

Gay and Lesbian Literature and Sexual Expression

Class Meets: MWF 12:40-2:10pm

Location and Office Hours: TBA

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is for the participants to be able to understand what constitutes gay and lesbian literature and in turn, how its authors are able to pursue the expression of their ideals within it. Looking at literature through a queer lens enables us to see the common themes of challenges to heteronormativity, intersectionality, human issues, class and the influences of society on the queer lifestyle. While there is no single definition of queer literature, there are some obvious attributes such as queer author, subject matter, or same sex-relationships that make queer literature easier to recognize, but there are also themes that are more hidden that this course will seek to make more apparent. The struggle for acceptance and the fight for equality have been included in queer literature, and as history changes and evolves, so do ways of expression. Through looking at many different styles of writing, participants will be able to see that some works that are labeled gay or lesbian are difficult to read in that context. Some works just don't seem queer. We will also look at poetry written at different time periods to illuminate how unique different writing styles are, even when writing about the same topics. Gay literature works to promote the idea that human issues are gay issues and gay issues are human issues. Mediums like fiction, poetry, dance, and performance art all became ways of expression, both for homosexuals and heterosexuals. Expression is essential to understanding gay and lesbian literature, and is why we will use expression as an analysis of the works we will read.

Safe Space/ Class Participants:

This class is offered to students of all different sexual orientations and identities. This class is for those who are interested in gay & lesbian identity, whether this relates to someone who is transsexual, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, queer, or of any other sexual orientation or identity. This class will be a safe space for any questions or comments related to the literature we read, class discussions, or other related themes that will emerge over the course of the quarter.

Required Texts:

Rubyfruit Jungle, Rita Mae Brown

Poems by Walt Whitman including "For You O Democracy", Frank O'Hara, and Elsa Gidlow.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Tennessee Williams

Book of Salt, Monique Truong

Stone Butch Blues, Leslie Feinberg

Full Frontal Feminism, Jessica Valenti

Women and Bisexuality, Sue George

Feminist Theory, Wendy Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski

Required Assignments:

Daily, in-class reading quizzes at the beginning of each discussion based class
Three short papers with draft workshops
Weekly Current Events
Attendance of the Vagina Monologues
Follow up written report to the Vagina Monologue performance
Final

Course Objectives:

1. Participants will be able to understand different styles of gay and lesbian literature from a range of literature that is both diverse as well as very differently presented.
2. Participants will be able to explain by the end of the class in a detailed final, what they believe gay and lesbian literature is, with supporting examples from what we have discussed and read in class.
3. Participants will become familiar with the social, historical, and cultural circumstances surrounding gay and lesbian literature, both during acceptance and oppression.
4. Participants will understand how gay and lesbian literature is used for the benefit of the gay community in times when it was illegal or “unnatural” to be gay.
5. Participants will be able to use intersectionality as a lens in gay and lesbian literature to show the multiple levels of oppression that are human issues, relating to everyone, both in the queer community and outside of it.

Class Preparedness:

Participants should always come to class with the readings done, cell phones off, and ready to participate. Failure to contribute to the discussion or failure to bring the text will count against your participation grade.

Plagiarism:

Participants are expected to not engage in any academic or intellectually dishonest practice such as plagiarism or cheating. Plagiarism and cheating may, therefore be grounds for failure in this course and/or dismissal from the College.

Attendance:

Because this is a discussion based class, participation is essential to understanding the material, as well as in drafting papers and receiving good grades on the reading exams at the beginning of each class. More than three excused absences will lower your participation grade by one full letter. You should always email the professor the reason that you could not attend class, and in this way some absences can be excused. Participation in draft workshops is also very important to your grade, so you should not miss these days.

Lateness:

Class begins at 12:40 sharp, and the reading quizzes will be given at 12:50. If you come in after the reading quiz has begun, you do not get extra time to complete it. If you

come in after 12:40 you will be counted as late. Three tardies will count toward one unexcused absence. If you are consistently late your grade will suffer unless you have an extenuating circumstance that you discuss with the professor.

Reading Quizzes:

At the beginning of each class period a reading quiz will be given. This quiz is to:

1. Show your comprehension and reading of the literature for class.
2. Give us discussion material for that class period, through giving every participant ten or so minutes at the beginning to sort out what they want to share or what they found important in the reading.
3. Allow the instructor to understand what was unclear so that we can go over it in that class period, or for the instructor to see what questions came up that people might not want to ask to the class.

Grading Scale for Reading Quizzes:

1-5

1. I did not do the reading and this is reflected in my reading.
2. I briefly skimmed and have a less than adequate hold on the material.
3. I did the reading but didn't make any connections or have a knowledgeable analysis of the material.
4. I did the reading and made a valuable analysis of the literature and did a very good job in answering the question prompt.
5. I obviously did the reading and made a great analysis of the question asked, putting in examples from the text, with clear, logical arguments to defend them.

A five is equivalent to an A+, so any fours will be counted as the highest grades with fives being extra credit. Because there are many reading quizzes, to get the full 10% grade you can fail two of them, and still receive an A. After that, your grade will be lowered.

Grade Percentages:

Participation (includes peer-reviews): 30%

3 Papers: 40%

Reading Quizzes: 10%

Weekly Current Events: 10%

Attendance of Vagina Monologues: 5%

Write up of performance: 5%

Assignments:

Paper 1: What is Gay and Lesbian Literature to You?

This paper should reflect your attitudes and ideas on gay and lesbian literature before taking this class, while contrasting it with the themes we will brainstorm together in our first week of class. You should compare these ideas to the themes we have seen in the readings since the first week like social conditions, gender, theme encoding, etc. The introduction should reflect your earlier ideas and what you think contributed to making you think that way. Also, please include in your conclusion whether or not your ideas have changed or stayed the same, and what you think could have possibly contributed to a change or lack of change.

2-3 double spaced pages

Paper 2: Compare and Contrast

For this paper you should use one poem from the packet and one novel to make your analysis. This can be any of the novels we have read up to this point. This paper is to be an interpretation of gay and lesbian literature through the themes we have discussed over the course of the class. If you would like to do additional research on the background of the author, or social conditions during the point of time that is referenced, you can feel free to do so. This compare and contrast should reflect how different authors use different themes and writing methods to illustrate oppression and difference. This paper should include some thinking on why some authors make their works very openly queer, while other use encoding or other such methods to make it difficult to be read as queer. If you have another author or poem you would like to use, please consult the instructor.

3-4 double spaced pages

Paper 3: What to Tell the World? Blog

After reading *Full Frontal Feminism*, which is a novel that began as an Internet blog, I would like you to blog about what you think are the most pressing issues in gay and lesbian communities that we can see reflected in the work of the authors we have studied. This blog should target a certain audience and the writing should be used as a tool to gain their attention. The audience can be of your choosing, just include what age bracket, gender and demographic at the bottom of your paper. The grading of this paper is based on readability, your choices for your writing and your target audience, as well as the themes that you use. These themes can be taken from weekly current events and you may consult with your peers on this assignment. Are these modern issues that are pressing? Why do you think they are important? Why should anyone else do anything about them? What is your call to action?

3 double spaced pages

Weekly Current Events:

There will be a current event due on every Friday of every week except when a paper is due, we are watching a film, or as is indicated in the syllabus. The current event should highlight a LGBTQ event or issue, gay and lesbian themes we have seen in our reading, political, religious, legal, social problems related to class content, or other articles of interest that can be related to the class in a critical and analytical way. Your current event should be 1-2 pages, double-spaced, that includes a **brief** summary of the article, why it is an important issue for the class, the relevance of it to the themes and issues we are discussing in class and what your opinion is regarding the tone, writing and engagement of the piece.

Some example of topics for current events:

Don't ask, don't tell policy
Proposition 8 in California regarding same-sex marriage
Gay stereotypes in the media

Write up of Vagina Monologues:

The purpose of having the class attend the Vagina Monologues, besides raising awareness about domestic violence, is to show how sexual identity is expressed in a medium different from print. While *The Vagina Monologues* are also a novel, there are many differences to reading it in print and watching it live. The write up should include your favorite and least favorite monologues, based on content not artistic talent, and why, as well as if there were any themes presented that were similar to any we have discussed in class. The write up should conclude with your stance and opinion of theater as a means of sexual expression and identity, and how it differs from print. Include if you believe these differences to be positive or negative.

2-3 double spaced pages

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Intersectionality

How are working class men honored by Walt Whitman and Frank O'Hara?
How is intersectionality encoded into the poem by Elsa Gidlow?

Monday: What is Gay and Lesbian Literature? Discussion of heterosexuality and sexual spectrum. Course Overview

Wednesday: Assorted poems; Discussion of themes

Friday: Assorted Poems Continued...

Week 2: Identity Exploration

How is the questioning of one's sexuality made natural in Rubyfruit Jungle?

How is heteronormativity challenged by Molly's relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual?

Monday: Rubyfruit Jungle

Wednesday: Rubyfruit Jungle

Friday: Rubyfruit Jungle

Week 3: The Importance of Class, Family and Society on Sexual Identity and Expression

How is Brick's sexuality based on the acceptance of the society he is in and his family?
How is queer literature made accessible to people who are questioning their sexual identity?

Monday: Finish up last Discussion Of Rubyfruit Jungle, Paper 1 Draft due Friday.

Wednesday: Begin Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Friday: Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Peer Workshop for Paper 1

Week 4: Multifaceted Oppressions

How is Gertrude Stein and Madame B. Toklas' cook's identity of homosexual and "indo-Chinese" used to express intersectionality?

How are Gertrude Stein and Madame B. Toklas seen to overcome their oppressions of being lesbian, female and unconventional?

Monday: Film (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof with Paul Newman) Paper One Due

Wednesday.

Wednesday: Begin Book of Salt

Mitsuye Yamada, "Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism," 365-68
(FT Reader)

Friday: Book of Salt

Week 5: Multifaceted Oppressions

Does this novel parallel to any issues of immigration that are important right now?
What is the significance of names in oppression?

Monday: Book of Salt

Wednesday: Finish Book of Salt

Friday: Discussion of Book of Salt in Relation to other literature we have read.

Week 6: Social Constructions of Gender

How is history written on the body for Butler, and how is the body's relation to culture important in studying gay and lesbian literature?

How is cultural coding similar to the encoding of queer themes?

Monday: Allan Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, Them, or an Us (75-97) FT Reader
Gerda Lerner, “The Creation of Patriarchy”, 212-229 e-reserve
Draft Due Wednesday of Paper Two
Wednesday : Draft Due, Peer Workshop.
Friday: Judith Butler “Gender Trouble”, 496-504 (FT reader)
Judith Halberstam “Transgender Butch,” 550-61 (FT Reader)
Final Draft of Paper Due Monday.

Week 7: Social Constructions of Gender continued...

How are bathrooms used to depict heteronormativity and the difficulties of not fitting into only one cultural box?

Can the necessity to transform one’s appearance ever be positive and not influenced by society?

Monday : Paper 2 Due,
Excerpts from Stone Butch Blues
Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinity
Wednesday : Finish Excerpts from Stone Butch Blues
Friday: Current Event Presentations

Week 8: Modern Writing/Blogs

How are blogs used in the media to target readers or to manipulate their audience?

Was Jessica Valenti’s writing in *Full Frontal Feminism* convincing to you? Who was her intended audience? Was she successful?

Monday: Full Frontal Feminism
Wednesday: Full Frontal Feminism
Friday: Draft for 3rd Paper Due Wednesday (Your own blog)

Week 9: Where are we now?

How do the issues that bisexual women face, in either being sexually voracious or having their sexuality be a “cop-out”, relate to the themes we have been studying?

Is bisexuality in the same place as lesbianism or homosexuality? Why or why not?

Monday: Women and Bisexuality
Wednesday: Women and Bisexuality
Friday: Women and Bisexuality

Week 10: Where do we go from here?

From what you have learned in this class, do you feel that the lens of gay and lesbian literature is helpful for aspects other than oppression and identity? Consider institutions like religion, politics and the military?

What is the most interesting you have learned in this class? What have you been able to apply to your life?

Monday: Sharing of Last Papers

Wednesday: Sharing of Last Papers

Friday: Preparation for the Final, small group meetings

Choose what films to watch the last week of class.

Week 11: Dead Week and Finals

Monday : Class Film Choice

Wednesday: Class Film Choice

Friday: Final