

English 7/8242: British Renaissance Literature
Space, Sovereignty, and Gender
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The British Renaissance produced some of the greatest writers in English history, including Spenser, Donne, and Shakespeare. Faced with a radically changing world (including the discovery of the “new world,” the heliocentric theory, the rise of Protestantism, the accession of a female monarch, etc.), these writers and their contemporaries sought to re-imagine accepted historical narratives, discover new ways of identifying and communicating the truth, and test the meaning and limits of aesthetic form. The result was some of the most exciting and vibrant literature in English history.

In the past few decades, critics have begun to investigate three ostensibly unrelated topics that fascinated early modern writers: 1) the importance of spatial understanding (from the domestic to the cosmological); 2) the role and nature of sovereignty; and 3) gender and sexual politics. Focusing closely on literary form, this class will explore these three topics as a way of understanding this formative literary period as well as our own cultural moment.

Possible Readings

Agamben, *Homo Sacer*
Machiavelli, *The Prince*
New Oxford Book of Sixteenth-Century Verse (ed. Jones)
Shakespeare, *Richard II*
Spenser, *Edmund Spenser's Poetry* (Norton)
Donne, *Songs and Sonnets*
Herbert, “The Temple”
Aemilia Lanyer, “Description of Cookeham”
Queen Elizabeth, *Works*
Ben Jonson, *Plays and Poems*
Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*