

Fall 2018

College of Liberal Arts Research Talk

3:05 – 4:05 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 7, MP 243

Sex, Spies, and Toilet Paper: Two English Professors Talk about Men, Women, & Intimacy



“Phillis’s Foul Linen: Sexual Disgust at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century”

by Deborah Ross

Today, as female comedians struggle to compete with men in “dirty” humor, it is most instructive to look back at the gender wars and sexual discourse of an earlier time: the Age of Satire; of Rochester and Swift. Comparing these men’s writings to those of their respective female contemporaries Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley, one sees at first what one has come to expect: masculine graphic physicality contrasted with feminine decorousness. That does not mean, however, that the males were forthright and accepting of the body, the females prudishly euphemistic. Rather, the male writers’ deliberate soiling of Virgilian and Ovidian pastoral idealism—Rochester’s pleas to “Phillis” to use toilet paper and “sponges,” and Swift’s description of angelic Chloe on the pot—has all the features of disgust as it is described in recent scholarly discussions. Conversely, Behn and Manley were no prudes; they used pastoral to declare that the body, and therefore sexual love, could be beautiful. For them, pastoral was an antidote to disgust, and a means of reaching a truce in the battle of the sexes.

“‘You and I Were Never Really Married.’: Role Playing and Intimacy in Fox’s *The Americans*”

by Laurie Leach

In Fox’s “The Americans,” spies Phillip and Elizabeth Jennings are masters of disguise and role-playing but struggle with determining which roles and which commitments are primary. Phillip has trouble feigning intimacy without those feelings becoming real, which eventually make his continued work as a spy unendurable, while Elizabeth’s primary allegiance to the Soviet Union and her contempt for American culture make “Elizabeth Jennings,” American wife and mother, her most difficult role.



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