

English 288

Lara Farina, ENGL 288, Spring 2004, Sexual Diversity in Literature and Film

English 288
Sexual Diversity in Literature and Film
Tu-Th 2:30-3:45
Professor Farina

This course examines representations of gender, sexual practice, and erotic orientation, with the goal of understanding how those depictions reflect and sometimes challenge our most basic ideas about identity. We use literature and film to help us articulate who we are, both as individuals and as a culture. When we do so, we select and adopt the categories of identity that these media offer us, and nowhere is our contemporary effort to categorize ourselves more tenacious than in the area of sexual preference.

To understand our contemporary desire to identify and classify sex, we will study the history of sexual categories in the West, starting with debates about same-sex love in Classical antiquity. This survey will also touch upon Christian attitudes towards sex, the body, and "perversion," before moving on to modern discussions of sexual practice. Topics to be discussed include: philosophies of gender, gender inversions, same-sex love, queer identity, libertinism, sex and race, pornography and censorship.

Note: This course will contain some explicit reading/viewing material. It will also contain a good deal of reading in criticism and cultural theory.

Required Texts:

Stein, *Forms of Desire*.
Plato, *The Symposium*.
The Romance of Silence.
Marlowe, *Edward 11*.
Gide, *The Immoralist*.
Larsen, *Passing*.
Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*.
Hwang, M. *Butterfly*.
Winterson, *The Passion*.

Required Coursework:

- eight 1-2 page reading responses (see attachment) 30%
- one 5 page paper 20%
- one 8-10 page paper 25%
- active participation in class discussion (see attachment) 25%

Course Policies:

You are allowed three absences with no penalty, after that, your class participation grade will suffer. Two late arrivals (more than 5 minutes) will count as an absence. In general, I do not care why you are absent and do not want to see any notes. The only exceptions to this are cases where some serious condition requires you to be absent for a week or more. At six absences, you will fail this class: to contest this, you must take the issue to the Dean, not me.

Late essays will be downgraded at the rate of one grade per day. I will not accept late responses. If you know that you're going to be absent when a response is due, you may email it to me before class.

Note that there will be no chances for extra credit or make-up work.

Contact Info:

My drop-in office hours are from 4:00-5:00 Tuesday and Thursday in 357 Stansbury Hall. You can also make an appointment to see me. My office phone is 293-3107 x. 426, and you can email me at either my MIX address or at Lara.Farina@mail.wvu.edu. Do not email me to find out what you missed in class: get in touch with another student for notes.

Schedule:

(R) indicates a due date for a reading response; (S) indicates one for a summary

1/13 Introduction; personal ads

1/15 Hacking, "Making Up People; Padgug, "Sexual Matters" (both in Stein)

1/20 Plato, The Symposium (to page 33) (R)

1/22 Plato, The Symposium (to end)

1/27 Halperin, "One Hundred Years of Homosexuality" (e-reserve); Boswell, "Categories, Experience, and Sexuality" (in Stein) 1/29 Brown, from The Body and Society; "A Transvestite Saint" (e-reserve) (S)

2/3 Silence, (to line 2126) (R)

2/5 Silence, (to line 4026)

2/10 Silence, (to end)

2/12 No Class

2/17 Marlowe, Edward II (R)

2/19 Marlowe, Edward II

2/24 Short Paper Due; viewing of Jarman, Edward 11

2/26 viewing of Jarman, Edward 11

3/2 Carter, from The Sadeian Woman (e-reserve); Foucault, "The Perverse Implantation" (in Stein) (S)

3/4 Dollimore "Gide and Wilde in Algiers" (e-reserve)

3/9 Gide, The Immoralist (to page ?)

3/11 Gide, The Immoralist (to end) (R)

3/12-3/22 Spring Break

3/23 Larsen, Passing (to page 62)

3/25 Larsen, Passing (to end)

3/30 Baldwin, Giovanni's Room (to page?) (R)

4/1 Baldwin, Giovanni's Room (to end)

4/6 Hwang, M. Butterfly

4/8 Epstein, "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity" (in Stein) (S)

4/13 viewing of Kiss of the Spider Woman

4/15 viewing of Kiss of the Spider Woman

4/20 Winterson, The Passion

4/22 Winterson, The Passion

4/27 viewing of Exotica
4/29 viewing of Exotica

5/3 Long Paper Due

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Reading Responses:

As part of your participation in this course, you will write eight 1-2 page typed responses to or summaries of the required reading. These are due at the beginning of class and are intended to provide some starting points for class discussion. Each day they are due, I will call on several members of the class to read or summarize their responses. While you will not be graded on style, responses must be written in coherent sentences, not as notes or an outline.

On the schedule of readings, assignments are either marked with an (R) for response or an (S) summary. I am asking you to do two different things here: 1) summarize critical or historical readings and 2) analyze literary readings. For a summary, I want you to identify the main arguments of a reading and briefly discuss how these are supported. For a response, do not summarize the plot of the work we are reading; rather try one of the following options:

- 1) Select a particularly rich, interesting, or important passage to explicate. Discuss why it's worth reading closely.
- 2) Discuss a particular image, character, or theme.
- 3) Discuss the structure and/or voice of the work: consider the effects of its point of view.
- 4) Find out about the work's social context.
- 5) Compare the work to another one we have read.

The responses require that you have read the assigned text carefully and actively and that you provide the best interpretations that you can. Try to reference specific passages, as a way of pointing us to material for thinking about what you see in the reading.

You do not need to defend a thesis or stick to one topic (though you should try not to pursue more than two or three observations per response). It is more important that you develop some questions for the rest of the class to pursue. You can either begin the response with a question or two, developing some tentative answers of your own, or you can begin with some interpretive observations and devise questions from these.