

# *Race and the English Renaissance*

English 3210: Sixteenth Century Literature  
Spring 2020, TR 2:40 – 4:05

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“However you disguise your bodies, you lay not your [cosmetics] so thick that they sink into your souls. That your skins being too white without, your souls be not all black within.”

—Thomas Nashe, *Christs tears over Jerusalem* (1593)

“If virtue no delighted beauty lack,  
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.”

—William Shakespeare, *Othello* (1607)

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**Description:** This course will explore theories and depictions of race in English literary works from the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Known as the English Renaissance, this period is characterized by an explosion of creativity in the literary arts. As we will discover, the English Renaissance also saw the gradual rise and codification of contemporary notions of race, a term closely associated at the time with “lineage” and “descent.” In this course, we will investigate and clarify relationships between these terms as we examine a range of striking cultural objects, from theoretical tracts on skin color, nobility, and cosmetics to canonical literary works such as Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1612). To gain a comprehensive picture of early modern racial thinking, we will also consult documentary materials such as woodcuts, maps, and travel narratives, and we will turn as needed to contemporary academic discussions on race and racism. Throughout this upper-level course, you will spend significant time closely reading, analyzing, and thinking about the texts assigned. We will pay particular attention to the political, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which our texts were produced, as well as the perseverance and transformation of literary forms, conventions, and themes. You should come prepared with ideas and ready to discuss and investigate the texts with the class.

## **Texts:**

*Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. B: Sixteenth Century and Early Seventeenth Century* (10<sup>th</sup> edition)  
Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton, *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*.

## **Requirements:**

|                                        |     |
|----------------------------------------|-----|
| Attendance/ Quizzes and Participation: | 10% |
| Five Response Papers                   | 10% |
| Exam 1                                 | 25% |
| Exam 2:                                | 25% |
| Final Essay:                           | 30% |

## **Learning Outcomes**

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify and analyze major English Renaissance authors, genres, and works.
2. Demonstrate understanding of the social, political, and cultural history of the English Renaissance, with particular emphasis on constructions and representations of race and gender.

1. Accurately map out the development of literary trends and influences in early modern English literature.
2. Formally analyze poetic language, including the use of prosody, figurative language, rhetoric and a variety of literary devices.
3. Write cogently about individual authors, works, and literary forms in early modern England.

### Conduct and Policies

- While in class, you are expected to pay attention; you are not allowed to engage in private conversation, texting, or other behaviors that disrupt class activities. Turn off your phones and other electronic equipment before class.
- Student conduct should accord with university expectations, as outlined by the Office of Judicial and Ethical Programs (<http://saweb.memphis.edu/judicialaffairs/>). Disciplinary procedures will also be governed by the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities.
- Bring the relevant text to *every* meeting of class.

### Grading

- You must submit all assigned work in a timely fashion to pass this class.
- Attendance is required in this class.
- More than FOUR unexcused absences (or TWO full weeks of class) may result in failure of the course. By virtue of maintaining your enrollment in this course, you acknowledge this rule.
- More than two unexcused absences may lower your final grade.
- Repeated tardiness or early departure will be recorded as absences (generally two tardies or early departures will be equivalent to one absence).
- If your absence is excused (sickness, family emergency, university function), please hand in any pertinent evidence (e.g., doctor's notes). I will record the absence as excused and, if necessary, arrange for you to reschedule examinations.
- Pop quizzes may be assigned at any time; performance on these quizzes will count toward your class participation grade.
- Plagiarism on any assignment may result in a failing grade for the course and may result in Summary Discipline. (See Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities at <http://saweb.memphis.edu/judicialaffairs/> ).
- Instances in which a student's work reflects genuine confusion over when to cite and proper citation format may be addressed by allowing the student to rewrite the essay or assignment; the final grade for that particular assignment may also be reduced. Any questions you have about what you need to cite should be directed to the professor before you hand in the assignment.
- You will be required to submit your essays to turnitin.com "for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all." (Office of Legal Counsel, October 17, 2005)
- Your grade will be assessed according to a +/- scale. So, for example:

|             |            |              |
|-------------|------------|--------------|
| A+ = 97-100 | B+ = 87-89 |              |
| A = 93-96   | B = 83-86  |              |
| A- = 90-92  | B- = 80-82 | and so forth |

At the University of Memphis, an A- earns 3.84 out of 4 possible points; all other +/-s indicate a .33 distance from the nearest integer (i.e., a B+ = 3.33, and a B- = 2.67).

### **Response Papers**

- You must hand in FIVE response papers over the course of the semester. At least two, but no more than three must be submitted before the midterm.
- You will hand in response papers at the beginning of class. No response papers will be accepted at the end of class.
- You should type and print out your response papers.
- The intention of the response paper is for you to get down some thoughts on paper about the reading, so that you will be prepared to participate in class.
- Your response papers should be about the reading for the day that you are handing the paper in, not for reading that we have already discussed in class. Response papers submitted for the wrong date/reading will be returned without a grade.
- As their name suggests, response papers should record your honest and hopefully well-thought out response to the readings. You may discuss what was interesting, pleasing, or confusing in the reading. You may pose questions, but your response papers should not simply be a list of questions.
- Your response papers will not be graded for format, grammar, or academic style. I encourage you to share your thoughts in whatever style suits you best. However, I do suggest quoting from the text in every response paper (as a way to get you thinking).
- Response papers should be between minimally 2 full pages and no more than five pages in length.
- Response papers will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

### Accommodation/ Disability Statement:

Students who have a disability or condition that may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with the Student Disabilities Services Center to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modification or accommodations.

### **Note:**

This syllabus is subject to change.