

S. Sloane

E334: Gay and Lesbian Literature

Fall 2012

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 11-12, 3-4pm; Friday, 3-4pm; and by appointment

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### *Overview*

This course in gay and lesbian literature is simply described on the English Department website: “Literature by gay and lesbian authors on gay and lesbian themes.” While that description captures the main intent of the course, its reductiveness does not capture the rich and vibrant literature that originates from people who explore their oppositional status to the mainstream, those who explore their “queerness” in their writings and their lives. In this section of E334 we are going to read historically and thematically as we consider questions of sexuality, gender, and sex as they are understood in important works of American and British literature of the last hundred years. We will read poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and a graphic novel, watch films, and substantively discuss what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, bi-gendered, or intersex in the terms of these texts, within their historical contexts. Moving chronologically from *The Well of Loneliness* and *Tender Buttons* to Cunningham’s *The Hours*, Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, and Hollinghurst’s *The Stranger’s Child* (published just months ago), the course will seek to understand these works in their historical contexts, as well as chart the shifting attitudes towards GLBTQI people and issues within literature—and in our lives. To some extent, the course itself will move into uncharted waters as we compose ourselves and our readings within the contexts of a presidential election, heated debates about gay rights, and the class’s own shifting questions and arguments as the semester unfolds. Respect for each other and for ourselves as we discuss the issues raised in these works is essential.

### *Course Requirements*

This class is reading intensive. You should plan on reading at least 100-150 pages a week for the duration of this course. Complete the reading assignments on time, and come to class prepared for discussion. That means carefully reading the texts, marking specific pages and passages for discussion, looking up any words you don’t know, and coming to class with questions and/or observations about the day’s reading. As a class community, we will all help each other understand the readings and figure out their significance to the course’s ongoing questions.

### *Course Texts*

*Annabel: A Novel* (Winter)

*Fun Home* (Bechdel)

*Gender Outlaws* (Bornstein and Bergman)

*Giovanni's Room* (Baldwin)

*The Hours* (Cunningham)

*The Stranger's Child* (Hollinghurst)

*The Well of Loneliness* (Hall)

*Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Serano)

*Selections from "Tender Buttons" (Stein), available free as Gutenberg e-text*

### ***Forum Postings (30%)***

Thirty percent of your course grade will be determined by weekly one- to two-page postings to our Writing Studio class Forum. These are very important because they are the starting point for two longer papers you must write for this class. In order to receive full credit for this portion of the class, you will complete **FIFTEEN** Forum Postings. The following guidelines apply:

- Post a thoughtful, competently written, considerate one- to two-page response to one of the weekly prompts by 10am each Thursday. These will be referred to as LITERARY RESPONSES.
- Read and post brief responses to at least two of your classmates' postings by 10am on Monday. Make sure that your responses are as thoughtful and considerate as any you would wish to receive. No credit will be given for postings that are disrespectful, inattentive, or otherwise inappropriate. These will be referred to as CLASSMATE RESPONSES.
- Prompts will be posted directly after class every Monday.
- Forum Postings will be graded on their complexity of thought, demonstration of knowledge and understanding of previous course readings, and clarity and creativity in the kinds of responses. Postings must be completed by the time they are due (as listed above). Completing 15/15 postings of excellent quality will earn a grade of 100%, 14/15 postings of excellent quality will earn a grade of 93.3%, 13/15 will earn a grade of 86.7%, etc. Postings that are poorly written, insubstantial, or inappropriate will earn no credit. However, there is a middle ground: each response to a book and response to a classmate will be graded per usual, with grades of A-F, or 100%-0%. Failure to consistently respond to your classmates' postings will have negative effects on your grade.

Occasionally your professor will give you a break from these weekly assignments, giving everyone full credit for a week when no response is due. She will tell you about these discussion forum "holiday weeks" in advance, as we need them.

### ***Two Longer Responses (20%)***

Twenty percent of your course grade will be determined by your performance on two longer essays in response to prompts given by your professor. If you have completed all your forum postings, these two five-page essays will be much easier. They will be based directly on the posts you have made, giving you the chance to provide a more polished, thoughtful, and deeper reflection on the

works we have read so far. Prompts for these two essays will be given three weeks in advance of their due date.

### *Participation (20%)*

This class will demand a presence, attentiveness, and collaboration that may not be familiar to students. Students are expected to contribute to class discussions by offering thoughtful remarks, referring to specific passages and phrases in the book under discussion, and by completing in-class writing assignments with the same attention to detail. At the beginning of the semester we will start to go over some of the basic descriptions of the structure of narratives and how to read rhetorically. We will also cover some basic feminist theories and reader-response theories of reading and writing. By the end of the semester, students are expected to know these terms and to apply them to the work under discussion.

### *Midterm (15%) and Final (15%)*

In the middle of the class and at the end of the class, students will be required to take an exam that covers the previous seven weeks of the course. The exams are not cumulative. The midterm will cover the material we have read in the first half of the class; the final exam will cover the material we have read in the second half of the class. Both exams will be open book.

### *Grading*

The University uses +/- grading on final grades, and thus the grades in this class will incorporate +/- calculations on a 4.0 scale where:

A+ = 4.0; A = 4.0; A- = 3.667; B+ = 3.334; B = 3.00; B- = 2.667; C+ = 2.334; C = 2.00; D = 1.00; F = 0.00 Excessive absences override all these noted percentages for class assignments.

### *Honor Pledge*

At the end of every assignment you turn in, you must write the Colorado State University Honor Pledge by hand: *"I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance."*

### *Attendance Policy*

Students are expected to attend all classes. However, it is my experience that sometimes life does take an unexpected turn, and that it can be unreasonable to expect a student to miss no classes in a single semester. Therefore, my attendance policy is this: students may miss up to *the equivalent of one week's worth of class, which is THREE CLASSES*, no questions asked. You should use these absences for sickness, broken limbs, weddings, funerals, or to take a mental health day. **Your final grade will go down 10% for each additional class you miss, with the only exceptions to be determined on a case-by-case basis, and then only if you have made *prior* arrangements with your instructor.** Reasonable accommodation will be made to allow individuals to observe their

established religious holidays. Such accommodation, in the case of a student, might be the rescheduling of an exam or giving a make-up exam, for example. Please see your professor in advance to alert her to the need for such accommodation.

### *Writing Center*

Students who wish to use writing center resources may either visit the physical location, Eddy 06, or visit its extensive website: <http://writing.colostate.edu>. The CSU Writing Center is a free service offered to all members of the CSU community. Students, faculty, and staff all use the service, and it is *not* solely for those who have learning disabilities, are inexperienced writers, or have been required to use the center by their instructors. *Students of all levels and abilities use the CSU Writing Center.* While the students who work at our writing center will not proofread for you, they will work *with* you on any other aspect of the writing process, from brainstorming to polishing the final draft.

### *Accommodations for Students with Disabilities*

Provisions for alternative testing arrangements and other accommodations are readily available to those students who have *written documentation* of their disabilities. Please see your instructor outside of regular class time immediately upon your enrolling in the class to discuss these services or any disability you may have for which you are requesting accommodation.