

Sex and Representation:

Introduction to Gender and Sexuality in World Literature

COML 1027 (Also offered as: CIMS 1027, GSWS 1027)

Course Description

Sex is everywhere. It's intimately individual and jarringly universal. It's about ourselves, and it's about being together with others. It comes from within us with great force, and it's forced upon us from the outside by our societies and communities. It is experienced as extremely authentic while also regulated through an intricate network of cultural codes, traditions, and laws that articulate explicit as well as implicit attitudes toward gender and sexuality. In this course, we will explore how, throughout different historical and cultural contexts, writers and thinkers grappled with issues such as normal and deviant sexual practices, masculinity and femininity, and the intersection between gender and cultural categories such as race, class, and nationality. An introductory course in literary studies, this course will focus on a wide range of genres in the tradition of world literature, aiming at providing the students with basic skills to critically analyze and engage with literary texts and cultural artifacts. We will read, watch, and discuss texts in various genres (prose, poetry, essays, drama, film, theory) and from different cultural backgrounds (ancient and modern; from America, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East).

Course Goals

- Develop aesthetic sensitivity and basic skills in critical reading of literary texts and cultural artifacts of various genres: novels, essays, poetry, theory, and film.
- Become familiar with historical trends involving gender and sexuality in world literature: masculinity, femininity, same-sex love and sexuality, the intersection between gender, sexuality, race, and class in different cultural contexts.
- Develop written and conversational skills in analyzing literary texts and cultural artifacts.

Course Format

The course consists of two 90-minute weekly meetings. Before each meeting, the students are required to complete assigned readings of primary and secondary sources. In class, we will discuss reading materials – as a group and in smaller teams – as we explore the topics at hand as a learning community.

Assignments (instructions below)

- Nine weekly one- to two-paragraph responses, to be submitted by midnight the day before the course meeting.
- One two-page response to the reading materials. This short-format paper is designed to help prepare the students to write the final paper.
- Two meeting minutes recapping the discussion in class, to be shared with the class.
- Final paper: 5-6 pages, analyzing a literary text of the student's choice.

Grading

- Participation in class discussions (20%)
- Meeting minutes (10%)
- Weekly responses (20%)
- Response paper (20%)
- Final paper (30%)

Instructions for Course Assignments

Participation in Class Discussions: Students are expected to attend the weekly meeting after having read the assigned texts, and ready to engage in class discussions, led and mitigated by the instructor.

Meeting Minutes: Each student will be assigned to write a summary of one of the class discussions, to be shared with the group by midnight before the next meeting.

Weekly Responses: One- to two-paragraph responses to the reading materials, guided by a prompt provided by the instructor, to be submitted by midnight, the day before the corresponding course meeting. The students are free to choose the 9 out of 14 weeks in which they will submit their responses.

Response Paper: A 2-page long response paper to be submitted instead of one of the weekly response assignments. In this paper, the student will expand on one of the questions/topics in the weekly prompt provided by the instructor. This assignment is aimed at preparing the students to write the final paper, and the students are hence expected to adhere to academic writing standards: using references and including a bibliography (the students may but are not expected to use reading materials other than those assigned by the instructor).

Final Paper: A 5-6 pages long paper, analyzing a literary text of the student's choice. By the second-to-last meeting, students are required to submit a one- to two-paragraph proposal, to be discussed with and approved by the instructor. The papers are due 10 days after the last day of the semester.

Note on using AI tools: While artificial intelligence tools become an important technology that greatly contributes to academic work and research, **using AI in this course might hinder students from obtaining the course goals, and hence is strictly prohibited.** Students may use AI tools to proofread texts and correct grammar mistakes before submission, however, using AI tools to generate

text for written assignments is not allowed, and will be considered as a violation of the University of Pennsylvania's [Code of Academic Integrity](#).

Tentative Weekly Meetings and Assigned Reading¹

INTRODUCTION

Week 1: Sex, Gender, and Beyond

No reading required.

SECTION I: Using the Ancients

Week 2: Greek Homosexuality

- a. Plato. *Symposium*. Socratic Dialogue
- b. Foucault. *The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure* (1984) (excerpts TBD).
- c. Davidson. "Sexing Up the Greeks" in *The Greeks and Greek Love* (2007).

Week 3: Excavating the Feminine Voices of Ancient Greece

- a. Sappho. Selection (TBD) Poetry
- b. Hauser, Emily. "Mother Sappho: Creating Women Poets" in *How Women Became Poets: A Gender History of Greek Literature* (2023).
- c. Dubois // Lyn Wilson on Sappho (TBD)

Week 4: The West and the Unsettling Roman Heritage

- a. Ovid. Book I of *The Art of Love*. Poetry
- b. Zuckerberg, Donna. "The Ovid Method" in *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age* (2018).

Week 5: Queer Heroes of the Bible?

- a. Book of Ruth; Book of Samuel 1:8-2:1, the Hebrew Bible. Scripture
- b. Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd, Sailor* (US, 1924). Novella
- c. Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *Reading the Women of the Bible* (2002) (excerpts TBD).

SECTION II: Between Fiction and Theory – Feminist Thought

Week 6: Revisiting the Canon

¹ Information on editions and translations is TBD.

- a. Tolstoy, Leo. *The Kreutzer Sonata* (Russian Empire, 1889). Novella
- b. Dworkin, Andrea. *Intercourse* (1987) (excerpts TBD).

Week 7: Women's Writing

- a. Woolf. *To the Lighthouse* (UK, 1927). Novel
- b. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex* (1949) (excerpts TBD).
- c. Cixous, Hélène. *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975).

Week 8: Auto-Theory

- a. Preciado, Paul. *Testo-Junkie* (Spain, 2008). (excerpts TBD). Auto-Theory
 - a. **OR** (TBD)
- b. Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. (US, 2015). (excerpts TBD). Auto-Theory
- c. Fournier, Lauren. *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (2021). (excerpts TBD).

SECTION III: Between Fiction and Theory – The Deviant becomes Queer

Week 9: The Queer Underworld

- a. Genet, Jean. *Our Lady of the Flowers* (France, 1943). Novel
- b. Stephens, Elizabeth. *Queer Writing: Homoeroticism in Jean Genet's Fiction*. (excerpts TBD).
- c. Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. (excerpts TBD).

Week 10: From Deviant Sexuality to Queer Ideals

- a. Hitchcock, Alfred (dir.). *The Birds* (US, 1963). Film
- b. Edelman, Lee. Chapter 4 in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004).

Week 11: Queer Reformation

- a. Baldwin, James. *Another Country* (US, 1962). Novel

SECTION IV: Colonial Encounters

Week 12: Deviant Sexuality between East and West

- a. Ben Jelloun, Taher. *Leaving Tangier* (France, 2006). Novel
 - a. **OR** (TBD)
- b. Taïa, Abdellah. *Another Morocco* (France, 2004) (Selection TBD) Short stories
- c. Najmabadi, Afsaneh. Chapters 1 and 2 in *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (2005).

Week 13: Nationally Masculine

- a. Abu-Assad, Hany (dir.). *Omar* (Palestine, 2013). Film
- b. Adler, Yuval (dir.). *Bethlehem* (Israel, 2013). Film

Week 14: Queer between Local and Universal

- a. Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Essays/Poetry
- b. Eng, David L, Jack/Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz. “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” (2005).
- c. Love, Heather. “Doing Being Deviant” in *Underdogs* (2021).