

Sex & Sexuality in American Poetry

Professor Merrill Cole
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English 335, Section 001
Spring Semester 2012

Office: Simpkins 109
Hours: W, 12:00-1:00; MWF, 2:00-3:00

MWF, 3:00-3:50 p.m.
Simpkins 27

Texts

There will also be a lot of material to download from WesternOnline and on my faculty website. Students planning to order books online need to make sure they buy the editions with the ISBNs listed below; alternative editions are not acceptable.

Ai, *Vice*. ISBN: 0393320189

The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas Johnson. ISBN: 0316184136

The Complete Poems of Hart Crane, ed. Marc Simon. ISBN: 0871401789

Allen Ginsburg, *Howl and Other Poems*. ISBN: 0872860175

The Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara, ed. Mark Ford. Knopf ISBN: 0375711481

Sylvia Plath: The Collected Poems, ed. Ted Hughes. ISBN: 0061558893

Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives & Tender Buttons*. ISBN: 1611044871

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition*. ISBN: 0140421998

Course Objectives

This course examines changes in erotic expression in the United States through the close study of its poetry, from the Puritans to the postmodern contemporary, with more intensive focus on what developed from Walt Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass* and the poems of Emily Dickinson. At issue is not only the elaboration or concealment of sexuality through metaphor and textual erotics, but also the emergence of new identities and new possibilities for human relation. We will study poems that reinforce conservative perspectives on sexual relations, alongside those that contest them, whether by voicing a woman's desire, articulating a homoerotic possibility, or attempting to transgress all the norms of American culture. We will analyze important intersections of sexuality with other social justice concerns, including race, class, religion, nationality, age, and disability.

This course places poetry in historical context, attending to the wider public discourse to which it contributes and in which it attempts to intervene. We will treat sexuality as a serious realm of academic concern, as well as a provocative and stimulating line of critical inquiry.

Requirements

Prerequisite: ENG 200, or consent of the instructor.

This course involves two short, five-page close reading essays and a seven-page final research essay. The task for the research essay is to connect poetry to some contemporaneous aspect of the American culture, and a handout will describe the assignment in greater detail.

There will be homework assignments, many of them creative in nature. Students will have the option, at the end of the semester, of turning in either a three-page self-reflective essay, or a series of poems, for a grade.

Students will be responsible for leading small group discussions on a rotating basis. When it is your turn, you will prepare four typed, double-spaced questions for discussion and turn them in to me at the end of the class. Please do not write out answers to the questions on the page you give to me.

Everyone must actively participate. To participate actively means to keep up with the reading and to come to class every session prepared with insights and arguments. Thus it is very much to your advantage to take notes as you read.

Please see <http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/> for student rights and responsibilities.

Grading

Participation:	20%
Discussion Leading:	10%
First Short Essay:	15%
Second Short Essay:	15%
Self-Reflective Essay <i>or</i> Poems:	10%
Research Essay:	30%

Unless excused, late essays will receive a one-letter grade reduction. I am, however, willing to grant an extension for almost any reason, so long as the student contacts me *at least 24 hours in advance*. Extensions on the final essay, however, will only be given under exceptional circumstances. Plagiarism will result in an F for the course, and I will report the student for academic discipline. Missing classes, or arriving late, will affect the participation grade.

Visiting My Office

Please take the opportunity to meet with me during my office hours, or by appointment, to talk about the readings, or your writing. *I very much appreciate any kind of feedback about the course.*

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I will make academic accommodations for any student who notifies me of the need. For me to provide the proper accommodation(s), you must provide me documentation from Disability Support Services. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention, as I am not legally permitted to ask. Students who require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e., fire, tornado, etc.) should tell me the most appropriate procedures to follow. Please contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512.

Schedule

Week 1: January 18-20
Introduction to the course. Sexy Puritans.

Week 2: January 23 – 27
Poe
Leaves of Grass

Week 3: January 30 – February 3
Leaves of Grass

Week 4: February 6 – 10
Leaves of Grass
Howl & Other Poems

Week 5: February 15 – 17
Howl & Other Poems
Emily Dickinson

Week 6: February 20 – 24
Emily Dickinson

Week 7: February 27 – March 2
Emily Dickinson
Civil War Context
First Short Essay due February 27

Week 8: March 5–9
Tender Buttons
Cubism

Spring Break.

Week 9: March 19 – 23

Hart Crane

Week 10: March 26 – 28

Second Short Essay due March 26

Sylvia Plath

Week 11: April 2 – 6

Sylvia Plath

Other women poets.

Week 12: April 9 – 13

Frank O'Hara

Week 13: April 16 – 20

Frank O'Hara

John Ashbery.

Week 14: April 23 – 27

Vice

Week 15: April 30 – May 4

Vice

21st Century Sex Poems

Self-Reflective Essay or Poems due May 4

Final Exam Week, May 7

Research Essay due May 7 at 3:00 p.m. in my office