

WST/ENG 317: LGBT Literature

Prof. Nishant Shahani

Spring 2012: Tues and Thurs: 2.50-4.05

CUE 418

Office hours: Thurs: 11.00-12.00, 1.30-2.30, and by appointment

Office: Wilson 10 E

Email: nshahani3@wsu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine some of the major concepts and political issues that shape gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer experience through literary and cultural productions. Our approach will be to understand texts in relation to context – to see how historical contingencies and political debates inform literature, but also to see how literature and culture can inform (and challenge) public and political opinion. We will thus read literature in conjunction with critical readings on LGBT history as well as queer theory. We will not limit ourselves to texts by authors who explicitly identify as LGBT or queer, but will also grapple with the question of what constitutes the archive of “queer” literature. Genres we will examine include the novel, memoir, drama, the epistolary mode, and even film. The texts under consideration grapple with the radically different meanings and discursive formations of queerness in various historical and institutional contexts: “queer” desire in 1920’s Pakistan, post-Stonewall AIDS experience, pre-Stonewall female masculinity, black and queer “switchpoints” during the Cold War years, and Chicana queerness during the “war years,” just to name a few.

While a prior familiarity with queer theory or LGBT literature is not expected, a commitment to anti-homophobic inquiry will be considered axiomatic to engage with the materials in this class.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will acquire the theoretical tools to critique heterosexual and cis-gendered privilege by engaging with literary and cultural texts.
- Students will understand some of the central political debates in the field of LGBT studies and queer theory.
- Students will learn how to analyze literary texts and formulate original thesis-oriented arguments about these readings
- Students will understand the ways in which “sexuality” as an issue dovetails with various other social institutions such as media, religion, family, and education.
- Students will be able to understand literature in conjunction with history and larger political and social debates.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Course Packet:
(Available at Cougar Copies only)
2. *The Hours* – Michael Cunningham
3. *Angels in America Part 1: Millennium Approaches* – Tony Kushner
4. *Girls, Visions and Everything* – Sarah Schulman
5. *Zami* – Audre Lorde
6. *Stone Butch Blues* – Leslie Feinberg

CLASS POLICIES

1. Attendance:

Attendance is compulsory. You are allowed a maximum of 3 personal absences and 1 absence for which you have university sanctioned documentation (given to me BEFORE you miss the class). For your 3 personal absences, I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so please use these absences for genuine emergencies. For every additional absence beyond this, your grade will drop. In other words, if your final class grade is B+ and you have 4 personal absences, your final grade will drop to B. You are responsible for any work you might have missed during your absences.

2. Tardies:

If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, you will receive a tardy. Tardies will be calculated in accordance to the class watch, not yours. Three tardies will constitute an absence. I take attendance at the very beginning of class. If you come to class late and miss attendance, it is your responsibility to come up to me after class and inform me that you were present. I will change the absence into a tardy, but you are allowed to do this only two times during the semester. If you miss a quiz because you are late, you will not be able to make up the quiz, and will not receive any points for it. In general, you are requested to be very mindful of time—entering class late is a distraction to the instructor as well as to your peers.

3. Academic Integrity Policy:

Plagiarism or cheating of any kind on any assignment will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the assignment **as well as the entire course** and a report to Student Affairs. See the WSU handbook on academic dishonesty (WAS 504-25-025) for further details and if you are at any time unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, or cheating, please see me. For specifics regarding academic dishonesty and student conduct in general, please see --
<http://conduct.wsu.edu/default.asp?PageID=338>

4. Disability Accommodation:

Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have documented disability. Please notify me during the first week of class if any accommodations are needed for the course. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable. All accommodations must be approved through the Disability

Resource Center (DRG) in Administration Annex 205, 335-1566.

5. Safety Information: <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu> & Emergency Site:
<http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies>

6. Technology

* **Students must turn off cellular phones/blackberries/I phones/electronic gadgets during class.** (Your cell phone is not considered “off” when it is on vibrate). If a student's cellular phone rings during class hours, she/he will be penalized with an absence. Cell phones must not be placed on your desks or in front of you during class. In other words, anything that beeps, vibrates, flashes... (you get the point) must be turned off during class hours.

* If I catch you texting or using any electronic device during class hours, (this includes during film screenings), you will be marked absent. I may also ask you to leave the class.

* Please do not use your cell phone even to look at the time.

* Please do not use laptops during class hours. If you wish to use your laptop to take notes, you must take special permission from me and always sit in the front row.

7. Academic Etiquette:

* While healthy disagreement and difference in opinion is expected and encouraged, I do expect that discussions should be conducted in a respectful and civil manner. If I interpret any of your comments as verbal harassment, I will ask you to leave the class.

* If you want feedback on your writing or class performance, please visit my office hours or make an appointment to see me. **I do not give feedback on your papers via email.** All email correspondence must be limited to questions for which I can give you a quick response.

* Unless specified by me, all your assignments must be turned in as hard copies. Electronic submissions or attachments via email are not acceptable. Visit my office hours for feedback on assignments.

* Please do not get up and leave the class during class hours unless it's a genuine emergency since this distracts your classmates and the instructor.

* Do not use class hours for your lunch break. You must not be eating **anything** during class hours.

* If I see you engaged in any activity that does not pertain to classroom pre-occupations, I reserve the right to give you an absence for that day even though you are technically present in class.

* If I interpret any of your behavior to be disruptive, unprofessional, or rude, I reserve the right to ask you to leave the class (which will then be counted towards your absences)

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Class Participation (100 Points): You are required to take part in class

discussions. I expect you not only to respond to my questions and comments, but also to the comments of your peers in class. While I encourage difference of opinion (from the text under consideration, the instructor, or a point of view expressed by a classmate), I expect you to be respectful and civil. Any form of bigotry will not be tolerated. Please note that class participation does not only mean “talking” in class. You must engage with the text under consideration. If you are failing quizzes, you are obviously not reading the required materials. Failing quizzes will drastically affect class participation points. Sleeping, chatting with friends, reading a newspaper, eating, not submitting assignments on time, not preparing for class, will all result in low class participation points. I reserve the right to confront you about your conduct and participation in class. I also reserve the right to call on you to ask you your response to any of the readings that you have done for the day. You must come to class prepared with an insight or a question about the reading.

2. Discussion Presentation and Paper (100 Points): At the beginning of the semester, you will choose any one reading. You will be responsible for introducing that reading on the day it is scheduled. Your presentation must include at least one outside academic source that connects with the reading. Organize your presentation in the following manner:

- a. Provide some information about the author
- b. What are some of the main thematic concerns in this text?
- c. What are some of the implications of the literature you have read to LGBT politics and history?
- d. Comment on the reading’s connection with everyday politics or its connection to another reading/cultural text you are familiar with.

I would strongly recommend that you visit my office prior to your presentation in order to make sure you are on the right track.

Your presentation must be at least 10 minutes. At the end of class, you must provide me with a double-spaced 2-page summary of your insights into the reading.

3. Mid-term exam (100 points)

4. Quizzes (100 points): Surprise quizzes will be given at any point during the semester to ensure you are doing the reading. You cannot make up quizzes if you are absent or late to class. Quiz questions will be simple but one incorrect answer results in the failing of a quiz.

5. Mid-term Paper (250 points) – A hand out detailing this assignment will be provided in class.

6. Presentation of Final Paper Abstract (50 points): At the end of the semester, you will write a 500-word abstract and a Bibliography for your final paper. You will present this abstract to the class (no longer than 5 minutes).

7. Final Research Paper (300 points): A hand out detailing this assignment will be provided in class.

8. Extra Credit (30 points)

Extra credit will be given if you attend any class-related activity on or off campus and write a two-page summary of the event and your understanding of its significance. You can receive no more than 30 points through extra credit. **Extra credit cannot adequately compensate for absences in class or poor performances in assignments.**

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

(Note: You are expected to have read the assignments *by* the date indicated on the schedule. Come to class prepared with commentary and notes for the day's reading. I reserve the right to make changes, which I will announce in advance.)

All the below readings are in the Course Packet unless otherwise indicated. You must come to class already having read the readings on the day indicated below.

WEEK 1: Introductions/Discussion of Syllabus

Jan 10 – Discussion of Syllabus

Jan 12 – Introductions

WEEK 2: Queer Axioms

Jan 17 – Key Terms – Introductory Lecture – (Do NOT miss this class or you will have difficulty understanding future classes).

Jan 19 – Emmanuel Nelson, “Introduction” –from *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature*

WEEK 3:

Jan 24 – Robert McCruer, “Introduction: Reading the Queer Renaissance” from *The Queer Renaissance*

Jan 26 – Rocko Bulldagger, “Dr. Laura, Sit on my Face,” Dean Spade, “Letters about Poverty,” Max Gordon, “Brother to Brother: A Letter to Herman Cain”

WEEK 4:

Jan 31 – Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*

Feb 2 – Discussion Contd.

WEEK 5:

Feb 7– Sarah Brophy, “AIDS Testimonial Writing and Unresolved Grief”

Feb 9 – Discuss mid-term assignment, Conclude Discussion of *The Hours*

WEEK 6:

Feb 14 – Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*

Feb 16 – Discussion of thesis topics; Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”

WEEK 7:

Feb 21 – Discussion of Kushner contd.

Feb 23 – Eve Sedgwick, Selections from *Tendencies*; Tennessee Williams, “Hard Candy”

WEEK 8:

Feb 28 – Ismat Chughtai, “The Quilt”

March 1 – Samuel Delany, Selections from *The Motion of Light in Water*, Roderick Ferguson, “Sissies at the Picnic: The Subjugated Knowledges of a Black Rural Queer,” Cherrie Moraga, Selections from *Loving in the War Years*

WEEK 9

March 6 –

Screening: *The Watermelon Woman* (Dir: Cheryl Dunye)

March 8 – Discussion of film, Mid-term Paper due.

WEEK 10:

March 13 – Spring Break

March 15 – Spring Break

WEEK 11:

March 20 – Selections from Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* and Sarah Schulman, *Girls, Visions and Everything*

March 22 – Discussion Contd., Discussion of final paper requirements

WEEK 12:

March 27 – Exam

March 29 – Exam

WEEK 13:

April 3 – Audre Lorde, *Zami*

April 5 – *Zami* discussion contd.

WEEK 14:

April 10 – Discussion of final Paper thesis topics

April 12 – Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*

WEEK 15:

April 17 – Feinberg, contd., Judith Halberstam, Selections from *Female Masculinity*

April 19 – Conclude discussion of Feinberg

WEEK 16

April 24 -- Presentations

April 26 – Presentations