The Age of Aphra Behn: Restoration Literature

In this course we will read a selection of exciting and significant works of Restoration literature, including a number of Restoration stage comedies, and explore how they contribute to the creation of new literary modes and to the formation of modern notions of personal identity. We will give particular attention to the career and works of Aphra Behn, England's first widely successful female professional writer.

The "restoration" of King Charles II in 1660, after two decades of turmoil (including the English civil wars, the execution of Charles I, the formation of a Puritan Republic under Oliver Cromwell, and a period of wild social experimentation) was widely celebrated, even by former supporters of his father's opponents, by a society tired of constant ideological conflict. Compared with the self-denying ideals of the 1640s and 1650s, when both plebeian and aristocratic social and sexual license was attacked (Christmas was banned for a few years), the Restoration (roughly 1660-1700) was a period of great social and sexual indulgence. With the easing of restraints on personal behaviour, social ideas, and even literary expression (Cromwell, for example, had closed the theatres; Charles re-opened them), Restoration literature both represented and helped to create a exciting, dynamic, and experiment-rich burst of energetic cultural expression.

The period has something for just about every interest: the sexual satire of court wits such as Rochester and Etheredge; the reflective poetry of Katherine Phillips; defences of women scientists by Margaret Cavendish; witty celebrations of female autonomy and desire (by Aphra Behn and Cavendish); new ideals of individual and colonial heroism (Milton's Adam, Behn's Oroonoko) and comic satires of those ideals (Dryden's Mac Flecknoe); new genres (such as the novel, travel narrative, biography, and autobiography); new kinds of published authors (such as women and the middling ranks); new media (widely disseminated print forms such as the newsbook and the broadside); the appearance of the professional writer (Grub Street); new modes of old genres (women actors were now allowed for the first time, leading to a female-dominated star system and to an increasingly heterosexualized stage); and new literary relationships to classical Greek and Roman literature and learning, relationships which--according to some critics at least--see "Athenian" or forward-looking, modernizing writers in conflict with "Augustan" or backward-looking, reactionary writers.

These diverse literary and cultural trends, set in motion by the upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century civil wars in England, may remind us a bit of the miscellaneousness of the scatological debris flowing down the gutter in Swift's "A Description of a City Shower": "Sweepings from Butchers' Stalls, Dung, Guts, and Blood, / Drowned Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drenched in Mud, / Dead Cats, and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down the Flood." This is not eighteenth-century literature as it has traditionally been taught—a period of literary decorum, rococo neo-classicism, and sentimental effusions. Instead, the wild, levelling
dynamism of Swift’s city is a fitting metaphor for the social and literary energies of the oft-hidden side of the literature of the period 1660-1700, and beyond.

Rather than approach our readings by way of a chronological survey, I have grouped the material under four headings—women and the new science; the libertine; the new woman; and anti-colonialism. In each unit we will sample both venerable classics and upstart contenders to the canon, and consider how shared literary techniques and concerns, and shared social questions, serve to organize the texts within each unit. One writer in particular—Aphra Behn—will be singled out for attention across all four units.

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Office: Hagey Hall 257; Phone: 888-4567, ext. 2416
Office hours: 4:00-5:00 Tuesday and 1:00-2:00 Thursday, or by appointment

Required Texts:
Robert DeMaria, Jr., ed., British Literature, 1640-1789: An Anthology, 2nd ed. (Blackwell)
Silvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson, eds., Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader (Broadview)
Gamini Salgado, ed., Three Restoration Comedies (Penguin)
Janet Todd, ed., Oronoko, The Rover, and Other Writings (Penguin)

Recommended Texts:
Joseph Gibaldi, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 5th ed. (MLA)

Assignments: Attendance and active preparation for and participation in class discussions and exercises (10%); mid-term essay or 15-minute class presentation on a Restoration topic (your choice = 20%); 7-page paper (30%); and a final examination (40%).

Students ARE REQUIRED to prepare course readings ahead of the relevant classes. For those who choose to write it, the mid-term will be held on October 18. The paper is due at the start of class on November 22. Class presentations, for those who choose to deliver one, will be scheduled starting in the second week of classes. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, and fastened with a staple (do not use plastic report folders or other fasteners or covers); if using a word-processor, laser print your paper and do not use right justification. A page is 250 words. Papers must follow the format laid out in the MLA Handbook, 5th ed. Papers late without prior permission may be penalized 2% per day. Uncompleted assignments will be graded F-.

NOTE: Please keep a photocopy of any paper you submit, and never hand a paper in by sliding it under (or sticking it to) my office door.
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SYLLABUS

September 11: Introduction

September 13: Prelude: New Forms, New Energies:
    Swift, “A Description of a City Shower” (in DeMaria)
    Dryden, “Mac Flecknoe” (in DeMaria)

I. The New Woman

September 18: The Status of Women:
    The Marriage Service (handout)
    Chudleigh, “To the Ladies” (handout)
    Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies (excerpt in DeMaria)
    Defoe, “An Academy for Women” (in DeMaria)

September 20 & 25: Female Friendship:
    Cavendish, “Female Orations” (in Bowerbank and Mendelson)
    Philips, “To Mrs. Wogan, My Honoured Friend, on the Death of Her
    Husband,” “Orinda to Lucasia,” “Parting with Lucasia. A
    Song” (in DeMaria)

September 27 & October 2: Liberated Women:
    Behn, “An Epistle to the Reader, Prefixed to The Dutch Lover”
        (handout), “Epilogue to Sir Patient Fancy” (in Todd)
    Cavendish, The Convent of Pleasure (in Bowerbank and Mendelson)

II. The Libertine

October 4 & 9: Future Passion:
    Herrick, “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” (in DeMaria)
    Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress” (in DeMaria)
    Rochester, “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” “The Disabled Debauchee,”
        “A Satyr on Charles II” (in DeMaria)
Behn, "The Disappointment," "To the Fair Clarinda," "Ovid to Julia" (in DeMaria); "On Desire" (in Todd)

October 11 & 16: The Constraints of Desire:
Wycherley, The Country Wife (in Salgado)

October 18: Midterm

October 23 & 25: Sexual Modernism:
Etherege, The Man of Mode (in Salgado)

October 30, November 1 & 6: Women Who Rove with the Wolves:
Behn, The Rover (in Todd)

III. Women and the New Science

November 8 & 13: Genres of Science:
Sprat, The History of the Royal Society (excerpt on handout)
Dryden, "To My Honoured Friend, Dr. Carleton" (in DeMaria)
Rochester, "A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind" (in DeMaria)
Behn, "Preface to Her Translation of Fontenelle's Entretiens" (in Bowerbank and Mendelson)

November 15 & 20: Genders of Science:
Pepys, Diary (excerpt on handout)
Cavendish, The Blazing World (in Bowerbank and Mendelson)

IV. Anti-Colonialism

November 22 & 27: Noble, African, and Anti-Christian:
Behn, Oroonoko (in DeMaria or Todd)

November 29: Conclusion and Review