

Application for the R-MWC Summer Student Faculty Research Program
Assistant Professor Mara Amster
Darcie Dikeman, '04

Project: Exploring the Archives: Looking at Prostitution in the 17th-Century

During the time that I spent researching my dissertation, I became fascinated with a number of seventeenth-century texts about prostitution. While some have become quasi-canonical, other relatively obscure texts seem to have disappeared into the archives; yet, together they provide an intriguing portrait of early modern life and its complex and contradictory opinion of female sexuality. The texts make use of various narrative strategies: monologues, dialogues, and omniscient narrators. They allow the reader entry into a world where sexuality and economics intermingle, where female characters are given distinct voices, where the moral issues of sin and repentance are subtly complicated, and where the display of female sexuality is often likened to a performance. The texts have proven invaluable to my work as both a scholar and a teacher.

I have recently signed a book contract with Ashgate Publishing Company to edit a volume that includes nine of these texts.¹ The book, tentatively titled Seventeenth-Century Texts on Prostitution, is to be included in their series, The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works, with a manuscript due date of February 2005. The series — credited with providing an “enormous service to scholars of the period” and praised as “ambitious and courageous”² — makes available collections of early modern writings by, for, and about women. The series seeks to fill in the gaps that exist in the fields of Renaissance and Women’s Studies by making easily accessible and affordable previously difficult-to-find texts. The volumes in the series are all facsimile editions (i.e., reproductions of original manuscripts); they include an introduction (written by the editor) that provides an overview of the texts and a survey of the relevant scholarship on the subject, the texts, and the author(s).

The work that Darcie and I plan to undertake this summer is two-fold: locating the best (i.e., cleanest and most complete) manuscripts and researching the introduction. Using a variety of Renaissance databases and bibliographical catalogs, we will identify which libraries house which manuscripts, view via microfilm as many of the manuscripts as we can for comparison purposes, prepare a sample inventory for the general editors, and contact the appropriate libraries. As part of this process, we will be both familiarizing ourselves with the technological resources and reading the early modern manuscripts. Manuscript-

¹ The nine texts are Thomas Coryate, Crudities (1611); Thomas Cranley, Amanda, or, The reformed whore (1635); Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I (1616); Robert Greene, A Disputation betweene a hee-conny-catcher and a shee conny-catcher (1592; given this text’s importance for the volume, I have made an exception to the strict seventeenth-century timeline); Richard Head, The Miss Display’d (1675); Gervase Markham, The Famous Whore, or Noble Curtizan (1609); Thomas Overbury, “A very Whore” (1611?); and John Taylor, A bawd (1635) and “A Whore” (1630).

² Sixteenth Century Journal 30.2 (1999); Renaissance Studies 13.4 (1999)

reading is a skill that requires a good deal of patience; as such, it is one for which I think Darcie will be particularly well suited. Together Darcie and I will learn how to track down and locate sources and make comparisons as well as delve into the institutional bureaucracy that surrounds ordering materials from libraries around the country and in England.

We will also be researching the subject of early modern English prostitution. For the volume as a whole we will try to explain why I have brought these specific texts together and what types of generalizations they may lead us to make about prostitution in seventeenth-century England. For each text included in the volume, we will provide a brief introduction. These "histories" will detail biographical information about the author; a brief description of the text and its importance; an account of the time and occasion of the text's first publication and an account of subsequent editions, if any exist; a justification of my choice of manuscript and a summary of its relationship to other extant copies and/or modern editions; and a select bibliography. Also included in the introduction is a critical/historical discussion of the text in which we will provide a survey of the modern critical reactions to the text.

It goes without saying that Darcie and I will not be able to complete all this work in eight weeks. However, I do believe that the work we accomplish this summer will provide the necessary framework for the project. The archival work will help organize future library trips and the research will provide a solid draft of the introduction. In addition to discussing her work at the day-long symposium at R-MWC, Darcie is considering presenting a paper regarding the archival experience at a conference on student scholarship.

I have had the opportunity to get to know Darcie in her role as English department assistant. She is unfailingly professional: prepared, energetic, and thoughtful. This semester I have the chance to know Darcie in the classroom (she is currently in English 304) and it is apparent that the dedication and eagerness she brings to her job is matched by her performance in class. Bill Coulter, her advisor, has said that she "has loads of genuine intellectual curiosity . . . [and] will work with tireless energy. [She] cares about what she's doing and thinks about it a lot." He notes that he "can think of few students I'd rather have for such an undertaking." I can only echo his sentiments.³

Given that a good deal of our work will be carried out at the University of Virginia library, our budget will include travel funds. The other expenses I anticipate are for photocopying manuscripts, ordering microfilm, and contacting libraries (by phone and mail). A budget of \$300 should be more than sufficient. I have also applied for a VFIC Mednick Memorial Fellowship for this project.

Thank you for considering this proposal. Darcie and I hope that you will allow us the opportunity to work together this summer.

³ I'm not sure if this information is relevant, but Darcie lives off-campus and has mentioned that she wouldn't need to make use of campus housing this summer.

Last semester I took a course in Medieval Literature and found myself fascinated and absorbed by the subject. This fascination has transferred to this semester's course in Renaissance Literature. Our summer research project will enable me to examine the roles of women in a historical context, increase my understanding of the period, and allow me to further explore my curiosity. Since our project will serve a greater whole by making obscure texts internationally available to scholars and students of Renaissance Literature and women's history, being part of its creation will give me a tremendous sense of accomplishment and achievement. Indeed, the international flavor of this project particularly resonates with me; having lived in Europe for three years I am attuned to and interested in references to place, locals, customs, and festivals that have survived into our present century. I, like Dr. Amster, believe the availability of otherwise obscure texts is important to scholarly studies because of its potential to change our perceptions of the past and create groundbreaking work in literature and women's studies.

I have taken several literature courses at Randolph-Macon. From the Medieval Literature course, I have learned how to read and write Middle English, studied extensively the roles of women in courtly love, and have created a solid foundation for studies in Renaissance Literature. In the Renaissance Literature course this semester, I am expounding upon my previous knowledge to study -- for my term paper topic -- the ways in which women manipulated their sexuality as a means to gain power during the Early Modern era. Such a topic will naturally prepare for me the type of work we will be undertaking in the 17th century prostitution project. As a result, I will be equipped to appreciate the texts due to experience and unique knowledge. Furthermore, I will be able to utilize the skills I have learned from my concentration in Symbol and Myth. The concentration has trained me to analyze literature from various perspectives including religion, myths, symbols, society, gender, and history.

This project is acutely suited to my current interests in the Early Modern era and to my goals of becoming a literature professor in the future. Working with Dr. Amster will introduce me to the methods in locating and researching esoteric documents that will prepare me for work in graduate school and a PhD program. Not only will I learn the methods for compiling and formulating a research project but also I will increase my confidence as I present the archival experience to Randolph-Macon and to an undergraduate conference of my peers. By concentrating on specific texts, the project will enable me to combine my career choice with my passion for literature. Most importantly, this project presents the opportunity for me to engage my intellect and delve into in an area of study that holds great fascination for me.