

ENGL 305: EARLY MODERN TRANS STUDIES

Prof. Colby Gordon
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Office: English House 210
Office Hours: Tues. 9:00-12:00 in English House (and by appointment)

Fall 2026
Class Time: M/W 11:40-1:00
Room: English House III

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why has it been possible to envision a gay or a queer but never a trans Renaissance? This course asks what it means to imagine histories of transness that extend back to the early modern period, centuries before the development of a sexological vocabulary for gender identity. Through a series of literary, historical, and theoretical readings, we ask: how did premodern subjects imagine gender variance? Who exactly was transitioning then, and what does it mean to understand them as trans? How does the early modern history of trans life converge with histories of racism, colonialism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia? How might we construct the history of cisness? We will consider together how early modern texts speak to the historical, theoretical, and political concerns that animate contemporary trans studies.

REQUIRED TEXTS (AVAILABLE AT BRYN MAWR BOOKSTORE)

- Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings* (Penguin, 1994)
- *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford World's Classics, 2009)
- C. de Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, trans. Michele and Gabriel Stepto (Beacon Press, 1997)
- John Lyly, *Galatea and Midas*, ed. George Hunter and David Bevington (The Revels Plays, 2007)
- *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen Fallon (The Modern Library, 2007)

Additional readings, marked with an asterisk, are available on our course Moodle site.

CONTENT ADVISORY

Because of the nature of our class, our readings will engage with difficult material, including physical violence, sexual assault, racism, and colonialism. I will do my best to signal if sensitive matter is coming up in the readings or likely to be discussed in class, and you may want to consult summaries of the works we're reading as well. I want to encourage you to speak with me as soon as possible if you have particular concerns about encountering these topics.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Please consult the schedule of assigned readings posted on Moodle. Note that the schedule is subject to change.

EXAM DATES

Exam 1 (In-Class) Wed., Oct. 7
Exam 2 (In-Class) Wed., Nov. 18
Final Exam due by **noon** on **Friday, Dec. 18**

GRADING

Grade will be calculated out of 100 pts. Here are ways you can earn them:

Exams: 50 points possible for each; I will drop the lowest score
Stage and Record a Scene: 5 points (Optional, 1x max)
Rest Activity: 1 point (2x max)
Memorize and Recite Poem During Class: 3 points (1x max)
Memorize and Recite Poem During Office Hours: 2 points (1x max)

No assignment is required. You can earn points by completing assignments in whatever combination works best for you and your schedule.

Final grades will be determined by the total number of points you earn, according to this chart:

4.0: 95+ points
3.7: 90-94 points
3.3: 85-89 points
3.0: 80-84 points
2.7: 75-79 points
2.3: 70-74 points
2.0: 65-69 points

AI POLICY:

The use of AI at any stage in the writing process is strictly prohibited.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Excessive absences (more than 6) is grounds for failure of the course.