

Seminar: Secrecy and Selfhood

Prof. Rebecca Wiseman

A nobleman disguises himself as a woman to win the love of a princess he has never met. A Christian poet, tormented by the inconstancy of his faith, asks God to help him understand his true desires. A young woman starves herself in order to express her remorse for infidelity to her husband.

All of these examples are taken from works we will read this semester, and in all of them individuals struggle to express, conceal, or reshape their identities. The works from which the examples are taken, like all of the texts we will read in this course, are haunted by a set of questions: What does it mean to be true to oneself? What happens when you attempt to change your identity, to cross the boundary-lines dividing categories of gender and class? Is there a kind of freedom in disguise and dissimulation?

Over the course of the semester, we will read medieval and early modern prose, drama, and poetry in order to examine the ways in which the categories of privacy and identity developed into the concepts we recognize today.

Reading List

Gower, *Confessio amantis*
Petrarch, *La vita nuova*
Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*
Montaigne, *Essays*
Wyatt, selected lyric poems
Sidney, *The New Arcadia*
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*
Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*
Clifford, *The Diary of Anne Clifford*
Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*
Donne, *Holy Sonnets*
Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*
Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*
Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*
Bruce R. Smith, *The Key of Green*
Renaissance Culture and the Everyday, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt
Jon R. Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*