

# Portfolio Exam

*Due by 9:00AM on August 13, 2018 emailed as one continuous PDF (including cover sheet) to [nsilverman@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:nsilverman@gc.cuny.edu). Exams received after 9:00AM on August 13 and/or not sent as one continuous PDF will receive a grade of Fail.*

**Student Number:**

**This exam includes:**

Framing Essay (2000 words total)

Including:

Intellectual Autobiography (1000 words)

Reflections on the Portfolio Exam (1000 words)

Conference Paper (10 double spaced pages + works cited)

Including:

Conference Call for Papers

Abstract (200 words)

**Plus two of the following three parts:**

Review Essay (12-15 double spaced pages)

Annotated Bibliography

Including:

15 Entries

1500 word Rationale

Syllabus (5-8 double spaced pages in total)

including:

Teaching Statement (1-2 pages)

Syllabus (3-4 pages)

Analytical Explanation (2-3 pages)

**This exam fulfills the comprehensive stipulations in the following ways (texts may be repeated):**

1. Three different centuries:
  - a. Text: Part:
  - b. Text: Part:
  - c. Text: Part:
2. One Pre-1800 text & One Post-1800 text:
  - a. Text: Part:
  - b. Text: Part:
3. Two different national traditions:
  - a. Text: Part:
  - b. Text: Part:

## **Framing Essay:**

### Intellectual Autobiography:

Entering into my first year of graduate school, I knew that my research interests rested in twentieth and twenty-first century representation of queer adolescence. I spent the second half of my undergrad taking whatever classes I could find that focused on queer literature and theory. While working my way through as many queer novels as I could get my hands on, I began to develop an interest in how the characters in the literature discover their sexuality and how this discovery is reflective of what queerness means to the author. I became interested in the ways that understandings of sexuality have changed over time as reflected in literature. I also noticed a trend within queer novels where the characters would use books to develop their own understandings of their sexuality. This link between reading and queerness became the topic of my undergraduate honors thesis and the writing sample that I submitted with my application.

With the intention of exploring queer adolescence further, I enrolled in Carrie Hintz's "Bodies and Minds of Children's Literature" class during my first semester. I had focused my undergraduate research on adult literature, and saw this class as a way of expanding my focus into the books that are written for the age group I am interested in. During this class, I learned about the field of children's and young adult literature more broadly, learning who some of the leading scholars are and how to academically approach these texts. I was also able to explore my interests in queer literature through the final essay. I wrote the essay that became my portfolio exam conference paper, and used this as an opportunity to begin to develop an understanding of queer young adult literature.

I also explored this area in another class I took during my first semester: Feminist Texts and Theories. This class is the first required course for the Women's Studies certification, which relates to my secondary interest in feminist literature and theory. However, I used the final essay for this class, which the professors opened up to any topic related to gender or sexuality, as an attempt to answer the question of whether or not queer young adult literature can be better understood in terms of a literary tradition. I used this question in order to explore queer young adult literature more broadly and understand trends within the genre. While this was an ambitious project for someone who had only read one or two queer young adult novels at the time, it pushed me to read more texts and really invest in the topic. While I ultimately decided that the idea of a literary tradition was not fully suitable for queer young adult literature, I found the thought experiment to be quite fruitful.

During my second semester, I chose classes that would expand my focus and get me to think about areas of queer academia that I had not really taken much interest in up until that point. I enrolled in Will Fisher's "Early Modern Trans History and Theory" course. Having previously believed that queer identity cannot predate queer terminology, I entered the class as a bit of a skeptic. I thought that the phrase "Early Modern Trans" was somewhat paradoxical, but was nonetheless interested. Throughout the course, I found myself questioning the beliefs that I walked in with. While the stark differences between modern and Early Modern identities were apparent, I was surprised to see how clear the similarities were as well. I am still not sure that I would consider the identities we studied as being trans, but I can certainly see the relevance of using trans theory as well as the potential of these cases to influence trans and queer thinking today.

I also enrolled in “Introduction to Lesbian and Gay/Queer Studies.” This course counts towards the Women’s Studies certificate and was taught with a focus on creating a queer theory syllabus. Having not read as much queer theory as I would like and knowing that I would be teaching CUNY undergrads starting the following fall, I thought that this class would provide me with the opportunity to prepare for my future as both a scholar and an educator. What I did not expect was to learn about Open Educational Resources in the class. The professor, Matt Brim, instilled in us the importance of making queer theory affordable and taught us how OER serves as a means of doing so. While my final syllabus for the course was not entirely made up of OER, I have become committed to working with these sources as much as possible.

Outside of the classes that I have been taking, I have been trying to read as much queer literature and theory as possible, focusing primarily on queer young adult literature. While working on course assignments, I became aware of a lack of resources for queer young adult literature. In response to this, I have created a website in which I write about the books that I am reading. One of the things that I have learned in doing so is how few of the novels portray queer people of color. Since having this realization, I have taken a greater interest in tracking representations of race in these novels.

In my readings, I have also noticed that, as in coming-of-age novels marketed to adults, reading plays an important role in character self-discovery, as well as in the way that queer characters relate to one another. Moving into my second year and beyond, I plan on continuing to explore this relationship as well as what it says about how we understand queerness. I have noticed, for example, that for queer characters in coming-of-age literature reading is a solitary act, but queer characters in young adult literature often read together. I am not yet sure why this is, but it is something that I am interested in exploring. As I work towards my orals exam, I hope to find answers and also to ask more questions.

### Reflections on Portfolio Exam:

Since my interest in queer literature has been very narrowly focused on queer coming-of-age novels, I took the portfolio exam as a chance to explore different versions of queerness and what it means in a number of different time periods, national traditions, and genres. For each aspect of the exam, I decided to focus on something that was new to me. I sought to further my own research while stepping outside of my academic comfort area and developing the skills I will need as an academic more broadly.

For the conference paper, I focused on queer young adult literature. I made this decision because I felt that it was something I could actually see myself talking about at a conference. This paper was my first academic attempt to take a critical look at queer young adult literature and was an attempt to try to familiarize myself with the field. I chose the problem novel as a lens through which to approach these novels because it provided me the opportunity to look at the evolution of the genre. While there have been many articles about individual texts recently, the last comprehensive guide to queer young adult literature was published in 2006. I was interested in exploring the ways that these novels have developed since that time. This conference paper represents my first step in attempting to trace these trends; it is something that I will continue to explore throughout my time as a graduate student and ultimately incorporate into my dissertation. This conference paper was also the first time that I worked academically with fantasy novels. As an undergrad, fantasy was a genre that none of my professors talked about. However, I have found that fantasy is one of the most popular sub-genres of queer young adult literature. Queer young

adult fantasy, though often overlooked, also has a great deal to offer in terms of what it has to say about queer identity. Unrestricted by the social pressures of the real world, the queer potential of fantasy novels is limited only by the author's imagination. Fantasy is certainly an area that I will continue to pay attention to moving forward.

I wanted to use the annotated bibliography as an opportunity to explore queerness throughout history. As a modernist, I have been trained to believe that you cannot ascribe modern sexuality identity categories, such as "gay" or "trans," to people who existed in time periods or cultures where these terms were not used. In the past, I have used this as an excuse to avoid studying any literature prior to the twentieth century. However, I knew that there was a rich history that, while not directly related to my research interests, I wanted to learn more about. While I took Will Fisher's "Early Modern Trans" class to explore this issue, I created this annotated bibliography to expand my understanding of this area outside of trans literature and theory. Specifically, I looked at queer and trans theory that covered British and American traditions from the fifteenth to nineteenth century. In addition to focusing on theory about these periods, I wanted to look at some literary examples from them. Doing so gave me an opportunity to work with texts that I would not otherwise read. In the bibliography, I also tried to focus in on aspects of race, class, and gender. Since much of queer and trans theory focuses on white men, I felt that it was important to include texts that explicitly addressed other identities. While my focus will continue to be on contemporary novels, I found this to be an incredibly helpful exercise. Having this foundation in queer history will be helpful in my exploration of what queerness means today as opposed to what queerness looked like in the past.

Lastly, I chose to create a syllabus for an introductory writing class as a means of expanding my focus of queerness into identity more broadly. While I could have decided to use the syllabus that I developed as part of my Introduction to Lesbian and Gay/Queer Studies, I opted to create a freshman writing syllabus for a number of reasons. First, it gave me a way to prepare for the class that I will be teaching this fall as I had never taught an introductory writing course before. Secondly, and more importantly, it was to practice incorporating my own research interests into classes that might not seem to obviously fit. The opportunities to teach strictly queer content might be few and far between, especially while teaching as a grad student, so it is important for me to find ways of incorporating this material into other classes. Moreover, the syllabus provided me with the chance to work with texts that I normally would not take an interest in, therefore expanding the scope of the type of content I can teach. I arrived at the course theme of "coming out," because I felt that it would allow me to do just that. In a class about coming out, I would be able to include queer content, but also talk about other aspects of identity. I was especially attracted to this theme because it would allow me to incorporate a diverse range of texts. I was also interested because all of the texts would be non-fiction, which is not something I would typically work with. I tried to include the greatest range possible. While the texts are almost exclusively by British and American writers, they cover topics ranging from video games and comic books to abortion and gun control. The writers themselves are incredibly diverse, including famed Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, Native American Chief Seattle, and author and activist Alice Walker. The texts themselves also range from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. It is my hope that in creating such a diverse syllabus, I can expose my students, as well as myself, to texts that they would not read on their own, but that they can learn a great deal from.

## Conference Paper

### Abstract:

The problem novel, once a staple of young adult literature, has since become all but extinct. Many young adult theorists believe that the field has moved away from these early explorations of social taboos in favor of increasingly more complex characters and plots and in favor of fantastical tales over realistic accounts. However, when it comes to queer young adult novels, the evolution has not been quite as pronounced. For queer youth, the messages of the problem novel were especially detrimental, and thus the decline of the genre came as a welcome relief. Yet, while their modern replacements are undeniably an improvement, the shortcomings of these newly published novels remain clear. This article looks at two recently published queer young adult fantasy novels, Rainbow Rowell's *Carry On* and Francesca Lia Block's *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, in comparison to traditional queer problem novels in order to evaluate whether or not the problem novel is truly a relic of the past. After noting both the similarities and differences between these texts and their predecessors, the paper concludes by suggesting the creation of a new category of young adult literature — the crisis novel.

## Queers in Crisis:

### The Evolution of the Problem Novel in Queer Young Adult Literature

The problem novel is dead; gone are the days of books for teens that narrowly focus on a single social issue. At least that is what most young adult literature theorists would have you believe. Their argument holds that contemporary young adult novels are far more complex and far less didactic than this earlier class of literature. On the surface, this certainly appears to be the case. Characters and plots in contemporary books are noticeably more involved and nuanced. Yet, how far removed are these new novels from their problematic predecessors? Certainly, when it comes to queer characters in young adult novels, sexuality is still often positioned as a problem — although admittedly not as often or severely as in earlier texts. If we compare two contemporary queer young adult novels to two earlier examples, the progress that has been made becomes clear, but so too do the shortcomings.

The origin of the problem novel dates back to the 1960s with the publications of books, such as S.E. Hinton's 1967 classic *The Outsiders*, which openly discussed taboo topics from the perspective of an adolescent for the first time. It was not long before these types of books began to flood the literary market, and they were easy enough for readers to identify. All that readers had to do was look for a couple of features that can be found in most problem novels: a relatable third-person narrator with whom readers could easily identify, physically or emotionally absent parents, and another adult that serves as a mentor (Ross). It was perhaps because of these features, or because of teens' need for information that they could not otherwise find, that problem novels became increasingly popular. In fact, by the 1980s literary theorists of the day were going as far as to say that readers "expect crisis" and publishers were all too happy to meet that expectation (Nelms et al. 102). By the end of the twentieth century, however, it seemed that

teenagers and authors alike were turning away from the problem novel and towards more experimental forms of writing. The reasons for this were manifold. On one hand, television and media portrayals of issues once considered taboo meant that teens no longer had to turn to problem novels for their information (Nilsen). Instead, teens began reading fantastic tales of vampires and faraway lands simply for enjoyment. This was only exacerbated by twenty-first century attempts to censor novels by those who wish to protect children from the very issues that problem novels attempt to expose. Ultimately, these changes have brought us to a point where even the staunchest proponents of the problem novel must now admit defeat.

The death of the problem novel comes as especially good news to queer readers and writers, for whom the effects of the genre have been the most detrimental. Since homosexuality was often regarded as an immoral social issue at the time when the popularity of problem novels was rising, all early queer young adult novels were problem novels. According to Michael Cart and Christine A Jenkins, this conflation between queer young adult novels and problem novels “robbed homosexuals of individuality and perpetuated stereotypes” such as the danger of being queer and that queer people can only live sad and lonely lives (18). The prime example of this is John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*; published in 1969, it is widely regarded as the first young adult novel to explicitly address queerness through its depiction of the growing relationship between Davy Ross and Douglas Altschuler. *I’ll Get There* includes many of the characteristics of problem novels mentioned by Ross, most notably the taboo topic and absentee parents, as well as many of the stereotypes noted by Cart and Jenkins, such as the unhappy queer. When Davy blames the death of his dog on his sexual experimentation with Altschuler and vows that it can never happen again, it marks the start of a long history of problematic queer representation in young adult literature.

Even in novels where crises of sexual identity were not the primary problem addressed in a queer young adult book, it was often the cause. One of the most notable examples of this is Sandra Scoppettone's *Happy Endings Are All Alike*, first published in 1978. Unlike Davy, Jaret and Peggy in *Happy Endings* are completely confident with their sexualities, even if they do not want other people knowing about their relationship. The novel opens with the revelation that Jaret's mother has found out about the two girls and we quickly learn that Peggy's sister is aware of their relationship as well. As a result, both girls are worried about the information being passed on to their fathers. Readers may be quick to think that the rest of the novel will follow the girls' attempts to keep their relationship a secret; while this is a concern in the first half of the novel, the real problem in this novel is slowly revealed through a series of first-person chapters told from the perspective of an unknown narrator.

With the exception of these short chapters, the rest of the novel is told in the third-person style of most other problem novels, making these deviations stand out all the more. The climax of the novel comes when the first-person narrator, who we learn is a friend of Jaret's brother, rapes Jaret because he is angry after being rejected by Jaret and later discovering her relationship with Peggy (Scoppettone 108). This is the climax of the novel and the moment that characters must spend the rest of the book coming to terms with. It is also a moment that is depicted as being a consequence of queerness. *Happy Endings* teaches readers that to be queer is to risk not only their lives, but also the lives of those around them.

In the aftermath of Jaret's rape, she must make the decision of whether or not to press charges against her rapist. Jaret's sexuality results in hardship yet again when she realizes that coming forward also means coming out — for both her and Peggy. Jaret ultimately decides to come forward and does so with the fully support of her family. Yet this moment of acceptance is



overshadowed by the ensuing loss; Jaret loses her relationship with Peggy, Peggy loses whatever was left of her already shambolic relationship with her sister, and Peggy's father loses his job.

The novel ends months before the trial with the two girls reuniting and realizing: "And so what if happy endings didn't exist? Happy moments did" (Scoppettone 178). This is last line of the novel, which is reflected in its title, but is it true for all? Do no happy endings exist or is it just for queer characters and those close to them that happy ending are inaccessible?

If anyone can be seen as having a happy ending in Scoppettone's novel it is not Jaret or Peggy, but Jaret's rapist. He is the only character that Scoppettone gives a voice to; while an unknown narrator provides the readers with the account of Jaret and Peggy's thoughts and experiences, the rapist is given the opportunity to speak to the reader in his own voice throughout the story. In concluding her novel just prior to the trial, Scoppettone robs her readers of the ability to know his fate. However, if we take the opinions of the cops and lawyers into account, the reader has every reason to believe that Jaret's rapist will receive little to no punishment for his crime. After talking with the rapist, the police chief returns to Jaret and her family to urge them not to press charges because, as the narrator states, when "the judge learns that [Jaret is] not a virgin and on top of that she's a les. Well he's not going to think much of her morals" and may decide that she is the one at fault (Scoppettone 151). This moment in *Happy Endings* is just one of many examples of a common trend within queer problem novels; while homophobic characters get to walk away with a happy ending, queer characters must hold onto whatever happy moments they can get because they know that there are not many. It is easy to understand why it is a relief for many queer readers and writers to hear that the problem novel is dead.

The rise of the teen fantasy novel marked a significant shift for queer characters in young adult literature; instead of fighting homophobic classmates and family members, queer characters

began to fight off giants and evil wizards — or if not instead of, at least in addition to. For what was perhaps the first time in the history of young adult novels, the shift away from realism created a space in which queer characters could exist without their sexuality serving as the primary driving force of the novel. In fact, when placed in these situations, queer characters seem to stop thinking about their sexuality almost entirely. Take for example the characters of Simon and Baz in Rainbow Rowell's widely successful 2015 novel *Carry On*. Set in the Harry Potter-esque world of Watford, a magical school akin to Hogwarts, *Carry On* is the story of Simon Snow, the Chosen One who has been prophesized to defeat the Insidious Humdrum, a mysterious wizard who has been sucking magic out of the world.

The secondary plot of the novel sees Simon fighting and eventually developing a relationship with his rival and roommate Baz. As the chapters alternate between the first-person perspectives of Simon and Baz, the readers learn about Simon's attempts to discover the truth about Baz while Baz struggles to come to terms with his feelings for Simon. Baz, who grew up in the world of magic, struggles with self-acceptance in a way reminiscent of the protagonists of problem novels. At one point Baz, who was turned into a vampire by the same people who killed his mother, reveals to the reader that his father is "definitely more disappointed in my queerness than my undeadness" (Rowell 215). Baz's anger comes from a place where he feels that he can never have the love that he desires; his father will never accept him and Simon will never want to be with him. Baz also feels deterred from exploring his sexuality because of his identity as a vampire. While thinking about his desire to kiss Simon, he says that he has never kissed anyone because he has been afraid that he would bite them (Rowell 342). In this sense, Baz is even further from fully embracing his sexuality than even Davy. At least Davy, like many other characters in early queer young adult novels, was able to experiment with his sexuality — if only

in secret. In this fantasy world of wizards and vampires, these supernatural elements seem to get in the way of the characters understanding and expressing their sexual identities. For Baz, it is his existence as a vampire and for Simon it is his destiny as the Chosen One.

Unlike Baz, Simon does not seem to have spent any time at all thinking about his sexuality. Simon, who was raised in the mortal world without magic, is too preoccupied adjusting to the magical world and working to defeat the Humdrum to think about anything else. He simply goes through the motions and does what is expected of him, which includes both trying to save the world and getting a girlfriend. When Simon instinctively kisses Baz as a way to calm him down it comes as a surprise to the both of them. Baz later questions Simon about this and Simon tells him that he does not really have the time to think about his sexuality, or anything else for that matter, because all of his energy must be focused on defeating the Humdrum: “I don’t get to choose or plan. I just take it as it comes” (Rowell 355). Yet, in light of the impending crisis, Simon and Baz cannot take the time to figure out what this kiss means for them. Instead they must figure out a way to defeat the Humdrum, together, and it is only then that Simon can live in this world and still feel “normal,” living his life:

With wings.

And a tail.

And vampires.

And magicians.

And a boy in my arms, instead of a girl. (Rowell 516)

It is interesting that Simon includes dating a boy in the same list as vampires and magicians, and even more interesting that he chooses to state this last. One way of reading the order of this list is that Simon had to first overcome or adjust to the fantastical elements of the list before he can

finally accept the idea of dating a boy instead of a girl. Baz seems to share the same sort of mentality when he tells Simon that he did not believe that both of them would survive Simon being the Chosen One (Rowell 507). So long as Simon had to defeat the Humdrum, he and Baz could not be together. In this statement exists a sort of paradox. The magical crisis that allowed Simon to kiss Baz without even a moment's hesitation is the same obstacle that made it impossible for the two boys to understand what that kiss means.

This is not to say that crises in queer young adult fantasy novels always prohibit characters from embracing their sexuality; in fact, they can often have quite the opposite effect and be exactly the impetus that characters need for self-acceptance. Certainly this is the case in Francesca Lia Block's 2013 novel *Love in the Time of Global Warming*. Block is no stranger to the queer young adult novel, having written the widely successful *Weetzie Bat* series, which was the first to shift away from the realism that was rampant at the time. This time, Block opens her story in a way that is not unlike a traditional problem novel; our protagonist, Pen, spends most of her time reflecting on the loss of her family and friends while also attempting to make sense of her feelings for one of the latter. The only difference is that cause of this loss is something supernatural. A monumental earthquake Pen names the Earthshaker has caused tsunamis large enough to flood her neighborhood and wash her family away.

When a break-in causes her to flee her family home, Pen is thrust into the post-apocalyptic world and sets out to try to find her family, all the while reflecting on her life before the earthquake — a time referred to simply as "Then." Pen spends much of her early travels reflecting on her relationship with her friend Moira and questioning what the secret feelings she held mean. The issue of her sexuality soon becomes inconsequential, however, when she first encounters one of the many giants that have sprung out of the earth during the Earthshaker and

realizes how much danger she is in. Pen simply cannot afford to spend time worrying about her sexuality during an apocalypse. This idea becomes even more apparent when Pen develops feelings for her traveling companion Hex, whom she meets along the way. When Hex admits to Pen that he “wasn’t always a boy,” Pen is far more surprised by Hex saying that he wants to be in a relationship with her, realizing that, as she puts it, “gender seemed irrelevant” (Block 129-130). Pen reflects on her old feelings for her friend and her new feelings for Hex and realizes that there are more important things to worry about than gender and sexuality.

In the reality of “Then,” Pen would likely have put a great deal of effort into trying to understand what her feelings for a transgender man and a cisgender female mean, but, in the fantasy that has become her now, none of that seems to matter. All of the anxiety that Pen experienced about her sexuality disappears when she must face the serious threat of being eaten by a giant or enslaved by a witch. She states, “I stopped worrying about it all in the midst of so much real loss and grief. I had forgotten what I thought about sexuality, except that I liked to be near Hex” (Block 130). Pen talks about how she “stopped worrying,” about her sexuality as if it was a conscious choice that she made; in truth, the reader watches Pen as her thoughts of Moira become increasingly less frequent and are replaced instead with thoughts of how to kill giants and find her, hopefully still alive, family. Pen is forgetting about her sexual anxiety in an unconscious shift that results from the crisis she is currently facing.

Like Simon, Pen is too caught up in her quest to think and instead simply acts on her feelings as she becomes aware of them. Unlike Simon, Pen and Hex enter into a relationship amid all of the chaos. They do not have to wait until Pen reunites with her family or for the giants to be defeated for them to become intimate. Along the way, they are even joined by two teenage boys, Ash and Ez, who start a relationship of their own. Both boys knew they were gay

before the Earthshaker, but in this new world there is long her a need for Ash to worry about his mother catching him and smashing his most prized possessions — he no longer has either (Block 182). While the loss caused by the Earthshaker was great, out of the ashes and debris arose a world of queer potential.

Clearly both of these texts present a significant departure from the early works of authors such as Donovan and Scoppettone. Yet, many of the elements of the problem novel remain. While both Rowell and Block wrote in the first-person perspective of the queer characters, the other problem novel criteria that were previously noted remain present. The characters are all meant to be relatable to the reader. Simon, Baz, and Pen all have absentee parents: Simon is an orphan, Baz's mother is dead, and Pen's parents are both missing. In both books, characters rely on the help of an adult mentor: the headmaster in *Carry On* and Merk in *Love in the Time of Global Warming* — although in both novels, the men turn about to be the protagonist's fathers, adding a modern twist on this trope. Moreover, the characters must face a central conflict as part of their coming-of-age experience. In light of these simulates, we can see that queer young adult literature has not become so far removed from the problem novel as most theorists would have us believe. Certainly, it can be argued that these characteristics are not unique to problem novels and can be found in almost all genres of literature. This is true, but it is the presence of all of these characters together that makes it significant. No, these new books are not problem novels, but they are strongly related, and therefore require a name of their own — the crisis novel. While these crisis novels are undeniably an evolutionary step up from the problem novel, they too are detrimental to the very community of queer young adults that they are trying to benefit.

In both *Carry On* and *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, as well as in many other queer young adult fantasy novels, the crises that characters must face take priority over their

concerns about gender and sexuality. On the one hand, this is a positive development because queer individuals, much like Pen, learn that sexuality does not always have to be a cause of great anxiety. However, this relief from societal pressures does not occur in a world that the reader can find familiar. Readers can relate to the internal conflict that Pen experienced in the world of “Then”, but not to the relief she experiences while fighting off giants. It is likely that authors such as Block and Rowell wished to show a positive queer story and found it easier to do so in a fantasy world. The worlds they create are undeniably uplifting, but they only provide momentary relief. When readers close the novel, they are immediately brought back into the real world. These texts seem to want to say that we have moved beyond the homophobia that predominated the problem novel, but by having a fantastical setting, they instead prove that this is still not quite true. These texts also teach teenagers that they can only deal with one problem, or crisis, at a time. Even Baz, who accepts his queer identity while facing his father’s homophobia, fears exploring his sexuality because he is also a vampire; he cannot accept both identities at the same time. This is problematic because it tells queer readers to put their sexual identity on hold until every other problem is resolved, and this is not often possible. We should certainly be praising crisis novels for their diversity and the progress that they have made, but we must also be acutely aware of their shortcomings.

While crisis novels may not dominate the young adult literature market in the way that problem novels once did, they do represent a significant portion of the field. Therefore, while there are certainly realistic texts that show that positive queer experiences are possible, many teen readers would rather pick up a tale of fantasy and adventure. With the consequences of such a decision now clear, we must hope for a future where queer characters can fight off evil wizards while still being able to discover, develop, and understanding of their sexuality at the same time.

## Works Cited

- Block, Francesca Lia. *Love in the Time of Global Warming*. Square Fish, 2013.
- Cart, Michael and Christine A. Jenkins. *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content 1969-2004*. Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2006.
- Donovan, John. *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*. 1969. Flux, 2010.
- Levy, Michel, and Farah Menlesohn. *Children's Fantasy Literature: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Nelms, Ben, et al. "Young Adult Literature: Children of Crisis, Children of the Times." *The English Journal*, vol. 76, no. 3, 1987, pp. 102–05.
- Nilsen, Alleen Pace. "That Was Then...This Is Now." *School Library Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, Apr. 1994, p. 30.
- Rafael, Lucy. "Are Problem Novels a Problem?" *Independent School*, vol. 64, no. 2, Winter 2005, pp. 98–100.
- Ross, Catherine Sheldrick. "Young Adult Realism: Conventions, Narrators, and Readers." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1985, pp. 174–91.
- Rowell, Rainbow. *Carry On*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2015.
- Scoppettone, Sandra. *Happy Endings Are All Alike*. 1978. Lizzie Skurnick Books, 2014.



**Call for Papers**a service provided by [www.english.upenn.edu](http://www.english.upenn.edu)

search

[FAQ](#)  
[changelog](#)[2018 \(/cfp/2018\)/02](#)[\(/cfp/2018/02\)/05](#)[\(/cfp/2018/02/05\)](#)[-](#) [-](#) [-](#) [-](#) [print](#) [-](#)[flag as inappropriate \(/node/add/flag/75081\)](#)

## Reading Young Adult Fiction

**deadline for submissions:** March 9, 2018**full name / name of organization:**

Sean Donnelly / University of Birmingham

**contact email:**[sdd338@bham.ac.uk](mailto:sdd338@bham.ac.uk) (<mailto:sdd338@bham.ac.uk>)

Reading YA Fiction Symposium, Thursday 24th May, Westmere House, University of Birmingham

YA Fiction has boomed in popularity in the twenty first century, from blockbuster franchises *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* to critically acclaimed works by authors including Phillip Pullman, Patrick Ness and Malorie Blackman. Once valued primarily as a pedagogic tool, YA is beginning to emerge from the shadow of Children's Literature to become an exciting field of study in its own right. Critics including Roberta Trites, Robyn McCallum, Allison Waller and Crag Hill have produced complex theoretical readings of YA, establishing the groundwork for specialist scholarship in this area.

*Reading YA* seeks to provide a space for discussion of YA as a significant field of cultural production. There is a growing number of YA specialists in the UK, and we hope this event will provide a space for discussion and dissemination of this research.

The confirmed keynote is Maria Nikolajeva, a Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge, renowned internationally for her work on children's and YA literature.

Suggested topics may include but are not limited to:

- Literary theory and YA
- Historical accounts of YA from the 1940s to the contemporary
- YA and convergence culture: fandom and readership studies
- Genre theory and YA
- Analysis of YA sub-genres (romance, dystopia, horror, comedy, fantasy)
- YA and narratives/theories of adolescence
- #WeNeedDiverseBooks: representation of race and ethnicity in YA
- #OwnVoices in YA: how YA functions as a space for the conveyance of marginalised perspectives
- YA and LGBTQ+

The event will form part of a two-day event on YA at the University of Birmingham. The second, 'Writing YA' will take place on Friday May 25th and will involve YA authors discussing their experiences of writing, publishing, and reading in

a series of workshops and author events. Delegates are encouraged to attend both in order to participate in an exciting discussion of YA between readers and writers.

We welcome abstracts of no more than 200-words for 20-minute papers from across subject areas including film, television, literature, education and psychology. We are also open to ideas for panels on the above or related topics. The symposium invites papers from academics, early career researchers, postgraduate research students and undergraduates alike.

Please send all abstracts to [sdd338@bham.ac.uk](mailto:sdd338@bham.ac.uk) (<mailto:sdd338@bham.ac.uk>).

The deadline for submission of abstracts is Friday 9th of March 2018.

### categories

<a href="/category/childrens-literature">childrens literature (/category/childrens-literature)</a>	<a href="/category/fan-studies-and-fandom">fan studies and fandom (/category/fan-studies-and-fandom)</a>
<a href="/category/film-and-television">film and television (/category/film-and-television)</a>	<a href="/category/gender-studies-and-sexuality">gender studies and sexuality (/category/gender-studies-and-sexuality)</a>
<a href="/category/popular-culture">popular culture (/category/popular-culture)</a>	

---

Last updated February 21, 2018

This CFP has been viewed 1,501 times.

# Queers in Crisis

The Evolution of the Problem Novel in Queer Young Adult Literature

## What Will Be Discussed

- ▶ The rise and fall of the problem novel
- ▶ The implications for queer teens
- ▶ Examples of queer problem novels
- ▶ An examination of queer young adult fantasy novels
- ▶ Defining the crisis novel
- ▶ A new set of implications
- ▶ Final thoughts
- ▶ Lingering questions

## Criteria for a Problem Novel

- ▶ Narrow focus on a social issue often considered taboo
- ▶ A relatable narrator readers can identify with
  - ▶ Often not the character facing the problem
- ▶ Physically or emotionally absent parents
- ▶ Another adult that serves as a mentor

## The Rise of the Problem Novel

- ▶ Originated in the 1960s
  - ▶ Example: *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton (1967)
- ▶ More realistic and complex than earlier YA books
- ▶ Taught teens about issues that were rarely discussed
- ▶ Reached peak popularity in the 1980s

## The Fall of the Problem Novel

- ▶ Significant decline in popularity at the turn of the century
- ▶ Television programs began covering previously taboo topics
- ▶ The rise of fantasy novels
- ▶ Movements to censor novels deemed inappropriate

## Implications for Queer Teens

- ▶ Homosexuality widely regarded as wrong in problem novels
- ▶ Queerness often depicted as a phase
- ▶ Queer characters were often harshly punished
- ▶ Taught that queer individuals are never happy

## Queer Problem Novels: *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*

- ▶ Written by James Donovan
- ▶ First published in 1969
- ▶ Meets many of the criteria for a problem novel
- ▶ Davy blames his dog's death on his sexual experimentation
- ▶ He decides that it can never happen again
- ▶ Set the tone for queer young adult novels that followed

## Queer Problem Novels: *Happy Endings Are All Alike*

- ▶ Written by Sandra Scoppettone
- ▶ Published in 1978
- ▶ Jaret and Peggy are shown having a happy relationship
- ▶ Shows the negative consequences of being queer
  - ▶ Jaret is raped as a result of her sexuality
  - ▶ Peggy and her family suffer when Jaret comes forward
  - ▶ Rapist most likely escapes punishment

## A Queer Fantasy: *Carry On*

- ▶ Written by Rainbow Rowell
- ▶ Published in 2015
- ▶ Simon, the Chosen One, has no time to think
- ▶ Baz, a vampire, does not think he can act
- ▶ Only once the crisis is dealt with can they be together
- ▶ Fantasy as both an impetus and impediment

## A Queer Fantasy: *Love in the Time of Global Warming*

- ▶ Written by Francesca Lia Block
- ▶ Published in 2013
- ▶ Pen worried about her sexuality before the apocalypse
- ▶ Now, she is too busy fighting giants to think about it
- ▶ This new world seems to reward queer people

## A Problem or a Crisis?

### Problem Novel

- ▶ Realistic Fiction
- ▶ Third-person
- ▶ Reliable, relatable narrator
- ▶ Absentee parents
- ▶ Adult role model
- ▶ Queer punishment

### Crisis Novel

- ▶ Fantasy
- ▶ First-person
- ▶ Reliable, relatable narrator
- ▶ Absentee parents
- ▶ Adult role model
- ▶ Queer Potential

## A New Set of Implications

- ▶ Queerness is presented in a positive light
- ▶ Fantasy makes it harder for readers to relate
- ▶ Readers must eventually return to the real world
- ▶ Implication that sexuality can only be dealt with last



## Final Thoughts

- ▶ Crisis novels are beneficial and play an important role
- ▶ Readers who enjoy fantasy may not read realistic fiction
- ▶ Next step: fighting giants AND discovering sexual identity

Questions?

## Annotated Bibliography:

The distinction between childhood and adolescence is a fairly recent development, and the earliest young adult literature dates back less than a hundred years. As such, my research in queer adolescence has focused solely on modernist thought and contemporary literature. The earliest text that I have worked with outside the requirements for a class is *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, which was first published in 1928. Basing my views in a historicist approach, I believed that anything earlier than this was too far removed from modern conceptions of sexuality to be relevant to my research. In the past, I have used this as an excuse to write off earlier time periods and only focus on my own. However, I have come to realize that, even if notions of sexuality were not the same, an understanding of the past can only help with my understanding of sexuality in the present.

This bibliography is the result of that realization. While ideally, I would have focused on early representations of adolescence, the historical conceptions of maturation and the resulting lack of material on historical adolescence meant that I had to work with queer representation more broadly. I decided to include texts starting from the Middle Ages, through the Early Modern period, and into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the texts are either from or about Europe, with a particular focus on England, but I also included a few texts that focus on American history. While I still do not think that I will work within the time periods that this bibliography covers, I do believe that it is a useful resource. I can imagine giving it to students to show them that, although what I am teaching them focuses only on the past hundred years, queer history goes back much farther and is far more complex than modern notions reflect. The resource that I have created is an introductory overview of queer history that reflects my growing understanding of the past and can be used by others as a guide or a springboard for further exploration. I also believe that it can be a tool for queer history scholars to help them to get a sense of the other periods and how theirs fits into the larger history.

The idea for this bibliography was initially to give an overview of queer history in the periods that I decided to cover. However, as I started reading through some of the texts from each period, I began to see the way that the authors took different approaches to their work. Susan Lanser, for example, creates space between the people that she is studying and modern identities by referring to her subjects as “saphists.” In comparison, while Emma Donoghue acknowledges the differences between her subjects — some of which overlap with Lanser — and modern individuals, she chooses to refer to everyone that she discusses as “lesbians.” These differences made me realize that in order to understand queer history I had to first understand the ways in which history becomes queered. I included David M. Halperin’s *How to do the History of Homosexuality* for this very reason. Halperin directly addresses the divide between essentialists and social constructionists and the ways in which historicists build on constructionist ideologies. In the final chapter of his book, Halperin even provides readers with his idea of what the proper way to go about constructing and understanding the history of sexuality. While Halperin focuses specifically on male homosexuality in this chapter, his work is

a useful tool for understanding how different queer historical scholars conceptualize their work. We can therefore use Halperin as the starting point for constructing queer history and continue on through the various historical periods.

While queer history goes back as far as history itself, I chose to start my bibliography with the Middle Ages. I did this both because it would be impossible to cover every period in fifteen sources, and because it is from this point forward that historians truly begin to work with texts written in English. Since this is the earliest period, and therefore the most removed from modern conceptions, I chose to include only one secondary source about it — Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval*. I chose this text because it was the most comprehensive overview of the period that I could find. Dinshaw talks about both men and women and relates the current importance of doing the work of reclaiming and rebuilding queer history.

Moving onto the Early Modern period, I selected Lanser's *The Sexuality of History* and Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*. These two texts complement each other because Bray is primarily concerned with male homosexuality and Lanser focuses exclusively on women. Both of these authors also attempt to make theoretical contributions and seem to be arguing for their own unique approaches to queer history.

For the eighteenth century, Norton's *Mother Clap's Molly House* brings attention to the queer communities that we already beginning to form. Norton shows that queer identity and subculture dates much further back than most people would assume. Emma Donogue, though published almost two decades earlier, adds on to Lanser's work by bringing women to the forefront of queer history. Donoghue focuses on a smaller window of time than Lanser, but provides a deeper look at the years that Lanser did not focus on as closely.

As I moved into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I realized that I was more familiar with some of the material. Because of this peripheral familiarity and the fact that this is the most recent century I included, I again chose to use only one secondary source; this time I selected *Strangers* by Graham Robb, a text that offers a detailed look at various aspects of queer history throughout Europe and America in the 1800s. Robb also offers a critique that was unique to me, arguing against some of the very methods that other historians in this bibliography use — such as the reliance on court documents.

The final period that I wanted to study in this bibliography was Early American. I selected *A Queer History of the United States* by Michael Bronski because, even though Bronski's history goes much farther than early America, I found the arguments that he was making to be quite compelling. Since Robb provides an overview of queer American history, I selected Rachel Hope Cleave's case study of Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake as a complement. Not only does Cleave's examination of the relationship between these two women in the early 1800s provide the most in-depth look at a single subject than any other source in this bibliography, but it also challenges the claims of many lesbian history scholars that relationships between women in early periods were largely unknown to the public.

For all of the periods I focused on, with the exception of Early American, I also selected a primary source to analyze. I chose a text from each period that I believed best reflected the content in the secondary sources. I chose the *Canterbury Tales*, because it is a text that many people are already familiar with and because it is one of the few from the period that was written in English. For the remaining three primary texts — *Galatea*, *No Priest But Love*, and *Love Letters Between a Certain Late Nobleman and the famous Mr. Wilson* — I tried to select texts that were equally as compelling but not as well known. I felt that it was important to include these primary texts in addition to the secondary texts because it allowed me, and others who might use this bibliography, to form opinions that are not reliant on the ideas of other historians.

Lastly, I wanted to include trans history within my larger focus of queer history. Because trans studies is a more recent field than queer studies, and trans history is an even more recent subfield, there are fewer texts that offer overviews of the various periods as there are with lesbian and gay history. For this reason, I chose to use Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* in order to provide a detailed overview. I also chose to include C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides* because it offers a more theoretical look at trans history than Stryker and because it also takes on race as a central issue. While some of the other sources in this list mention race, only Snorton takes an explicit interest in the way that blackness and queerness intersect.

If I was able to include more sources, I would have made sure to include authors who paid more attention to the intersections of queerness with other factors such as race and class. I would have also included non-Western histories. In attempting to create an overview of queer history with fifteen sources, it is inevitable that some issues will be given greater attention than others, and some will be left off entirely, but this bibliography has helped me to understand the importance of queer history and it is something that I will continue to take interest in.

Bray, Alan. *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*. 1982. Columbia University Press, 1996.

As one of the first scholar focused on homosexuality in the Early Modern Period, Bray has not only helped create the field, but continues to shape it today. Focusing exclusively on males, Bray explores the way homosexuality was addressed in literature and official documents as well as the way it functioned within society. Bray begins by exploring the way in which sodomy and buggery, the two terms used at the time to describe male same-sex sex acts, differ from modern conceptions of homosexuality. He goes on to describe how the sodomite was often coupled with the heretic and the sorcerer, arguing that this coupling shows a fear of sodomy and the use the sodomite as a scapegoat for misfortune. Despite this, Bray reveals evidence that male-male sex acts were indeed quite common in society — especially in the systems of prostitution, large households, and schools. Bray reconciles this seeming disparity by arguing that most people who performed these acts did not view themselves as sodomites and the widespread fear of sodomy allowed the system as a whole to seemingly erase the existence of these acts. In doing so, Bray makes an argument for the proper way of creating queer history.

Bronski, Michael. *A Queer History of the United States*. Beacon Press, 2011.

In his attempt to answer the question of what LGBT+ history in America looks like, Bronski arrives at the answer queer history is American history. Through his broad and expansive history, from 1492 to 1990, he argues that the same events that shaped mainstream history also shaped queer history and that the two are inextricably linked. Bronski begins his history prior to Columbus' arrival in America, stating that gender and sexuality were far more fluid in many Native American communities and that the puritans who came to colonial America used this "hypersexualization" to other the Native Americans and justify their actions. Puritan ideologies at this time resulted in the idea of separate spheres for men and women and, through this, the creation of homosocial spaces and ideals about gender roles. Bronski traces how these gender roles changed as a result of developments such as westward expansion and industrialization. The two biggest contributions of this text, however, are the links he makes between developments in queer history and war as well as the emphasis on the power of entertainment media in shaping public opinions.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Circa 1400-1410. Edited by Nevill Coghill, Penguin Classics, 2003.

Queer readings of the *Canterbury Tales* have largely focused on the Pardoner. The Pardoner, widely disliked for his deceitful ways, shares a tale of three men who set out to kill Death but are ultimately betrayed by their greed and kill each other instead. The

queer potential of the Pardoner is first evident in his description during the prologue as being “a geldyng or a mare” — a eunuch or a feminine man. Both of these options strip the Pardoner of his masculinity, and when placed in the context of medieval understandings of same-sex sex acts, show that Chaucer may indeed have created the Pardoner to be a queer character. The Pardoner’s queer potential is seen in his tale as well. The Pardoner focuses his tale on the homosocial, and seems to take a particular interest in the male body. Other queer readings of the Pardoner focus on his potentially sexual relationship with the Summoner and with the fact that his tale ends with a kiss between the Host and him. While it is impossible to say with certainty whether or not Chaucer intended the Pardoner to be read in such a way, these analyses prove to be quite fruitful.

Cleaves, Rachel Hope. *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Weaving together large array of archival material such as diaries letters and news clippings, Cleaves sheds light on the lives of Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake, two women who lived together as a couple outside of Boston for forty-four years after first meeting in 1807. While evidence from what is left of their diaries shows that both women struggled to reconcile their actions with their faith, records indicate that their neighbors and families were rather accepting. In fact, at least one of their neighbors referred to them as being married and Charity’s nephew, romantic poet William Cullen Bryant, even wrote publicly about their relationship. Cleaves attributes this acceptance to their rural community and the fact that the women separately took on the rational roles of husband and wife. Through telling this story of an early same-sex marriage, Cleaves challenges the notion of the closet, claiming that it is a product of selected ignorance as opposed to secrecy. Cleaves also challenges the common historical belief that queer individuals and relationships were always kept secret or that no one believed such relationships to be sexual.

Donoghue, Emma. *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801*. Harper Perennial, 1996.

Donoghue opens with examples from the life of Queen Anne that show the various ways “passion” was used at the time — both to reflect strong friendship and romantic/sexual feelings between women. This makes it difficult for scholars to study lesbian history at the period because they have to be expansive without being too broad. In studying female passion in the long eighteenth century, Donoghue wishes to challenge the notion that women did not have a means of discussing their attraction to other women. Looking at historical and literary documents, she points out a number of identities and groups in

which female passion was expressed, including: female crossdressers, hermaphrodites, and Sapphic communities. She takes particular interest in the tribade, a woman believed to have an enlarged clitoris and therefore capable of loving women, and female husbands, women who would cross-dress and marry other women. Donoghue uses the term lesbian to refer to these disparate identities, but acknowledges that they are categorically different from the modern lesbian, thus creating a lesbian history without an essentialist argument.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Duke University Press, 1999.

While primarily a queer analysis of historical and literary documents from 1390 to 1430, *Getting Medieval* also argues for the usefulness of queer historicism in understanding the cultural ideology of the present and future. Dinshaw begins by analyzing the way various other queer historicists, such as Foucault and Boswell, approach their work and showing the impossibility of a singular history. Dinshaw spends the majority of the text exploring the queer potential of texts including the *Canterbury Tales*, court documents concerning the trail of John/Eleanor Rykener, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. She does not distinguish between fictional and historical accounts, stating that both provide meaningful insight into the past. Moreover, Dinshaw seems to subvert the constructionist/essentialist divide, arguing that the real value of queer historical work is the way in which the past informs the present. Dinshaw focuses on the formation of communities, such as Lollards, and how community formation can often be paradoxical. In the final chapter, Dinshaw shifts her focus to contemporary society and argues that the unique skillset of queer medievalists can be incredibly useful to contemporary cultural studies.

Halperin, David M. *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. University of Chicago Press, 2002.

In this collection of essays, Halperin situates himself within the constructionist-essentialist debate of what a history of homosexuality looks like, building upon his previous writings in order to come to a revolutionary conclusion. In “Forgetting Foucault,” Halperin analyzes how overusing Foucault’s writings has led to misinterpretation and lack of nuance, arguing for a more critical engagement with him. “The First Homosexuality?” analyzes the various historical uses of the word “lesbian,” comparing it to other historically specific terms such as kinkaidos and tribadism. In doing so, Halperin not only argues for a social-constructionist approach, but one that is more inclusive of women. In “Historicizing the Subject of Desire,” Halperin returns to Foucault in order to question the validity of addressing sexuality as a discourse and draws attention to the ways in which different historical mentalities have prescribed meaning to

the body. Lastly, “How to Do the History of Male Sexuality” traces the history of four distinct categories — effeminacy, paederasty or “active” sodomy, friendship or male love, and passivity or inversion — in order to show how they are related to, but distinct from, homosexuality. These essays work together to show that a social-constructionist approach can, and should, still acknowledge continuities throughout time.

Lanser, Susan S. *The Sexuality of History: Modernity and the Sapphic, 1565-1830*. University of Chicago Press, 2014.

In this text, Lanser builds off of Foucault’s notion that sexual identity is dependent on historical circumstances and flips it to argue that history, and indeed society, is more indebted to sexuality than most scholars believe. Looking back at public documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, she states that female same-sex desire has continually helped to shape notions of what it means to be modern. The text focuses on women because, as Lanser argues, general queer history has largely focused on men and therefore made it the default and a look at the history of female sexuality is an essential contrition to both queer and women’s studies. Lanser’s use of the word “saphic” in referring to this period shows that she is acknowledging that these identities and behaviors were “lesbian-like,” but also distinctly different from how we conceive of lesbians today. After studying a number of texts from across Europe, Lanser concludes by stating that the representation of the sapphic as a modern development in all of these disparate moments to show the political power of sapphism and that modern interests are not new, merely reconceived.

Lyly, John. “Galatea.” 1588 *Galatea and Midas*, edited by George K. Hunter and David Bevington, Manchester University Press, 2007.

In a small village where every five years the fairest virgin must be sacrificed to Neptune as retribution for the destruction of his temple, two fathers decide to dress up their daughters as men and hide them in the woods. The two daughters, Galatea and Phillida, find each other in the woods and are immediately drawn to one another. Both are unsure of how to act around the other and, while they are aware that something is not entirely right, begin to develop feelings. At the end of the play, the truth of the deception is revealed, but both young women are still in love. Venus offers to turn one of the women into a man so that their relationship might be more acceptable, but the audience never learns which girl is transformed. The play is open to a number of different queer readings. It is easy to read the two girls as lesbians; however, this reading is complicated by the crossdressing and transformation, which ultimately opens the play to a trans



reading. A gay male reading of the play is also possible since both girls are dressed as men and would have been played by boys.

*Love Letters Between a Certain Late Nobleman and the Famous Mr. Wilson*. 1723. Edited by Michael S Kimmel, Harrington Park Press, 1990.

Published anonymously, *Love Letters* purports to be the true correspondence between Edward Wilson and an older nobleman, accompanied with commentary. Wilson was a young man who seemed to live beyond his means and was killed in a duel in 1694. While the letters claim to provide an explanation as to how Wilson was able to support his lavish lifestyle, historians have been able to find no evidence to validate the letters. Regardless of whether the document is fact or fiction, it still serves as an insightful means through which to understand the way homosexuality was regarded at the turn of the eighteenth century. The letters and commentary show evidence of the underground lifestyle of men such as Wilson and the nobleman. Throughout the letters the men both express fear that the other will leave them for a woman and take turns admitting their contempt for the opposite sex. Wilson is also seen crossdressing to be able to visit the nobleman more freely. Through the letters, readers can see the way in which a supposed homosexuality identity was beginning to take shape in the 1700s – an identity marked by effeminacy and misogyny.

Norton, Rictor, *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England 1700-1830*. 1992. The Chalford Press, 2006.

Beginning with the premise that we can indeed ascribe modern terminology to past groups of people, Norton explores what he calls the “gay subculture” that was discovered in and around London in the 1700s. Norton illustrates common occurrences of the time, such as the existence of molly houses, the use of “maiden names” and the existence of marriage ceremonies to prove that this subculture was nearly identical to queer existence at the time of his writing. He compares the mollies of the 1700s to the modern gay male and dismisses the social constructionist model of sexual identity. Primarily through the use of legal documents, Norton traces the development of this group, referring to King James as a homosexual and tracing the influence of the Buggery Act and the Society for the Restoration of Manners. Norton also uses the lampooning of public figure Lord Hervey, who was said to have been not male nor female, to stake claim to an early belief in a third sex. While Norton provides a thorough glimpse of lifestyles during this time, he is limited in his use of modern terminology and therefore fails to see important distinctions between then and the time he was writing.

Robb, Graham. *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.

Robb opens with the anecdote of the prejudice he experienced while writing this book to show that our contemporary culture is not as accepting of queer issues as many people claim. This text challenges the progress narrative of LGBT history, stating that most time periods are more similar than different; in all of the periods Robb studied, for example, there was a common misconception that homosexuality had become more prevalent than ever before. Focusing on 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America, *Strangers* explores the history of both male and female homosexuality. In his first section, Robb argues against the use of court documents as evidence of queer history. He states that these cases are far from common and often overly generalized by historians, using as an example the trial of Oscar Wilde where indecency was the true issue and Wilde received wide-scale public support. Of greater value to Robb, however, is the creation of homosexual commutes – both through coded communication and in locations such as bathhouses. Robb concludes by arguing that, despite popular belief, homosexuality was far from invisible and actually made a lasting impact on society and culture through the works of authors such as Gautier and Balzac.

Snorton, C. Riley. *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

After a brief preface in which Snorton begins to theorize the way in which discussions of contemporary violence against transgender people of color are shaped, he goes on to discuss the construction of black and transgender identities more broadly. Snorton uses a postcard depicting two, supposedly male, crossdressing performers circa 1900 as a symbol of his larger project, stating that, while we believe these identity categories to be fixed, this is not the case. Basing his arguments in Claire Colebrook's idea that transivity is the condition through which identity categories emerge, Snorton looks at moments of transition within the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Snorton looks at a vast number of historical instances, such as the gynecological experimentation of J. Marion Sims, but claims that *Black on Both Sides* is not meant to be a history. Instead, he is interested in the historical erasure of certain facts and figures in order to create a conceptualized identity category — especially as it relates to blackness and transness individually and in relation to one another.

Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, Revised Edition. Seal Press, 2017.

In *Transgender History*, esteemed transgender studies academic Susan Stryker provides a general history of the transgender movement in America beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After placing trans studies within the realms of feminist and queer movements, Stryker begins her history with the case of Thomas(ine) Hall, who spent time living as both a man and a woman in the 1620s. She then quickly shifts to the rise of trans\* identities in the 1900s, exploring the history of early trans individuals such as Christine Jorgensen, the first transwomen to undergo sex-reassignment-surgery. Stryker continues her history by talking about early protests such as the Compton's Cafeteria Riot and the Stonewall Riot of the 1960s and the backlash that these moments resulted in during the 1970s. It was not until the 1990s, according to Stryker, that social attitudes truly began to change and a substantial Trans\* movement began. In this second edition to Stryker's monumental work, she adds a final chapter that explores trans\* issues — such as bathroom bills — in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. While *Transgender History*, is intended for a wider audience and is therefore less theoretical, it continues to be a significant text for the understanding of transgender history.

Whitbread, Helena, editor. *No Priest But Love: The Journals of Anne Lister from 1824-1826*. New York University Press, 1993.

Anne Lister was a landowning woman from Yorkshire, England who lived from 1791-1840. Throughout her life, she kept extensive diaries that provide a detailed look at her life, with a particular focus on her romantic and sexual encounters with women. This particular edited volume is comprised of Lister's diary entries from 1824-1826; during this time, Lister visits Paris and develops a relationship with the widowed Maria Barlow while still trying to reconcile her feelings for the married Marianna Lawton. Knowing that she will soon come into her uncle's estate, Lister wishes to find a woman with whom she can spend the rest of her life. While flirting and intimacy between women was not uncommon at the time, Lister goes beyond this and fully embraces her sexuality. She was aware of the negative connotations of such a romantic identity, as evident by her writing the more intimate moments of her diary in code, but her blatant avowal of her love for women have led historians to refer to her as "the first modern lesbian." A trans reading of Lister's diary is also possible as Lister reveals her desire to take on the role of a husband for Barlow.

## SYLLABUS:

At the core of my teaching philosophy is the belief that knowledge flows in all directions, not just from instructor to student. I firmly believe that it is the responsibility of educators to encourage their students' own thinking and refrain from simply lecturing to them. This model of teaching stands in direct contrast to the banking model of education named and criticized by educational philosopher Paulo Freire. The banking model, which imagines that a lecturer deposits knowledge into the students as if depositing money into a bank, was the prevalent approach to teaching for many years and is, unfortunately, still common today. The field of English, perhaps more than any other discipline, provides educators with the ability, and therefore the responsibility, to leave this outdated tradition behind in favor of student-first, constructivist-based educational praxis.

I try to implement these ideologies in my teaching by spending the majority of the class engaged in critical conversations. For this reason, I find it beneficial to include a number of different topics on the syllabus whenever possible so that students have more opportunities work with materials in which they are interested. In some of the classes that I have taught, I have found it effective to have students select readings that they are interested in and ask them to facilitate class discussion on the day when that reading is assigned. Doing so allows students to bring their perspective of the reading into class instead of relying on mine. Even when I do not use this strategy, I make sure that I am facilitating the conversation, helping it along when necessary, but otherwise allowing the students' voices to lead and guide what we discuss. I also think that it is important to keep in mind that not all students feel comfortable engaging in large discussions and to accommodate the needs of different learners in the classroom. Some strategies that I have found effective have been starting with small group or paired discussions before transitioning into larger groups or giving students time to put their thoughts on paper before discussions. I have also begun to implement technology into my classes, asking students to post their thoughts on blogs or discussion boards.

If there is one thing that I learned from the education classes that I took in order to obtain my certification as a secondary English teacher, it is the importance of scaffolding. An instructor cannot simply give students an assignment and expect to receive quality results; instead, educators must provide students with low-stakes opportunities to work towards their final project. In my classes, I incorporate these opportunities through in-class writing exercises and drafting. For each major assignment, I make sure to include on the syllabus dates for students to turn in at least one draft, sometimes more, so that they can receive feedback on their work. I have my students peer-review and provide feedback on each other's work in addition to providing them with my own feedback. I also like to give my students the additional opportunity to re-submit one of their final papers by the end of the semester for additional credit. While I make this optional, many of the students take advantage of the opportunity, and I often find that their essays improve significantly as a result of the added round of editing. One assignment that I include in all of the classes that I teach is reflection posts following each assignment. I ask students to reflect on the work they did for the assignment and the progress that they feel they have made in the class. These posts are short but allow the students to take a moment and truly

consider their growth instead of simply moving on to the next assignment. Together with the scaffolding of the assignments, I have found that the students leave the class with a better understanding of themselves as writers.

Another core part of my teaching philosophy is the belief that educators must always keep in mind that their students have responsibilities outside of the classroom. As someone who has been both a student and an educator in the CUNY system, this is something that I have experienced firsthand. Because CUNY is the largest urban university system in the country, a majority of CUNY students have jobs in addition to being a student or families that it is their responsibility to care for. As an educator, I try to be mindful of this when deciding on the course workload. I am careful only to assign as much reading for each class as I believe necessary for discussion and other in-class activities I have planned. I also plan my lessons for each day with the assumption that not every student was able to complete all of the reading. This assumption allows the class to function regardless of whether or not everyone knows what was in the readings. As a result, students who would otherwise be disengaged in the class are able to actively participate and learn.

Recently, I have also become interested in open educational resources. It seems that the use of these free online texts are starting to become more prevalent in academia, and I believe that this is rightfully so. Being aware of the students that you are teaching means knowing that not all students can afford to spend hundreds of dollars on course texts each semester and that the material needs of a class are often the reason students choose whether or not to enroll in a specific course. OER provide an answer to this problem. Of course, not all subjects currently allow for OER, but these texts and other media forms are becoming increasingly available. Moreover, even if not every text in a course can be replaced by OER, cutting the cost even slightly can make a significant difference to students. While I am still new to the world of OER, it is my plan to work towards every course that I teach having zero textbook cost. I truly believe that this will be a benefit to all students and help to promote learning. Through the incorporation of these beliefs into my teaching practice, I hope to create courses where students leave believing that they learned and grew as individuals. Ultimately, it is my belief that the job of an educator is not to teach, but to help students learn.

## ENGLISH 111: INTRODUCTION TO COLLEGE WRITING

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

ENG 111 is an introductory course designed to help you transition to college-level writing. Throughout the semester, you will engage in writing that is both personal and social. You will be given opportunities to express your own ideas and then to put these perspectives in conversation with others' ideas. In this section of English 111, we will be taking on the theme of "coming out." The term coming out is used by members of the LGBTQ+ community to refer to the process of revealing one's gender or sexuality identity — either to one's self or to others. While we will discuss gender and sexuality in this class, our focus is much broader. If we take the general meaning of coming out to be revealing a part of one's identity, then it becomes clear that coming out is something we are all required to do time and time again. College especially is a time where we attempt to discover who we are and have more freedom over our own choices, such as what courses to take and what major to select. During this semester, we will use the course readings and assignments as a means of studying various aspects of identity, and in doing so perhaps come away with a greater understanding of our own sense of self.

### COURSE GOALS:

- Students will be able to engage critically with non-fiction texts
- Students will participate in respectful, academic discussions on a wide array of topics
- Students will understand various rhetorical strategies and learn how to integrate them into their own writing
- Students will begin to write at a college level, following the process of: draft, proofread, and revise
- Students will explore various aspects of identity in the readings as well as in themselves.

### COURSE TEXTS

The required text for this course is ***The Norton Reader: Shorter Fourteenth Edition***

ISBN: 978-0393617412

Note: You are required to bring a copy of the reading to class with you each day, along with the materials necessary to take notes in class; a flash drive to save your work on is also recommended but not required

### COURSE POLICIES

**Attendance:** Because of the nature of this class, attendance is incredibly important. Please try not to miss any classes, but I understand that everyone has lives outside of our classroom. If you do need to miss class please reach out to me so that I can help you with any content that you may have missed.

**Academic Integrity:** This class is meant to help you become a better writer and I do not expect any of your writing to be perfect. All writing should be your own and there is no need to plagiarize. This college has a strict no- plagiarism policy and if you are caught it can result in failure of the course or even dismissal from the college. Please talk to me if you are not sure what constitutes as plagiarism.

**Accommodation and Accessibility:** If you are in need of accommodations such as a note-taker, interpreter etc., please contact the Office of Student Accessibility. Once registered with the office, please let me know and we can work together to make sure that you receive whatever accommodations you may need. If you are in need of assistance but do not qualify for the Office of Student Accessibility please let me know and I will try my best to help.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

In this class, you will complete four formal writing assignments. The order of the assignments is purposeful in that the skills you develop in one assignment will be necessary for successive assignments as well. By the end of the course, you will move from personal writing, to analyzing a text, to incorporating a text together with your own opinions in order to create an academically sound argument.

**Reflexive Narrative:** A personal narrative that provides details on a specific personal experience or set of experiences related to the course themes of identity and coming out. **750-1000 words.**

**Critical Analysis:** A summary of the rhetorical and linguistic strategies that an author uses in one of the course texts. These strategies should then be analyzed in an evaluation of the text's argument and whether or not it is successful. **1000-1250 words.**

**Weighing In:** This is your longest assignment for the course. You will summarize to sources that touch on the course theme, putting the two sources in conversation with one another and with your own ideas and perspective in order to form an argument. **1500-1750 words.**

**Rewind and Re-envision:** Your final formal assignment for this course entails two parts. First, a re-envisioning of a previous assignment for a different audience. Second, a reflection that describes the audience, purpose, and genre of the re-envisioned text. **750-1000 words.**

**Reflection Posts:** In addition to the formal assignments, you are required to write a brief reflection posted to the course Blackboard site by the class following the completion of each formal essay. You should use this reflection to think about your work on the essay and your growth in the class. **150-200 words each.**

**NOTE:** You will be given the chance to revise one final essay for the chance at an increased grade on that assignment of up to one letter grade (eg. B-> A) due by the end of the semester.

**GRADING POLICY:**

- Reflective Narrative: 15% of Final Grade
- Critical Analysis: 20% of Final Grade
- Weighing In: 30% of Final Grade
- Rewind and Re-envision: 15% of Final Grade
- Reflection Posts 10% of Final Grade
- Participation\* 10% of Final Grade

\*To receive full credit for participation, students should come to class each day having read the material assigned for that day and ready to engage in discussions and other activities pertaining to what they read. Participation also entails completion and active engagement in all in-class activities. . Should there be any reason that hinders your ability to participate, please speak with me and we will work together to resolve the situation.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **Identity:**

- Aug. 28 Introduction to the course. Review of syllabus
- Aug. 30 Frazier pp. 59-65; Skloot pp. 495-499; Hughes pp. 547-548
- Sep. 04 Didion pp. 1-3; Barry pp. 166-168; Weiwiora pp. 189-172

### **Reading and Writing:**

- Sep. 06 Intro pp. xvix-xxxvii; Franklin pp. 290-293  
\*\*\*\* First Draft of Reflective Narrative Due\*\*\*\*
- Sep. 11 **NO CLASS**
- Sep. 13 Intro pp. xxxvii-lxi
- Sep. 18 **NO CLASS**
- Sep. 20 Welter pp. 509-514; Nabokov pp. 515-519  
\*\*\*\* Second Draft of Reflective Narrative Due\*\*\*\*

### **Education:**

- Sep. 25 Zinsser pp. 256-261; Rodriguez pp. 274-279
- Sep. 27 Graff pp. 237-241; Douglas pp. 228-232  
\*\*\*\*Final Draft of Reflective Narrative Due\*\*\*\*

### **Hardship and Tragedy:**

- Oct. 02 Walker pp. 22-26; Lewis pp. 183-190
- Oct. 04 Sanders pp. 36-46; Goode pp. 150-152

### **Wealth:**

- Oct. 09 Eighner pp. 13-22; Fisher pp. 153-156  
\*\*\*First Draft of Critical Analysis Essay Due\*\*\*\*
- Oct. 11 Rose pp. 262-269; Singer pp. 368-379

### **Race:**

- Oct. 16 Gates Jr. pp. 135-140; Obama pp. 549-555
- Oct. 18 Staples pp. 141-143; Angelou pp. 201-203  
\*\*\*\* Final Draft of Critical Analysis Essay Due\*\*\*\*
- Oct. 23 Kingston pp. 270-273; Anzaldua pp. 280-289; Chief Seattle p. 315



**Gender and Sexuality:**

- Oct. 25 Quindlen pp. 72-74; Woolf pp. 520-530
- Oct. 30 Ortiz pp. 56-59; Truth pp. 75-76; Oates pp. 204-207  
\*\*\*\* Research for Weighing In Essay Due\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 01 Gay pp. 77-82; Baron pp. 362-365

**Politics and Activism:**

- Nov. 06 Nestle pp. 140-150; Barber pp. 224-227  
\*\*\*\*Draft of Weighing In Essay Due\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 08 Barry pp. 232-236; Eagleman pp. 421-435
- Nov. 13 Ivins pp. 214-216; Pollan pp. 398-413
- Nov. 15 Williams pp. 316-323; Tisdale pp. 414-420
- Nov. 20 Franklin pp. 29-34; McPhee pp. 307-312  
\*\*\*\*Final Draft of Weighing In Essay Due\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 22 **NO CLASS**

**Jobs and Hobbies:**

- Nov. 27 Chabon pp. 531-535; McCloud pp. 537-542
- Nov. 29 Bissell pp. 110-117; McGonigal pp. 220-223

**Unpopular Opinions:**

- Dec. 04 Epstein pp. 216-219; Carr pp. 324-332  
\*\*\*\*First Draft of Rewind and Re-envision Due\*\*\*\*
- Dec. 06 Quindlen pp. 208-210; Bird pp. 247-255

**Course Wrap-up:**

- Dec. 11 Presentations  
\*\*\*\*Final Draft of Rewind and Re-envision Due\*\*\*\*
- Dec. 13 Time scheduled for course Final  
\*\*\*\*\* Last day to hand in revision of one final draft for additional credit\*\*\*\*\*

I created this syllabus for the first of two introductory courses required for all students at the college where I will begin teaching in the fall. Because it is a foundational course, the English department wants to ensure that all students leave the course with the same basic skills and knowledge. It is for this reason that the department has created a number of guidelines for this syllabus. I was told that all of the texts had to be from one of four non-fiction anthologies and was given a general basis for the major assignments of the course. Of the textbooks that I was able to choose from, I selected *The Norton Reader* because I felt that it included the most diverse essays and that students would be more likely to take an interest. It was also the textbook that best fit the theme that I was imagining for the course.

I arrived at the course theme of “coming out” for two different reasons. The first was so that I could still teach the material that I would typically focus on, at least in some capacity. While this may come across as somewhat selfish, I believe that educators are at their best when they are working with materials related to their own interests. More than simply satisfying my own desire, however, I also believed that this topic would be of interest to the students. The term “coming out” may have a predominantly queer usage, but more generally, it is about embracing one’s identity. Self-discovery is a crucial aspect of the college experience, and since this class will predominantly consist of incoming freshman, I found it to be a quite fitting theme.

I also believe that the theme of coming out lends itself quite well to the objectives of the class. Because this is an introductory English course, the primary goal is for the students to learn how to critically engage with texts and transfer that critical engagement into academic writing. Students are expected to walk away from this course, along with its successor, knowing how to read and write at a college level. However, these introductory courses can often be quite dry, which can ultimately interfere with the students’ ability to learn. I tried to select a variety of different readings for the course in the hopes that at least some of them will be of interest to the students. If the students are interested in the material that we are discussing, then they are more likely to be engaged and therefore learn. It is also my personal objective for the course that the students will be able to learn something about both themselves and the world around them. We will be covering a number of issues that could be considered controversial and I want to help my students learn how to discuss these topics in an informed and respectful, but still critical, manner.

One of the texts that I am especially looking forward to teaching is “Facebook Multiples Genders but Offers Users the Same Three Tired Pronouns,” which was originally written by Dennis Baron for the blog *The Web of Language* in 2014. The article deals with the proliferation of gender identity categories on Facebook that exists in contrast to the scarcity of pronoun choices. Baron, an English and linguistics professor at the University of Illinois, credits this to the reverence that many people hold for grammar. Of all the articles included in this syllabus, Baron’s is one of the most explicit in terms of its relevance to the course theme. Social media platforms are an important reflection of one’s self. As such, the ability to display the proper gender identity is invaluable. The article also briefly touches upon the issue of privacy and the choice of whether or not to display one’s gender identity altogether.

This article is paired on the syllabus with an article by Roxane Gay in which she discusses how three public figures came out and the social implications of those actions. Together, the two articles comprise the last day of the section of the course that is devoted to issues of gender and sexuality. This category, along with the preceding categories of race and wealth, exists as part of the unit that concludes with the Weighing In essay. For the Weighing In essay, the largest formal assignment of the course, students are expected to critically engage with at least two sources in order to create an argument related to the course theme of coming out. More specifically, the assignment asks them to comment on a current social or political issue related to a marginalized group of people. While the students are not limited to the three categories that are covered in this portion of the course, the categories are meant to serve as examples and introductions into potential issues that they essays can address. Articles in this section, such as Baron's, are also useful in that they can be used for in-class scaffolding exercises for the final essay.

One of the aspects of Baron's article that I am most interested in exploring with the class is Baron's use of satire to make his argument. Baron's satire allows him to place a great deal of meaning into what is quite a short article. His first use of satire occurs when Baron provides an explanation of why Facebook has given users more gender options while not including more pronouns. He writes, "at worst the server is struck by thunderbolts from the grammar gods, because gender may be socially constructed, but grammar is sacred" (Baron 362). Baron is drawing on internet culture and the prevalence of people on social media who go out of their way to correct the grammar and spelling mistakes of others. Baron credits these individuals, for whom he compares grammar to religion, with being the reason that Facebook did not include pronouns when they rolled out all of the gender identity options. Baron also taps into internet culture more generally when he makes comments such as "It's uncanny. It's irresistible. It's pictures of cats" and "I don't know. It's complicated" (363). Baron is acutely aware of the audience who reads his blog posts; while he never explicitly states his argument, his references and use of humor help to ensure that it is clear. Baron is arguing for increased pronoun options on Facebook. Baron's essay is also a commentary on social media culture. He ends by stating that, regardless of what Facebook ultimately decides to do about pronouns, he will continue to have his gender on Facebook private. Baron does not include his explanation of why this is, instead choosing to let it linger. As a result, Baron leaves his readers with a number of questions about what information should be shared on Facebook, what information is better left private, and why.

This article is a useful text to use with students. Not only does it show how humor can be used as a tool of academic writing — two things many students might believe to be at odds with one another — but it also as a launching point for conversations about a number of different topics. Before getting into the discussion of the article, I plan to ask students if they have ever taken a survey or filled out a form where they felt that the questions were too invasive or that the response options did not really fit them. In addition to having a class discussion on the aspects of

the article and the ideas that the article touches upon, I will have the students reflect on their own social media identities and what it is that they share about themselves. Following the discussion, students will be asked to work in groups to outline an analysis using the Baron and Gay articles. I plan to have the students go through the articles and select at least one quote from each that points to the authors' arguments. Students will then find a way to combine the two essays, along with their own opinions, into an argument. While the students are working, I will walk around, providing feedback and guiding the students to further their thinking. This exercise will serve as practice for the weighing-in essay, the first draft of which is due the following class. Students will use this time as a final opportunity to practice the skills they need for the essay before they are expected to hand something in. The Baron article is an important text for the course; it provides a number of different opportunities for learning moments in the class and I am truly looking forward to teaching it.