

Debt, Loyalty, and Lyric in the Seventeenth Century

Description

How does one own something? How does one owe something? These are central preoccupations during the seventeenth century, a century that witnesses both the first modern bourgeois revolution and the rise of modern banking and finance capital. This course explores what a variety of short poems have to tell us about the intersection of these various concepts and, just as importantly, how concepts of debt and ownership impinge on modern notions of sovereignty and obedience. To put a very fine point on it, do you own your own obedience and then trade it to a sovereign? In what sense is allegiance a debt? In what sense a choice? This course then explores how lyrics during this period imagine allegiance and its relationship to exchange. If the king, like God, does not really need the gift of our loyalty, then the notion of a bartered political transaction between subject and monarch seems fundamentally misguided. Cavalier, loyalist, and even purportedly more revolutionary metaphysical lyrics, in their refusal to conceive of governance according to the terms of contract theory, may provide a means of imagining economic, if not political freedom.

In this course, we will read a lot of seventeenth-century lyrics, themselves often a type of commodity exchanged, alongside pivotal English treatises on politics, social equality, and social contract theory. In addition, we'll read David Graeber's *Debt*, with its insistence that humans are not naturally bartering animals, as a conceptual frame for portions of the course.

Readings

Gerrard Winstanley, <i>Fire in the Bush</i>	Thomas Carew, <i>Poems</i>
James Harrington, <i>Oceana</i>	Margaret Cavendish, <i>Poems and Fancies</i>
John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i>	Katherine Philips, <i>Poems</i>
Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>	George Herbert, <i>The Temple</i>
John Milton, <i>The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates</i>	John Suckling, <i>Fragmenta Aurea</i>
Anna Trapnel, <i>The Cry of a Stone</i>	Richard Lovelace, <i>Lucasta</i>
Ben Jonson, <i>Poems</i>	Abraham Cowley, <i>The Mistressse and Poems</i>
John Donne, <i>Songs and Sonnets, Elegies, and Anniversaries</i>	Lucy Hutchinson, "Elegies"
	Aphra Behn, <i>Poems upon Several Occasions</i>

Texts

Seventeenth-Century British Poetry, 1603-1660, eds. John P. Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin (W.W. Norton, 2006).
John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Penguin, 1977)
George Herbert, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Tobin (Penguin, 1991)
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Penguin, 1982)
John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett, 1980)
David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Melville House, 2011)

Requirements

Undergraduates: five short analysis papers, one concept report, and a final research paper.
Graduate students: five short analysis papers, one oral presentation, one seminar paper.