

Sex and Representation

Spring 2024

COML 1027 / CIMS 1027.401 / GSWS 1027.401

Mondays & Wednesdays 10.15 - 11.44 AM

Course Instructor:

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This course explores 20th and 21st century literature and film from around the world that problematize representation and resist normative categories of gender and sexuality. By focusing on figures from outside Eurocentric locations of power, we will explore how their radical approaches to form and subject-matter invite us to think differently about desire and identity in specific historical and geographical contexts. How did colonialism produce certain expressions and representations of gender and sexuality? How did decolonization confront such representations while also carrying some of its legacies? The texts in this course attend to such concerns, while also significantly extending outside their specific locations into other parts of the world, complicating colonial and post-colonial geographies. We will study how various forms of desire— normative and non-normative— are constructed by the operations of power in an unequal world, and how literary and cinematic texts negotiate with and transform such understandings of desire.

This class will meet in person for Spring 2024 for 14 weeks between January 22 (first class) and May 1st (last class). The class will include in-person lectures and interactive sessions that students are expected to attend. There will also be ungraded exercises and activities that will allow students to work together in smaller groups while in class. On the whole, students can expect to not only understand the core themes of this course, but also learn models of cultural analysis, critical writing, and oral presentation skills.

Preparation for each week's lectures involves reading or watching the primary texts before class. Apart from a few weeks where we tackle longer texts for which students will have more time, the reading load will be around 80-100 pages per week spread across 2 lectures. All texts will be in English and no prior familiarity with the material is required.

Required Books:

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys. (Penguin Classic; 3rd edition; 2000; ISBN: 978-0141185422)

I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem by Maryse Condé. (University of Virginia Press; 2009; ISBN: 978-081392767)

Kari by Amruta Patil. (Harper Collins; 2018; ISBN: 978-8172237103)

Dictée by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. (University of California Press; 2nd edition; Restored; 2022; ISBN: 978-0520390485)

Sherazade by Leïla Sebbar. (Interlink Books; 2014; ISBN: 978-1566569880)

All other shorter texts and readings will be provided on Canvas. Students may consult with Student Financial Services to find out what support they are eligible to receive to cover costs of purchase.

Outline of Assignments and Assessments:

Class Participation (30%)

Students are expected to attend class having read the assigned readings for the week and to share their impressions with each other. Class work is meant to be collaborative. This includes listening and responding to what the instructor and fellow students have to say in class.

Weekly reaction post: Students will write a short reaction of less than 250 words to the week's texts. They will have to pick out a key quote or scene from the text that stood out to them, write a brief critical reflection on it, and posit a question that the student would like the class to discuss. This should be posted on the discussion board on Canvas by 9 pm the day before the class meets (Sunday).

Class Discussion (15%)

During week 2, students will choose one primary literary or cinematic text from the syllabus and sign up for presentation days. The students will meet the instructor the week before the presentation to discuss ideas and get guidance/help if they require it. Each presentation should ideally be between 5 to 7 minutes; students are not expected to use powerpoint. The student will introduce the work, the author/filmmaker, and the historical and geographic context of the respective text.

While students are strongly encouraged to present in class, if due to discomfort or hesitation to speak, someone would rather not present in class, accommodations can be made to reframe this assignment for such a student under exceptional circumstances.

Short Midterm Essay (20%)

Students will choose a theoretical essay that we will have discussed in the classes leading up to this week. They will identify the key words used in the essay and explain them; they will then use that theoretical frame to analyze a literary, cinematic, visual or social text of their choosing from outside the syllabus. 2-3 pages, double spaced. **Due March 3rd, 9pm as a Word Document submitted on Canvas.**

Final Essay Proposal (5%)

Students will submit a written proposal of approximately 250 words for their final essay detailing the primary text they will choose, theoretical frames with which they will analyze it, and the general argument. **Due April 15, 9 pm as a Word Document on Canvas.**

Final Essay (30%)

Students are expected to write a 1500 word essay engaging with the themes of the course discussed over the semester. Elaborating on their submitted proposals, they will write a critical essay employing literary analysis or comparison between various texts. A more creative project rewriting a specific text from the syllabus according to the student's own interpretation is also viable with prior consultation with the instructor. **Due May 7, 9pm as a Word Document on Canvas.**

There is no final exam for this course.