

# Sexuality in Literature

ENGL 215:9E

Fall 2020

W 6-8:55 pm (on Zoom)

## Contact Information

Dr. Shannon Draucker (she/her/hers)  
Email: [sdraucker@siena.edu](mailto:sdraucker@siena.edu)

Office Hours: T 2:30-5 pm  
Th 2:30-5 pm  
& by appointment

*\*\*all office hours on Zoom this semester; link to Dr. D's meeting room [here](#)\*\**



Image sources: *Fun Home*, *British Library*, *Poetry Foundation/Getty Images*

## Course Description & Learning Goals

How do writers write the erotic? How do literary works from a variety of genres capture experiences and sensations that are often private, taboo, or even illegal? What techniques and strategies do authors use to describe moments of desire, pleasure, arousal, and stimulation? What language is used to depict sexual experiences that are traumatic, painful, or violent? How do writers negotiate the slippages between sexual identities, acts, preferences, and performances? What can literary works tell us about the history of gender and sexuality across cultures and time periods?

These are just a few of the questions that will motivate our readings and discussions in this course. Our consideration of these ideas will require all of us to draw upon our most fundamental close reading, critical thinking, and communication skills. Successful completion of this course means you will:

- Improve your abilities as a close reader of literary texts *and* theoretical works about gender and sexuality.
- Hone your voice as a scholar who enters critical conversations about literature, gender, and sexuality.
- Develop as a writer who recognizes the importance of revision and engages meaningfully with feedback.
- Become an active participant in class discussions by respectfully listening to and engaging with your peers' ideas.

- Ponder deeply the connections between the material in this course and the “real world.” How does analyzing sexuality in literature help us to better grapple with issues in our own time?

### Required Texts

The following course texts are available at the Siena Bookstore and online. I encourage you to order from [Bookshop.org](http://Bookshop.org) so that your purchases will support independent bookstores during this difficult time. Many of these novels can also be purchased at local independent bookstores such as the Book House of Stuyvesant Plaza, Market Block Books, or Dove & Hudson. You are required to use *these editions*. Please consult with me if you have difficulty accessing one of these course texts.

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Mariner / ISBN: 9780544709041)

David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*. (Dramatists Play Service / ISBN: 9780452272590)

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*. (Mariner / ISBN: 978-0156031820)

### Canvas

Given our hybrid format this semester (more below), Canvas will be our primary medium for sharing documents, submitting work, and participating in discussion forums. Our Canvas site is organized into a series of “Modules,” where you will find all of the readings, discussion boards, and assignments for each week.

### Meeting with and contacting me

Office hours (listed at the top of the syllabus) are periods of time each week when I am in [my Zoom room](#) and available to meet with anyone who joins. You are welcome to “visit” office hours at any time (no appointment needed!) to ask questions, go over a paper draft, talk about the reading, or just chat. This is *your* time, so please take advantage! Studies show that students who come to office hours regularly find more success in and get more out of their courses. If you’d like to meet with me outside of office hours, please email me, and we can set up a mutually convenient time.

Our primary mode of communication outside of class and office hours will be email, so please check your email regularly for updates from me. Feel free to email me at [sdraucker@siena.edu](mailto:sdraucker@siena.edu) at any time. I will respond within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on weekends.

### Course meetings and Zoom tips

This semester, Sexuality in Literature will be a synchronous, online course. This means that we will **meet on Zoom every Wednesday evening from 6-8:55 pm**. We will take a 10-15-minute break around 7:30 pm. I will make every attempt to vary our activities

so that our course is as engaging and interactive as it would be in person. Here are a few Zoom tips that will help us feel as “together” as possible:

- Consider leaving your video camera on during class. I recognize that some of you might need to turn off your video due to bandwidth issues or home distractions, but it would be great to see all of your faces as much as possible.
- I ask that you **use Zoom’s “gallery view”** rather than “speaker view.” You can change this in the upper right-hand corner of your screen. This will allow you to see everyone else participating rather than just the person speaking.
- When you are not speaking, try to **mute yourself** to eliminate as much background noise as possible. Don’t forget to unmute yourself when you want to speak, though!!
- We will often use the **“breakout room”** feature of Zoom, so be prepared to break into small groups.
- To ease discussion with such a large group, I will ask you to use the **“hand raise”** function on Zoom. You can find this option by clicking “Participants” and then clicking on the small blue hand on the tab on the right. I welcome questions at any point. Please put your hand “down” after I have answered your question.
- Feel free to use the **“chat”** feature on the bottom of your screen if you need to send me a message or want to share a thought with the class. I can’t guarantee that I will always be able to look at the chats, but I will definitely look on breaks.

Please keep in mind the new addition to the Student Handbook (Section IV, Article 13) regarding the unauthorized recording of classroom or other academic activities: “In all cases, unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Further, students who cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute instructional materials without authorization. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate College office.”

### **Course requirements**

In order to make the most out of this course, you will do a good deal of reading and writing and engage in a variety of class activities. Specific course requirements include:

- **Reading:** In order to participate fully in class, you must complete the assigned reading *before* the class meeting. I will expect you to *study*, not just read, the assigned texts. *Studying* can include, but is not limited to: re-reading key passages, annotating your books, taking notes, and jotting down questions. **As our course meets only once a week, you will have a significant amount of reading to complete before each class period. Do NOT save the reading for the day or night before class;**

**you will not be able to complete it thoroughly. This class will ask you to manage your time throughout the week and plan your work accordingly. Don't hesitate to contact me if you need help developing reading or time management strategies.**

- Perhaps your most challenging reading assignments this semester will be the works of gender, sexuality, queer, and critical race theory assigned each week. We will grapple with these difficult texts together by creating a shared “**Critical Toolkit**” (link [here](#)). You will receive a more detailed assignment sheet during the first week of class, but in short, each of you will be responsible for *one* theoretical source throughout the semester. You will produce a short piece of writing and give a brief presentation about your source.
- **Discussion:** You should come to class prepared to discuss the works we read, share your ideas, and/or participate in small group activities. Active, thoughtful, and respectful participation is the cornerstone of our course.
- **Writing:** You will complete a variety of low- and high-stakes writing assignments throughout the semester. These are designed to help you practice analyzing texts, crafting arguments, organizing your ideas, engaging with primary and secondary sources, and revising your prose. To this end, you will complete the following:
  - A “critical toolkit” entry & presentation (4 paragraphs)
  - A mini close reading (2 pgs.)
  - A “Sexuality and Intersectionality” essay (5-6 pgs.)
  - A final paper/project (4-5 pgs. or equivalent)

You will receive detailed handouts for each of these assignments as the time approaches.

## Grading

I will outline specific grading criteria for each graded project on individual assignment sheets. Here is the overall points breakdown for the course requirements:

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- Critical Toolkit: 75
  - Mini close reading: 50
  - Sexuality and Intersectionality essay: 125
  - Final paper/project: 100
  - Participation, Attendance, and Engagement: 100
- =450 points total

Here are the letter grade conversions based on a 450-point scale:

>=423 = A  
405-422 = A-  
392-404 = B+  
378-391 = B  
360-377 = B-  
347-359 = C+  
333-346 = C  
315-332 = C-  
302-314 = D+  
288-301 = D  
270-287 = D-  
<=269 = F

### **Attendance Policy**

As this is a seminar-style course that meets only once a week, your regular attendance and active participation are essential to your success in the course *and* your classmates' learning experiences. Missing **more than two class sessions** will lower your final grade. For each additional day missed (day 3 and beyond), your final grade will be lowered by **five percent (rounded to the nearest whole point)**. This "free" absence can be used for anything from oversleeping to illnesses, holiday travel, religious/cultural observances, extracurricular commitments, or emergencies. **Missing four or more classes will result in a failing grade for the course.** If a long-term illness or family emergency arises, contact me and the VPAA Office ([academicaffairs@siena.edu](mailto:academicaffairs@siena.edu)), and we will work it out.

### **Academic Citizenship**

Siena College's Mission Statement reads, "Siena fosters the rigorous intellectual development of its students through a healthy exchange of ideas both inside and outside the classroom...It develops in each individual an appreciation for the richness of exploring knowledge from a variety of perspectives and disciplines." To this end, my expectation is that we will work together to make this classroom a safe, supportive, and inclusive space for the dynamic and respectful exchange of ideas. I ask that we all approach the diverse perspectives offered by our authors and each other with respect, sensitivity, interest, and engagement. The ability to engage in healthy intellectual debate and disagreement is one of the greatest affordances of a liberal arts education, but such debates should never consist of disrespectful comments, hurtful remarks, hostile actions, or personal attacks.

Many of our course texts deal with difficult topics such as death, illness, racism, gender discrimination, sexual violence, and xenophobia. Much of this material can be emotionally and intellectually challenging. I will do my best to offer a "heads up" about particularly graphic or intense content so that we can all engage safely, carefully, and thoughtfully with the material. If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

## **Late and Missed Assignments**

Unless you have extenuating circumstances and make specific arrangements with me in advance, graded assignments (signaled with an asterisk[\*] on the syllabus) will be penalized **by five percent (rounded to the nearest whole point)** for each 24-hour period they are late. If you are habitually late with your assignments, you will be unable to engage fully in the class, and this will also affect your participation and attendance grade. ***Please note that I will not accept any late work for the course after Tuesday 11/24 at 11:59 pm EST.***

## **Plagiarism & Academic Integrity**

According to Siena's Statement on Academic Integrity, "The concept of academic integrity lies at the heart of any college. This is particularly true of Siena with its strong Franciscan tradition and its dedication to fostering sound moral growth. In such an environment, academic dishonesty cannot be tolerated. Students who commit such acts subject themselves to sanctions as severe as dishonorable dismissal from the College. Academic dishonesty can take different forms, including, but not limited to: cheating [dishonesty in a test situation], plagiarism [dishonesty in the presentation of materials in a paper or report], and failure to report known instances of academic dishonesty."

Please note that academic dishonesty and plagiarism are serious offenses and can result in failure of the assignment and/or course as well as disciplinary action at the college level. Cases of plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the disciplinary procedures described in Siena College's Academic Integrity Policy, the full version of which can be found online:

<https://www.siena.edu/offices/academics/academic-policies-and-procedures/academic-integrity-policy/>

In this class, we will discuss conventions for using and citing sources in academic papers. If you have any questions about plagiarism or academic dishonesty, I invite you to speak with me.

## **The Writing Center**

The Writing Center, located in Library 09, provides free one-on-one writing support to all members of the Siena College community. Trained peer consultants assist students at all levels with writing assignments in a variety of subjects. Professional tutoring services and English language support are also available, as well as a long-term Mentor Program for weekly meetings. The Writing Center consultants work with writers from all levels of experience, ability, and expertise. I encourage you to make use of this

invaluable resource at least once for each major paper this semester. To learn more and make an appointment, please visit:

<https://www.siena.edu/offices/writing-center/>

### **Chosen Name and Gender Pronouns**

I aim to create an inclusive learning community that supports all students, including students of all gender expressions and identities. You are invited to tell me early in the semester which set of pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/their/theirs, etc.) you feel best fits your identity. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

### **Accessibility Statement**

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Siena College is committed to fostering an accessible learning environment to all students. Students with particular needs should contact the Office of Accessibility (Foy Hall 109), which is responsible for providing accommodations to students with disabilities. All information disclosed is private and will not be released without your written permission. More information can be found here:

<https://www.siena.edu/offices/accessibility/>

We all learn in different ways, and I am committed to supporting your learning needs. If you have specific accommodations, please let me know at the beginning of the semester so that I can help you get the most out of this class. Any information about your accessibility needs will be treated with the utmost discretion.

Many difficulties (medical, emotional, financial, cultural, and familial) can affect our abilities to perform academically. Siena provides several support services that are available to all students, including the Office of the Dean of Students, Student Academic Success and Engagement (SASE), Health Services, the Counseling Center, the Title IX Office, and the Department of Public Safety. I am happy to provide more information or connect you with these services throughout the semester.

Office of the Dean of Students: <https://www.siena.edu/offices/dean-of-students/>

Student Academic Success and Engagement (SASE):

<https://www.siena.edu/offices/student-academic-success-and-engagement/>

Health Services: <https://www.siena.edu/offices/health-services/>

Counseling Center: <https://www.siena.edu/offices/counseling-center/>

Title IX/EEO Office: <https://www.siena.edu/offices/title-ix-eeo/>

Department of Public Safety: <https://www.siena.edu/offices/public-safety/>

Please do not hesitate to contact me with ideas or suggestions for making this class more inclusive and accessible. I am committed to supporting your learning in any way I can.

## **Pandemic & Emergency Preparedness**

You are instructed to bring all texts and a copy of the syllabus/course schedule home with you in the event of a College Closure. If your situation permits, you should continue with readings and assignments to the best of your ability, per the course schedule. I will give you instructions via email regarding how to deal with assignments and deadlines. If possible, I will set up online office hours so that you can “check-in” with any questions you may have. If you do not have internet, we will find another method of communication. Stay connected with information regarding the College’s status and reopening schedule by monitoring the Siena website.

# Course Schedule

Please note: readings are listed on the day they are due. All course readings are on our Canvas site except for the Bechdel, Hwang, and Walker. Items listed in **bold** are things you need to hand in; items listed in **bold with an asterisk (\*)** are graded assignments.

This schedule is subject to change as needed. Updates will be provided in class and via email.

## Unit 1: Hidden Sex

W 8/26: Zoom link [here](#)  
**Before class:** Watch Kimberlé Crenshaw, “The Urgency of Intersectionality” (TED talk)  
**In class:**  
Introductions & syllabus  
“Coded Sex” packet:  
Anne Bradstreet, “A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick employment”  
Emily Dickinson, “Come slowly – Eden!”  
Dickinson, “Wild nights – Wild nights!”  
Elizabeth Gaskell, from *Cranford*  
George Eliot, from *Middlemarch*  
Thomas Hardy, from *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*

W 9/2: Zoom link [here](#)  
Christina Rossetti, “Goblin Market” (C)

*Theoretical frames:*  
Michel Foucault, “We ‘Other Victorians’” (from *The History of Sexuality, vol. I, 3-13*)\*  
Foucault “The Incitement of Discourse” (from *The History of Sexuality, vol. I, 17-35*)\*  
Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex”\*\*

## Unit 2: “Deviant” sex

W 9/9: Zoom link [here](#)  
“The Wilde Trials, 1895” (*Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook, 49-54, 56-62*)  
Oscar Wilde, “Apologia”  
Lord Alfred Douglas, “Two Loves”  
Lord Alfred Douglas, “In Praise of Shame”  
Walt Whitman, “We Two Boys Together Clinging”  
Whitman, “City of Orgies”  
Amy Levy, “Sinfonia Eroica”

Michael Field, "A Girl"

*Theoretical frame:*

Foucault, "The Perverse Implantation" (from *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I, 36-49)\*

W 9/16: Zoom link [here](#)  
**First Critical Toolkit comment due today (before class)**  
David H. Hwang, *M. Butterfly*

*Theoretical frames:*

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution"\*  
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, from *Epistemology of the Closet*\*

### **Unit 3: Sexy Sex**

W 9/23: Zoom link [here](#)  
**Mini close reading due\* (before class, via Canvas)**  
Erotic poetry packet:  
Sappho of Lesbos, Fragment 31  
John Donne, "To His Mistress Going to Bed"  
H.D., "Sea Poppies"  
Adrienne Rich, "The Floating Poem, Unnumbered"  
Audre Lorde, "Recreation"  
Pablo Neruda, Love Sonnet XI  
Rupi Kaur, "the very thought of you," "you wrap your fingers," "he moved her hand"

*Theoretical frame:*

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"\*

### **Unit 4: Sexual Violence**

W 9/30: Zoom link [here](#)  
Harriet Jacobs, from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

*Theoretical frames:*

Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence Against Women of Color"\*

Saidiya Hartman, "Seduction and the Ruses of Power"\*

Angela Davis, "We Do Not Consent: Violence Against Women in a Racist Society"\*

W 10/7: Zoom link [here](#)  
**Optional Comments on Comments for mini close reading due!\***

**(before class, via Canvas)**

Carmen Maria Machado, "The Husband Stitch"

Kristen Roupenian, "Cat Person"

Watch FreeQuency, "I'm Sorry"

*Theoretical frames:*

Kate Manne, "Himpathy," "Locker Room Talk," & "Misogynoir in Action," from *Down Girl*\*

Linda Martin Alcoff, from *Rape and Resistance*\*

**Unit 5: Sexual Identity**

W 10/14: Zoom link [here](#)

**Second Critical Toolkit comment due today (before class)**

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 1-147

*Theoretical frames:*

Alice Walker, from *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*\*

Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement"\*

Audre Lorde, from "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (C)\*

**\*\*Week of 10/19: Meet with Dr. D about Sexuality and Intersectionality Essay (draft due at least ONE HOUR before meeting); sign up [here](#)\*\***

W 10/21: Zoom link [here](#)

*The Color Purple*, 148-end

**S 10/25: Sexuality and Intersectionality essay due!\* (by 11:59 pm EST, via Canvas)**

W 10/28: Zoom link [here](#)

Pat Parker, "My Lover is a Woman"

Chen Chen, "I Invite My Parents to a Dinner Party"

Danez Smith, "The 17-Year-Old and the Gay Bar"

Smith, "on faggotness"

*Theoretical frames:*

Michael Warner, from *The Trouble with Normal*\*

David Halperin, from *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*

Janet Halley, "The Construction of Heterosexuality"\*

W 11/4: Zoom link [here](#)

**Optional Comments on Comments for Intersectionality Essay due!\* (before class, via Canvas)**

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

*Theoretical frames:*

Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"\*

Jack Halberstam, from *Female Masculinity*\*

Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, "Sex in Public"\*

## **Unit 6: Sex and Illness**

W 11/11: Zoom link [here](#)

**Third Critical Toolkit comment due by today (before class)**

Essex Hemphill, "When My Brother Fell"

Melvin Dixon, "Heartbeats"

Justin Chin, "Undetectable"

Danez Smith, "it won't be a bullet"

Smith, "strange dowry"

Smith, "every day is a funeral & a miracle"

Smith, "litany with blood all over"

*Theoretical frames:*

Susan Sontag, from *AIDS and its Metaphors / Illness as Metaphor*

Paula Treichler, from "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification"

## **Unit 7: Sexual Futures**

**\*\*Week of 11/16: Meet with Dr. D about final paper/project (send outline/draft at least ONE HOUR before meeting; sign up [here](#))\*\***

W 11/18: Zoom link [here](#)

Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (C)

Ursula Le Guin, "Coming of Age in Karhide" (C)

Janelle Monaé, from "Dirty Computer" (watch) (C)

*Theoretical frame:*

Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century"\*

**T 11/24: Final paper/project due!\* (via Canvas, by 11:59 pm EST)**

***All outstanding work for the course must be turned in by today (T 11/24) at 11:59 pm EST. I will not accept any late work after this time.***