COURSE DESCRIPTION:

When I was sixteen I picked up a can of peas in a grocery store and could feel from the can that it had just been touched by a man who would love me better than anyone had ever loved me and I panicked.

--CA Conrad, “The Queer Voice”

This course will advance students’ understanding of sexuality studies and U.S. American, British, and Irish literature through analysis of multiethnic 20th and 21st-century novels and short stories. As much as possible, we will connect popular culture to literary narratives that represent lived and imagined sexualities, desires, and bodies that are dynamic and often unresolved. For example, how does literature challenge our preconceived notions that sexuality can be reduced to “gay”/ “straight”, “normal”/ “perverse”? We will also read a few short theoretical and analytical texts provide us with contexts and methodologies for understanding constructs of sexuality as they intersect with formations of race, gender, and class. Through the assigned literary works, we will approach sexualities as lived realities and as systems of meaning that change over time and vary with context.

Texts:

Students are responsible for obtaining their own texts before arriving in Cork. Please note that Giovanni’s Room and the supplementary readings on sexuality must be read before the summer course begins. However, I encourage you to read all of the texts, or as many as possible, beforehand, so that you may take full advantage of all the opportunities afforded by the program.

- Jeanette Winterson, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (Grove Press, ISBN-10: 0802135161)
- Monica Ali, Brick Lane (Scribner, ISBN-10: 0743243315)

Student Learning Outcomes:

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

--Consider depictions of sexuality in literature in relation to cultural, social, and historical contexts
--Comparatively analyze how contemporary writers have employed modes and genres of writing to depict sexuality
--Analyze formations of sexuality as they intersect with race, gender, religion, and nation in fiction from the U.S. and the U.K./Ireland
--Produce complex written arguments in essay form that address the prominent themes and topics represented in the literary texts that follow
--Synthesize critical and theoretical debates about the literary texts and integrate them into analysis and research about the literary texts (*graduate students)
Assignments:
• 1-2 page weekly reading response assignments, due in class at the beginning of the week unless specified otherwise
• Short essay—5-7 page “midterm” essay focused on theme/topic/context relevant to course focus
• Final Paper—Undergraduates: 8-10 page research paper centered on analysis of at least 1 literary text from the syllabus and supported by at least 2 secondary sources; Graduate students: 12-15 page research paper centered on analysis of at least 1 literary text from the syllabus and supported by 3-4 relevant secondary academic sources that reflect critical/theoretical debates surrounding the texts.

Grades: Midterm Essay: 20%; Final Paper: 40%; Class Participation: 20%; Short Writing Assignments: 20%

Reading Schedule:

Pre-course Preparation Let’s Talk about Sexuality
The following are supplementary readings, made available online, to be read and responded to in a 2-3 page response before the course begins—Simone de Beauvoir chapter “Myth and Reality” from The Second Sex; Audre Lorde essay, “The Uses of the Erotic”; bell hooks chapter, “Talking Sex” from Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom; Michael Warner, The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life (excerpts)

Week 1 Americans in Europe: Finding Your (Sexual) Self
James Baldwin, Giovanni’s Room (1956)

Week 2 What’s So Dangerous About Coming of Age?: Censored Female Sexuality in Irish and Irish-American Fiction

Week 3 I’m Coming Out!: Queering the Household in British and Irish Fiction
Jeanette Winterson, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985), Mary Dorcey short story, “The Husband”

Week 4 Love, Desire, and the Immigrant Experience in the Postcolonial Era