

AI 274 WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL: GOD, SEX AND THE GUILTY CONSCIENCE IN LITERATURE

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Competencies Offered: A-1-D, A-1-E, A-3-G, H-3-X

Course Description:

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves.

---*Mary Oliver*

Oh, wash me, cleanse me from this guilt. Let me be pure again. For I admit my shameful deed—it haunts me day and night.

---*Psalms 51:2-4*

Humans have always had an impulse to worship a God (or Gods). And humans have always been irresistibly drawn to sexual self-expression. Present throughout Western history is this fascinating paradox: the God whom we worship condemns the sex which we crave. Guilt is often our link between the sacred and the profane. The triangulation of religion, sexual desire and guilt has long been the concern of artists and writers. This course examines this phenomenon in William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, and Tony Kushner's Angels in America (Parts 1 and 2).

Student Requirements:

Students are required, in addition to participating in in-class discussions and presentations, to submit the following:

A final Research Paper
An eight-entry Journal

Expected Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, students will have

- a general awareness of the social and moral climates of three different periods of Western history
- an increased awareness of the possible impacts of religion on human behavior in general, and on sexual behavior in particular
- a greater appreciation for the humanities, particularly with respect to literature
- an increased ability to articulate how contemporary human experience parallels or differs from that of a previous cultural period
- some detailed knowledge of the writing of William Shakespeare, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Tony Kushner

Required Learning Tools:

Texts:

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Introduction by Kathryn Harrison. New York: The Modern Library, 2000

Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America, Part 1: Millennium Approaches*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993.

Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America, Part 2: Perestroika*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1996.

Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. The Arden Edition. New York: Methuen & Co., 1986.

Handouts:

Handouts will be distributed throughout the course. They include, but are not

limited to, readings from the following texts:

- Abrahamson, Paul R., and Steven Pinkerton. *With Pleasure: Thoughts on the Nature of Human Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Berger, Harry Jr. *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Browning, Frank. *The Culture of Desire*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Burt, Richard. *Unspeakable ShaXXXpeares: Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Connor, Randolph P. *Blossom of Bone: Reclaiming the Connections between Homoeroticism and the Sacred*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.
- Davis, Murray S. *Smut: Erotic Reality/Obscene Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Jonathan Dollimore. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- . *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Downs, Donald Alexander. *The New Politics of Pornography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Domenici, Thomas and Ronnie C. Lesser. *Disorienting Sexuality: Psychoanalytic Reappraisals of Sexual Identities*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Drakakis, John, ed. *Alternative Shakespeares*. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Eisler, Riane. *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth and the Politics of the Body*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
- Goldberg, Jonathan. *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- Greer, Germaine. *Sex and Destiny: the Politics of Human Fertility*. New York: Harper and Row, 1984.
- The Holy Bible*. King James Edition.
- Lewes, Kenneth. *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Male Homosexuality*. London: Quartet Books, 1989.
- Maurer, Harry. *Sex: an Oral History*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1994.
- Osborne, Lawrence. *The Poisoned Embrace: a Brief History of Sexual Pessimism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Panati, Charles. *Sexy Origins and Intimate Things*. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- Rechy, John. *The Sexual Outlaw*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1984.
- Shattuck, Roger. *Forbidden Knowledge: from Prometheus to Pornography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Smith, Frederick M., Herman C. Smith, Richard S. Salyards, Francis M. Sheehy, Columbus Scott, Edmund L. Kelley and Frederick B. Blair. *The Book of Mormon*. 1908 Authorized Edition.
- Stoltenberg, John. *Refusing to be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*. New York: Meridian Books, 1980.
- Sullivan, Andrew. *Virtually Normal*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Tannahill, Reay. *Sex in History*. New York: Scarborough House, 1992.
- Traub, Valerie. *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Wheeler, Richard P. *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Course Outline:

Week 1

Introduction to the topic:

Adam, Eve and the Serpent. Original Sin

Introduction to the Competencies:

General discussion of the Research Paper and the generating of topics
The nature and purpose of the Journal

Week 2

Introduction to Measure for Measure:

Christian morality, then and now

“What is a Shakespeare?”

The sexual and moral climate of Shakespeare’s Vienna

What is the Duke doing?

1st Journal entry due

Week 3

Measure for Measure

Claudio, Isabella and Angelo: sin and virtue, punishment and reward

Claudio’s predicament

Isabella’s dilemma

Angelo’s crisis

Small-group discussions and presentations

Research Paper check-in

2nd Journal entry due

Week 4

Measure for Measure

Isabella’s trial and the strange “resolution” of the situation

Small-group discussions and presentations

3rd Journal entry due

Week 5

Introduction to The Scarlet Letter

Puritanism

Seventeenth-century morality and contemporary morality

The social/sexual limitations and expectations of women, then and now

The Scarlet Letter as a “romance”

Small-group discussions and presentations

Research Paper check-in

4th Journal entry due

Week 6

The Scarlet Letter

Hester Prynne: transgression, transcendence and transfiguration

Small-group discussions and presentations

5th Journal entry due

Week 7

Introduction to Angels in America

Morality in 1980’s America

Sexuality, homosexuality and Ronald Reagan

The world of the play: “there are no angels in America”

Small-group discussions and presentations

Research Paper check-in

6th Journal entry due

Week 8

Angels in America

Judaism

Mormonism

The many amoralities of Roy Cohn
The journeys of Joe and Harper Pitt
Small-group discussions and presentations
Research paper check-in: bibliography due
7th Journal entry due

Week 9

Angels in America

Prior Walter: AIDS as illness and metaphor
Small-group discussions and presentations
8th Journal entry due

Week 10

Wrap-up

Research paper presentations
Research paper due

Assessment:

intelligent, informed participation in discussions and presentations (30%)
Assessment of student competence will be based on
Journal (30%)
Research Paper (40%)