

# Clark University

## Comparative Literature 130: Sexuality and Textuality

Professor Robert Tobin  
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M, W 12:00-1:15  
Room: Biophysics 326  
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“Sexuality and Textuality” serves as an introduction to gay and lesbian studies and queer theory in an international and intercultural context. As we study the representation of sexuality in a variety of cultural contexts, we will ask and begin to answer such questions as:

- How does the sexuality of a writer express itself in his or her writings?
- How does the sexuality of a reader affect his or her reading?
- How do rhetoric and language themselves inform sexuality?
- Is there such a thing as a sexual culture or subculture?
- Is sexuality comparable to gender, race or religion as a marker and signifier of identity.

Broadly speaking, I hope that graduates of this course will be able to speak in a more informed way about the relationship between sexuality and cultural products such as literature in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. Some of the concepts that I hope people will be able to use fluently include: essentialism, constructivism, homosociality, queer, identity, homosexual, gender inversion, liberal, emancipationist, sexological, masculinist, performativity, lesbian continuum, and compulsory heterosexuality. By the end of the semester, students will know some of the main ideas associated with such theorists and scholars of sexuality as Boswell, Halperin, Winkler, Massad, Sedgwick, Foucault, Butler, Rich and Cusick. In addition, they will be familiar with the representation of sexuality in the works of Plato, Sappho, Shakespeare, Hafiz, Thomas Mann, Colette, Willy, Manuel Puig, Verana Stefan and Reinaldo Arenas.

Beyond the question of the relationships between sexuality and literature, I believe that this course will help students live up to Clark University’s goals of challenging convention and changing the world. I hope it will help you make a difference to the extent that you will be able to bring some historical and cultural context, as well as some new ways of thinking, to the debates about sexual matters that continue to bedevil modern society. As we work through the semester, we should be working on our skills in writing and speaking, as well as listening and reading. We should also be developing a more critical approach to a subject that frequently elicits knee-jerk reactions. And we will test the limits of regarding sexuality as a kind of diversity, while also examining a broad variety of diverse cultures.

## Required Texts:

- Arenas, Reinaldo, Before Night Falls, trans. Delores M. Koch. New York: Penguin, 1994.
- Colette, The Pure and the Impure. Trans. Herma Biffault. NYRB Classics 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Volume 1. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1978.
- Mann, Thomas. Death in Venice. Translated by David Luke. Edited by Naomi Ritter. Boston: Bedford, 1998.
- Plato on Love: Lysis, Symposium, Phaedrus, Alcibiades ..... Ed. by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006.
- Puig, Manuel. The Kiss of the Spider Woman. Trans. by T. Colchie. New York: Vintage, 2006.
- Stefan, Verena. Shedding and Literally Dreaming. Trans. by Beth Weckmueller and Johanna Albert. New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1994.
- Willy, The Third Sex. Trans by Lawrence R. Shehr. Chicago: University of Illinois, 2007.

**Assignments and Grading:**

Participation	20
Wiki contributions:	
as primary contributor	10
as general participant	10
Short Mid-Term Paper	10
Final Presentation	10
Final Paper	20
Final examination	10
Odd assignments and homework	10

## Explanation of assignments:

*Participation:* This is a seminar format, so your participation is important! If you need accommodations on this front, please contact me.

*Discussion forum:* We will be running a “wiki” through Cicada. The goal of the wiki is to establish a fairly reliable record of what we have done in class. We will begin each class with a reference to the wiki. Particularly if people have conflicting memories about what went on in the previous class, we’ll be able to work them and reach some kind of consensus. At the end of the semester, the wiki will be a primary source of information for the final examination.

- Each week, one or two people will be *primary contributors*. I would like the primary contributors to take notes in class and post them to the wiki.
- Every week, everyone will be expected to participate as a *participant*. As a participant, students can polish and perfect the class report. Everyone should check in to the wiki at least once a week.

*Short mid-term paper:* This is a five-page research paper, using at least one of the literary sources that we have read and at least one of the scholarly or theoretical sources. It

should have a thesis, be organized logically, and cite appropriately and accurately. The writing should be error-free, scholarly, and stylistically elegant. As a general topic, you will be answering the question, "Is Foucault right? Is there a history of sexuality?" (But please come up with your own title!) Use some of our original sources for your evidence.

*Final paper:* This should be a roughly ten-page research paper, on any literary, cultural or theoretical topic pertaining to sexuality that interests you and that I approve. (Be sure to check with me if the paper focuses on a text that we didn't discuss in class.) As a rule of thumb, I would suggest that you have at least five secondary sources. The writing standards listed for the short mid-term paper apply to this paper as well. Along with the final presentation, this will be the primary means of assessing whether you have achieved the object of discussing the relationship between sexuality and culture in an informed way.

*Final presentation about research topics:* Everyone will give a ten-minute report on their paper at the end of the semester.

*Final Examination:* There will be a very brief final examination to make sure that you are comfortable with the terminology that the course has developed and that you are familiar with the authors whom we have discussed.

*Odd assignments and homework:* periodically I might assign a little extra assignment.

## Grading Criteria

### Grade Structure for Papers:

**A:** An “A” paper will have a clear and original thesis. It will be well written, with a lively sophisticated style. Arguments will be comprehensive, take into account obvious objections, and buttressed by strong evidence. There will be virtually no errors in grammar, punctuation or spelling.

**B:** A “B” paper will have a clear thesis and be solidly written.

**C:** A “C” paper will lack a clear thesis. Many arguments will not follow from the evidence given, or will be asserted, rather than proven. There will be errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**D:** A “D” paper will have a topic, but no thesis. Many arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. Others will not follow from the evidence given or will be asserted rather than proven. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**F:** An “F” paper will scarcely have a topic. Arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

### Grade Structure for Participation:

**A:** advances the discussion; contributes complex insights; will be articulate and engaging; and enhances and encourages the participation of others.

**B:** expresses text-based, substantial ideas; stays with the topic and continues the discussion; actively volunteers; asks good questions; shows genuine effort; but might fluctuate between “A” and “C” behavior.

**C:** shows acquaintance with the text if called on; tends to offer personal opinions without textual references; does not advance discussion; actively listens, but does not participate.

**D:** continued refusal to participate in discussion; exhibits signs of disengagement, such as sleeping, zoning out, or non-attendance; and reveals no evidence of having done the reading.

**F:** “D” behavior carried to the extreme.

### Final Notes:

Attendance: Attendance is vital for a seminar class. More than three absences may result in the lowering of your final grade by a whole letter.

Lateness: Late papers complicate the grading process. Therefore, I will take off a half grade for each day of lateness. I leave the calculation up to you whether the extra work you put into a paper will be worth the grade erosion caused by lateness.

Disabilities: Please contact me as soon as possible if you have any disabilities that require accommodations.

## Syllabus

### Unit I: Premodern Sexualities

- Sept. 3            Introductions  
Biblical Texts
- Sept. 8            Plato's Symposium  
Sept. 10           Plato's Symposium (Boswell v. Halperin)
- Sept. 15           Sappho (Winkler)  
Sept. 17           Shakespeare (Sedgwick)
- Sept. 22           Hafiz (Massad)

### Unit II: Foucault

- Sept. 24           Foucault, History of Sexuality
- Sept. 28           Foucault, History of Sexuality

### Unit III: Sexology and Nineteenth-Century Germanic Sexualities

- Sept. 30           Sexologists and German Emancipationists
- Oct. 6            Sexologists and German Emancipationists  
Oct. 8            Mann, Death in Venice
- Oct. 13           [no classes]  
Oct. 15           Mann, Death in Venice  
Oct. 17           *Midterm paper due: Is Foucault right? Is there a history of sexuality?*

### Unit IV: France and the Early Twentieth Century

- Oct. 20           Colette, Pure and the Impure  
Oct. 22           Colette, Pure and the Impure
- Oct. 27           Willy, The Third Sex  
Oct 28           **Mandatory Tuesday Evening Lecture: Lawrence Schehr, Professor of French, University of Illinois**
- Oct. 29           Willy, The Third Sex, with visit by Professor Schehr

### Unit V: Twentieth-Century Latin America: Sexology, Film and Performativity

Nov. 3 Puig, Kiss of the Spider Woman  
 Nov. 5 Puig, Kiss of the Spider Woman

Nov. 10 Puig, Kiss of the Spider Woman  
 Nov. 12 Butler

### Unit VI: Lesbian Theories and German Literature

Nov. 17 Stefan, Shedding (Rich)  
 Nov. 19 Stefan, Shedding

Nov. 24 Queer Music (Cusick)  
**Visit from Professor Ivan Raykoff, Professor of Arts in Context, Eugene Lang College, New School**

Nov. 26 [no class]

### Unit VII: The Culture of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean

Dec. 1 Arenas, Before Night Falls  
 Dec. 3 Arenas, Before Night Falls

### Unit VIII: Projects

Dec. 8 Class Projects on contemporary international glbtq literature  
 Dec. 9 “ “ “ “ “  
 Dec. 10 “ “ “ “ “