

WST 212: Queer Theory
Spring 2017
Tuesday and Thursday, 6:15pm to 7:30pm
Lattimore 540

Instructor: Scott O'Neil
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Office Hours: Tues. 8pm-9pm in Robbins Library, and by appointment

Course Description:

Queer theory is a poststructuralist critical theory that arose from the fields of feminist studies and early LGBT studies in the 1990s. This theory not only works to bring non-dominant sexualities under the purview of academic study but also focuses on challenging the supposed stability of the social identity categories of sex, gender, and sexuality. Some of the questions that will be posed within the space of this class include the following: How are bodies that do not conform to binary gender norms received and perceived by both queer and non-queer publics? How have queer identities been informed by other identity categories (such as race, class, nationality, etc.)? What kinds of feelings arise from and attach themselves to instances of normatively resistant forms of gender/sexuality, and how might we understand the political import of these feelings? How does queer theory intersect with LGBT activism, and what is its relevance in both the academy and society at large?

Course Structure:

This course is effectively split into two sections: Foundations and Applications. In the Foundations section of the course, weeks one through six, we will read several important and foundational texts in Queer theory, and work together to apply each of those texts to a single primary source. That primary source is Andrew Holleran's short (150 pages) novel *Grief*. Holleran's novel was the 2007 recipient of the Stonewall Award for Literature, and will serve as our "practice text" in the first part of the course, as we work towards close reading through the Queer theory lens. In the Applications section of the course, each week will focus on a particular historical/generic theme. During this part of the course, our Tuesday classes will be spent discussing secondary/scholarly Queer theory texts along those themes, and our Thursday classes will be spent applying those ideas to primary sources including but not limited to music, film, literature, and more.

Course Policies and Guidelines:

Grading and Evaluation:

Class Participation (includes attendance and Blackboard Discussions): 15%

3 Short Response Papers (2 pages each): 25%

Formal Paper 1: 25%

Formal Paper 2: 35%

Attendance/Participation

This class is structured as a seminar. At the very core of Queer theory is the idea that there are voices that are not heard by the majority/authority. As such, this class will not work as a lecture. For this class to work, it is important that everyone is in class, prepared for class, and willing to add their voices to the discussion. In a theory course, it is not uncommon for people to "talk their way to comprehension," so never be afraid to speak up and make some connections. Your experiences, both lived and academic, are the most valuable resources we have in this classroom.

Readings and Required Texts

This course has three required texts, all of which will be available at the UR Bookstore. All other readings will be available either on the Blackboard course page or via library reserve/streaming.

The required texts are:

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I.*

Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*

Andrew Holleran, *Grief: A Novel*

Short Response Papers:

During the semester, you will be required to write three short response papers. Each paper will be two pages long, and should engage with and summarize the main argument(s) of one of the *theoretical/secondary* readings that week. Responses should then seek to connect those arguments to other texts that we've discussed in class. Finally, each response should culminate with three questions, inspired by the reading, that might serve as good discussion starters in our class session. I do not assign these response papers to be due at any specific time. You may select any

three texts to engage with. My only caveats are that you must have at least one response paper in each of the two sections of the course (Foundations/Applications), and the response must be submitted *before* the class meeting discussing that text.

Formal Papers

You will write two formal papers this semester. The first will be a 4-5 page paper based on a prompt distributed in class. The second paper will be 8-10 pages in length and will explore a topic of your choosing that connects to some of the ideas discussed throughout the semester. I highly encourage students to regularly discuss possible paper topics with me, and to make good use of office hours.

Late Assignments

My late policy for formal papers is simple--I can work with you if I know about the problem *in advance*. I do not need any outlandish reasons to issue an extension. I understand that there are times when the work of all your classes comes due on the same week and you just get overwhelmed. As long as you ask me *before* the paper is due (at least a day before the due date) and as long as the extension is *within reason* (a day or two to a week at most), I can always work with you. If you come to me after the fact, there isn't much that I can do.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

In any academic writing, proper citation is paramount. My mantra is "when in doubt, cite it." Over-citing can be annoying, but under-citing can lead to disaster. If you are ever unsure about how or when to cite a source, please consult with me, the Writing Fellows, or any of the myriad other resources available on campus for that purpose. Intentional plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment and possibly more severe repercussions depending on the scale of the offense. Please be aware of the university's Academic Honesty policy:
<http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/>

COURSE CALENDAR/READINGS

* Syllabus is subject to change. All changes will be announced, both in class and on Blackboard.

Week 1: January 19th -- Course Introduction and Structure

Thursday- Introductions, course structure/outline, etc. What IS queer theory? Why do we study it? How do/can we define it (O.E.D.)?

-Read *Grief* by Andrew Holleran.

Week 2: January 24th and 26th--Foundations of Queer Theory 1

Tuesday: Read Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, Parts I, II, and III. Read Nikki Sullivan's "The Social Construction of Same-Sex Desire: Sin, Crime, Sickness."

Thursday: Application of Foucault to *Grief*.

Week 3: January 31st and February 2nd -- Foundations of Queer Theory 2

Tuesday: Read excerpts from Lynne Huffer's *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (on Blackboard).

Thursday: Application of Huffer to *Grief*.

Week 4: February 7th and 9th -- Foundations of Queer Theory 3

Tuesday: Excerpts from Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and from *Between Men* (on Blackboard). Read J. Bryan Lowder's article, "Sedgwick's *Between Men* Shows the Astonishing Power of Queer Theory 30 Years Later" (link on Blackboard).

Thursday: Application of Sedgwick to *Grief*.

Week 5: February 14th and 16th -- Foundations of Queer Theory 4

Tuesday: Read excerpts from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (on Blackboard). Read Nancy Fraser's "Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler" (on Blackboard). Read Nikki Sullivan's "Performance, Performativity, Parody, and Politics."

Thursday: Application of Butler/Sullivan/Fraser to *Grief*.

Week 6: February 21st and 23rd -- Foundations of Queer Theory 5: Expanding the Queer Theory Lens.

Tuesday: Read excerpts from Rosemary Hennessy's *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (on Blackboard). Read excerpts from Kevin Floyd's *The Reification of Desire* (on Blackboard). Read excerpts from Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* (on Blackboard) and "Hate Speech and the Fight for Roma Representation After New York Comic Con" by Andrew Wheeler (link on Blackboard). Read Nikki Sullivan's "Queer Race."

Thursday: Application of queer economic and "terrorist" othering to *Grief*.

***** FIRST FORMAL PAPER IS DUE (2/28)*****

Week 7: February 28th and March 2nd -- Queer Topics in Antiquity

Tuesday: Read excerpts from John Boswell's *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (on Blackboard). Read excerpts from Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* and Nancy Wilson's *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible* (all on Blackboard).

Thursday: Biblical passages including excerpts from the Book of Ruth and the Song of Songs.

Week 8: March 7th and 9th -- Elizabeth I, Queer Politics, and the Construction of Virginity

Tuesday: Read excerpts from Theodora Jankowski's *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*.

Thursday: Read/Discuss passages from John Lyly's court play *Gallathea*. Potential classroom visit from Theodora Jankowski.

***** March 11th through March 19th--SPRING BREAK *****

Week 9: March 21st and 23rd -- "Freaks," Disease, and Disability

Tuesday: Read excerpts from the following texts (all on Blackboard):
-Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*.

- Eli Clare's *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*.
- Robert McRuer's *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*.

Thursday: Read selected passages from Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Also read passages from Richard Daniel Altick's *The Shows of London*, Lennard J. Davis's *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, and Julia Rodas's "Tiny Tim, Blind Bertha, and the Resistance of Miss Mowcher: Charles Dickens and the Uses of Disability" (all on Blackboard).

Week 10: March 28th and 30th -- Shakespearean Cinema

Tuesday: Read excerpts from Anthony Guy Patricia's *Queering the Shakespeare Film: Gender Trouble, Gay Spectatorship and Male Homoeroticism* (on Reserve in Robbins Library) and Mario DiGangi's "Making Monsters: The Caroline Favorite and the Erotics of Royal Will" from *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley* (on Blackboard).

Thursday: Read excerpts from Edward P. Vining's *The Mystery of Hamlet: An Attempt to Solve an Old Problem* (on Blackboard). Watch Derek Jarman's *Tempest* (streaming online via the University holdings). In class, we will also watch excerpts from Asta Nielsen's silent *Hamlet*.

Week 11: April 4th and 6th -- Music and Performance

Tuesday: Read excerpts from *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (on Blackboard) and excerpts from Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (also on Blackboard). In class, we will apply ideas

from these texts to an array of musical genres and performers, from John Cage, Liberace, and Adam Lambert to Glam Rock, Disco, and music from the *Wizard of Oz*.

Thursday: There will be no class today. I will be presenting a paper at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference in Atlanta. Please take this time to work on your final papers.

Week 12: April 11th and 13th -- Comic Books and Superheroes

Tuesday: Read Christian Norman's, "Mutating Metaphors: Addressing the Limits of Biological Narratives of Sexuality" from *The Ages of the X-Men: Essays on the Children of the Atom in Changing Times* (on Blackboard). Read "Slashing the Fiction of Queer Theory: Slash Fiction, Queer Reading, and Transgressing the Boundaries of Screen Studies, Representations, and Audiences" from the *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (on Blackboard). Read "'Why Can't I Be Just Like Everyone Else?': A Queer Reading of the X-Men" by Michael J. Lecker from the *International Journal of Comic Art* (on Blackboard). Also, take a look at the article at Geeks Out that discusses the metaphorical connection between the Legacy and AIDS viruses (link on Blackboard).

Thursday: In class, we will look at and discuss the following: Scenes from *X-Men 3* dealing with "the cure," scans from the *Love is Love Pulse* benefit comic book, a comparison between pages from *The New Warriors* (Bolt) and *The Teen Titans* (Speedy), and *Astonishing X-Men* #51 (in contrast with *X-Men* #30). We will also discuss the casting and the cutting room floor for Marvel cinematic films such as *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

Week 13: April 18th and 20th -- Television and Media

Tuesday: Read "Reading Queer Television: Some Notes on Method" by Daniel Marshall (on Blackboard). Read Nikki Sullivan's "Queering Popular Culture."

Thursday: We will apply Marshall and *several* of our foundational texts to several specific episodes of classic television. Some options here include: *Roseanne* (Season 5, Episode 8. Other options are 6.18 and 9.10), *Ellen* (4.22/23), *M*A*S*H* (2.22, 7.16, 2.3), *Three's Company* (pilot), *Queer as Folk* (pilot), *Oz* (Beecher/Keller episodes), *Orange is the New Black* (1.3), *The Real World: San Francisco* (3.19), *Friends* (1.8, 2.24), *Will and Grace* (pilot), *All in the Family* (1.5), *Modern Family* (pilot), etc.

Week 14: April 25th and 27th -- Queer Futures (SF and Fantasy)

Tuesday: Read excerpts from Jose Esteban Munoz' *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (on Blackboard). Watch Season 5, Episode 17 ("The Outcast") of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Thursday: Read Greg Egan's short story "Oceanic" from the August 1998 issue of *Asimov's Science Fiction* (on Blackboard). Half of the class needs to watch Season 4, Episode 23 ("The Host") of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The other half of the class needs to watch Season 4, Episode 6 ("Rejoined") of *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* (both are on Netflix).

Week 15: May 2nd --Reflection/Food/Evaluations/Interview with Jeremiah Schwennen.

Tuesday: We will wrap up the class, and have a Skype

conversation with Iowa author and educator, Jeremiah Lee Schwennen. Schwennen recently published the fifth book of his *Spiralchain* series. The series features several prominent LGBT characters.

***** Final papers are due by no later than May 8th *****