

CLARK UNIVERSITY

SEXUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Comparative Literature 133

MW 4:15-5:30, Fall 2010

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What happens when we think of sexuality, with all of its transgressive and individualistic energies, in terms of rationally established universal human rights? Literary texts that focus on individual cases in the context of larger cultural and social traditions with a particular attention to the power of language can help us sort through some of the complex ideas that emerge from a discussion of sexual rights.

In this class, we will focus on controversial issues—like sadism, masochism, male homosexuality, lesbianism, age of consent, prostitution, polygamy and transsexuality—that bring rights conflicts to the forefront:

- The Marquis de Sade's Philosophy of the Bedroom, written just as the concepts of human rights and sexual identity were emerging, contemplates the unbounded sadistic individual in the context of a liberal and radical political philosophies.
- Thomas Mann's Death in Venice, published just as modern sexual categories and identities were emerging, examines the relationship of sexuality, disease and privacy.
- Fumiko Enchi's The Waiting Years, about the waning days of polygamy in Japan, presents a stark contrast between varying visions of the role of women in society.
- J. M. Coetzee's Disgrace depicts the power relations between male faculty and female students, against the backdrop of race and class issues in post-Apartheid South Africa.
- Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Bridge of the Golden Horn describes the life of a young Marxist artistic Turkish woman who wants to lose her virginity.
- Jeffrey Eugenides's Middlesex is a massive novel devoted to the question of intersexuality.

Beyond the question of the relationships between sexual rights 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 us make a difference to the extent that will be able to bring some historical and cultural context, as well as some new ways of thinking, to the debates about matters concerning sexual rights 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 subjects that frequently elicit knee-jerk reactions. And we will make progress in considering sexual rights, while also examining a broad variety of diverse cultures.

Assignments:

- five short take-home exams 50%
- class presentation and discussion leading 10%
- write-up of class presentation and discussion 10%
- final examination 10%
- participation, including small assignments 20%

Short Take-Home Exams: The questions for these exams are given on the syllabus already. Always be sure to include evidence from the literary text as part of your answer. Part of what we are doing is learning how literature contributes to political and social discussions. So don't tell me what you think of polygamy, tell me how the novel supports what you think of polygamy. I would like these exams to be no longer than two pages, but they can be single-spaced.

Class Presentation and Discussion Leading: Once a week teams of students will present on a topic related to the novel, as well as lead discussion of the novel, focusing on the topic at hand. Usually this will be on a Wednesday, the team will consist of two students, and the topic will be posted in the syllabus. Often I will suggest a scholarly article.

Write-Up of Class Presentation and Discussion: The students who present and lead the discussion will then write up both their presentation and the discussion of the novel. This will be two separate documents. It should be handed in within a day of the class in question.

Final Statement: This will be a very short statement, a chance to reflect on the course as a whole and put together some final thoughts on sexual rights as they are expressed in literature.

Participation: Even though there are almost 30 students in the course, participation in small and large group discussion remains important. If the large class size prevents you from making your mark, contribute more to the forums on our cicada site. There may also be small assignments or in-class quizzes in the course of the semester which I will calculate as part of the participation grade.

Additional 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.

GRADING STANDARDS

Short Take-Home Exams

- 10 Outstanding original arguments, clear, well presented, with documentation from text. Extraordinary version of “9.”
- 9 Clear, original, well-presented, well-documented arguments. Goes beyond class discussion, proves points well, develops sophisticated and subtle analysis. Witty and elegant writing style.
- 8 Clear and well-presented, but less original—shows signs of understanding class discussion, but not necessarily going beyond it. More assertion than documentation. Dwells on obvious points. Writing style good, but not scintillating.
- 7 Some factual errors, significant problems in presentation (spelling, grammar, punctuation). Arguments unclear.
- 6 Significant factual errors, many problems in presentation.
- 5 Fatal misunderstandings of texts and discussions. Presentation problems so strong that text is incomprehensible.
- 0 Failure to submit assignment.

Class Presentation and Discussion Leading

A: presents complex material in an accurate and understandable way. Imaginative links between topic and text. Encourages and creates lively discussion.

B: may need some help in presenting material, but generally on the right track. Straightforward but not necessarily surprising links between topic and text. Makes good-faith effort to lead discussion, although at times questions and prompts fall flat.

C: some serious misunderstandings of material to be presented. Only superficial efforts at linking topic to text. Inadequate preparation of discussion questions, very general questions (“What do you all think?”)

D: general misunderstanding of material to be presented. No effort to link topic to text. Poor knowledge of literary text under discussion.

F: failure to prepare topic material or literary text. No serious questions.

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.

day by day

(* = student presentations and discussion leading)

- Aug. 27 Intro: What is sex? What is a right? How can literature help us think about these questions?
Rubin's Sexual Hierarchies and Human Rights. From Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Note for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge, 1984): 267-319.
- Aug. 30 Sexuality and Human Rights
Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Rights of Man
Bill of Rights
Read: Arvind Narrain, "Human Rights and Sexual Minorities: Global and Local Contexts," Law, Social Justice and Global Development 2001 (2). Available online at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2001_2/narrain
Recommended: Ignacio Saiz, "Bracketing Sexuality: Human Rights and Sexual Orientation—A Decade of Development and Denial at the UN," Health and Human Rights 7.2 (2004): 49-80.
- Sept. 1 Sexuality and Human Rights: The German Tradition
- Sept. 6 Labor Day, no classes
- Sept. 8 Sade, Philosophy of the Boudoir, pp. 1-76
Recommended: Lynn Hunt, Inventing Human Rights: A History, (New York: Norton: 2007). Especially chapter 1, "Torrents of Emotion."
- Sept. 13* Sade, 77-173
Report on Consent: William N. Eskridge, Jr., "The Many Faces of Sexual Consent," William and Mary Law review 47 (1995): 47-67.
- Sept. 15* Sade
Report on European Court of Human Rights Case: Laskey, Jaggard and Brown v. the United Kingdom ("Spanner Case")
Martin Scheinin, "Sexual Rights as Human Rights—Protected under Existing Human Rights Treaties?" Nordic Journal of International Law 67 (1998): 17-35.
- Sept. 16 Short Take-Home Exam Due. Chose 1 of the questions below. 2 pages single-spaced should do it):
- *Where do Sade's sexual practices fit in your sexual hierarchies or the sexual hierarchies of a community to which you belong?*
 - *Is there any way in which the sexual practices described by Sade are protected by concepts of human rights? Or do Sade's ideas of sexuality actually violate concepts of human rights? It would be particularly interesting to think about this in terms of the eighteenth-century rhetoric of the Rights of Man versus the twentieth-century rhetoric of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*
 - *Does the sexuality described in Sade's writings seem similar to or different from modern Western sexuality? Think about this both in terms of general notions of sexuality and specific questions of Sade's practices and the concepts of sadism and sadomasochism today.*

- Sept. 20 Thomas Mann, Death in Venice, pp. 1-34
- Sept. 21* Thomas Mann, Death in Venice, pp. 34-63
Report on Jeffrey Weeks, Sexuality (London: Tavistock Publications, 1986), chapter 1, "The Language of Sex," and chapter 2, "The Invention of Sexuality," pp. 11-44.
- Sept. 27* Thomas Mann, Death in Venice
Report on: Helmut Graupner, "Love vs. Abuse: Crossgenerational Sexual Relations of Minors—A Gay Rights Issue?," Journal of Homosexuality 37.4 (July 1999):
- Sept. 29 My Mann Talk
Assigned Reading: Robert Tobin, "Making Way for the Third Sex: Liberal and Illiberal Impulses in Mann's Portrayal of Male-Male Desire in His Early Short Fiction," A Companion to German Realism, 1848-1900 (Woodbridge, England: Camden House, 2002).
- Sept. 30 *Short Take-Home Exam Due (one or two single-spaced pages):*
- *Do you think Aschenbach is gay? Is he a pedophile? Is he bisexual? Is this just a one-time thing?*
- Oct. 4 Fumiko Enchi, The Waiting Years, pp. 7-79
- Oct. 6* Fumiko Enchi, The Waiting Years, pp. 81-129
Polygamy and Rights Report on Lisa M. Kelly, "Bringing International Human Rights Law Home: An Evaluation of Canada's Family Law Treating Polygamy," University of Toronto Faculty of Law Review 65.1 (Winter 2007): 1038.
- Oct. 11 Fall break, no classes
- Oct. 13* Fumiko Enchi, The Waiting Years, pp. 130-203
 Asian Rights Discourses
Report: Erick Laurent, "Sexuality and Human Rights: An Asian Perspective," Journal of Homosexuality 48.3-4 (Jan-Feb, 2005): 163-
- Oct. 14 *Short Take-Home Exam (Choose 1):*
- *What kind of rights do the women in The Waiting Years have? In what ways are their rights violated, by the standard of modern human rights institutions?*
 - *Would polygamy always be in violation of human rights? What about prostitution?*
 - *If you were from a modern human rights organization, what would your approach be when you were confronted with a society with very different gender and sexuality rules, like the one in The Waiting Years?*
- Oct. 18 J.M. Coetze, Disgrace, pp. 1-58
 Prostitution, miscegenation, sexual harassment, student faculty-relationships, lesbians rape
- Oct. 20* J.M. Coetze, Disgrace, pp. 59-112
Report on Pamela Cooper, "Metamorphosis and Sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of Disgrace," Research in African Literatures 36.4 (Winter 2005):22-39

- Oct. 25 J.M. Coetze, Disgrace, pp. 113-174
Africa and homosexuality
Recommended for everyone, Jeff Sharlet, "Straight Man's Burden: The American Roots of Uganda's Anti-Gay Persecutions," Harper's Magazine (September 2010).
Additional recommendation: "Donald Donham, "Freeing South Africa: The 'Modernization' of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto," Cultural Anthropology 13.1 (1998): 3-21.
- Oct. 27* Coetze, Disgrace, pp. 175-220
Report: African Court of Human and People's Rights
South African Constitution
- Oct. 28 *Short Take-Home Exam (Choose 1):*
- *How would you lay out the rights claims of the characters in Disgrace?*
 - *How do racial and economic rights interact with sexual rights?*
- Nov. 1 Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Bridge of the Golden Horn, pp. 3-76
Recommended: Beverly Weber, "Work, Sex and Socialism: Reading beyond Cultural Hybridity in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Die Brücke vom goldenen Horn," German Life and Letters 63.1 (January 2010): 37-53.
- Nov. 3* Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Bridge of the Golden Horn, pp. 77-130
Report on Ipek Ilkcaracan and Gülşah Seral, "Sexual Pleasure as a Woman's Human Right: Experiences from a Grassroots Training Program in Turkey," Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies, ed. Pinar Ilkcaracan (Istanbul: Women for Women's Human Rights, 2000)
- Nov. 8 Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Bridge of the Golden Horn, pp. 133-190
Butler Fracas: Gay Rights and Burqas, Islam and Europe. Readings by Tobin.
- Nov. 10* Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Bridge of the Golden Horn, pp. 191-256
Report on Islam and Human Rights: Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, "Toward a Cross-Cultural Approach to Defining International Standards of Human Rights," Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspective: A Quest for Consensus, ed. Abdullahi Ahmen An-Na'im (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 19-43.
Recommended for all: Tariq Ramadan, "An International Call for Moratorium on Corporal Punishment, Stoning and the Death Penalty in the Islamic World," available online at: <http://www.tariqramadan.com/An-International-call-for.html>
- Nov. 11 *Short Take-Home Exam:*
- *Citing from Özdamar's autobiographical novel, discuss some specific cases where Islam and Western human rights organizations seem to come into conflict. How are these conflicts to be overcome?*
- Nov. 15 The Supreme Court of the United States: Right to Privacy/Abortion/Sodomy
- *Griswold et al v. Connecticut, 381 US 479 (1965)*
 - *Roe v. Wade, 410 US 113 (1973)*
 - *Lawrence et al v. Texas, 01 102 (2003)*

- Nov. 17 marriage cases: Massachusetts, California
- Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health, SJC -08860, Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, 440 Mass 309, 798 N.E. 2nd 941 (Decided November 18, 2003)
 - Perry et al v Schwarzenegger et al, United States District Court for the Northern District of California
- Nov. 22 Class cancelled
- Nov. 24 Thanksgiving break
Read at least through page 211 of Eugenides's Middlesex
- Nov. 29 Jeffrey Eugenides, Middlesex, Book 1
Intersexuality and transsexuality
- Dec. 1* Jeffrey Eugenides, Middlesex, Book 2
Report on Judith Butler, "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality," Undoing Gender (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 57-74.
- Dec. 6* Jeffrey Eugenides, Middlesex, Book 3, pp. 215-397
Report on Kate Haas, "Who Will Make Room for the Intersexed?" American Journal of Law and Medicine 30.1 (Summer 2004): 41-68.
Another possibility: James L. Nelson, "The Silence of the Bioethicists: Ethical and Political Aspects of Managing Gender Dysphoria," GLQ 4.2 (1998): 213-230.
- Dec. 8 Eugenides, Middlesex, Book 4, pp. 401-529.
- Dec. 9 *Final Short Take-Home Exam*
- *Discuss how Eugenides's Middlesex sheds light on one of the essays that we have read about intersex questions?*
- Dec. 14 *Short Final Exercise: How would you define a sexual right and how does literature help you think about sexual rights?*