

English 6365: Women Onstage in the Long Eighteenth Century

Fall 2006

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Mondays, 1:00–3:50
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Description:

Since even before Robert Gould wrote, in reference to Aphra Behn, "For *punk** and *Poetess* agree so pat / You cannot well be *This*, and not be *That*" (1709), women have had an ambivalent attitude towards the theatre. Despite such hostility, many women playwrights (Susanna Centlivre, Hannah Cowley, Eliza Haywood, and Behn herself) had their works successfully produced, while others, such as Margaret Cavendish and Frances Burney, wrote plays that were neither published nor staged during their lifetimes. This course examines a series of plays written between 1662 and 1798, in order to explore i) the treatment of "women's issues" such as the marriage market and forced marriage, ii) the gendered ways in which the playwrights publicly positioned themselves in their prefaces and elsewhere, iii) the critical reception of those plays which *were* produced or published, and iv) the factors which may have prevented the production or publication of Cavendish's plays, at the beginning of the period, and Burney's, close to the end.

*[punk=prostitute]

Course texts:

- Anonymous, *The Female Wits* (1704) (on reserve)
- Joanna Baillie, *Plays on the Passions* (1798). Ed. Peter Duthie. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001.
- Aphra Behn, *The Rover, or The Banish'd Cavaliers* (1677). Ed. Anne Russell. Second edition. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1999.
- , *The Second Part of the Rover* (1681) (online)
- Frances Burney, *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater* (1779; 1796-1801). Ed. Peter Sabor & Geoffrey Sill. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2002.
- Margaret Cavendish, *Bell in Campo and The Sociable Companion* (1662; 1668). Ed. Alexandra G. Bennett. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2002.
- Susanna Centlivre, *The Busybody* (1709) In Melinda C. Finberg, Ed. *Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Hannah Cowley, *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780) (in Finberg)
- Elizabeth Griffith, *The Times* (1779) (in Finberg)
- Eliza Haywood, *A Wife to be Let* (1724) (on reserve)
- Catherine Trotter, *Love at a Loss* (1700) (on reserve)
- Mary Pix, *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) (in Finberg)

In the interest of economy, many of these plays can be found online or in the library. However, I would in most cases like you to read the prefatory and/or additional material.

Evaluation: (see end this handout for fuller description of assignments)

- Biographical assignment — 20%
- Presentation — 20%
- Paper — 35%
- Participation/Weblog — 25%

Schedule:

Please note: Check online for the secondary readings after Oct. 2, as well as for any updates or changes to this schedule.
Online sources are linked from the course website.

Sept. 11 — Brief history of, and attitudes toward, women on stage; introduction to course; signing up for blogs

Sept. 18 — Anonymous, *The Female Wits* (1696) (on reserve and available as PDF file via WebCT)

Secondary reading: Finke, Laura A. "The Satire of Women Writers in *The Female Wits*." *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 8.2 (Fall 1984): 64-71. (available as PDF file via WebCT; on reserve)

Day, Robert Adams. "Muses in the Mud: the Female Wits Anthropologically Considered." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7.3 (1980): 61-74. (available as PDF file via WebCT; on reserve)

Video: *Tis Pity She's A Whore: The First Women on the London Stage* (Films for the Humanities, 1994. 26 min.)
Excerpts from *Stage Beauty* (Dir. Richard Eyre, 2004)

Sept. 25 — Margaret Cavendish, *Bell in Campo* and *The Sociable Companion* (1662; 1668; Broadview 2002)

Secondary reading: Gallagher, Catherine. "Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England." *Genders* 1 (Spring 1988): 24-39. (available as PDF file via WebCT; on reserve)

Marta Straznicky, "Reading the stage: Margaret Cavendish and Commonwealth closet drama." *Criticism* 37.3 (Summer 1995): 355ff. (available online through EbscoHost Academic Search Elite)

Seminar: Cavendish

Oct. 2 — Aphra Behn, *The Rover, or The Banish'd Cavaliers* (1677); *The Second Part of the Rover* (1681, available online); and a small package of prologues and other material (available as PDF file via WebCT)

Secondary reading: Hobby, Elaine. "No Stolen Object, but Her Own: Aphra Behn's *Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*." *Women's Writing* 6.1 (1999): 113-127. (available as PDF file via WebCT; on reserve)

Thompson, Peggy. "Closure and Subversion in Behn's Comedies." *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*. Ed. Katherine H. Quinsey. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1996. 72-88. (available as PDF file via WebCT; on reserve)

Seminar: Behn

Oct. 9 — Thanksgiving: No classes.

Oct. 16 — Mary Pix, *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) (in Finberg)

Secondary reading: see course website

Seminar: Pix

Due date: Proposals for Wikipedia entries due.

Oct. 23 — Catherine Trotter, *Love at a Loss* (1700) (on reserve and available as PDF file via WebCT)

Secondary reading: see course website

Seminar: Trotter

Oct. 30 — Susanna Centlivre, *The Busybody* (1709) (in Finberg)

Secondary reading: see course website

Seminar: Centlivre

Nov. 6 — Eliza Haywood, *A Wife to be Let* (1724) (on reserve and available as PDF file via WebCT)

Secondary reading: see course website

Seminar: Haywood

Due date: Abstracts for papers due.

Nov. 13 — Elizabeth Griffith, *The Times* (1779) (in Finberg)

Secondary reading: see course website

Seminar: Griffith

Nov. 20 — Hannah Cowley, *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780) (in Finberg)

Secondary reading: see course website

Seminar: Cowley

Nov. 27 — Joanna Baillie, *Plays on the Passions* (1798)

Secondary reading: see course website

Seminar: Baillie

Dec. 4 — Frances Burney, *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater* (1779; 1796-1801; Broadview 2002)

Secondary reading: Francesca Saggini, "From *Evelina* to *The Woman Hater*: Frances Burney and the "Joyce" of Dramatic (Re)writing" and one other (see course website)

Seminar: Burney

Due date: Papers due.

Assignments:

Biographical Assignment/Presentation

Biographical Assignment (20%): due Oct. 16th

Presentation (20%): due throughout term

Most of you are aware of Wikipedia. Your assignment is to choose one of our playwrights and

- i) write/edit/emend the Wikipedia entry on her, and
- ii) present material about her and her play to the class on the day scheduled to discuss her work.

Biographical Assignment

Some of our writers have full Wikipedia entries, some have "stubs" (incomplete entries), and one (Griffith) has none.

This assignment will be completed in several phases. First, I would like to see your proposed material/emendations, along with a rationale and bibliography. At that point I will either give you a green light or further suggestions; once your proposal is finished to both our satisfactions, you (or a technophilic proxy) will post your material and/or emendations online for the world to see.

Obviously there are strictures to what you can write, and to how you write; you need to follow Wikipedia policies and guidelines. You may address any issues (for example, material that you might post if you had your druthers, but which you cannot given the policies) in your proposal.

For Wikipedia links and further reading, see the website.

Presentation

You will introduce the group to your chosen playwright on the day we are scheduled to discuss her work. You will allude to her biography as it pertains to her writing and our assigned play in particular; you will pay attention to her critical reputation, during her lifetime and since; and you will discuss anything of interest in your work on your Wikipedia entry.

You will then introduce us to the play, filling in any pertinent background information we may not have, and outlining how it might be of interest to us in the context of the course.

You may also allude to the critical article(s) I have assigned. It is assumed that these articles will frame part of our wider discussion of each play so presenters can address them as much or as little as seems appropriate.

Paper

Abstracts: due Nov. 6

Final paper (35%): due Dec. 4

Chose a play written by a woman playwright between 1660 and 1800 and write a well-developed, articulate, article-length paper that explores a fresh aspect of the text. You may look at more than one play, and more than one writer, but be sure not to water down your focus with too broad a field.

I am available for consultation throughout the process. To that end, I would like to see an abstract fairly early in the process.

You are encouraged to blog about the research and writing processes.

Weblog/participation

Weblog: at least one substantial entry due weekly; mark will be calculated after Dec. 4

Weblog/participation (25%)

Each member of the class is expected to initiate and maintain a blog (a weblog)* about the readings, class discussions, assignments, and related matters (such as other texts you are reading or have read, &tc.). I may post specific questions for you to address.

Resources will be made available for those who are less experienced. As this is not a computer design class, emphasis is on content. Online resources available via the course weblog.

You are expected to read and respectfully yet incisively comment on others' blogs/posts. This is an interactive exercise.

*Please note: If you really don't want to do this assignment, you may hand in a series of journal entries throughout the term.