

## Advanced Seminar: Towards a Queer, Trans Modernism

We two boys together clinging,  
One the other never leaving,  
Up and down the roads going—North and South excursions making,  
Power enjoying—elbows stretching—fingers clutching,  
Arm'd and fearless—eating, drinking, sleeping, loving.  
~ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

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**Course Description:** For some literary scholars, the concept of queer American modernism might ring like a curious doubling: surely the buffet flats and drag balls animating the vibrant nightlife of the Harlem Renaissance speak to the relative centrality of queerness in Black modernism. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. famously quipped, the Harlem Renaissance was “surely as gay as it was black” (1993). By the same token, George Chauncey’s foundational work in queer history, *Gay New York* (1994), points to the proliferation of queer subcultures in early twentieth century New York City. He concludes that far from an exception, this particular metropolitan space “may well have been prototypical, for the urban conditions and cultural changes that allowed a gay world to take shape there, as well as the strategies used to construct that world, were almost surely duplicated elsewhere” (28-29). Once again, we see a certain mutually reinforcing relationship between, on the one hand, the historical conditions of modernity and, on the other, queer forms of desire, identity and community. Such scholarship may lead us to a similar conjecture as queer theorist Heather Love when she posits: “Is queer modernism simply another name for modernism?”

Building off and extending this critical history of queer American modernism, this class will examine a distinct double relation unique to this period of intensive cultural change, “a male soul confined to the female body,” or what transgender studies scholars today might identify as proto-transgender identity. Indeed, the turn of the century period appears positively rife with cultural formations of non-normative gender, from sexually inverted women to transfeminine men. Although the postmodern era is often identified as the privileged period of (trans)gender trouble, our class will investigate how trans-ing gender was a central component of modernist aesthetics.

### Learning Objectives:

- Identify the continuities and divergences between queer and transgender modernist history
- Recognize trans-ing gender as a complex cultural process not necessarily tied to a concrete identity
- Utilize an intersectional perspective that attends to the function of race in gender and sexuality
- Identify the core aesthetic and political elements of Anglo-American high modernism and the Harlem Renaissance
- Locate queer and trans- modernisms outside of metropolitan spaces
- Analyze the relationship between modernity and non-normative forms of identity and desire

### Required Texts

- Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905)

- Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923)
- Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (1925)
- Djuna Barnes, *Ladies Almanack* (1928)
- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
- Wallace Thurman, *Infants of the Spring* (1932)
- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality vol 1* (1976)
- James Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (2011)
- Emma Heaney, *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Transfeminine Allegory* (2017)

### Required Viewings:

1. *The Florida Enchantment* (1914)
2. *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1993)
3. *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1989)

### Course Assignments:

- Midterm Paper: 20%
- Final Research Paper: 30%
- Archival Assignment: 15%
- Sakai Quizzes: 10%
- Class Participation (synchronous and asynchronous): 10%
- Final exam: 15%

#### Midterm Paper (20%)

The midterm paper will be **3-4 double spaced pages** and will feature a close reading/literary analysis of a film or text (or both). You will be expected to make an argument about some element of the cultural text and provide extensive evidence drawn from the text to support your claims. Expectations, criteria, and due dates will be detailed in a separate handout. Overall, the purposes of these assignments are for students to critically and deeply engage with course content and make an argument regarding the significance of their particular insights and observations.

#### Final Research Paper (30%)

The final research paper will be **5-6 double spaced pages** and will also primarily feature a close reading of a particular literary text or film. Although this paper is chiefly a close reading of a primary text, it will also require you to integrate the voices of other scholars into your essay. As such, you must conduct outside research and identify at least two reputable, scholarly sources that are relevant to your paper. Read these sources carefully and closely, and determine how you might draw their conclusions into your paper. Then, properly cite these sources with MLA style citation and include them in a Works Cited page at the end of the paper.

#### Archival Assignment (15%)

This assignment is meant to be a semester-long project where you will apply your insights about the class to an archival project held at Special Collections in our campus library. In the beginning of the semester, there will be a presentation by a Special Collections librarian to introduce the assignment

and present the archival objects at your disposal. You will choose **one object to study this semester**. You will then assemble secondary sources to create and publish an Adobe Spark, Scalar, or Hypercities page on your analysis. You are encouraged to shape your response to the archival document as you read the authors, artists, poets, and directors of this course, and you're welcome to talk about your ideas with me in an appointment any time this semester.

#### Sakai Quizzes: (10%)

Almost every week, you will be asked to complete a short quiz that will assess the material discussed in the readings and lecture. The purpose of these short quizzes (**10 in total**) is for students to practice close reading and close viewing, slowing down as they make their way through course content and actively processing the material. All quizzes will be open note with the lowest grade being dropped.

#### Class Participation (15 %)

Your final course participation grade will be based on three central elements: attendance, discussion, and preparation:

- *Attendance:* You are permitted **two absences**, no questions asked, without penalty. Absences may be excused only with timely, official documentation from the appropriate university office. For each subsequent absence, you will lose 1 percentage point from your class participation grade. Seven or more absences may be grounds for failure in this course. If you miss class for any reason, you are not excused from the assignments due or completed during that class period. Finally bear in mind that class will start on time each day; habitually entering the (virtual) classroom late is disruptive and will negatively impact your participation grade, as will repeated absences;
- *Preparation:* Preparation is not an abstract ideal but a series of concrete steps. Mark up your books: jot notes in the margin of the text, circle key words, look up words you do not know, scan interesting lines, brainstorm connections and questions. In other words, **read actively**, generating ideas for class discussion and your personal essays as you go. Adequate preparation means you can describe the situation, speaker, and basic argument for any given passage we cover in class; the basic plot and thematic developments in a segment of a novel or play; and the central cinematic devices and themes present in a film.
- *Meaningful Participation:* Active discussion in this classroom is absolutely dependent on adequate preparation. Coming to class with your books thoroughly marked and ideas/questions ready will help facilitate a more stimulating and intellectually exciting learning environment and assist you in confidently articulating your thoughts to a diverse audience. Everyone has 'off' days here and there, but I expect you to be ready and contribute to class each period.

Optional Asynchronous Participation: If you would prefer to participate asynchronously in class discussions, you have the option of completing **forum posts** on the assigned reading and submitting them by midnight before class. Each post should be roughly between **250-500 words** and offer your informal meditations on the assigned reading for that class period. Your forum post will then be integrated into class discussion during our regularly scheduled synchronous sessions.

Your participation in class is of utmost importance to me. If there are any issues I should be aware of in order to ensure your success in the class, please contact me at your earliest convenience so we can devise strategies to make the class accommodating for all.

### Final Exam: (15%)

The final exam will consist of three sections: analysis and identification of specific quotes, short answer questions, and a long essay. The final will be cumulative and will cover all texts discussed in class.

### Classroom Environment

Creating a classroom environment that makes all students comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas is critical. I value the opinions and perspectives of individuals from all diverse backgrounds. My goal is that all students' needs are addressed in this course and all perspectives are valued. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation and physical and learning ability. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all minority student groups. I value your input to improve the climate of my classroom.

### Due Dates:

All papers and revisions are due by midnight on the assigned deadline and must be submitted to the proper place on Sakai. All class readings and screenings must be completed before the day they are listed on the course schedule, before the synchronous session. Finally, you are able to request one-**three-day extension** over the course of the semester, no questions asked. Students requesting multiple extensions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

### **Grading Scale:**

A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D+ (67-69); D (63-66); D- (60-62); F (<60).

I will use traditional rounding to determine grades that fall between whole values. Any mixed number with a decimal value of five tenths or higher will round up to the next whole number. (For example, 92.5 will round up to an A as a 93, but 92.4 will not.)

## **Unit 1: Modernism and Queer Subjectivity**

### **Week 1: “Scientia Sexualis”: Making the Modern (Homo)sexual Subject**

- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality vol 1* (1976)
- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855) [selections]

### **Week 2: Racializing the Homosexual Body**

- Siobhan Somerville, Introduction & Chapter 1: “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body” in *Queering the Color Line* (2000)
- *The Florida Enchantment* (1914)

### **Week 3: Neuroses, Perversions, and Other Sexual Aberrations**

- Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905)

#### **Week 4: Towards a Queer, Trans Modernism**

- Heather Love, “Introduction: Modernism at Night.” *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 3, Modern Language Association, 2009, pp. 744–48
- Heather Love, “Transgender Fiction and Politics” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing* (2011)

### **Unit 2: Modernism and Transgender Subjectivity**

#### **Week 5: Tiresian Figures and Anglo-American High Modernism**

- Emma Heaney, *The New Woman* (2017)
- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)

#### **Week 6: “Developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy”: Female Sexual Inversion**

- Havelock Ellis, “Sexual Inversion in Women” in *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition* (2008)
- Djuna Barnes, *Ladies Almanack* (1928)

#### **Week 7: Whiteness and Female Masculinity**

- Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (1925)
- Alison Hammer, “Epic Stone Butch: Transmasculinity in the Work of Willa Cather.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*. Volume 7, Number 1, February 2020.

#### **Week 8: Gender Transitions and Transnational Modernism**

- *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1993)
- Jessica Berman, “Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?” *Modernism/modernity*, Volume 24, Number 2, April 2017, pp. 217-244

### **Unit 3: Gay, Trans New York**

#### **Week 9: Dispelling the Myths of Queer Identity and History**

- George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (1994) [selections]
- Eric Garber, “A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (Martin Duberman, 1989)

### **Week 10: Queering the Harlem Renaissance**

- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
- Michael L. Cobb, “Insolent Racing, Rough Narrative: The Harlem Renaissance’s Impolite Queers.” *Callaloo*, vol. 23 no. 1, 2000, p. 328-351.

### **Week 11: Trans-ing the Harlem Renaissance**

- James Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (2011) [selections]
- Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (2009) [selections]

### **Week 12: Creating a Black Queer Tradition**

- *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1989)
- Wallace Thurman, *Infants of the Spring* (1932)

## **Unit 4: Queer Modernisms in Unexpected Places**

### **Week 13: Racial and Sexual Indeterminacy in the American South**

- Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923)

### **Week 14: Queer Entertainment and Sexual Tourism in the Global South**

- Julio Capó, *Welcome to Fairyland: Queer Miami Before 1940*. Chapel Hill: UNC-Ch Press, 2017. [selections]

### **Week 15: Recovering the Queer Frontier**

- Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America’s Frontier Past*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. [selections]