughtful scholarly conversation during class. No prior knowledge of early modern history or political thought is required. Resources will be provided during class and on *Canvas* to facilitate student learning in these areas.

Required Readings:

We will cover texts or parts thereof by the following early modern writers: Thomas More, Christopher Marlowe, King James I, Elizabeth Cary, Thomas Hobbes, John Milton, Anne Bradstreet, Margaret Cavendish, Robert Filmer, John Dryden, Aphra Behn, John Locke, and Mary Astell. These readings will be augmented by an assortment of relevant critical works by contemporary scholars of early modern literature and political thought, including Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, Carole Pateman, and Hayden White.