

## MODERN FICTION AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

### Required texts:

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (Delta)  
Michael Chabon, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (Perennial)  
Michael Cunningham, *The Hours* (Picador)  
E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (Norton)  
Andrew Holleran, *Dancer from the Dance* (Perennial)  
Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (Vintage)  
Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Penguin)  
Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories* (Bantam)  
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford World's Classics)  
Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (Vintage)  
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harcourt Brace)  
(Other texts on Blackboard.)

Course requirements: regular attendance and participation, all the assigned reading, five prep papers due in class on any five Fridays of your choice (but I must receive at least two before fall break), and a longer paper (10-12 pages) due at the end of the semester. I consider regular attendance and active participation in discussion to be integral parts of the course. Please feel free to see me whenever you have questions or problems you'd like to talk about. My office hours are MF 2:30-4:00, Th 1:30-3:00, and at other times by appointment. I also regularly check my email ([david.walker@oberlin.edu](mailto:david.walker@oberlin.edu)).

Preliminaries: This course will explore the representation of gay and lesbian experience in selected twentieth-century novels. In doing so, it will engage a number of complex social, psychological, and political issues, including the nature of sexual identity, the history of sexual minorities in the past century, and the variety of responses to dynamics of repression and liberation. Fundamentally, though, this is a *literature* class, by which I mean that we will treat the texts as distinctively imaginative creations, rather than simply as products of social and historical forces. I've chosen these particular books because I hope they will all repay attention to their artistic qualities, and I'll be asking you to pay close attention to their language and form as well as to their thematic content. We will certainly raise theoretical questions about the nature and dynamics of fiction, and I will be asking you to do some reading in the criticism, but the bulk of our attention will be on the primary works themselves. Please be sure that's the sort of course you want to take.

There are a couple of other issues I'd like you to consider carefully before deciding to take this class. The reading load is fairly heavy; I hope it won't feel unfair or burdensome, but it's crucial that you have the time to do *all* the reading carefully and thought-

fully, so I would urge you not to take this class concurrently with another course in the novel. My teaching tends to be quite text-centered; you should bring the book under discussion to class every day and prepare to refer to it frequently.

I will expect active participation in discussion from each member of the class; this means, first of all, preparing carefully, noting issues in the day's reading that seem to you particularly worth talking about, passages that seem especially important or problematic, etc. It also means listening and responding thoughtfully to each other in class, not just talking to hear yourself talk. Good discussion in a class this size doesn't usually happen automatically; it depends on everyone's willingness to cultivate the skills required. Particularly given the sensitive nature of the material we'll be exploring, I'd like this class to feel like a genuine community, and for each of you to be committed to bringing that about.

Prep papers, as the name suggests, are intended to help you prepare to make productive contributions to discussion by articulating some of your ideas and reactions to the assigned material in advance. You owe me five of them, due in class on any five Fridays of your choice (at least two of which must be before fall break). They should focus on the material to be discussed in class that day, not on material previously discussed. Prep papers should be between 300 and 500 words, typed and double-spaced, and while I don't expect the prose to be polished, I do expect you to have invested thought and imagination in them. Don't feel you need to generalize about the whole assignment: it's fine to isolate a particular issue or passage for scrutiny. I won't be grading the prep papers individually, but I plan to return them with brief comments, and then I'll ask you to turn all five back in at the end of the semester for a cumulative prep-paper grade.

Schedule of class meetings and assignments:

M 2/3 Introduction

### I. THE CLOSETED TEXT

W 2/5 Henry James, "The Pupil" (1891) [and excerpt from David Halperin, "One Hundred Years of Homosexuality"]. Download and print out from Blackboard.

F 2/7 Willa Cather, "Tommy, the Unsentimental" (1896) and "Paul's Case" (1905), also on Blackboard

### II. AESTHETES AND DECADENTS

M 2/10 Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), the Preface (*not* the editor's Introduction!) and chapters I-V

W 2/12 chapters VI-XI

F 2/14 chapters XII-XX

M 2/17 David Leavitt, "Saturn Street" (1997), on Blackboard

W 2/19 Mann, *Death in Venice* (1912), chapters 1-3  
F 2/21 chapters 4-5

M 2/24 Holleran, *Dancer from the Dance* (1978), through chapter 3  
W 2/26 chapters 4-6  
F 2/28 chapter 7-end

### III. WHO'S AFRAID

M 3/3 Forster, *Maurice* (1914), chapters 1-15  
W 3/5 chapters 16-33  
F 3/7 chapters 34-46 and "Terminal Note"

M 3/10 Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), pp. 3-64  
W 3/12 pp. 64-139 (middle)  
F 3/14 pp. 139-194

M 3/17 Cunningham, *The Hours* (1998), pp. 3-79  
W 3/19 pp. 81-162  
F 3/21 pp. 163-226

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### FALL BREAK 3/22-30

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### IV. PASSING

M 3/31 TBA  
W 4/2 Larsen, *Passing* (1929), Parts One and Two  
F 4/4 Part Three

M 4/7 Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Part One  
W 4/9 Part Two, chapters 1-3  
F 4/11 Part Two, chapters 4-5

### V. BEYOND BINARISM

M 4/14 Chabon, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988), chapters 1-9  
W 4/16 chapters 10-15  
F 4/18 chapters 16-23

M 4/21 Kay, *Trumpet* (1998), pp. 1-100  
W 4/23 pp. 101-95  
F 4/25 pp. 196-278

M 4/28 Winterson, *Written on the Body* (1992), pp. 9-69  
W 4/30 pp. 69-125  
F 5/2 pp. 127-90

M 5/5 Peter Cameron, "Jump or Dive" (1985), and David Evershoff, "The Dress"  
(2001), on Blackboard  
W 5/7 Amy Bloom, "A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You" and "Rowing to  
Eden" (2000), on Blackboard  
F 5/9 Conclusions

W 5/14 *Final paper due*