

EN4/6723: British Literature and Culture from 1660-1700

T/R: 12:30

Dr. Peter DeGabriele

Impotence and Power: Sex and Politics in the Restoration



The Restoration in England (1660-1688) was peculiar for its rigorous insistence on thinking politics through sexuality. Poets compared King Charles II's sceptre to his sexual organ, and tragedians represented the political decisions of their protagonists as based upon their choice of sexual object. As we read the literature of the period we will look at the way in which the supposedly private affairs of sexuality and desire intrude upon, and even dominate, both affairs of state and the subtle power dynamics of social and cultural life. We will look at how literary works construct sexual and gender identities, and how they think through problems of power, authority, and individual freedom. Readings will include satirical poetry by Rochester and Dryden; prose by Aphra Behn; heroic drama by Thomas Otway and Nathaniel Lee; and comedies by William Wycherley and William Congreve.

During the semester, you will write bi-weekly reading responses, compose two essays and take two exams: one midterm and one final.