

ENGLISH 2300.401: QUEER POETRY FROM HOMER TO HUGHES

This seminar will offer students a preview of the first anthology of queer poetry available in English before 1926: *“All The World in Thee”*: *LGBTQ+ Poetry from Homer to Langston Hughes*, edited by Stephanie Burt, Drew Daniel, and Melissa E. Sanchez (forthcoming from Columbia University Press in 2025). Reading selections of poetry from the classics through the early twentieth century, we will consider how this work makes visible a long history of queer desire and gender nonconformity right at the center of the Western canon.

Some of the authors we will discuss include Sappho; Ovid; Virgil; Francesco Petrararch; William Shakespeare; Katherine Phillips; John Milton; Aphra Behn; George Gordon, Lord Byron; Anna Seward;f Arthur, Lord Tennyson; Herman Melville; Walt Whitman; Emily Dickenson; Algernon Charles Swinburne; Michael Field; Oscar Wilde; Gertrude Stein; Angela Weld Grimké; Hart Crane; Countee Cullen; and Richard Nugent.

Students will acquire both knowledge of the poetry written in or translated to English before 1926, the shifting histories of gender and sexuality that this poetry makes legible, and the skills to understand how poetic form shapes meaning. Over the course of the semester, we will consider the following questions:

- what makes a poem part of an early LGBTQ+ canon: its author’s sexual identity or practice? explicit depiction of homoerotic desire? inclusion of homoerotic imagery? representation of gender nonconformity, fluidity, or transition?
- How does a long history of LGBTQ+ writing challenge our current sexual and gendered norms, including our definitions of heterosexuality, homosexuality, or transness (all identity categories named only in the late nineteenth century)?
- How does the genre of poetry, with its focus on thought and feeling rather than plot and its formal complexities, allow us to think about LGBTQ+ desires, practices, relationships, and subjectivities differently than drama or prose fiction?
- What can these poems tell us about how race, class, gender, empire, and colonialism shape both experiences of desire and ideals of desirability?

All readings will be available on the course Canvas page. Through a series of short writing and research assignments, all students will create their own critical guide to the poem or poet of their choice. We will present these projects publicly at a conference (followed by a reception for friends and family) at the end of the spring semester.