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Gods and Monsters: Religious Deviants in Renaissance England

Course description

Like most large-scale societies, Renaissance England was big enough to have room for a variety of different religious viewpoints. There was a fine line separating folklore and magic from theology, and most individuals--as they do today--held views that were determined by their own experiences rather than by what the government told them to believe. But religion was also inextricably tied up with the rule of law. As the popular film *Elizabeth* makes clear, the sixteenth century was a period in which Catholics and Protestants vied for power: when a new monarch came to the throne, there was a good chance that members of their opponents religion would be tortured, deprived of their property, or even killed. Thus the Renaissance was also a time of profound intolerance, especially toward non-Christians. This course will explore conflicts of faith within England's borders before finally looking outward to the New World, where English colonists encountered a whole new set of beliefs that, to their great surprise, were often as sophisticated as their own. The course is structured around several short writing assignments. Participation in the process of revision, guided by peer reviews and by individual conferences, will be crucial to students' success in the course.

Course texts

Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*
Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*
Rowley, Dekker and Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*
Behn, *Oroonoko*
Kapur, *Elizabeth*