

EN4/6723: British Literature and Culture from 1660-1700

T/R: 12:30

Dr. Peter DeGabriele

Impotence and Power: Sex and Politics in the Restoration

“Dost thou call that a monkey?”



The Restoration in England (1660-1688) was peculiar for its rigorous insistence on thinking politics through sexuality. Poets compared King Charles II's sceptre to his sexual organ, and tragedians represented the value of the political decisions of their protagonists through the quality of their choice of sexual object. As we read the literature of the period we will look at the way in which the supposedly private affairs of sexuality and desire intrude upon, and even dominate, both affairs of state and the subtle power dynamics of social and cultural life. We will look at how literary works construct sexual and gender identities, and how they think through problems of power, authority, and individual freedom. Readings will include poetry by Philips, Rochester, and Dryden; prose by Aphra Behn; heroic drama by Thomas Otway and Nathaniel Lee; and comedies by Behn, William Wycherley, and William Congreve.