

**Course Description English3367--Gay and Lesbian Literature : The Social Formation of
Gay Writing Stonewall to Present.**

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Time: Tuesday and Thursday 10:00

Spring 2015

Gay and lesbian culture has been in the news a good deal in the last few years, but it has tended to arise in regard to gay

and lesbian marriage and the recent Supreme Court decision allowing marriage in certain circumstances and in some states (not Texas). But less attention has been paid to the less visible, sometimes underground, culture formed in the crucible of gay and lesbian communities over the last forty years, that led to support and pursuit of such legal and civil rights.

This course begins with that popular culture and its emergence from the Movement of the late 1960s and tracks the making of gay and lesbian literature as one key product of that counterculture. By studying the gay and lesbian culture from about 1969 to the present, this course hopes to ground the reading the popular literature formed during this period in a deeper historical and cultural context.

Gay and lesbian literature, it can be argued (David Bergman in *The Violet Hour* has presented such an argument), has produced some very significant and occasionally great literature over the last forty years. But this course is less interested in what might be viewed as elitist canonical high literature, and more focused on the no less important pop culture and pop literature. When one shifts to pop culture and pop literature, the old ways of doing literary analysis used on 'high literary art,' do not apply very well. History becomes not simply an option but a necessity to understand the pop culture artifact and so will play a central role in our reading of gay and lesbian literature in the post-Stonewall period.

We begin with the idea that gay and lesbian literature was socially and collectively formed as a part of the communities it refers to. The communities and social formations come first. Then gay and lesbian authorship was made through the work and struggle –and death-- of many people over next last forty years. In this course, we shall be less concerned with individual elitist authors, than with the social construction of popular authorship.

While this course will include several writings by women including the classic lesbian coming out novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*, by Rita Mae Brown, the classic gay male romance *The Frontrunner* by Patricia Nell Warren and the short story by Annie Proulx that was transformed into the film hit *Brokeback Mountain*, this course will tend to spend a bit more time on the development of gay male writing from Stonewall in 1969 to the present ; in part this is because the teacher is a man and this is the area he has published research on. However, it reflects an historical reality. Large sectors of both the gay male and the lesbian community embraced a policy of separatism during the 1970s and 1980s, and gay and lesbian literature reflects this original historical split. That said, this course will critique this notion of separatism and will consider the problems it raises by tracing the connections between gay and lesbian literature. About half of our texts are lesbian literature and about half the texts we study are authored by women. And there will be many opportunities for students as small groups and as individuals to read lesbian literature.

The term 'literature' is being used in this course the way it was used in the eighteenth century to mean writings, in a wide range of written forms. Rather than signifying only imaginative writing (that is fiction, poetry, and drama) and canonical writing (*Beowulf* to Virginia Wolfe), we shall be concerned with other sorts of writing from this period including articles in underground newspapers and magazines, manifesto writing, biographies, autobiographies, essays, creative nonfiction, book reviews, apologies and confessions, documentary writing, film scripts, even pornography. We will track out the emergence of the concept of gay and lesbian authorship from this complex and varied set of writing practices. The idea of great literature will be critiqued and this course will focus on pop culture and popular writing. I see these materials through a modified new historicist method similar to that described by Stephen Greenblatt.

I am thinking these will be our primary texts, but there will no doubt be some changes by the time class begins. **VERY IMPORTANT: Come to class first to get information about textbooks. Do not go to the bookstore.**

Rubyfruit Jungle (Rita Mae Brown, 1973)
The Front-runner (Patricia Nell Warren, 1974)
Tales of the City (Armistead Maupin, 1976-78)
The Sexual Outlaw (John Rechy, 1975/ 1975)
Dancer from the Dance (Andrew Holleran, 1978)
The Normal Heart (Larry Kramer, 1985)
Valencia

Only one text below. Small groups will read one of the following texts and report to the class on it. This list will be expanded.

Stone Butch Blues (Leslie Feinberg, 1993)

Zami Audre Lord

(1982)

Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay. (Annie Proulx et al. 2005)

I am also considering the use of films (DVDs).

Boys in the Band (1970)

A Very Natural Thing (1973)

Brokeback Mountain (2005)

We Were Here (2011)

Requirements:

There will be a small group presentation on the books on the second list, a written research project due at end of the course, and three in class essay exams. The format of the course will be an intensive discussion and student presentation.

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