

## Course Description Form

Course number and section: ENGL 430 / ENGL 521B

Course Topic: Feminist Forerunners: Early Modern Women's Literature and Contemporary Theory

Credits: 3

Term: Term 2

Schedule: 3-hour Seminars held Fridays 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. in FIP 138

Instructor: Dr. Margaret Reeves

### Course Description:

This course will examine the relationship between modern feminist thought and what could be called the "proto-feminist" thought of early modern women. The approach is both comparative and historical, in that we will read a selection of texts by seventeenth-century women writers and compare their ideas about gender, female subjectivity, race, and class to those found in modern feminist theory. Can early modern women writers, despite their very different social and historical circumstances and perspectives, be counted as feminist forerunners? Is feminism itself primarily a modern movement, or does it have a longer history than is often acknowledged? In what ways do the social and historical contexts in which a woman writes shape her ability to understand, challenge, and navigate social injustice and systemic oppression? Reading texts written during the seventeenth century (1600-1700) alongside selections by modern feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Bell Hooks, Genevieve Lloyd, and Trinh T. Minh-ha will enable this comparison between early modern proto-feminism and modern feminist thought. We will investigate both the commonalities as well as important differences in women's writing during these distinct historical periods. Possible areas of inquiry include the politics of literary and theoretical canons; representations of female subjectivity, sexuality, same-sex desire; and strategies used by feminist and proto-feminist thinkers to actively contest restrictive cultural and social codes.

### Tentative Reading List:

In addition to selections from works by late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists, including those mentioned above, we will read the following works by seventeenth-century writers:

Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* and *Some Reflections upon Marriage*

Aphra Behn, *The Rover*

Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, *The Convent of Pleasure*, selections from *Orations*

Mary Chudleigh, "The Ladies Defence"

Judith Drake, Excerpt from *An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex*

Margaret Fell, Excerpt from *Women's Speaking Justified*

Anne Finch, selected poems

Sarah Fyge Egerton, *The Female Advocate*

Amelia Lanyer, "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women"

Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen*

Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus*