

USCDornsife

**Department of
English**

English (ENGL) 344mg

Gender, Sexuality and Desire in Times of War
Sexual/Textual Diversity

Semester: Fall 2019, Tu/Th 11am-12:20pm

Location: VKC 151

Professor Karen Tongson, Ph.D.

Office: Taper Hall of the Humanities (THH) 416

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1-3pm, by appointment

Contact Info: tongson@usc.edu

Course Description

This course explores a range of cultural texts reflecting upon, or set during times of war, from epic global conflicts, to undeclared and metaphorical wars. How do literature, film, music, and other narratives reframe our relationship to conflict, its resolution or its failure to resolve? Does a “war time mentality” result in the scarcity of desire as much as a dearth in resources or commodities? How does war necessitate transformations to gender and sexual roles in broader cultural spheres, and how are zones of conflict eroticized, pathologized or both?

NOTE: This course will sometimes deal very frankly, explicitly and even provocatively with topics that some of you may deem controversial, i.e. gender, sex, sexuality, race politics, sexual and prejudicial violence, psychological trauma, etc. Professor Tongson expects that you will engage with all of the course materials thoughtfully, while participating respectfully and considerately in discussions. IF YOU CANNOT DISCUSS OR SCREEN UNRATED AND EXPLICIT MATERIALS FOR PERSONAL OR RELIGIOUS REASONS, YOU MUST BRING THIS UP WITH THE PROFESSOR AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER.

Course Email Policy: Please address your email with the greeting, “Dear Professor Tongson,” and then submit your substantive question. DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES EMAIL YOUR PROFESSOR TO ASK “WHAT IS THE READING FOR TOMORROW?/NEXT WEEK?/NEXT MONTH?” or any other variation on that inquiry. You must read the syllabus—this document you currently have before you—since all of the readings and course policies are outlined for you here.

Required Texts

The Handmaid's Tale - Margaret Atwood

Parable of the Sower - Octavia Butler

The Berlin Stories – Christopher Isherwood

The Sympathizer - Viet Nguyen

The English Patient – Michael Ondaatje

Persepolis - Marjan Satrapi

The Night Watch – Sarah Waters

Media:

Cabaret – Film/Musical, dir. Ebb and Masteroff

The Handmaid's Tale – TV Series (seasons 2 & 3)

Apocalypse Now – Film, dir. Coppola

Course Objectives and Tenets

- Critical thinking: reading, discussion, analysis, and writing about the diversity of sexual cultures will challenge all of us to collaborative inquiry, and expand in our thinking about the changing aesthetic and historical nature of sex and gender identity vis a vis literature, film, TV, music and other media

- This course will offer students a global approach to understanding sexual diversity and the range of textual genres used to express that diversity. Given our increasingly globalized and mediated context, we will consider sexuality in the context of international/world cultures, disparate traditions, and the specificity of cultural experience.
- You will hone your skills in discussing, thinking, and writing about questions related to gender, sexuality, race, class, nationality and its representations in informed, respectful ways.
- You will learn to evaluate ideas from multiple perspectives, and to formulate informed opinions on complex issues of contemporary relevance.
- This course is reading intensive. You **MUST** show up to class having read all of the assigned material for discussion.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

We will share course information such as links to videos, music, images, additional articles, or other peripheral materials on our private, password protected course tumblr. You will also post your weekly writings, images, links and other commentary on this private tumblr.

LINK: <http://sexualtextualdiversityF19.tumblr.com>

Password: whatisitgoodfor

On the first day of class, you will submit your preferred email addresses to your professor. An invitation will be sent to your email along with instructions on how to join the blog and sign-up for our tumblr (if you aren't already signed up).

Course Requirements and Assessment of Assignments

- **Participation and Attendance 10%** - This course is designed as a collaborative, discussion-based seminar between the professor and students. **Readings should be completed prior to each seminar**, and students are required to participate actively in each session. Attendance will adversely affect your grade, because if you aren't in class, you aren't participating. Any more than 4 missed sessions constitute a failing participation grade for the course.
- **Responses + Presentations and tumblr posts 20%** - Every Wednesday, on a rotating basis starting in week 2, small groups of students will be responsible for writing short essays, and presenting a brief close reading or supplemental topic related to the week's themes and readings. Presentations are informal, and are meant to get the discussion going. Groups will be expected to use the tumblr page to set up discussion questions and prompts, and to share relevant multimedia material like images, videos, music, etc. Depending on the number of students, you will likely have to do up to three presentations, and 5 short response essays. Groups will be determined in the first week of class.
- **Midterm Examination 20%** - There will be an in-class midterm exam in Week 7 on **Thursday, October 10**. This exam will include textual ID's with contextual explanations, and character/setting ID's.
- **Essay (6pp) 20%** - One research essay will be assigned after the midterm examination due via email as a word document on **Monday, November 11**. Prompts will be distributed at least two weeks before the deadline.
- **Final Reading Quiz 10%** - You will have a brief final reading quiz on our last day of class, **Thursday, December 5** for the first part of class. This is to ensure you continue to keep up with the reading after the midterm examination, and counted separately from your final project.

- **Final Creative Project 20%** - The final project will combine a writing component with another creative component that may include creative writing, visual art, music, digital platforms, film, podcasting, or other media approved by the professor. Final essays are due **Monday, December 9**.

Course Schedule

NOTE: The day the reading is listed is the day that section is DUE for class discussion. The professor reserves the right to change any of the assigned materials at least two weeks prior to its scheduled coverage in the course syllabus.

Week 1

Tu | August 27 - Introduction to the Course
Th | August 29 - *The World at War* (1973), ep. 1 ["A New Germany: 1933-1939"](#)

Week 2

Tu | September 3 - Isherwood, *Berlin Stories*, "About this Book" and "The Landauers" (pp. 139-end)
Th | September 5 - Film: *Cabaret* (screen at home); Isherwood, *Berlin Stories*, chs. 1-5 (pp. 1-55).

Week 3

Tu | September 12 – Waters, *The Night Watch* (all of "1947")
Th | September 15 – Waters, *The Night Watch* ("1944," chapters 1-4)- **Group 1**

Week 4

Tu | September 17 – Waters, *The Night Watch* ("1944," chapter 5 and all of "1941") - **Group 2**
Th | September 19 – Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Chapters I-V, pp 1-77)
Guest Lecture by Eli Dunn

Week 5

Tu | September 24 – Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Chapters VI-11, pp. 77-189) – **Group 3**
Th | September 26 – Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Chapters XI-end, pp. 189 - end) – **Group 4**

Week 6

Tu | October 1 – Hulu Original Series, *The Handmaid's Tale* S.2 – screen at home, discuss in class – **Group 1**
Th | October 3 – Hulu Original Series, *The Handmaid's Tale* S.3 – screen at home, discuss in class – **Group 2**

Week 7

Tu | October 8 – Midterm Review Session (optional)
Th | October 10 – MIDTERM EXAMINATION (in class)

Week 8

Tu | October 15 – Screening (at home) *The English Patient*, dir. Minghella 1997
Th | October 17 – FALL BREAK

Week 9

Tu | October 22 – Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (Sections I & II, "The Villa," "In Near Ruins") – **Group 3**
Th | October 24 – Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (Sections III-VI, "Sometime a Fire," "South Cairo 1930-38," "Katharine," "A Buried Plane.") – **Group 4**

Week 10

Tu | October 29 – Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (Section VII - END, "In Situ," "The Holy Forest," "The Cave of Swimmers," "August") – **Group 1**
Th | October 31 – Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* (Beginning - end of Ch. 7) – **Group 2**

Week 11

Tu | November 5 – Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* - Ch. 8 - 18 – **Group 3**
Th | November 7 – Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* (Ch. 18 -end) - **Guest Lecture: Eli Dunn**
Film, *Apocalypse Now* (screen at home, discuss in class).

DUE: Essay, Monday, November 11 (via email as a word doc)

Week 12

Tu | November 12 – Satrapi, *Persepolis* (Beginning – “F14”) - **Group 4**
Th | November 14 – Satrapi, *Persepolis* (“The Jewels” – End) – **Group 1**

Week 13

Tu | November 19 – Butler, *Parable of the Sower* – **Group 2**
Th | November 21 – Butler, *Parable of the Sower*- **Group 3**

Week 14

Tu | November 26 – Butler, *Parable of the Sower* - **Group 4**
Th | November 29 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 15

Tu | December 3 - Butler, *Parable of the Sower*
Th | December 5 - Final Reading Quiz & Discussion

DUE: FINAL CREATIVE PROJECTS, Monday, December 9

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

An Official Note on Examinations: Make-up exams will only be given under extraordinary circumstances and will require documentation from a physician. The content and form of any make-up exam will be at my discretion. In any case, you should inform me via email or phone prior to missing an exam. If you feel you must reschedule an exam on account of having (a) two additional exams scheduled at the same time or (b) three exams in a 24-hour period, inform me *at least* two weeks prior to our scheduled mid-term. The final exam **must** be taken at the time noted in the syllabus.

Student Expectations: By selecting this class, you have made the choice to be here and embrace the challenges and provocations of the course fully. We will explicitly discuss issues of race, gender, and sexuality, among other topics. Doing so will require emotional maturity and a commitment to collegiality and rigor. While we each have specific inclinations and orientations, I expect us all to will rise to the challenge posed by course readings, lectures, films, and excursions.

Student Behavior: Please note that student behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Technology: Laptop usage is permitted in class. However, students who actively use phones or other technology to the point of distraction (e.g., phones make noise) will be asked to leave class and see their participation grade affected. Additionally, there is no recording (e.g., video, audio, photographic) allowed

in the classroom and/or discussion sections without the express written permission of the professor. Finally, all teaching materials for the course and communication on tumblr and by email is for the registered students, teaching assistants, and faculty. These materials are for the exclusive use for our learning community and should not to be used or transmitted for any other purpose.

Statement for Students with Disabilities: Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability should register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when necessary documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible, preferably by or before fifth week. DSP is located in Student Union (STU) 201 and is open from 8:30AM-5PM, Monday through Friday. Their contact information is as follows: 213-740-0776 (Phone), 213-740-6948 (TDD Only), 213-740-8216 (Fax); Email: ability@usc.edu;
Webpage: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html.