

ENGL 4200: Early Modern Special Topic***Poetics & Historiography***

Wednesdays: 6:00-9:50

Fall Quarter, 2011

CRN 4183

Sturm Hall 435

W. Scott Howard

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: In “An Apology for Poetry” (1595)—often cited as a text that epitomizes English Renaissance poetics—Sir Philip Sidney elevates poetry above philosophy and history, arguing that “the poet only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter, but maketh matter for a conceit.” Which theories of poetry and history (from England and the Continent) have the greatest influence upon Sidney? Which challenge Sidney’s model? And how do other English dramatists, poets, and writers (women and men) work within and against that dynamic context of power relations among competing fields/forms of discourse & knowledge from Plato (c. 427-347 BCE) to Katherine Philips (1631-1664), Aristotle (c. 384-322 BCE) to Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673)? This class will investigate a major topic in the early modern era: the relationship between poetics and historiography. Beginning with Plato and Aristotle, students will study the works (both canonical and non-canonical) of Continental and English philosophers, poets and historians from the 13th through the 17th century. The course will also involve examinations of recent scholarship, theory and criticism in the field. Students are requested to be prepared to discuss the following texts at the first meeting: Plato’s *Republic*, Book X; and Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

More Information: *Poetics and Historiography* (ENGL 4200: Early Modern Special Topic) fits into a few possible distribution requirements in the English Department’s graduate program, including: the concentrations, either Rhetoric & Theory, or Literary Studies; and the historical periods of study, either before 1700, or between 1700 and 1900. As with any trans-historical class offered at the graduate-level, the department’s default policy is that the student’s final project may determine the matching distribution requirement and/or program concentration (with approval of the Graduate Director). Final projects for this course will be determined according to individual student proposals and may include a variety of theoretical, creative, and literary/cultural/scholarly approaches. While the primary literary studies focus in this class will concern the 16th and 17th centuries (mainly in England), the scope for our studies in poetics, historiography, philosophy, and literary theory & criticism will cover a robust and diversified, international field from Classical times through the early modern and into the modern era. Within that capacious context, we will pay special attention to important early modern and modern schools of thought, cultural developments, and artistic practices that have deep roots in earlier time periods, such as: the poetics of the sublime; neo-Classical aesthetics; materialist philosophy, and various theories about poetic indeterminacy, contingency, and eidetic making. We will also recover an almost forgotten conversation about poetic fictions and simulacra.

BOOKS: Used copies available via Powell’s, <http://www.powells.com/>, Amazon, <http://www.amazon.com/>, and others.

Adams, Hazard, ed. *Critical Theory Since Plato*. 3rd ed. Fort Worth: Heinle, 2004. ISBN: 0155055046; \$153.95.

Bowerbank, Sylvia, and Sara Mendelson, eds. *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2000. ISBN: 155111173X. \$25.95.

Breisach, Ernst. *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern*. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994. ISBN: 0226072835; \$20.00.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Alastair Fowler. 2nd ed. London: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1998. ISBN: 0582215188; \$64.29

Rivers, Isabel. *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge, 1994. ISBN: 0415106478; \$41.95.

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- Three weeks @ eidetic poetics
- Three weeks @ constitutive poetics
- Three weeks @ figural historicity / simulacra / sublime indeterminacy

READING / WRITING / RESEARCH:

• Eight Texts written in reply to your choice of documents from our readings during the given week in the quarter. Open topic. You are free to write in the form & style of your choice, including, for example: letters, dialogues, fictions, critiques, essays, pericopes, theoretical formulations . . . & etc. My hope is that you'll use these huit écrits/eight writings as opportunities to engage seriously & playfully with your choice of works. You might also think of these as small steps toward your final project for the course. Make these weekly writings manageable for your time, please. [60% of grade]

• One Project involving research. Open topic. The project should engage in some way with your selection of documents from our readings during the quarter, and should also address topics & works/materials beyond that immediate scope. You are free to write in the form & style of your choice. Project proposals will be solicited for discussion. [40% of grade]