

Department of English & Writing Studies

**English 3320F (001)**  
**Desire in the Renaissance**  
Fall 2024

(draft syllabus)

*Western University is located on the lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, and Attawandaron peoples.*

**Instructor:** Professor Madeline Bassnett

**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

This course will examine the profuse complexity of Renaissance love poetry. Love poems were transgressive, fantastical, and even political. They allowed men and women to break through cultural and religious restrictions on the expression of desire, and gave them a language to discuss gendered and political dynamics of dominance and submission.

In this course, I'm especially interested in the idea of "writing back." While we'll take care to establish the normative language of desire, we'll also think extensively about how writers transgress that language. We'll ask questions such as: How do women writers establish themselves as desiring subjects using the patriarchal discourses of Petrarchism and Neoplatonism? How do both male and female writers destabilize normative gender hierarchies, express same-sex desires, and even gesture towards non-binary identities? How do Renaissance writers respond to and reshape traditional narratives of desire in ways that allow us, today, to reflect on our own increasingly multidimensional experience of desire, gender, and sexuality?

**Objectives:**

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

- Identify traditional discourses of Renaissance desire, including Petrarchism, Neoplatonism, and Ovidianism
- Analyse generic, formal, and discursive methods of expressing desire
- Examine the development of non-normative expressions of desire
- Engage with theoretical and critical examinations of gender, desire, and sexuality
- Engage critically and creatively with Renaissance literature
- Develop effective arguments through a combination of close reading and independent research
- Evaluate, critique, and integrate secondary criticism
- Discover connections between the past and present

### **Course Ethos**

Our class will honour the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will use each other's preferred and chosen names and pronouns; we will engage in respectful and generous conversation with each other; we will avoid language that is hurtful, violent, or exclusive. We will also acknowledge that we may make mistakes, and that learning from each other and questioning ourselves is part of the EDI process. My goal is to create a challenging and safe space to explore and exchange ideas. Please feel welcome to talk with me if you have any concerns.

### Course Materials

#### **Required:**

Available through the Western Bookstore as **print** copies only and in the editions listed. You will be required to bring the relevant text to every class. Laptop/device use in this class will be limited, and you will not have regular access to screens. (see Technology Use below) The final exam will be open-book. You will be permitted to bring the print copies of *Broadview Coursepack* and Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* to the exam, with any notes you have made in the margins. OWL material will not be allowed into the exam.

*Broadview Coursepack* bundled with Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam* (Broadview Press)

Selected readings (as indicated on the Course Outline) will be available through OWL Brightspace (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>). I encourage you to print out this material for easy access and reference during discussions and online lectures.

If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

### **Group Discussions 10% (8/10)**

Each week (except for Weeks 1 and 12) we'll be engaging in organized and guided discussion sessions.

These groups will provide opportunities for focused peer-group conversation and analysis. Topics are designed to assist with essay preparation and encourage practical and creative responses to the readings. You'll be asked to appoint a note-taker for the group, and to hand in/email me your notes at the end of class, with a list of attending members. While your notes won't be formally graded, evidence of attendance AND fruitful discussion will count towards 10% of your final grade. All groups should be prepared to contribute to follow-up class discussions.

**Note:** If you miss a discussion due to absence, then it will count as one of the 2 "non-counted" discussions. Accommodation will not be granted for the first 2 discussions missed.

**Bonus:** If you're here for all 10 discussions, you'll get a bonus 2%.

### **Reading Responses (2 x approx. 500 words) 15%**

**Due:** Nov. 27 (midnight) at the latest

A list of reading response topics will be provided in the first week of class (Assignment Guidelines folder). You must choose two of these topics for your responses and hand them in when completed. Please complete both responses before handing them in. Although you have lots of flexibility here, these must be submitted by November 27<sup>th</sup> at the latest to avoid penalties. I'd encourage you to take advantage of the flexibility and get these done sooner than later.

### **Short Essay (1000 words) 15%**

**Due:** Anytime between September 30-Oct. 4 (midnight)

Please see Assignment Guidelines for more information. We will discuss these in more detail in the second week of class.

### **Research Essay (2000 words) 25%**

**Due:** Anytime between November 18-22 (midnight)

Please see Assignment Guidelines for more information. These will be posted and discussed in detail after Reading Week.

### **Final Exam 25%**

There will be a three-hour written exam during the December exam period, which will cover the entire term's work. This exam will consist of short answer questions plus two longer essays. I will give you a list of **four** possible essay topics on the last day of class. **Two** of these topics will be included on the exam (i.e. there will be no choice). You may bring your hard copy texts (*Broadview Coursepack* and Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam*) **AND** one 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper with notes (you can use both sides) to the exam. You may **not** bring in copies of OWL texts

### Additional Information

#### **Technology Use**

Please keep the classroom technology free. Except when necessary (e.g. to read OWL material, or as needed during discussions), please put away all laptops, iPads, cellphones, and other gadgets. If you have legitimate need for any of these items (on an ongoing or specific basis), please talk to me.



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