

English 203 Proposal  
Keri Behre

Renaissance Fare: Literature, Food, and Bodies in Early Modern England (Spring 2012)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Is a blackberry simply a blackberry, or do our (or Shakespeare's) beliefs about blackberries have bearing on their material reality? If you truly believed that cantaloupe could make you gravely ill – even kill you – might it actually do so? In this class, we will study major poetic and dramatic texts by authors such as Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Milton alongside early modern “dietaries,” books that collected recipes, remedies, and conventional wisdom about food, in order to better understand the food that appears in the literature of this period. We will investigate the *social, medical, and moral* dynamics of food consumption in popular texts that would have had great power to affect and reflect common understandings of how bodies were constituted through eating and drinking. We will examine the depiction of both male and female bodies, the language surrounding the visual performance of eating, the presence of corpulent and emaciated bodies, and the ways in which early modern audiences may have “read” and understood the presence of food in literature. In doing so, we will become familiar with the “renaissance fare” of early modern English literature.

**POSSIBLE TEXTS:**

Dietaries: Tobias Venner's *Via Recta ad Vitam Longam*  
Gervase Markham's *The English Housewife*  
Thomas Dawson's *The Good Housewife's Jewell*

(I will likely order an inexpensive printed version of one of these and download excerpts from the rest from Early English Books Online.)

Literature: Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (selections)  
Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*  
Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*  
Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*  
Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*  
Anonymous's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*  
Milton's *Paradise Lost* (selections)

(I realize this is probably too many early modern texts for a 200-level course; I'll choose either Jonson or Middleton to dispense depending on the selections I choose from the dietaries above.)

**EVALUATION** will consist of daily work, two small research presentations about food in the literature we're reading, a short paper, and a (longer) final paper.

Jennifer Nish  
First- and Second-Year English Program  
English 203 Course Proposal  
10 December 2010

### English 203: Composing and Digital Cultures

This proposed course, "Composing and Digital Cultures," will place emphasis on developing students' critical awareness of the relationship between technology and communication practices, and using this awareness to compose in multimodal and Internet genres in addition to the traditional academic essay. Students will be asked to think carefully about elements of the rhetorical situation in their own uses of technology and in the texts they read, gaining insights into the purpose, audience, and context of texts about technology and texts composed with/through technology. Students will be asked to conceptually integrate traditional academic work (reflection, analysis, research) with technology, in addition to composing in familiar or new digital genres. Potential material for individual and group analyses may come from social networking sites, websites designed for users to share creative work, forums, comment threads, photo sharing sites, social gaming, and more. Student compositions may range from blogs, wikis, youtube videos, Voicethread (voicethread.com) collaborative multimodal compositions, and, of course, academic essays.

The course will begin with a unit in which students are asked to discuss their own uses of technology, in conjunction with specific studies of blogs, Facebook, and possibly one other genre or site. Students will read texts such as Andrew Sullivan's "Why I Blog" (written for *The Atlantic*), Nicholas Carr's "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" and either *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out* by Mizuko Ito or *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* by Nancy Baym. Students will also watch *The Social Network* as a way to look at the development of Facebook and the rhetorical situation of its users (its original purpose, audience, and context, and how that has changed as Facebook evolved). These texts and discussions will move students from reflections on their own use of technology to analyses of communicative uses of technology in its social contexts.

The next unit of the course will branch out, studying and comparing various communities of online composing and interactivity. Potential texts include *Youtube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* by Jean Burgess, an excerpt from *What Video Games have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* by James Paul Gee (or a series of YouTube videos in which he presents a lecture on the same topic, pending a comparison of the level of complexity and applicability of each option), and an excerpt from *Convergence Culture* by Henry Jenkins (in which he discusses online communities of *Harry Potter* fan fiction writers). Students will also look at selected examples of media convergence and participatory culture, such as: Stephen Colbert fans' engagement online with "truthiness" and "wikiality" concepts from his show on Comedy Central; Online fan communities, such as *Lostpedia* (a wiki for fans of the television show "LOST"); and writers of *Harry Potter* fan fiction (discussed in Jenkins' book). Students will be asked to compare digital forms of composing with more traditional forms (and with more "academic" forms), discussing the different rhetorical possibilities and effects of each.

A third unit (if there is room for four) will discuss the changes to traditional rhetorical forms of creativity, reading *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* by Clay Shirky, an

excerpt from *Poetry's Afterlife* by Kevin Stein (available for free online at \_\_\_\_\_), and selected examples of online creativity with "traditional" forms, such as *The Man Who Painted Agnieszka's Shoes* (the "Facebook novel" by Dan Holloway, developed interactively with feedback from Facebook users).

Finally, the last part of the course will complicate these studies of digital composing with a look at how factors such as gender, social class, disability, race, language, and transnational factors complicate our notions of what we can do with digital compositions, such as who has the tools and skills to compose digitally, who has the most freedom in their use of digital tools for composing (and in their membership in digital cultures), and who technology users can reach with these digital compositions. Potential texts include *Gender Circuits* by Eve Shapiro, *Digital Disability: The Social Construction of Disability in New Media* by Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell (or a selection from the book), a chapter from Lisa Nakamura's work on race and digital technology, and a reading about the "digital divide."

Through this course, students will be asked to interpret, analyze, and critique digital compositions and texts about technology, to think critically about the relationship between technology and experience, and to engage with these materials and ideas in their own compositions. Readings will attempt to focus on multimodal and digitally-composed works, along with texts that ask students to think about these works in critical ways. The structure and text list are still being revised, of course, with attention to providing students with texts which discuss digital compositions and their complexities, as well as digital compositions themselves (many of which are shorter than novels or other potential texts for a 203 course).

#### Full texts

- *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out* by Mizuko Ito or *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* by Nancy Baym.
- *Youtube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* by Jean Burgess
- *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* by Clay Shirky
- *The Man Who Painted Agnieszka's Shoes* (the "Facebook novel" by Dan Holloway, developed interactively with feedback from Facebook users)
- *Gender Circuits* by Eve Shapiro
- *Digital Disability: The Social Construction of Disability in New Media* by Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell (or a selection from the book)

#### Shorter texts or excerpts

- Andrew Sullivan's "Why I Blog"
- Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?"
- *The Social Network* (Columbia Pictures, 2010)
- A selection from *What Video Games have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* by James Paul Gee (or a series of YouTube videos in which he presents a lecture on the same topic, pending a comparison of the level of complexity and applicability of each option)
- A chapter from *Convergence Culture* by Henry Jenkins
- and excerpt from *Poetry's Afterlife* by Kevin Stein
- a chapter from Lisa Nakamura's work on race and digital technology
- a reading about the "digital divide"