

Objectives: This class was designed to continue our survey of British literature by focusing on Shakespeare, the Renaissance and the search for meaning through the idea of choice. Through essays and class discussions, students were asked to analyze the ideas that informed this culture as it was represented in the literary pieces. Students were encouraged to seek out contrasts and parallels between cultural mores and to integrate history, literature, religion, philosophy and art to build a comprehensive and organic view of the English world from 1590 - 1815 with a focus on love and free will. We examined Early Modern attitudes toward racial and gender differences and the waning of religion and the rise of individual choice. Students read the following:

William Shakespeare: Hamlet (Arden 2nd– Harold Jenkins, ed.), The Sonnets;

Christopher Marlowe: The Passionate Shepherd To His Love;

Sir Walter Raleigh: Answer To Marlowe;

John Donne: The Bait, The Flea, The Ecstasy, The Perfume, The Good Morrow, Elegy XX: To His Mistress Going To Bed, Sappho to Philaenis, A Valediction Forbidding Mourning, Valediction on Weeping, Holy Sonnet # 6; Meditation 17;

Katherine Philips: Against Love;

Aphra Behn: Oroonoko, A Thousand Martyrs Have I Made, The Willing Mistress;

John Milton: Paradise Lost, Book I and selections; On The Late Massacre In Piedmont; On His Blindness, How Soon Hath Time, Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint, Lycidas;

Andrew Marvell: To His Coy Mistress, The Definition of Love;

Jane Austen: Pride and Prejudice;

Peter Ackroyd: Shakespeare: The Biography (chapter about the sonnets)

Jonathan Bate: The Genius of Shakespeare, selections

Harold Bloom, Jonathan Bate, Marjorie Garber: The Ghost of Shakespeare, Harper's 1999

Stephen Greenblatt: Shakespeare's Leap, The New York Times Magazine, 2004.

S. Schoenbaum: Shakespeare's Lives (selections)

Edward Dolnick: The Ghost's Vocabulary, The Atlantic Monthly, 1991

E.A.J. Honigmann: Shakespeare: The Lost Years (excerpt) 1985

Lorrie Moore: The Modern Elizabethan (on Shakespeare), The New York Times, 2006

Nieder Korn, William S.: Seeing the Fingerprints of Other Hands In Shakespeare, NYTimes, 2003

Simon Critchley, Jamieson Webster: Let Be: An Answer to Hamlet's Question, NYTimes 2011

Sherwin Nuland: Review: Passions and Tempers: A History of The Humours, NYTimes, 2007

Thomas Mallon: Love's Deity (review of John Donne: The Reformed Soul), NYTimes, 2007

Gary Rosen: Review: Descartes' Bones, NYTimes, 2008

Anthony Gottlieb: Particle Man (review of Giordano Bruno), NYTimes, 2008

Charles Isherwood: Ben Johnson: In and Out of Shakespeare's Shadow, NYTimes, 2012

William Empson: Donne: The Space Man, Kenyon Review 1957; Shakespeare's Angel, Evidence for Herbert, Mr. W.H. (essays) 1996

Colin Burrow: Shall I Go On? (article about John Milton), London Review of Books, 2013

Charles Nicholl: Elizabethan True Crime Plays, London Review of Books, 2021

There was one summary essay:

- A comparison of attitudes toward love of Austen, Shakespeare and two of the poets we read.

During the trimester, students wrote seven shorter essays:

- An analysis of the evidence for Oxford and Shakespeare;
- An explication of Sonnet 129 in light of the other sonnets (in-class timed essay);
- An essay on attitudes to European and non-European people in Oroonoko;
- An explication of a specific soliloquy in Hamlet (including teaching it to the class);
- A discussion of Satan's personality in Paradise Lost;
- An assessment of the meaning of tragedy in Hamlet.

- An comparison of Elizabeth and Charlotte in the first third of Pride and Prejudice (in-class timed essay).

Students who missed a deadline or were late to class wrote one additional exercise:

- An additional explication of a specific soliloquy in Hamlet