WST/ENG 317: LGBT Literature

Prof. Nishant Shahani
Fall 2015
MWF: 11.10-12.00
Todd Hall 303
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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, poetry, and even film. The texts under consideration grapple with the radically different meanings and discursive formations of queerness in various historical and institutional contexts.

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 and cultural 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. Angels in America Part 1: Millennium Approaches – Tony Kushner (Available at the Bookie)
3. Zami – Audre Lorde (Available at the Bookie)
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. **Ignorance about what constitutes plagiarism will not count as an excuse for plagiarism.** 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.


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, or flashes must be turned off during class hours.
* If I see you texting or using any electronic device during class hours, (this includes during film screenings), you will be marked absent. I will 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.
* 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 pack up your things in the last few minutes of class before class has ended. I will dismiss class at noon sharp.
* Do not use class hours as lunch/breakfast time. 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 (reading newspapers, doing homework for another class) 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)

8. Email Etiquette:
* As per WSU policy, please only use your official WSU email address (@wsu.edu) to communicate with me.
* Please address all email with appropriate salutation and sign off. (Dear Prof. _______; Sincerely/Best ________). Remember that you are not informally communicating with a friend.
* 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.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Class Participation (100 Points): Active participation in class discussions, group activities, and application exercises that are based on class readings and lectures is expected. Specific in-class group activities will be conducted throughout the semester; additionally, readings will be taught through class discussions (and not only lectures) in which you must participate. 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. If you fail more than 3 quizzes, you will automatically lose 50 points on your class participation grade.** 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. I recognize that not everyone is confident speaking in front of a large number of people – there are various ways you can make up for this – emailing me questions before class, visiting my office hours to discuss materials one on one. Below is a break up of your class participation grade:

100-80 points: Excellent participation; Active and insightful contributions; Significantly enhances the classroom dynamic with questions, comments, and responses. Engages the text under consideration and does all the reading. **To get full points on class participation you should not fail any quizzes.**

79-60: Consistent participation with adequate insight into text. Good but somewhat basic contributions.

59-40: Rarely contributes but attentive and not disruptive in any way.

39-20: Indifferent, consistently failing quizzes, physically present but checked out of class.

19-0: Disruptive to classroom activities; use of cell phone/texting; disrespectful of professor and fellow students.

2. **Response Journals (100 Points):**

You must keep a response journal in which you will write analysis of the primary texts we will read throughout the semester on a weekly basis. On any given day, I will begin class by calling on you to read out your response. For your responses, answer any one (or more) of the following questions:

a. What are some of the central political concerns of the reading? What political institutions are the characters responding to and/or critiquing?

b. What connections can you make between the text’s themes with contemporary LGBT politics, or with any other readings this semester? Why is the text relevant or important?

c. Whose point of view in the text is privileged? What are the limits and possibilities of this privileged point of view?

d. What vectors of identity does the text intersect with and how? (race, class, disability, gender, national identity etc.)

e. How does the form of the text (imagery, metaphor, style, language, montage, soundtrack) convey some of its thematic preoccupations?

Please note the specificity of these responses. Avoid simplistic (I liked/disliked, I was bored, I found it interesting, I did not understand etc.)

Note the RD (for response due) in your class schedule, which indicates when you will write responses. Note that you might have to write more than one response to a given text if the discussion is spread out over a few weeks. All responses should be approximately 15 sentences (at
least).

3. **Mid-term exam (100 points):** You will write the exam in class, but all questions will be given to you one week prior to the exam.

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.

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**

**August**

M 24 -- Introduction to Course Objectives and Class Policies

W 26 -- In class assignment

F 28 -- Student and Instructor Introductions

**Week 2**

M 31 -- Lecture and Key Terms

**September**

W 2 -- Lecture Continued; Key Historical Moments

Week 3

M 7 -- Labor Day: HOLIDAY

W 9 – Audre Lorde, Zami (RD)

F 11 – Audre Lorde, Zami

Week 4

M 14 – Audre Lorde, Zami (RD)

W 16 – Audre Lorde, Zami

F 18 -- Selections from Chicana Lesbians (RD)

Week 5

M 21 -- Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhran, "Cycle Undone," "Carved Crimson into the Bark of a White Page: A Queer/Trans Womanist Indigenous Colored Poetics" (RD)


F 25 -- Eli Clare, "Because Poems are Kisses, Fists, and Underground Rivers," "Reading across the Grain," "Stones in my Pockets, Stones in my Heart" (RD)

Week 6

M 28 -- David Caron, Selections from The Nearness of Others (RD)

W 30 – Alex Juhasz, Video Remains (screening in class) and discussion

October

F 2 – Clips from Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard’s United in Anger

Week 7

M 5 – Angels in America (RD)

W 7 – Angels in America

F 9 – To be announced

Week 8

M 12 – To be announced
W 14 -- Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” and clips from *Perestroika*

F 16 -- Thesis discussions

**Week 9**

M 19 -- *Luna* (RD)

W 21 -- *Luna*

F 23 -- Discussion contd.

**Week 10**

M 26 -- *Luna* (RD)

W 28 -- *Luna*

F 30 -- Discussion Contd.

**November**

Week 11

M 2 -- Discussion of *Paris is Burning* (RD)

W 4 -- Discussion of *Paris is Burning*

F 6 -- *End of San Francisco* (RD)

**Week 12**

M 9 -- *End of San Francisco*

W 11 -- Veteran's Day: HOLIDAY

F 13 -- *End of San Francisco* (RD)

**Week 13**

M 16 -- Exam

W 18 -- Exam

F 20 -- Exam

**Week 14**

Thanksgiving Week
Week 15
M 30 -- Transparent (RD)

December
W 2 -- Transparent
F 4 -- Thesis discussion

Week 16
M 7 -- Presentations
W 9 -- Presentations
F 11 -- Presentations