

LOST WORLDS

English Renaissance Literature

This upper-level elective will study the spaces and places of early modern English imaginative fiction. The English Renaissance (c.1485-1660) was a period of fantastic creativity and profound disturbance. To writers of this era, the world seemed to be remaking itself every day – the boundaries of earth, sea, sky, and stars were being erased and redrawn, and everything that people thought they knew about the universe was being unlearned and new discoveries made, so that it felt like old worlds were dying and new ones were being re-made around them. At the same time, religious, cultural and social revolutions were creating radical new possibilities for the *interior* worlds of private people – the universe inside of each person seemed to be filled with more wonders, mysteries, and terrors than anyone could have suspected.

For the poets, writers, and artists of this time period, literature itself was also a new world being made and unmade, and one that could help them understand, explore, and access invisible corners of the human heart, as well as reach for the almost unimaginable cosmos of natural and supernatural experience.

In this class, we will read some of the most daring and radical writers of the early modern era and the worlds that they discovered, destroyed, created, and left behind for us to explore. We will read both famous and unknown authors from a range of genres, including lyric, drama, epic, and prose.