

**English 416-01/Women's Studies 416-02: Lesbian Literatures**

Fall 2012, W 3.30-5.50

Wren 2

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E-mail: [sxrait@wm.edu](mailto:sxrait@wm.edu)Course description

In the late nineteenth century, doctors, lawyers and sexologists developed a new sexual category for women: the homosexual woman, “Sapphist”, or lesbian. Of course, women had been feeling, and acting on, their attraction to one another for centuries, but for the most part such feelings had not been seen as central to, and constitutive of, their identities. In this course we shall be looking at a range of poetry and prose fiction, starting with a selection of poems from England in the seventeenth century, and finishing with a 2006 graphic novel. Our aim will not be to discover the “authentic” narrative of lesbianism. Rather, we shall assume that all narratives of identity can be seen as historical constructions, and we shall ask what aesthetic and literary possibilities are opened up by the production and circulation of such narratives.

Required textsRadclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*Nella Larsen, *Passing*Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle*Audre Lorde, *Zami*Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*Ann Bannon, *I Am a Woman*Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour*Lillian Faderman, ed., *Chloe Plus Olivia* (abbreviated to *C+O*)Course schedule and reading assignments

Asterisked texts are available online in the Course Documents section of the Blackboard site, either in pdf or through a hyperlink. **You must either print out your own copy of all course documents and bring it to class on the day we are scheduled to discuss it, or come to class with a laptop from which you can access the article via wireless internet.**

**Introduction: lesbian and queer**

- W Aug. 29.: \* Martha Vicinus, “The History of Lesbian History,” forthcoming in *Feminist Studies*, 38:3 (2012)  
 \*Sue O’Sullivan, “I Don’t Want You Anymore: Butch/Femme Disappointments,” *Sexualities*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1999), 465-73  
 \*Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” in *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.223-42

**“Lesbianism” before lesbians: romantic friendship**

- W Sept. 5: Writings by Katherine Philips (1631-64), *C+O*, 17-24; Aphra Behn (1640-89), *C+O*, 24-7; the Ladies of Llangollen (1737-1829, 1755-1831), *C+O*, 32-7  
 \*Harriette Andreadis, “Re-Configuring Early Modern Friendship: Katherine Philips and Homoerotic Desire,” *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 46:3 (2006), 523-42 (at

[http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.wm.edu/journals/studies\\_in\\_english\\_literature/v046/46.3andreadis.htm](http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.wm.edu/journals/studies_in_english_literature/v046/46.3andreadis.htm)  
 ], hyperlinked from BB)

**Report on a chosen text (from Section I of C+O)**

- W Sept. 12.: Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market", 1862, *C+O*, 60-75  
 \*Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs*, 1:1 (1975), 1-29 (at <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.wm.edu/stable/3172964>, hyper-linked from BB)  
 \*Lisa Moore, "'Something More Tender Still than Friendship': Romantic Friendship in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *Feminist Studies*, 18:3 (1992), 499-520 (at <http://hdl.handle.net.proxy.wm.edu/2027/spo.0499697.0018.304>, hyperlinked from BB)

**Report on a chosen text (from Section I of C+O)**

**First in-class writing**

**Sexology and "A Man Trapped in a Woman's Body"**

- W Sept. 19.: Writings by Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1886), *C+O* 157-84; Sigmund Freud (1920), *C+O* 164-78; Anne Lister (1791-1840), *C+O* 198-206  
*The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Chs. 1-23

**Report on a chosen text (from Section II of C+O)**

- W Sept. 26.: *The Well of Loneliness*, to the end  
 \*Jay Prosser, "'Some Primitive Thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition': The Transsexual Emerging from *The Well*," repr. in Laura Doan and Jay Prosser, eds., *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness* (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 2001), pp. 129-44

**Report on a chosen text (from Section II of C+O)**

**Second in-class writing**

**In the closet: lesbian encoding**

- W Oct. 3.: Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)  
**Report on a chosen text (from Section IV of C+O)**

- W Oct. 10.: Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour* (1934)  
 In class, watch *The Children's Hour*, dir. William Wyler, 1961 (108 mins.)

**Report on a chosen text (from Section IV of C+O)**

**First paper due (5-6 pp.)**

- W Oct. 17: **Mid-term exam essay** (in class, 40 mins.)  
 In class: watch *Forbidden Love*, dir. Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie, 1992 (85 mins.)

- W Oct. 24: Ann Bannon, *I Am a Woman* (1959)  
**Report on a chosen text (from Section IV of C+O)**

**Lesbian-feminism**

- W Oct. 31: Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973)  
**Report on a chosen text (from Section V of C+O)**

- W Nov. 7.: Audre Lorde, *Zami* (1982)  
**Report on a chosen text (from Section V of C+O)**  
**Third in-class writing**

W Nov. 14: Writings by Adrienne Rich (1929-2012), *C+O*, 569-73; Judy Grahn (1940-), *C+O*, 573-88; Jane Chambers (1937-83), *C+O*, 596-655

\*Adrienne Rich, “Transcendental Etude” and “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), in *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose*, selected and edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: Norton, 1993)

**Report on a chosen text (from Section V of *C+O*)**

W Nov. 21: THANKSGIVING VACATION

**Identities and borders**

W Nov. 28: Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (1982, expanded edn. 2000)

**Second paper due (7-10 pp.)**

W Dec. 5: Final exam revision and review

Each student chooses a text from Section VI of *C+O* and comes to class prepared to discuss it informally (ungraded, no written report required)

M Dec. 10: Final exam, 9.00-12.00

**Course policies**

1. Absences: Although this is a large class, there will be a heavy emphasis on discussion and it will be impossible for you to “make up” classes that you have missed. I will, of course, excuse absences on grounds of illness, family emergency, and religious holidays, but **repeated unexcused absences will affect your grade, and may result in failing the course.** If you can, let me know in advance if you have to miss class. E-mail is a good way to communicate information like this, or to set up appointments, but it is not usually very constructive to try to have intellectual discussion over e-mail (for example if you are confused about something, or if you have questions about your papers or the reading, or if you want to talk through something you are working on). For this reason, I encourage you to come to my office hours, call me, or e-mail me to set up an appointment if there is something – anything! – you would like to talk about.
2. Late assignments: I do not accept late assignments, unless you have discussed the matter with me first. **In order to pass this course, you must complete all written and oral assignments, and take both exams.** I am usually very flexible with extensions if you approach me in advance of the due date.
3. Plagiarism and the Honor Code: I take violations of the Honor Code very seriously, and you should make sure you are familiar with its conditions, especially Section 2, which states that plagiarism is an infraction of the Honor Code. Plagiarism is defined as follows: “Plagiarism occurs when a student, with intent to deceive or with reckless disregard for proper scholarly procedures, presents any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were his or her own and does not give appropriate credit to the original source.” In all your assignments, secondary material must be fully acknowledged. Whenever you quote from another source (article, book, web page etc) make sure you include full details of the text you are quoting from (author, title, publisher, date of publication of your edition, if applicable, and page number, or, in the case of a web page, the full URL and page number, if there is one). Please note that copying and pasting from any online source – including Wikipedia – is bad practice in academic papers, and constitutes a clear violation of the Honor Code, unless you are quoting an academic article from an online periodical and you give full acknowledgement.
4. Multiple submission and the Honor Code: You should also note that you may not turn in the same assignment for more than one course (see Honor Code, Section 2, Number 4, which notes that the following is an infraction of the Honor Code: “the acts of using any material portion of a paper or

project to fulfill the requirements of more than one course unless the student has received prior permission to do so”).

- Cheating and the Honor Code: the Honor Code also covers examinations, and it notes that “giving unauthorized aid to another student or receiving unauthorized aid from another person” during an exam, and “using or consulting unauthorized materials” in exams, are both infractions of the Honor Code (see Section 2, Numbers 2 and 5).

## Assignments

### 1. **Preparation, participation and attendance**

Much of the work for this course will take place in between classes, as well as during them: for example, careful preparation for class, participation while we are together, and active engagement in discussion. You do not have to say brilliant things: rather, I encourage you to read carefully, ask questions, share difficulties and work with others to improve our collective understanding of texts and issues. I understand that speaking in class is easier for some people than for others, and that a lot of learning takes place through active listening, but I also want to make sure that everyone feels comfortable participating, so please come and talk to me if you feel inhibited or constrained in any way. Try challenging yourself to wait for someone else to speak first if you are a frequent contributor, or make an effort to speak at least once a week if speaking in class is difficult for you. You will be surprised how quickly it ceases to seem intimidating.

The reading load will vary from week to week, depending on whether we are studying poems or novels, so plan ahead! Some of the reading assignments may seem heavy to you, but bear in mind that this is a once-a-week course, so you can expect twice as much reading for each class than you would have if we were meeting twice a week. If you see a week coming up when there is reading that you know you will not be able to complete that week, start reading early. Always read with a pencil or highlighter in hand. Underline or mark phrases or passages that seem particularly important, or that interest you, and take notes. Try to think about the text as you read. What are its significant themes? Are there any words or concepts that keep cropping up? Does a particular passage remind you of a passage elsewhere, either in the same text or in a different one? If there is a part of the text that you don't understand, mark it with an interrogation point so that you remember to ask about it in class. If you prepare carefully for each class, it will be much more interesting than if you come along knowing nothing about the text we are discussing.

This aspect of your responsibilities in the class does not formally contribute to your grade, although repeated unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade (see “Course Policies,” above), and in some cases may result in your failing the course. Also, if your final grade based on written assignments (including exams) is on the border between two grades, the energy with which you participated and the thoroughness of your preparation for the class will be decisive in assigning your final grade.

### 2. **Three in-class essays on short passages (5% each for a total of 15%)**

This assignment is designed to help you improve your close reading skills. In twenty minutes, you will identify a brief passage from a text chosen from those that we have recently read for the class, including for that day, write a few sentences about its overall significance, and comment on the effect and significance of two important details in the passage, relating them to the rest of the passage, and to the work from which the passage comes (if it is an extract), as well as to the broader context.

### 3. **Report orally and in writing on a text of your choice (in pairs, with reports written up separately, 15%)**

This assignment is designed to encourage you to read, explore and discuss literature beyond what is specifically assigned for the course, so that you can follow your own tastes and interests and expand your appreciation and knowledge of the history and the literary representation of lesbianism.

In groups of three, you will research, analyze, and report on a text that is not assigned for the course, from the section of *Chloe and Olivia* that we are working from at the time. In your group, you will present your text to the class, reading it to/with them, explaining its context (author, form, style etc) and then talking informally about your responses and why you chose it. The hope is that the presentations will turn into a conversation between the whole class and the presenters. On the day of your oral report, you will also turn in a 2-page written report. Each of you will turn in a separate written report, though you will collaborate on the research and the oral presentation. The grade will reflect the quality of both your oral discussion and your written report.

**4. Two papers, 5-6 pp (15%) and 7-10 pp. (20%)**

You will write two formal papers for this class. Suggested paper topics and paper guidelines will be handed out well in advance of the due date, but you may also choose your own topic, as long as you run it by me first.

**5. Exams (mid-term 10%, final 25%)**

You will take two exams, a mid-term (essay in response to one of a choice of topics handed out in advance, written in forty minutes) and a final exam. The final exam will include short answer questions based on discussion of brief extracts from the works we have read, and one or more short essays (topics to be handed out in advance).

### **Guidelines for essays and papers, and grading standards**

These guidelines primarily refer to formal papers and essays, not to brief close readings such as those you will be doing in class and in the final exam, but most of these points are relevant to any writing assignment. There are many, many ways to write a good paper, but all good papers have some things in common. They are all clearly and grammatically written; they all develop an argument; they all give evidence for the argument they make; and they are all focused on the topic. What follow are guidelines rather than hard and fast rules, but they are designed to help you improve your paper-writing skills, so it's worth taking note of them. You can also find extremely helpful hints on paper-writing on the website of the Writing Resources Center, <http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/forstudents/handouts/index.php>. Peer tutors are also available at the WRC by appointment in person or on Skype to help you while you are planning and writing your paper. Visit <http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/forstudents/index.php> for more details.

### **Presentation and style tips**

- Indicate which paper topic you are addressing, and give your paper a title.
- Don't evaluate the text. Sentences that praise the author for her 'brilliant choice of words' don't add anything to your argument.
- When you are discussing a novel or story, analyze, don't describe or tell the plot. Your argument should be the result of some work and thought on your part; it shouldn't be something that is immediately obvious on reading the book.
- Use the present tense when you're describing events that happen in a novel. For example: 'when Frankenstein goes to Ingolstadt, he quickly becomes obsessed with his own research'.
- Make sure you spell the author's and the characters' names correctly.
- Italicize all titles of books and longer works. Place the titles of short pieces (essays, poems, chapters, short stories, articles) within double quotation marks and do not italicize.
- Revise your paper! It's very difficult to get it right the first time. Try to write a first draft a little in advance of the due date, so that you have time to work on it, with these guidelines in mind.
- Proof-read your paper! A reader can't tell whether a grammatical mistake is a typing error or your own mistake.

## Structure and method

- Your first paragraph should give an introduction to the topic of your paper. Outline the specific argument that you will be making, give an indication of your conclusion, and explain why it's important for an understanding of the novel as a whole. Keep your introduction as specific as you can. First sentences that say things like: 'From the beginning of the time the family has been an important theme in literature' are so general as to be practically meaningless. Often, starting with a quotation from a text can be a good way in.
- The basic structure of your paper is its *argument*. An argument makes a claim. It is not simply a statement of fact (for example, 'death is an important theme in Frankenstein') but an interpretation of the text (for example, 'Frankenstein is concerned with border-states: the borders between life and death, male and female, public and private, human and non-human'). An argument might be disagreed with; a statement of fact (if it's correct!) can't be. Keep your argument specific: make a limited claim.
- Make sure your paper follows a logical sequence. Does each sentence follow on from the one before? Have you made sure that you have a transition from paragraph to paragraph? Your paper should be like a chain of ideas, each linking to the one before and the one after.
- Your conclusion should summarize your argument and its significance and suggest some further thoughts based on it. Try not simply to repeat your paper in your final paragraph.

## Evidence (quotations)

- Give evidence, in the form of direct quotation from the text, or detailed reference to a scene in the text, for every point you make.
- If you are quoting directly, make sure you place your quotation in context, so that the reader can make sense of it and knows where it occurs in the text.. For example, 'when the monster confronts Frankenstein on the sea of ice, he says...'.
- Make sure you don't take statements by characters as evidence of the author's or narrator's views.
- Introduce quotations that are complete sentences with a colon (:).
- Your quotation must make grammatical sense either within the sentence in which it is included, or on its own, if it is presented after a colon.
- Indent quotations of more than sixty words. Do not put quotation marks around indented quotations.
- Use double quotation marks for quotations embedded in the text of your paper
- Write the page number of every quotation in parentheses after the quotation, and include a bibliography of works cited at the end of your paper. If you need help with citation styles, ask me or a librarian. It is very important that you acknowledge all your sources. If you do not, you may be suspected of plagiarism – taking the ideas of others without acknowledging them.

## Citation guide

The preferred citation style for literary criticism papers is MLA style, which uses a bibliography of works cited and then parenthetical references after quotations within the text. The full MLA style guide is available at Swem reference or circulation desks, call number (Ref) LB2369 .G53.

If the full guide is too confusing (and it does take some getting used to), two useful websites that pull out relevant parts of the MLA guide are:

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
- <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocMLAWorksCited.html>

These sites have links to particular topics, such as citing within the text, how to format a bibliography entry for various different kinds of works, etc.

NB: if you are quoting from a volume of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, it is fine for you to use the abbreviation I use in the syllabus and simply to place the citation in parentheses after your quotation like this: (NAEL, D, 566). This means: *Norton Anthology*, Vol. D, page 466. If it is not clear from the context which specific text you are quoting from, then add the author's last name and the title of the work in the parentheses like this: (Coleridge, "Dejection," NAEL, D, 904). If you are quoting from a poem it is useful to give the line number(s) as well as the page number. If you are quoting from your copy of one of the novels we are reading, then you need to include full details of your edition in the bibliography and then cite parenthetically (author's last name, page number).

Remember:

- titles of novels or books are italicized; titles of poems are placed between quotation marks
- quotations have to make sense in context (ie. the reader has to be given enough information to understand what is going on, and the actual quotation itself has to be compatible grammatically with its location in your text). More information on quoting is at:  
<http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/forstudents/handouts/quoting%20smoothly.pdf>

### Grading standards

Below are some of the general guidelines I will be using in grading your work for this course.

**A=Excellent** The 'A' paper is outstanding: it addresses its thesis thoughtfully and perceptively, and makes original points. It takes intellectual risks, but is always clear and well-structured. It contains few, if any, typing, grammatical or spelling errors. A straight 'A' indicates truly exceptional work.

**B=Good** The 'B' paper aspires to an 'A' but doesn't quite make it. It shows thought and work, but perhaps its structure isn't quite in place, or the writing is sometimes a little confused or ungrammatical, or its argument isn't quite fully developed, or it fails to give evidence for some of its claims.

**C=Satisfactory** The 'C' paper is acceptable: it carries out the assignment, but in a way that could be improved upon. It might contain good ideas that are not clearly expressed; or it may be clearly written but unadventurous, with an unambitious argument.

**D=Minimal Pass** The 'D' paper is weak: it fails to engage the topic, contains too many errors, is unstructured and unclear.

**F=Failure** The 'F' paper is a disaster: it shows little or no thought, and is so poorly written as to be unreadable.