

Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Literature

Section 80

ENGL 182

Fall 2023 4 Unit(s) 08/21/2023 to 12/06/2023 Modified 08/21/2023

This course will celebrate diversely-experienced bodies and sexualities, problematizing essentialized and binary-oppositional models of gender and sexuality, reading critically and rewriting creatively the language of sexed, gendered, racialized, and sexualized bodies. We will explore an “erotics of reading” (thinking of Lorde, from my epigraph, and of Susan Sontag) to plumb the manifold “pleasures of the text” (thinking of Roland Barthes) in our reading and writing to enjoy more fully the sensual-material elements—the aesthetic properties—of literary texts and the ways in which they “think feelingly” (Dickinson) about intersectional aspects of sexed bodies, gendered subjectivities, desire, love, and life. Assignments will include both more and less formal engagements with the texts that (in the light of my epigraph) activate critical-theoretical, personally reflective, and creative responses. As such, our reading and writing assignments will function as modes of critical investigation, creative experimentation, and personal empowerment.

As a 4-credit course, additional work is expected of you. Various readings in the theory of criticism will fulfill this function, most of them discussing alternative methods of critique and response beyond the more conventionally “symptomatic” readings that analyze the ways in which texts are unintentional functions of their sociocultural power structures (important work that you will also be able to undertake, should you choose), we will focus as much on how we might more creatively and affirmatively think with and through the texts themselves, trying to focus more on the questions these literary works are exploring, critiques they seem productively to launch, and the expansive cultural work we see them accomplishing (or at least attempting) more than than thinking over and against them as unintentional products of negative cultural forces (though this is inevitably the case, too, for all of us). In short, and far too simplistically, I want to focus on what we can affirm and celebrate--even love--about these texts more than their less-than-perfect, negative aspects.

Major Assignments:

We will have two major projects, one around midterm and a final. These are not exams (ick)! You will each develop projects in consultation with me. Each project will engage substantively with one or more of the texts I assign you to read, as well as with another text of your choice and/or the critical literature on that text. These projects can be historicist-contextual, philosophical, “auto theoretical” (you’ll see...), multidisciplinary, and/or creative (and/or...what do you imagine?).

I will note that no *strictly* creative projects will be approved or accepted; any *purely* creative engagement with your chosen text(s) must be accompanied by an explication of your creative work, explaining just how you see your creative choices engaging with/critiquing/responding to the text(s). It cannot be lazy, superficial, hermetically oblique, purely personal (though the personal can certainly be a part of it) and/or unrelated except in the most general of thematic ways (i.e., responding to *The Argonauts* with your own personal essay about your own family/relationships that doesn't speak through/with/about the specificity that text). Again, we'll work together and in peer groups to develop your project from inception to completion. With this greater freedom does come greater responsibility and the anxiety of more ambiguous parameters. Try to set aside your anxiety--and embrace the creative-*cum*-critical freedom!

The one certain rule is that you cannot repeat the same mode in both your midterm and final.

Course Description and Requisites

Representations of women, gender, and sexuality in literature, with special attention to the intersecting structures of race, ethnicity, and class.

Prerequisite(s): Upper division standing.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

This is a discussion-oriented class. **Participation is critical and required.**

Respect is always paramount. While debating ideas, disagreeing with and critiquing one another's arguments and offering alternate readings of texts are welcomed and expected, **disrespectful language or behavior will not be tolerated.**

Cameras must be on at all times. Working computer audio and video are required equipment for taking this class. You cannot be driving or engaged in other activities or conversations while in class. Tell any roommates or family members to respect your privacy and quiet or find another place from which to join our Zoom classroom.

As a rule, **I do not accept late work.** I am understanding about illnesses and those unexpected circumstances that are out of our control, however, so always stay in touch. Don't hesitate to explain your circumstances and ask for an extension or second chance, if you truly need one. Depending on the circumstances, and I will consider it.

And, of course, **no plagiarism**, recycling of old work, or any other academic dishonesty. **This includes using AI** to write or revise any part or all of any of your assignments. **DO NOT USE IT.**

Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Materials

Access to a computer with a fully-functional video camera and audio system and reliable internet are required for this course (we all need to be able to see and hear one another), as are the following books (all other readings will be posted on Canvas as electronic files for download):

Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red* (Vintage, 1998)

ISBN-10 : 037570129X

ISBN-13 : 978-0375701290

Harryette Mullen, *Recyclopedia* (Graywolf, 2006)

ISBN-10 : 1555974562

ISBN-13 : 978-1555974565

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Graywolf, 2016)

ISBN-10 : 1555977359

ISBN-13 : 978-1555977351

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The Red Letter Plays* (Theatre Communications Group, 2001)

ISBN-10 : 1559361956

ISBN-13 : 978-1559361958

Jeannette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (Vintage, 1994)

ISBN-10 : 0679744479

ISBN-13 : 978-0679744474

Grading Information

Grade Breakdown:

30% Weekly annotations, writing assignments, and in-class activities

30% Midterm Project

30% Final Project

10% Active and Substantive Participation (repeating what some else just said doesn't count)

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

See the Canvas Modules page for our course of study, including all reading and writing assignments, which I will publish on a rolling basis (rather than all at once, allowing for a more organic development to our course, especially as I get to know your perspectives, reading backgrounds, and interests as the semester progresses). I hope we can all find ways to make this a personally rewarding and intellectually meaningful experience of and through women's/Queer literary arts!