The University of Western Ontario  
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures

CLC 1023  
Sex and Culture

Lectures: Wednesdays 3:30-5:30 in Talbot College (TC) 141  
Tutorials: Mondays 3:30-4:30 (rooms TBA)

Instructor: Călin Mihăilescu  
Office: UC 361  
Office Hours: TBA  
Phone: 519 661-2111, x85862

Teaching Assistants: TBA

Course Description  
The course aims to introduce students to major literary, plastic, filmic and musical works, as well as philosophical, theological and scientific views of sexuality – from the Neolithic to present day, and from Asia and Europe to Africa, Australia and the Americas.

Course Content  
This course is structured as a sexual alphabet designed to introduce students to great erotic artefacts – literary, visual, musical – and to their historical, cultural and theoretical contexts. At that it introduces students to major literary, plastic, filmic and musical works, as well as philosophical, theological and scientific views of sexuality.

Each culture on record is also a culture of sex – multiple, contradictory, shocking, or alleviating. Taking aim at many temporal and geographical areas, the course will survey a wide array of cultural expressions and representations.

This erotic alphabet includes artefacts from literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, film, and television, which focus on hetero- and homosexuality, erotic icons and troubled selves, on the dramas and comedies that sex has elicited since humanity’s in-the-middle beginning.

Required texts
An Erotic Alphabet (course package)

Both can be purchased from the University bookstore / the Comparative Literature and Culture section.

Course Requirements

A. Class Participation (20%)
As part of the grade for participation, students are expected to participate in class discussions and complete possible on-the-spot quizzes. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class and tutorial. If you have a legitimate reason to miss class (sickness, family crisis, religious holiday), please contact your Teaching Assistants beforehand so that we can arrange for you to make up any missed material. Missed classes and/or lack of class participation can add up and adversely affect your class participation grade.

B. Two tutorial presentations, one in each term (5% * 2 = 10%)

C. Final essay (20%): 5-6 pages (1300-1600 words; due in class on April 3
The paper is to be written on a topic of your choice. All students are expected to have their topics approved during office hours. It would be a good idea to begin thinking about the final paper as early as possible in the semester.

D. Midyear Test (20%)

E. Final Exam (30%) - both D. and E. will consist of identification - and essay questions.

Aims of the Course

To study major expressions and representations of the erotic life in literature, visual arts, music and film from pre-history up to today.

To explore the facets of sexual experience and the diversity of sexual personae in various philosophical, theological and scientific traditions spanning cultures from around the world.

Learning Outcomes

The acquisition of general knowledge concerning the place of sexuality in different cultural systems.

The increased facility at distinguishing sexual identities, their fates and troubles, and at mapping out personal sexual histories and expectations, including the students’ own.

The exposure to a rich collection of artefacts, which will help students acquire a superior sense of orientation and develop critical skills to distinguish between “natural” and “cultural” sexual determinations and experiences.

The enhancement of the students’ historical, geographical and theoretical knowledge of various cultures.

Students will improve their ability to express themselves on these and other related topics, both orally (through in-class presentations) and in writing (essay and written examinations).

The establishment of an intellectually solid foundation for further study of Gender, Sexuality, and Culture through the fulfillment of a first-year requirement for the GSC Minor.

Course Guidelines – Students are expected to attend all lectures and to complete all required readings before coming to class. Tutorial presentations (which are not to be longer than 15 minutes) should be articulate, informative and provide personal analytic touch.

Plagiarism – “Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate, and by proper referencing such as footnotes and citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). The University of Western Ontario uses
plagiarism checking software. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.”

**Absenteeism** – Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.  
*UWO’s Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness* ([https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm](https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm))  
Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC): [https://studentservices.uwo.ca](https://studentservices.uwo.ca) under the Medical Documentation heading  
Note that, as e-mail will be used extensively for communication with the students, you should make sure your UWO account is in order.

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**Syllabus**

**FIRST TERM**

**Sept 9 Introduction (in TC 141):** presentation: sex/gender • animal/social • desire • appeal • consummation • exhaustion • procreation/recreation • mystery-bliss-misery • violence  
Show: *People vs. Larry Flint* (USA, 1996; dir. Milos Forman – 43.30-46.07)

**Sept 11 – A is for animals:** sexuality and the animal • pleasure magnets • sketchy sexology • at the crossroads of species • Darwin skating on life’s maps • Woody Allen on sheep  
Show: “What Is Sodomy?” – *Every Thing You Always Wanted to Know About Sex * But Were Afraid to Ask (USA, 1972; dir. Woody Allen – 18.05-33.35)

**Sept 16 – Tutorial**

**Sept 18 – B is for brothers and sisters:** myth and ritual • brotherhood • religion • incest • taboo and censorship • one Eve or two?  
Reading: *Genesis* 1-4 (A 158-162)  
Suggested for further study: *Genesis* 6-50, excerpts (A 163-191)

**Sept 23 – Tutorial**

**Sept 25 – C is for culture:** human nature is animal culture • where do we come from? • Mom’s the Earth and Dad’s the sky • since Egypt, since Babylon  
Suggested for further study: *Gilgamesh* (A 95-150)

**Sept 30 – Tutorial**

**Oct 2 – D is for the divine:** eros/philia/agape • god(desse)s among us • monotheism may be anti-erotic, but polytheism rarely is • pourvu que ça dure  
Readings: Plato’s *Symposium* (A 890-898); 1Corinthians 13  
Show: *Blue* (France, 1993; dir Krzysztof Kieslowski – 1.25.20-1.29.30)  
Suggested for further study: Ovid, *Metamorphoses* ([Venus and Adonis]; A 1110-1115);
Oct 7 Tutorial

Oct 9 – E is for the empresses and emperors: Theodora • Scheherazade • Napoleonism
Reading: *The Arabian Nights* (B 552-605)
Suggested for further study: Procopius’s chapters on Justinian and Theodora from *The Secret History* (EA)

Oct 14 – Thanksgiving; no class

Oct 16 – F is for fantastic fears: taboos • Victorianisms • violence • rape • *vagina dentata* • impotence • STD
Reading: Carlos Fuentes, *Aura* (F 830-852)
Suggested for further study: Michel Foucault, “We, ‘Other Victorians’” (EA)

Oct 21 – Tutorial

Oct 23 – G is for gay: death of Patroklos • origins of democracy • hiding and suffering • subtlety of freedom
Reading: Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice* (F 84-138)
Suggested for further study: Catullus’ poems (EA)

Oct 28 – Tutorial

Oct 30 – H is for hermaphrodites: that sex which was one • a-sexed angels and sexed demons • hermeneutics
Reading: Plato, *Symposium* (A 881-884)
Suggested for further study: Honoré de Balzac, *Sarrasine* (EA)

Nov 4 – Tutorial

Nov 6 – I is for infatuation: at first sight • “Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?” • the book as a go-between • rock-and-roll
Reading: Dante, *Inferno* (canto 3.1-18; canto 5; B 399 & 406-409)
Showing: artworks by Edvard Munch and Francis Bacon
Suggested for further study: John Donne, “The Flea” (EA)

Nov 11 – Tutorial

Nov 13 – J is for jouissance: wherever G is • boredom interrupted • orgasmic currencies • calligraphic bodies
Reading: The Marquis de Sade, *120 Days of Sodom* (excerpts in EA)
Viewing: Peter Greenaway’s *The Pillow Book*

Nov 18 – Tutorial

Nov 20 – K is for Kama sutra: grammars of lovemaking • Indian intricacies • Balinese quietism
Reading: *Kama Sutra* (EA)
Showing: Classical Indian artworks

Nov 25 – Tutorial

Nov 27 – L is for lesbians: on the island of Lesbos • Amazons • out of confinement • the folds of grace
Readings: Sappho’s poems (A 635-643)
Showing: Leonor Fini’s artworks
Suggested for further study:

Dec 2 – Tutorial

**DECEMBER – MIDYEAR TEST (date & room TBA)**

**SECOND TERM**
Jan. 6 – M is for the Middle Ages: Sanskrit delicacies • courtly love • drugs-and-elixirs • troubadours • birth of the modern “I”
Readings: Three Sanskrit women poets (B 947-949); Western medieval lyrics: Arnaut Daniel, Beatrice of Dia, Walther von der Vogelweide (B 326-328; 339; 342-344)
Show: “Do Aphrodisiacs Work?”, first sequence of Every Thing You Always Wanted to Know about Sex * But Were Afraid to Ask (USA, 1972; dir. Woody Allen – 3.30-18.02)

Jan. 8 – N is for the never neutered: mutilations • castrati • flattened selves • bland marriage • couch potatoes
Readings: Choderlos de Laclos, Dangerous Liaisons (EA)
Show: Farinelli (Belgium, 1994; dir. Gérard Corbiau; script Andrée & Gérard Corbiau; 16:50-28:55)

Jan 13 – Tutorial
Jan 15 – O is for old-age love: it’s never too late • counter-death • when there is nothing left to prove
Readings: Gabriel García Márquez, Death in the Time of Cholera (hand-out, pp. 204-225)
Suggested for further study: W.B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (F 526-527)

Jan 20 – Tutorial
Jan 22 – P is for pornography
vices and devices • early shows • watchful eyes • male gaze • 50% of the internet
Readings: Shakespeare, “Sonnet 129” ([Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame]; C 179); Ihara Saikaku, Life of a Sensuous Woman (D 591-611)
Showing: The People vs. Larry Flint (USA, 1996; dir. Milos Forman)
Suggested for further study: http://makelovenotporn.com/

Jan 27 – Tutorial
Jan 29 – Q is for queer: unabashed gender • out of the hard boxes • kink and the art of kind looking
Readings: Rumi, “Only Breath” (B 353-354); Federico García Lorca, “Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías” (F 577-578); Clarice Lispector, “The Daydreams of a Drunk Woman” (F 809-814)
Suggested for further study: Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest (EA); Steven Bruhm, “Queer Queer Vladimir” (EA)

Feb 3 – Tutorial
Feb 5 – R is for the Renaissance
full bodies • from the standpoint of Spring • how to become a real woman • all of rainbow’s allegories
Readings: Aretino, Dialogues (EA)
Slide show: Renaissance art
Suggested for further study: Petrarch, Sonnets 1, 3 & 333 (C 168-70); François Villon, “La Grande ballade” (EA)

Feb 10 – Tutorial
Feb 13 – S is for Seduction
smooth talkers • spirit incarnate • bodies without organs
Reading: Tirso de Molina, The Trickster of Seville (EA)
Suggested for further study:

Feb. 17 & 19 Conference Week; no classes

Feb 24 – Tutorial
Feb 26 – T is for trouble
witch-hunts • excess • gender benders
Readings: Malleus maleficarum (EA); Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, “The Tattooer” (F 80-84)
Suggested for further study: Judith Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone” (EA)

Mar 3 – Tutorial
Mar 5 – U is for returns
The survival of the fittest • Odysseus • nostos • second chances
Readings: Homer’s Odyssey (bk. 23, A 603-609); Dante, Inferno 26 (B 478-482)
Suggested for further study: Tennyson, “Ulysses” (E 435-436)

Mar 10 – Tutorial
Mar 11 – V is for Venus
Roman fashion • life is an aphrodisiac • only the Goddess • the history of beauty
Readings: Ovid’s Metamorphoses (“Venus and Adonis” (A 1110-1115); Apuleius, The Golden Ass (B 24-44)
Suggested for further study: Baudelaire, “Invitation to the Voyage” (E 472-3)

Mar 17 – Tutorial
Mar 19 – W is for Women Power: matriarchy • Marian cults • sex strikes • the grace of power
Readings: Aristophanes, Lysistrata (A 823-862)
Suggested for further study: Sylvia Plath, “Daddy” (EA)

Mar 24 – Tutorial
Mar 26 – X is for the unknown: blind dates • dark nights of the soul • forgetting as forgiving • mystical encounters
Reading: San Juan de la Cruz (C 762-763)
Suggested for further study: Euripides, Medea (A 783-822); Georges Bataille, “The Solar Anus” (EA)

Mar 31 – Tutorial
Apr 2 – Y is for the young – virginity • initiation rites • innocence running amok • a ballet of dances
Reading: Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet (EA)

Final essays are due

Apr 7 – Tutorial
Apr 10 – Z is for endings: never again • always alive • sex and sense
Readings: Quevedo “Love constant beyond death” (hand-out); Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude (EA)
Slide show: endings (Dido dying, Apocalyptic images)

APRIL– FINAL EXAMINATION (time & room TBA)