

**PMA 1133 | Sex Acts: American Drama 1950-Present**  
Monday and Wednesday, 2:55-4:10pm  
Eisner Pavilion 201



**Instructor:** Jayme Kilburn (jlk355@cornell.edu)

**Office Hours:** Mondays 10:00am-12pm and by appointment

My box is located on the second floor of the Schwartz Center, directly behind the elevator.

### **Course Description**

This course asks: how does sex in theater and performance contribute to our understandings of identity, power, and the community? Focusing on how desire is manifested through text, the actor, and the audience, this class will engage in scholarship and plays that use camp, personal narratives, realism, and experimental techniques in order to engage its subject. Who is the play being written for? How does the style of play manipulate the audience's reception of it? Is the playwright creating a community amongst the audience or ostracizing them? What methodologies is the playwright utilizing? How does the reader *feel* when they read the play? Why?

### **Rationale**

Drawing on theoretical lenses from theatre and performance studies as well as gender and sexuality studies and race/ethnic studies, students will read, view, and respond to a range of dramatic texts that revolve around sex, sexuality, and gender. Students will develop critical voices both in their writing assignments and in their in-class discussions. Focusing on issues of gender and sexuality as it appears in play scripts (and, implicitly, on stage), this course will discuss how representations of sex in theater and performance contribute to and challenge prevalent understandings of theater history, intimacy, and what "good" and "bad" theater is. We will work, through close readings, discussion, and live theatre attendance, to develop strong interpretive and descriptive skills and a shared critical vocabulary.

This course will feature in-class instruction in writing; in-class discussion of texts read, with attention paid both to the contents of texts and to the style and clarity of the writing itself; and peer-review through in-class workshops of writing assignments. Emphasis in our course meetings will be placed not only on the development of a critical voice in the seminar discussions, but on the development of a clear, organized, and persuasive critical voice in writing. Students will be able to adapt the writing and reading skills that they exercise in this class to a variety of humanities courses throughout their college careers.

### **Learning Outcome Statement**

This is a First Year Writing Seminar, so our work together during the semester will emphasize writing and its fundamental relationship to reading, thinking, and learning. You will learn how to read perceptively, think critically, and respond appropriately and coherently to college-level reading by writing a variety of essays ranging from short response papers to more complex argument papers and evaluations of the claims and evidence in multiple readings. The best writing takes time and effort, so your essays for this class will be developed in stages with peer review, in-class workshopping, and ‘progress’ assignments being conducted along the way.

By the time you complete this course, you should develop and demonstrate competency in the following areas:

- Writing that uses clear and appropriate theses, organization, arguments, evidence, mechanics (proofreading), and diction;
- Writing that draws from careful, close reading and analysis of critical essays and dramatic texts;
- Use of language, tone, and style appropriate to academic discussion in class and in writing;
- Ability to find the argument of a critical text and restate it clearly in your own words;
- An awareness of your individual process as a writer;
- Responsible incorporation of primary and secondary sources in your writing, using MLA citation style;
- Effective use of preparatory writing strategies such as drafting, revising, and peer review.

As this course is also a theatre course, you will be learning how to read, talk about, and understand plays. Approaching a play text analytically is a key part of dramaturgy, but in addition we will also be focusing on placing plays in the context of performance and discussing their political implications. By the end of the course you should have a basic understanding of dramaturgical analysis and a broader knowledge of the issues associated with the representation of culture and identity on stage.

### **Required Texts/Viewings**

1. All students should purchase *The Transition to College Writing* by Keith Hjortshoj.
2. Other required readings/viewings/listening for this class will be available through our class Blackboard site.
3. In addition to required reading assignments, students will be required to attend a live performances at Cornell. I will disseminate information about required performances well in advance, but it is the responsibility of the students to make sure they purchase tickets and attend performances. Attending these performances is crucial to be able to participate fully in in-class discussions and writing assignments.

### **Guidelines for Submission of Written Work**

No hand-written work will be accepted; all assignments should be typed and submitted in hard copy (specific due dates and times for individual assignments will be posted on Blackboard). All essays should be formatted as follows:

- Your name and the date at the top right or top left corner of the essay
- Essay title centered below your name
- One-inch margins; left-justified
- 12-pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced
- page numbers
- stapled
- MLA citation style: if you use any source in your essay (even if it is a text or other object we have used in class), you should include a Works Cited list at the end of your paper.
- *Save drafts of your essays. I may periodically check these. They also protect against accusations of plagiarism or “too much help.”*

### **Attendance Policy: Classes and Conferences**

Because this is a seminar course, which relies on the consistent presence and participation of its members to sustain our ongoing discussion, you must attend class each day. **If you miss more than two classes, your grade will be affected.** Exceptions to the attendance policy include family emergencies, observance of religious holidays, and documented medical issues. Should you need to miss class for any of the aforementioned reasons, please email Jayme (jlk355@cornell.edu) in advance of class to explain your absence. Please note that excessive lateness will also result in a final grade penalty (**three lates = one absence**).

**Each student will have two required, individual conferences with the instructor to discuss his/her/their/ze writing.** The conferences will be held in my office on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Schwartz Center (Room 420). We will set the first conference schedule as soon as class enrollment solidifies: I will send out a schedule of available conference times, and you are responsible for choosing an appointment during conference week(s). I am also available to meet with students outside of class during office hours or by appointment.

### **Grading Policy**

You will get a grade in the B range (B-, B, or B+) in this class if you fulfill all the requirements and produce fully satisfactory writing. If your writing is outstanding, you'll receive some version of an A. If you do not fulfill the requirements or your work is inadequate, your grade will suffer. I will notify you if your work starts falling below the B range. Plagiarism on any one assignment may result in failing the course.

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following components:

Participation 20%

(Attendance, Blackboard Posts, Contribution to Discussion, Investment in Peer Review)

Essay #2 10%

Essay #3 10%

Essay #4 10%

Essay #5 10%

Essay #6 15%

Essay #7 15%

Final Portfolio 10%

**There will be a grade penalty for late assignments of a third of a letter grade per day late:** for example, an A paper turned in one day late receives an A-; two days late receives a B+, etc.

## **University Policies and Regulations**

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

It is critical that you submit only your own, original work for this class, and that you follow scrupulously appropriate academic standards for acknowledging the work of others in your writing and research. Information on proper documentation can be found in *The Little Seagull Handbook*. **Please use MLA documentation for this class.**

The Code of Academic Integrity is found in the Policy Notebook for the Cornell Community and also on the web at <http://www.theuniversityfaculty.cornell.edu/AcadInteg/code.html>.

Students understand that by taking this course they agree to share their writing with others in the class for purposes of peer review and related exercises.

Students are prohibited from buying or selling course materials connected with this class. All course materials, including all reading/viewing/listening materials as well as lectures, assignments, syllabi, and related instructional materials, are protected by copyright. Without the express, written permission of the instructor, any buying or selling of course materials is unauthorized and constitutes classroom dishonesty.

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, please provide me with an accommodation notification letter from Student Disability Services. Students are expected to give notice of the need for accommodations within the first three days of instruction. If you need immediate accommodations or physical access, please arrange to meet with me within the first two class meetings.

## SEX ACTS CALENDAR

This calendar will evolve as our conversation and writing evolves—some readings or writing workshops later in the semester may change or move, according to our needs as a class. Additional writing-related readings and assignments may be added to supplement our in-class writing workshops.

### Week 1

Wednesday, August 24<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Due:** “Contemporary Lesbian and Gay Drama” by Sara Warner in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature* (2014)

*Course introduction; Essay 1 assigned and discussed.*

**Essay 1:** Choose a group listed on the Hemispheric Institutes archives and watch one the group’s performances. Write a 2-3 page paper on the performance and how they used our working definition of “sex” in their piece.

### Week 2

Monday, August 29<sup>th</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Draft of Essay 1

**Reading Due:** *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams

Wednesday, August 31<sup>st</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Essay 1 Final Draft (ungraded)

**Reading Due:** *Cowboys, Communists, and Queers* by David Savran (1992) (pgs 115-)

“When a Door Is a Jar, or out in the Theatre: Tennessee Williams and Queer Space” by Anne Fleche (1995)

**Essay 2:** Choose one of the articles assigned (Savran or Fleche) and synthesize their arguments in regards to *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Once you have summarized their arguments tell your reader if you agree or disagree with their analyses and why. (2-3 pages)

### Week 3

Monday, September 5<sup>th</sup> – Labor Day, no class

Wednesday, September 7<sup>th</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Essay 2 Due

### Week 4

Monday, September 12<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Due:** *Belle Reprieve* by Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, Bette Bourne, and Paul Shaw

Wednesday, September 14<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Due:** *Split Britches* edited by Sue Ellen Case Introduction (1996) (pages 27-29)  
*Memories of a Revolution: The First Ten Years of the Wow Café* (2015) (pages 14-27)  
*Essay 3 assigned and discussed.*

**Essay 3:** Theater is a deeply personal discipline that involves artist's exploring their own and other's identities. Using only 2-3 pages, you will be tasked with synthesizing your own identity. What made people and experiences made you who you are? How do you define yourself? What are you willing to share with the reader? Your story of self should give the reader a small glimpse of who you are and what defines you. It should also be concise and follow a through-line. The best story of selves focus on a certain theme of one's life and chronicles how that theme has manifested itself throughout one's journey. (See Jayme's Story of Self for Example).

### Week 5

Monday, September 19<sup>th</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Essay 3 Rough Draft

**Reading Due:** Clit Notes by Holly Hughes (O'Solo Homo, 2007)

*Pickaxe* by Ana Maria Simo (*Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café*, 2015)

Wednesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>

**Reading Due:** *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* by Jill Dolan, 2012 (pages 99-117)

**Assignment Due:** Essay 3 Due

### Week 6

Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup>

*The Mystery of Irma Vep and other Plays* (Charles Ludlam) (2001) (read Fan Forward, Intro, and Mystery of Irma Vep)

**Essay 4:** Using the Hemispheric Institute's video archive, view one of Split Britches other performances (examples include: *Split Britches*, *Upwardly Mobile Home*, *Lesbians Who Kill*, etc). Write a research paper that puts *Belle Reprise* and one of their other performances into conversation with each other. How are the themes of each play similar and how are they different? How is the aesthetic of each play similar or different? Who is the intended audience for each play? Knowing what you know about Split Britches, how do you see their theatrical methodologies manifested in their performances? (4-5 pages)

Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Due:** "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" by Judith Butler (*Theatre Journal*, 1988)

### Week 7

Monday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>

**Reading Due:** *Flaming Creatures* (film) by Jack Smith (1963)  
Carolee Schneemann, “Interior Scroll” (1975)

**Assignment Due:** Essay 4 Rough Draft

Wednesday, October 5<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Due:** Research “Karen Finley” performances and their significance. Be prepared to share your research with the class.

### Week 8

Monday, October 10<sup>th</sup> – Fall Break, no class

Wednesday, October 12<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Due:** Hello (Sex) Kitty Mad Asian Bitch on Wheels by Denise Uyehara (in *O Solo Homo*)

“Between the Personal and the Universal: Asian American Solo Performance from the 1970s to the 1990s” by Esther Kim Lee. *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6.3 (Oct 2003): 289-312.

**Assignment Due:** Essay 4 Final Draft

**Essay 5:** Using the model of plays we have read during the women’s movement, write your own play, adaptation of a play, or solo performance. Incorporate one of the following into your play: (1) Tamper with mainstream ideas of gender, femininity or masculinity, or sexuality; (2) Write your play from the viewpoint of a specific community; (3) Include a strong political message.

### Week 9

Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Due:** *Love conjure/blues* by Sharon Bridgforth (2004)

Wednesday, October 19<sup>th</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Essay 5 Rough Draft

### Week 10

Monday, October 24<sup>th</sup>

**Readings Due:** E. Patrick Johnson. *Introduction to Sweat Tea: Gay Black Men From the South – An Oral History* (2008) (pages 1-23)

E. Patrick Johnson. *Pouring Tea* (video excerpt)

Wednesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>

**Readings Due:** Kate Bornstein. *Virtually Yours* (in *O Solo My Homo*).

Kim Marra. “Riding, Scarring, Knowing: A Queerly Embodied Performance Historiography.” (2012)

**Assignment Due:** Essay 5 Final

**Essay 6:** Review one the performances that have taken place over the course of the semester. Write a 4-5 page review of the play incorporating your own research of the play's previous productions, how it fits with other plays in its genre, what the message of the play is, who you think the play is for, and your overall feelings about the production.

**Plays to Consider Reviewing:**

Dessert of Light (Sept 22-25) (Cornell)  
10-Minute Play Festival (Sept 29-Oct 1) (Cornell)  
Blood Wedding (Ithaca College)  
Hand to God (Kitchen Theatre)  
Precious Nonsense (Kitchen Theatre)

**Week 11**

Monday, October 31<sup>st</sup>

**Readings Due:** *Black Power Barbie* by Shay Youngblood (2013).

Wednesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Essay 6 Draft 1

**Week 12**

Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup>

**Readings Due:** *The Octoroon* by Dion Boucicault (1859).

*An Octoroon* by Brandon Jacobs Jenkins (2015).

Wednesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Essay 6 Draft 2

**Essay 7:** Select a performance of your own choosing that uses the device “sex acts” (as defined broadly by the class) and write a 7-10 page research paper. The research paper should incorporate the writing skills you have learned throughout the class: analyses, making cohesive arguments, and clarity.

You will spend one of the last four classes of the semester giving a 15-minute presentation on your final paper topic. You should plan to spend the first 10 minutes presenting to the class, and the last 5 minutes soliciting feedback from your peers and leading a very short discussion on the topic. You are encouraged to prepare some sort of visual or performance aid to accompany your presentation. Please approach this presentation as a preparatory part of the assignment: You should use your time with the class to help articulate your ideas verbally and to gather from your peers their invaluable insight.

**Week 13**

Monday, November 14<sup>th</sup>



**Put together our Zine.** Choosing from the creative and academic work we have turned in over the course of our class, we will put together our own “zine” to be distributed around campus.

Wednesday, November 16<sup>th</sup>

**Assignment Due:** Essay 6 Final Due

**Week 14**

Monday, November 21<sup>st</sup>

Student Presentations

Wednesday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>

Student Presentations

**Assignment Due:** Essay 7 Draft 1

**Week 15**

Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup>

Student Presentations

Wednesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>

Student Presentations

**Assignment Due:** Essay 7 Draft 2

**Final Portfolio – Date TBA**

Includes:

- Your final draft of essay 7
- 2 revised essays of your choice
- A personal statement about how you have grown as a writer throughout the course