

Department of English & Writing Studies

**Sex, Death, and Philosophy: Libertinism and Eighteenth-Century British Literature**  
**English 3341F (001)**  
Fall 2021

**Instructor:** Mark McDayter

**Course Day/Time:** Monday, 2:30pm-  
4:30pm

**Course Location:** UC 1405

Wednesday, 3:30pm-4:30pm

**Antirequisites:** There are no antirequisites for this course.

**Prerequisites:** At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020-1999 or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

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.

Welcome to **“Sex, Death, and Philosophy: Libertinism and Eighteenth-Century British Literature”** (ENG3341G), 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 lens 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.

**Objectives:**

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

**Content**

- demonstrate an advanced understanding of the literary tradition represented by “libertinism” in Restoration and early 18th century
- demonstrate an advanced understanding of a number of associated genres, including lyric, satire, comic drama, philosophical prose, prose romance, and the early novel
- demonstrate 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
- demonstrate a developing facility with a variety of approaches, theories and techniques which can be applied to the study of literature
- demonstrate a basic understanding of the changing forms of the literary texts of the late 17th and early 18th centuries
- demonstrate a basic understanding of the evolution of English morphology, phonology, syntax and lexicon across time and / or place

**Research Skills**

- demonstrate 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.)
- employ, at an introductory level, several highly specialized research tools and their uses (such as variorum editions, published bibliographies, concordances, etc.)
- demonstrate an advanced appreciation of the use of citation in one’s own work and within the critical tradition
- demonstrate a basic ability to recognize and describe the development of a scholarly tradition surrounding individual periods, authors, issues or even texts
- demonstrate an advanced ability to critique and review secondary sources within the context of their scholarly tradition

**Analytic Skills**

- demonstrate an advanced ability to analyze a text’s rhetoric and form and to employ that analysis in a broader argument
- demonstrate 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
- demonstrate a developing ability to applying a variety of scholarly or theoretical approaches to the analysis of texts
- demonstrate a developing ability to frame a complex research question which builds on and responds to an ongoing critical discourse
- demonstrate 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)
- demonstrate the basic ability to self-evaluate, so as to recognize and develop one’s best insights or questions
- exhibit a developing ability to respond constructively to criticism of one’s work
- demonstrate an understanding of advanced planning, organizational and note-taking skills

**Communication**

- employ a clear, concise and compelling prose style, free of technical errors
- possess a developing ability to structure a complex and engaging argument
- possess a developing ability to present one’s own analysis within the context of a specific theoretical approach

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

### Course Materials

This course requires the purchase of one text; all others will be available online, through external web sites, online holdings in Western Libraries, or PDF copies provided through the course OWL site. The one text you are required to purchase will be available through The Bookstore:

John Cleland, *Fanny Hill, Or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (Penguin)

All texts for this course are required readings.

### Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Manuscript Miscellany Exercise – 15%

Annotated Bibliography – 15%

Final Research Essay – 25%

Participation – 10%

Final Exam – 35%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

### Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

### Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement

of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

#### Additional Information

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).

#### Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

#### **Academic Consideration for Student Absence:**

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see:

[Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

For the **Student Medical Certificate (SMC)**, see:

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

**Religious Accommodation:**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or 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.

**Plagiarism Checking:**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Timetable

Manuscript Miscellany Exercise – 13 October

Annotated Bibliography – 10 November

Final Research Essay – 29 November

Final Exam – TBA