

ENGL 6302 Early Women Writers

Fall 2025

Contrary to cultural narratives that premodern women docile, under control, and voiceless, women in the Renaissance produced a stunning array of writing. We will read poems, autobiography, and household manuals that give insight into the daily lives of women in 16th and 17th century England. We will also read texts that imagine and explore new realities: adventures set in foreign lands, a play about an army of women, and the first work of science fiction in English by any author. In an effort to capture the full range of women's writing, we will read and analyze a variety of genres, from drama to prose to poetry.

This course surveys women's writing from the Renaissance while placing it in its historical, cultural, and literary contexts. We will learn how these authors thought about their authorship, and their gender as we ask what it meant to write literature as a Renaissance woman. Along the way, we will consider intersections of race, class, and sexuality with gender identity. We will read obscure poets such as Anne Locke, to poems written by Queen Elizabeth herself, texts that were published and those that went unread for centuries until feminist scholars re-discovered them. We will also engage with the form of these texts, from their original manuscript contexts with some attention to book history to some of the new digital projects which bring these writings into the modern age.

This course features a flexible assignment sequence, giving you the choice of how you want to demonstrate your learning and thinking.

Through taking English 6302, you will be able to

- Break down and interpret sixteenth- and seventeenth-century language
- Apply secondary criticism to literature while still making space for your own ideas
- Generate insightful arguments about literature, culture, and society
- Cultivate a practice of empathetic reading, discussion, and analysis that fosters justice and democracy in our society and communities
- Articulate your own learning and self-author your own learning goals

Course Materials:

You'll need to buy the following. Everything else will be available via our course site.

Mary Wroth, [*The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*](#). ISBN 9780866984515

Course Schedule [note that this course only met once a week]

Unit One: Theorizing Premodern Women

Day 1: Queen Elizabeth, Tillbury Speech; Joan Sharp “Defense of Women”
Joan Kelley, *Did Women Have A Renaissance*; Leah Marcus “The Queen’s Two Bodies”

Day 2: Assignment Plan and Goal Statement Due
Anne Clifford, *Autobiography* (1603); selections from Margaret Paston’s letters;
selections from Margaret Hoby’s diary

Day 3: Hannah Wolley, *The Gentle Woman’s Companion*; Cavendish *The Convent of Pleasure*

Day 4: Isabella Whitney, “Will and Testament”; Anne Bradstreet, “The Author to her Book”; Gayle Rubin, *Traffic in Women*

Day 5: Katherine Phillips, Mary Wroth, Jane Barker

Unit Two: Women and Religion

Day 6: Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*

Day 7: Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Day 8: Amelia Lanier, *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*; Anne Locke, “Meditations on a Penitent Sinner”

Day 9: Hester Pulter; The Pulter Project

Day 10: Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Miriam*

Unit Three: Making New Worlds

Day 11: Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*
WWO Assignment Proposal due

Day 12: Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*

Day 13: Mary Wroth, *Urania*

Day 14: Mary Wroth, *Urania*

Finals Period: WWO Project Due

WWO Conference Presentation

24 hours later: Final Reflection and Self-Assessment due

Assignments:

In this course, you will have the opportunity to choose how you will demonstrate the knowledge and skills you gain in this course. Please review the assignment options below and **complete the Assignment Plan and Goal Statement by [date]** You may change your mind as the semester progresses, but you must consult with me.

20% of your grade will come from Engagement. As this is a discussion-based course, it is crucial that you are present to participate in the conversation. If you must be absent from class, you are expected to communicate with me in advance. If you miss more than 3 classes, your grade should reflect this. If you miss more than 5 classes, I will drop you for non-attendance.

10% Class Presentation: secondary source and lead discussion

10% will come from reflective work: your initial goal statement, a short (1/2-1 page reflection with each assignment, a 1-2 page proposal for your WWO assignment, and your Final Reflection and Self-Assessment. You should think about how this course fits into your career plan as well as your larger MA programmatic goals

20% Women's Writers Online Project. This can be a 6-8 page syllabus inclusion pitch or a 5 page edition (with explanatory footnotes, a 2-page introduction, and 1-2- page cover letter). If you come up with another project involving this project, I am open to this, but you should meet with me to discuss this idea before turning in your pitch on 11/5. You will present on this during a final class conference.

5%: Peer Assessment of classmate's final project and presentation

The remainder of work (35 points) should come from the following options:

- Article Response (3 pages): 5 points
- Close reading essay (5 pages): 10 points
- Keyword essay (5 pages): 10 points
- Weekly engagement with Discussion forum (2 pages): 15 points
- Creative Response/Adaptation/Translation with 2 page critical statement: 15 points
- Annotated Bibliography (5-7 sources): 20 points
- Thinkpiece Assignment: 20 points
- Lead a section of Dr. K-M's "Reading Renaissance Women" FYS: 25 points (or both sections for 30 points) with written reflection. Meeting in advance
- Conference Paper (7-8 pages): 25 points. Meeting in advance
- Teaching plan for unit of HS course: 30 points
- Seminar Paper (15 pages): 35 points. Meeting in advance

[Institutional, Departmental, and Instructor Policies and resources redacted]