

Western University

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
GSWS 2243F
Reading the Rainbow: LGBTQ+ Young Adult Literature

Course Description

Much has changed in the landscape of 2SLGBTQIA+ adolescent literature since the publication of John Donovan's young adult novel, *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969), arguably the first text with queer content written for and read by teen audiences. Originally a niche genre of literature, 2SLGBTQIA+ young adult (YA) novels have become cornerstone texts in the field, reaching a previously unthinkable degree of admiration and celebration in both academic and popular contexts. How can 2SLGBTQIA+ YA literature push us to better appreciate different ways of existing, surviving, and thriving in heterocentric, patriarchal, and antiquesque cultures? To what extent can different branches of (queer) theory assist us in unpacking and examining the literary and radical potentiality of this increasingly mainstream subset of YA literature? In order to effectively answer these questions, we will draw from different queer approaches—including queer temporality, queer of color critique, and queer narratology—to examine a variety of recent 2SLGBTQIA+ YA texts. As a student in this class, you will develop an understanding of the literary, aesthetic, cultural, and historical issues that inform the creation and interpretation of 2SLGBTQIA+ YA literature, and you will develop a robust understanding of different queer theory approaches and their application towards the examination of various texts and cultural productions.

Course Objectives

This course is designed to help students:

- Understand the difference between paranoid and reparative reading practices and implement both in your analyses of 2SLGBTQIA+ YA texts.
- Understand the complex relationship between queer content and form and explore the extent to which 2SLGBTQIA+ novels necessitate innovative and experimental modes of narration and storytelling.
- Explore the emotional/affective dimensions of 2SLGBTQIA+ YA literature and understand the sociocultural politics of emotion in these texts.
- Become familiar with different strands of queer theory that draw from social and antisocial traditions and explore the overlaps between queer theory and other areas of theoretical and cultural inquiry.
- Engage with theorizations of the queer child and adolescent and determine how contemporary young adult fiction “queers” our understanding of these developmental categories.

In addition, the course will facilitate development of students’:

- Analytical thinking skills.
- Oral and written communication skills.
- Independent research skills.

Evaluation

- Critical Response Paper (300 Words) 10%
- Close Reading (500 Words) 15%
- Final Research Essay (2000 Words) 25%
- Participation 15%
- Final Exam 35%

Critical Response Paper (300 Words)

This assignment asks you to respond to one of our secondary readings. Your responses should not be a summary of the reading; rather, you should respond to a reading's ideas and argument(s), thinking through their implications and how they connect to the larger themes of the course. You may also use these responses as an opportunity to develop your own ideas for the final research essay.

For example, consider taking an aspect or two of one specific reading and connecting it to some of the broader themes or discussions within the course. Is there something (e.g., an idea or an argument) within a reading that connects well with a reading we've previously discussed? What are the key similarities or differences worth noting? Use these responses to "think out loud" about a specific article and to discuss what stood out to you about its ideas and why. Be sure to think through the implications of your ideas so the responses are not purely observational, offering, instead, the beginnings of a larger analysis.

Close Reading (600 Words)

This assignment asks you to examine a short passage from either *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* or *Juliet Takes My Breath Away*. In your discussion of the passage, you may consider its importance to the work as a whole, but the bulk of your attention should be focused on examining the significance of particular details—images and word choices—that contribute to the meaning of the passage.

This assignment provides you with an opportunity to practice the skills you will be using in the essay later this term: your ideas should be organized around a central thesis, a claim about the meaning of the passage that goes beyond the obvious. That thesis can be introduced in a short introductory paragraph and then summed up at the end in a short concluding paragraph; in between, you will need at least two paragraphs that serve to organize your supporting evidence into coherent categories. Your purpose is not to identify the role of the passage in advancing the plot but rather to examine the ideas that the passage explores.

Participation

I expect that all students will complete assigned course readings/viewings and will be prepared to discuss those readings on the appropriate day. Class discussion will comprise a large part of our course, and while I recognize that not all students are comfortable speaking in class, I do expect that all students will be engaged and actively listening. Weekly prompts will be posted in the discussion forums on OWL, allowing for additional opportunities to think through and discuss the weekly readings with your peers. Please get in touch with me at any point if you feel the nature of this course is making your participation difficult.

Final Argumentative Research Essay (2000 Words)

You will develop a 2000-word argumentative essay where you examine how a 2SLGBTQIA+ YA novel engages with a particular literary trope or topic and how this element connects to a broader theme, lesson, or conversation. Your analysis should describe the ways in which a specific element or attribute affects your interpretation of your selected novel as a whole. Although you are free to explore any topic or literary attribute that interests you, your analysis should ultimately aim to offer an original, complex, and insightful reading of your selected novel.

Final Exam

The final exam will test the knowledge that you've acquired throughout the entire semester. In this exam, you will be asked to analyze specific textual passages, as well as develop essay-length responses to two questions that address broad issues in the field of 2SLGBTQIA+ YA literature.

Required Course Texts

Adib Khorram's *Darius the Great Is Not Okay*

Gabby Rivera's *Juliet Takes My Breath Away*

Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*

Adam Silvera's *They Both Die at the End*

Mason Deaver's *I Wish You All the Best*

Anna-Marie McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours*

Claire Kann's *Let's Talk About Love*

Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed*