

# Queer Histories

## English 388: Topics in LGBTQ Studies

Prof. Lara Farina (lara.farina@mail.wvu.edu)  
TuTh, 1:00-2:15, Armstrong 403  
Office Hours: W 2:30- 3:30, 335 Colson Hall

This course explores what it means for people in marginalized sexual groups to lay claim to a history. Toward that end, we will look at representations of queer, trans, and/or intersex figures in literary history, particularly as these are depicted by authors who themselves could be considered sexually nonconforming. These figures challenge the assumption that past cultures didn't allow for sexual diversity and that sex and gender categories have been rigidly binary until very recently. We will discuss historically variable categories of sexual identity and question whether identification is necessary for the connection of "queer" people over time. Our topics include: premodern, early modern, and Indigenous theories of gender; intersex identities; same-sex desire in early period literature; trans narratives; adaptation and historical reclamation; colonization and historical revision; historical amnesia; homo-nationalism; and queerness as anti-identity.

Because this is a 300-level English class, you'll write analytic essays on the readings, one of which will require secondary research on your text and topic. We will discuss and practice the essential steps of writing a literary studies research paper: developing a research question, finding secondary sources, structuring an argument, revising a draft, and presenting material from your research.

### Required Texts

I expect you to have these books in class on the day we are scheduled to discuss them. You can use a digital version (e-book, kindle, etc.) if one is available, but I think you'll find it easier to find passages in a hard copy.

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Jenn Shapland, <i>My Autobiography of Carson McCullers</i> | 978-1951142292 (Tin House, 2021)   |
| Plato, <i>Symposium</i>                                    | 978-0140449273 (Penguin, 2003)     |
| <i>Silence: A Thirteenth-century French Romance</i>        | 978-0870135439 (MI State UP, 1999) |
| Virginia Woolf, <i>Orlando</i>                             | 978-1618953254 (Bibliotech, 2018)  |
| Claude McKay, <i>Romance in Marseille</i>                  | 978-0143134220 (Penguin, 2020)     |
| Natalie Diaz, <i>Postcolonial Love Poem</i>                | 978-1644450147 (Graywolf, 2020)    |

Additional materials will be placed on e-campus. Films will be available to stream through library reserves. As a way of thinking about how queer history is narrated in present-day information sources, we will also discuss some entries in Wikipedia.

### Required Coursework

verbal participation in class                      20 points

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| in-class writing responses | 20 points (4 @ 5 points each)              |
| 5-page essay*              | 20 points                                  |
| 7-page research essay*     | 35 points (including bibliography & draft) |
| presentation (5 minutes)   | 5 points                                   |

\*You must submit both essays to pass the class.

Class participation requires that you say something in class that is relevant to the text we are discussing. You can ask a question, answer a question, offer a reaction or interpretation, respond to another student's comments, direct us to a passage, or remind us of something else we've read. I do not expect you to have our readings all figured out before class discussion, but I do expect you to have done the reading, to have noted things you found interesting or significant, and to have some initial thoughts and questions. Each day you say something in class, you will earn one or two participation points, depending on how much you contribute.

In-class writing responses will ask you to discuss one or two interpretive questions about the day's reading. I expect you to answer the questions and support your answers with specific evidence drawn from the reading. I'll grade these based on: your use of textual evidence, the thoroughness of your answer, and the clarity of your writing. The dates for these assignments will not be announced in advance, but there will be six response opportunities (so I'll count *your best four* responses for your grade). If you are absent on a response day, you can simply do one another time.

The essays for the class will require you to make an argument about an element of one of the class texts. This argument should be of your own devising and should address a challenging question about the text's significance, meaning, form, function, or reception. You'll be given questions to choose from for the 5-page essay; you may develop your own question for the research essay. Grading criteria will include: the clarity and sophistication of your thesis and supporting arguments; the logical sequence of your argument; your use of evidence from the text; paragraph organization; sentence-level clarity, concision, and accuracy. For the research essay, you will also be evaluated on: your location of appropriate secondary sources; the use of these in the essay; the quality of the draft.

### **Class Structure**

We will use **ecampus** as our class hub. You'll find copies of assignments, handouts, some readings, and announcements there. I'll use the "**Announcements**" function in ecampus on a regular basis to give you directions and alert you to upcoming assignments. I will post your **grades** on ecampus continuously, so you will be able to see exactly how you're doing at any time (your grades will be visible only to you).

### **Attendance**

Because COVID has not gone away yet (sigh), I will not penalize for missed classes. If you do not feel well, you should not come to class. However, missing class deprives you of opportunities for participation and in-class response points, and it places additional burdens on you to keep up with our reading and discussion. If you are seriously ill or must quarantine, let me know. \*Students who miss a lot of class early in the semester rarely end up with a passing grade. If, after four weeks of class, you have more than two absences, you should probably drop.

### **Late Work**

The only thing you can hand in late is the 5-page essay. Lateness on that assignment will be penalized 3 points per day: so, not making the deadline brings a 3-point deduction, followed by further 3-point deductions for each following day late. Everything else needs to be in on time. Not handing in a bibliography or draft will result in a 5-point deduction from your research essay grade (missing both =10 point deduction).

### **Class Conduct**

I expect all members of class to be respectful of one another and to refrain from discrimination relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion. In discussion, do not assume that everyone shares your background, identity status, or beliefs. Disruptive, belligerent, and/or offensive behavior may result in removal from the class.

### **Academic Honesty**

All written work submitted for credit in this class must be produced by you for this class and must be in your own words. Any language you use from other sources, including your own previous work, must be properly cited. Familiarize yourself with [WVU's plagiarism policy](#). Plagiarism on essays will result in failure of the course.

### **Learning Accommodations**

Students requiring specific kinds of support should discuss these needs with me at the beginning of the semester. You may also want to contact the WVU [Office of Accessibility Services](#).

### **Safety and Wellness**

You can find a directory of services offered by WVU here: <https://safety.wvu.edu/>. WVU's [Carruth Center](#) offers counseling to help deal with stress, illness, and other burdens. They can help with everything from time management skills to trauma recovery. I am happy to help you locate the services you need, but please be aware that if you inform me of harassment or abuse, I am legally obligated to report it. This doesn't mean you will need to file or pursue a claim, just that someone will contact you to inform you of your options.

### **Office Hours**

Talking with me personally is a good way to get help with class participation, understanding the reading, and writing essays. I'm available Wednesday 2:30-3:30 and many other times. Make an appointment with me via email ([Lara.Farina@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Lara.Farina@mail.wvu.edu)). I typically respond to email from students once a day, weekdays only. I also encourage you to make use of the [Writing Studio](#) when outlining, drafting, and/or revising your essays.

### **Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Th 8/18 | Introduction  |
| Tu 8/23 | Dunn, from <i>Queerly Remembered: Rhetorics for Representing the GLBTQ Past</i> (ecampus) |
| Th 8/25 | Shapland, <i>My Autobiography</i> , pp. 1-66  |

- Tu 8/30 Shapland, *My Autobiography*, pp. 67-158  
Entry on “Carson McCullers” (*Wikipedia*)
- Th 9/1 Shapland, *My Autobiography*, pp. 159-254  
Entry on “Tennessee Williams” (*Wikipedia*)
- Tu 9/6 Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 3-32
- Th 9/8 Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 32-64  
Entry on “Achilles and Patroclus” (*Wikipedia*)
- Tu 9/13 *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (streaming from library)
- Th 9/15 *Roman de Silence*, pp. 3-85  
Cadden, from *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (ecampus)
- Tu 9/20 *Roman de Silence*, pp. 85-207  
Entry on “Saint Marinus” (*Wikipedia*)
- Th 9/22 *Roman de Silence*, pp. 207-315  
Entry on “John/Eleanor Rykener” (*Wikipedia*)
- Tu 9/27 Ohi, from *Dead Letters Sent: Queer Literary Transmission* (ecampus)
- Th 9/29 Raskolnikov, from *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern* (ecampus)
- Tu 10/4 **5-page essay due**; discussion of arguments
- Th 10/6 Fall Break, no class
- Tu 10/11 Woolf, *Orlando*, pp. 3-33, 73-97
- Th 10/13 *Orlando* (streaming from library)
- Tu 10/18 McKay, *Love in Marseilles*, pp. 3-79
- Th 10/20 McKay, *Love in Marseilles*, pp. 83-130  
Entry on “Ma Rainey” (*Wikipedia*)
- Tu 10/25 Ferguson, “Race-ing Homonormativity” (ecampus)
- Th 10/27 Literary Research Day
- Tu 11/1 Anzaldua, from *Borderlands/La Frontera* (ecampus)
- Th 11/3 Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem*

Tu 11/8 Election Day, no class (voter registration: <https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote> )

Th 11/10 Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem*  
Entry on “Two Spirit” (Wikipedia)

Tu 11/15 **research bibliography due**; discussion of topics

Th 11/17 Barker, from *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*  
(ecampus)

11/19–27 Thanksgiving

Tu 11/29 **4-page draft of research essay due**

Th 12/1 Research Presentations

Tu 12/6 Research Presentations

Th 12/8 **final research essay due**