

**ENG3341G: “Sex, Death, and Philosophy:  
Libertinism and Eighteenth-Century British Literature”  
Winter 2018 – Mark McDayter**

Because the popular image of the 17th and 18th centuries still prevalent evokes an era of stuffy aristocrats wearing uncomfortably voluminous and elaborate clothing, the extent to which sexuality formed a vital preoccupation of life in the period sometimes comes as a surprise. In fact, the men and women of England in the Restoration period thought of sex as enormously important as an expression of identity and an articulation of the human relationship to the world around. And they seem, on the basis of the literature and art of the time, to have engaged in a great deal of it.

**“Sex, Death, and Philosophy: Libertinism and Eighteenth-Century British Literature”**

(ENG3341G) is an honours course devoted to literary and cultural articulations of the phenomenon of “libertinism” as it was expressed from about 1660 to 1748. Libertinism represented a particular and surprisingly broad-ranging perspective on the world, and the place of humans within it: it addressed the shape of the cosmos, the mechanisms of human nature and understanding, and complexity of ethical and political structures and behaviour. And for many if not most libertines, sexuality stood as the ultimate human expression of the “freedom” that was promised (or threatened) by their radical philosophy.

We will be reading libertinism through the lense of a variety of genres, including lyric and satirical poetry, drama, prose romance, the novel, and philosophical discourse. We will additionally be discussing the political, cultural, ideological, and social contexts that informed libertinism.

The focus of the course is upon two authors who made important (and very different) contributions to the idea, expression, and indeed lifestyle of the libertine, John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, and Aphra Behn, but other authors whose work we will be addressing include Thomas Hobbes, the Earl of Dorset, George Etherege, and Eliza Haywood, and John Cleland.

Most of the texts in this course are relatively short and manageable. While many of them are representative of the mainstream of literature in the age, it is important to note that **some of these texts deal in very explicit and often crude terms with sexuality, sexual violence, and misogyny. In addition, some of the themes we are discussing may possibly be triggering to some.** We will be addressing these important issues in class through open and critically-informed classroom discussion throughout the course.

“The Libertine Restoration” will be taught during the Winter term on Mondays from 1:30 to 3:30, and Wednesdays 1:30 to 2:30. The classroom is UCC (University Community Centre) 54B.

### **Schedule**

**Please note that the schedule that appears below is somewhat flexible and subject to change.**

Handouts are available on the “Resources” page of the course OWL site. “Walker” refers to the ebook version of [John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester: The Poems and Lucina’s Rape](#), ed. Keith Walker and Nicholas Fisher (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), while “Melville” refers to the ebook version of Titus Lucretius Carus, [On the Nature of the Universe. A New Verse Translation by Sir Ronald Melville](#), intro. Don and Peta Fowler (Oxford University Press, 1998), both available through Western Libraries.

## Week 1 – 8-10 January, 2018

### *Course Introduction: Backgrounds*

The philosophical and cultural libertinism of the Restoration is rooted in political, social, and literary developments of the reign of Charles I (1625-1649), and represents moreover a reaction, in part at least, to the traumatic events of the English Civil Wars and Commonwealth periods (1649-1660).

#### **Texts:**

Suckling, “Why so wan and pale, fond lover . . .” ([Handout: OWL](#))  
Lovelace, “La Bella Bona Roba” ([Handout: OWL](#))  
Carew, “The Rapture” ([Handout: OWL](#))

## Week 2 – 15-17 January, 2018

### *Intellectual Backgrounds: Atoms, Madness, and Very Dangerous Books*

Much of the intellectual and philosophical content and rationale of Restoration libertinism was derived from two books, one ancient and one “modern,” that were considered by many among the most subversive and “dangerous” works ever written. The reputedly mad Roman poet Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* was a poetic account of Epicurean philosophy that was widely reviled as atheistic. Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* was similarly believed by many to be irreligious and politically dangerous. It is perhaps not surprising that these two most subversive texts should provide the underpinnings for a notoriously blasphemous philosophy.

#### **Texts:**

Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe* [*De Rerum Natura*] ([Melville](#))  
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Penguin) ([Hobbes’] Introduction, Ch. 1-3, 5-6, 11-13)

## Week 3 – 22-24 January, 2018

### *The Libertine Court and “the Culley of Britaine”*

The licentiousness of the court of Charles II, centred around Whitehall Palace and St. James's Park, is notorious — and perhaps somewhat exaggerated. What is certainly true, however, is that this tight-knit little world of aristocrats, courtiers, socialites, and government functionaries spawned a wealth of libertine satire, pressed into the service of social and political strategems that were as much about power and social prestige as they were about sex.

**Texts:**

Rochester, "Satyr" ("In the Isle of Brittain long since famous growne") ([Walker 86-87](#))

Dorset, "The Duel of the Crabs" ([Handout: OWL](#))

Anonymous, "Mrs. Nelly's Complaint" ([Handout: OWL](#))

**Notes:**

- Manuscript Exercise Assigned
- Research Essay Assigned
- Workshop on manuscript and microfilm (D. B. Weldon Library)
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**Week 4 – 29-31 January, 2018**

*Coffee and Smut: Libertinism about Town*

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**Texts:**

Anonymous, "Satyr" ([Handout: OWL](#))

Rochester, "Signior Dildo" ([Walker 145-151](#))

Wycherley, *The Country Wife* ([Online](#))

**Week 5 – 5-7 February, 2018**

*Libertine Men and Women*

Libertinism was not merely a philosophy, nor a literary theme. It was also, in theory at least, a way of life for its adherents. The degree to which the precepts of libertinism were actually reflected in their day-to-day business and interactions is, perhaps, arguable, and applicable only on an individual basis, but poets working in the libertine tradition certainly sought to address the putative impact of this approach to life upon the sexual politics of the day.

**Texts:**

Dorset, ["Methinks the poor town has been troubled too long . . ."] (Handout: OWL)  
Etherege, *The Man of Mode* (In *Four Restoration Libertine Plays*.  
[\[http://alpha.lib.uwo.ca/record=b4577558~S18\]](http://alpha.lib.uwo.ca/record=b4577558~S18))

Rochester, "A Letter from Artemiza in the Towne to Chloe in the Countrey" ([Walker 68-77](#))

**Week 6 – 12-16 February, 2018*****The Radiest Way to Hell: John Wilmot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Rochester***

The historical and literary personality who looms largest over the culture of libertinism in the Restoration was undoubtedly John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester. Young, sexually attractive, witty, and possessed of a brilliant gift for poetry, Rochester quickly became the "poster boy" for court libertinism, and, in that capacity, a figure of nearly mythic proportions. As he established his prominence as poet, satirist, and roué, there developed around him a larger-than-life reputation. Dozens of poems by others were attributed to him, and sometimes apocryphal tales of his sexual exploits, daring social antics, and blasphemies began to cluster around his public profile. Arguably, no critic was more severe or penetrating about this developing mythos than was the poet himself.

**Texts:**

Rochester, "Upon Nothing" ([Walker 106-110](#))

Rochester, "A Translation from Seneca's *Troades*, Act II, Chorus" ([Walker 56-57](#))

Rochester, "Love and Life" ([Walker 28-29](#))

Rochester, "Verses to the Postboy" ([Walker 104-106](#))

Rochester, "The Disabled Debauchee" ([Walker 70-80](#))

**Notes:**

- Manuscript Exercise due
- Annotated Bibliography Assignment assigned
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**19-23 February, 2018****READING WEEK**

No Classes

**Week 7 – 26-28 February, 2018*****The Female Libertine: Aphra Behn***

As will no doubt already be clear at this point in the course, many of the poetic and cultural expressions of libertinism in the Restoration are in practice firmly underwritten by an unquestioned phallogocentric understanding of “freedom” and “desire,” and a subtle (or not-so-subtle) misogyny. What, then, does it mean to be a woman in such a culture? And can there be such a thing as a *female* libertine?

**Texts:**

Rochester, “A Song” (“Faire Cloris in a Pigsty lay . . .”) ([Walker 39-40](#))  
Behn, *The Fair Jilt* (Oxford)

**Week 8 – 5-7 March, 2018**

***The Female Libertine II***

The Restoration in 1660 saw the resurgence of an English theatre scene that had been actively and effectively suppressed for 18 years. While older Elizabethan and Jacobean drama formed perforce an important part of the repertory of the two new theatre companies, the new plays that began to make their way on to the stage of London’s theatres were unlike anything that had come before, a reflection of the fact that theatre audience had also changed dramatically in the interim. More “aristocratic” and genteel, the new “comedy of manners” in particular held up a mirror to its audience, and explored (and critiqued) the newly fashionable libertinism of the town and court. Foremost among those dramatists who engaged in such explorations was Aphra Behn, who brought to her perspective a uniquely female perspective.

**Texts:**

Behn, *The Lucky Chance* (In *The Works of Aphra Behn* [<http://alpha.lib.uwo.ca/record=b4561184~S20>])

**Notes:**

- Annotated Bibliographies due
- Workshop on Secondary Sources and Finding Aids

**Week 9 – 12-14 March, 2018**

***Contracted Freedoms: The Shrinking Libertine World***

By the 1690s, the philosophical libertinism that had characterized the Court and Town of Charles II’s London was in retreat, under pressure on the one hand from a resurgent piety encouraged by the new monarchs, William and Mary, and on the other by a slow but discernible shift in the demographics of financial and social power from the old aristocracy, represented by writers like Rochester and Dorset, to an increasingly influential, and conventionally moral, middle class. These changes are reflected, on the

one hand, by the rise of a more “sentimental” and moralistic form of literature (particularly on the stage), but also by a subtle transformation of the dynamics of libertine writing itself.

**Texts:**

Congreve, *The Way of the World* (Handout: OWL)

**Week 10 – 19-21 March, 2018**

***“Limbs in Amorous Folds”: Sexual Diversities***

If it is true that libertinism in the Restoration was, in practice, largely male-centred and heteronormative in its assumptions and practices, it is also true that it did permit, to a greater extent perhaps than ever before, an expression of alternate sexualities that challenged not merely the conventional mores and norms of the era, but also to some degree the unquestioned tenets of “mainstream” libertinism itself.

**Texts:**

Rochester, “Song” (“How happy, Cloris, were they free . . .”) (Three Versions) ([Walker 21-27](#))

Rochester, “Nestor” ([Walker 11-12](#))

Behn, “To Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagined More Than Woman.” (Oxford)

Rochester, “Song” (“Love a Woman? You’re an ass . . .”) ([Walker 37](#))

**Week 11 – 26-28 March, 2018**

***Imperfect Enjoyments: The Dynamics of Desire and Fruition***

Libertinism confronted two paradoxes that threatened the human happiness that it promised. On the one hand, fruition extinguished desire or was itself fleeting, ephemeral, and ultimately unsatisfying. On the other, the disconnect between mind and body, between desire and capacity, continually betrayed the pursuit of fulfillment.

**Texts:**

Behn, “On Desire: A Pindaric” (Oxford)

Behn, “To Alexis in Answer to His Poem Against Fruition. Ode” (Oxford)

Etherege, “The Imperfect Enjoyment” (Handout: OWL)

Rochester, “The Imperfect Enjoyment” ([Walker 8-10](#))

Behn, “The Disappointment” (Oxford)

**Week 12 – 2-4 April, 2018**

***Critique and Revision: Libertinism Goes Middle Class***

<p><b>Texts:</b> Eliza Haywood, <i>Fantomina</i> (Online)</p>
<p><b>Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Essay due</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 13 – 9-11 April, 2018</b></p>
<p><i>New Genres: Pornography and the Commodification of Sexual Liberty</i></p>
<p><b>Texts:</b> Cleland, <i>Fanny Hill: Or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure</i> (Penguin)</p>
<p><b>Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review for Exam</li> </ul>

## Evaluation

Manuscript Miscellany Exercise	– 15%
Annotated Bibliography	– 15%
Final Research Essay	– 25%
Participation	– 10%
Final Exam	– 35%
	– 100%

For more information on these assignments, see “[Assignments: An Overview](#).”  
Broadly speaking, this course has two primary interrelated areas of focus:

- An introduction to some of the central concepts of “libertinism” as it manifested itself between about 1660 and 1748, with reference to its philosophical and literary articulations and presuppositions.

- A more general introduction to the social, political, and literary culture of the earlier part of that literary period often referred to as “The Restoration and 18th Century.”

The course is also designed to introduce, reinforce, or supplement some basic methodologies and approaches associated with literary scholarship, including research skills, analytical essay writing, and particular theoretical approaches (such as feminist theory, queer theory, genre theory, etc.).

### **Activities**

Students in this course are expected to engage at all times with fellow students, and with the texts and contexts that are the primary subject of our study. This means regular participation in class discussions, as well as full participation in such research-based activities as we may engage in.

- Reading and/or watching all course materials before coming to class
- Participation in class discussions
- Learning how to access a variety of research sources, including microfilm and online databases and texts
- Researching, “scaffolding,” and writing an analytical research paper

### **Course Objectives**

#### **Content**

- an advanced understanding of the literary tradition represented by “libertinism” in Restoration and early 18th century
- an advanced understanding of a number of associated genres, including lyric, satire, comic drama, philosophical prose, prose romance, and the early novel
- an advanced understanding and deployment of the language of literary analysis, including but not limited to those associated with close reading, formalist criticism, historicist approaches, and feminist and queer theory
- a developing facility with a variety of approaches, theories and techniques which can be applied to the study of literature
- a basic understanding of the changing forms of the literary texts of the late 17th and early 18th centuries
- a basic understanding of the evolution of English morphology, phonology, syntax and lexicon across time and / or place



## **Research Skills**

- proficiency with the essential tools of literary scholarship (library catalogues, citation and content databases) and the more specialized tools associated with this field (microfilm, EEBO, ECCO, etc.)
- an introduction to several highly specialized research tools and their uses (such as variorum editions, published bibliographies, concordances, etc.)
- an advanced appreciation of the use of citation in one's own work and within the critical tradition
- a basic ability to recognize and describe the development of a scholarly tradition surrounding individual periods, authors, issues or even texts
- an advanced ability to critique and review secondary sources within the context of their scholarly tradition

## **Analytic Skills**

- an advanced ability to analyze a text's rhetoric and form and to employ that analysis in a broader argument
- the developing ability to analyze a piece of literature within the specific cultural context(s) associated with libertinism in the Restoration and early 18th century
- a developing ability to applying a variety of scholarly or theoretical approaches to the analysis of texts
- a developing ability to frame a complex research question which builds on and responds to an ongoing critical discourse
- a basic ability to recognize and account for underlying theories, concepts, assumptions and arguments (both in one's own analysis and in that of other critics)
- the basic ability to self-evaluate, so as to recognize and develop one's best insights or questions
- the developing ability to respond constructively to criticism of one's work
- advanced planning, organizational and note-taking skills

## **Communication:**

- a clear, concise and compelling prose style, free of technical errors

- a developing ability to structure a complex and engaging argument
- a developing ability to present one's own analysis within the context of a specific theoretical approach
- a developing ability to present one's own analysis while confidently engaging with existing scholarship
- a developing capacity to engage in class discussions and respond meaningfully to lecture material and peer discussion while using textual evidence as support
- the basic ability to present one's work in a variety of more or less formal genres (seminar presentations, blog posts, performance, etc.)
- a mastery of the format and citation method of academic writing

### **Penalties for Late Work**

Work should be handed in on the date specified above. Late work will be penalized at the rate of one percentage point for each working day that they are late, to a maximum of ten points. Work submitted more than two weeks late will not be accepted unless accompanied by an acceptable reason for the delay (e.g., a medical certificate; see Academic Accommodation below).

### **Plagiarism**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

### **Academic Accommodation**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at [https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical\\_document.pdf](https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_document.pdf)

The full policy is set out here:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)