

**ENGL 3367. Gay and Lesbian Literature:
Sex Scandal, Shame, and the Politics of Queer Representation
Professor Margot Gayle Backus
M/W 1-2:30, R. Cullen 111**

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Policy Statement

I. Course Materials

Background:

Sally Munt, *Queer Attachments*
Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*

The Rocky Road to Dublin (film)
The Magdalene Sisters (film)

Dissident Sexualities and Irish Nationalism

Keith Ridgway, *The Long Falling*
Jamie O'Neill, *At Swim, Two Boys*

Women's Sexuality and the Public Sphere:

Kate O'Brien, *Land of Spices*
Emma Donoghue, *Touchy Subjects*
Mary Dorsey, *Moving Into the Spaces Cleared by Our Mothers*

Queer and Dissenting Irish Sexuality in Visual Media

The Velvet Goldmine (film)
Queer as Folk (television episode)
Opus Gei (videotaped Alternative Miss Ireland 2010 performance)

II. Statement of Purpose

This course is designed to introduce you to modern and contemporary Irish novels, poetry, short stories, and film/video engaging through representations of lesbian/gay sexual desire with Irish scandal culture as it evolved in relation to a range of sex scandals over the course of the twentieth century. These texts all in various ways represent interactions between public sexual norms and embodied subjectivity, particularly as these are mediated through sexual prohibitions and practices, often with a focus on the impact of recent media scandals upon our own subjective sense of embodiment. We will start with an overview of the public history of sexuality in Ireland, reading Diarmaid Ferriter's recent study, *Occasions of Sin*, and watching films exploring two moments in the evolution of modern and contemporary Ireland's scandal culture.

Because the two categories that constitute the focus of this course are sexuality and public affect, the theoretical work we will be reading will serve to give us a deeper and more complex understanding of these two categories. We will begin by reading sections of Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Volume I* in order to build a shared vocabulary concerning sexual practices and identities as these are transformed at the social level. We will go on to read several texts while simultaneously reading selections in Sally Munt's *Queer Attachments*. Each assigned text will be considered as supplying its own "history of sexuality," complete with its own account of how sexual practices and identities are adopted or transformed.

Course time will be spent discussing the assigned texts, with particular interest in applying aspects of the theoretical and historical readings to the assigned materials. These discussions will take place in small discussion groups and as a class. For each small group discussion, I will designate a group member to summarize group discussion for the class as a whole, so that small group discussions can help to elicit general discussion.

III. Assignments and Grading

Writing

Four 2-3 pp. essays responding to one or more of the assigned texts in a particular unit are a cross between the informal "reading journal entry" and a more formal critical essay. These essays are, in effect, a chance to show me essay drafts exploring ideas for a more formal final essay without a lot of pressure to perfect them, although obviously some revision is likely to result in a higher grade. Each short essay should have a clear thesis that is supported with textual evidence, and should be clearly and cogently written, with a clear introduction and conclusion. **Each of the four short essays will count as 10% of the final grade.**

The 5-7 pp. final essay represents a central goal of this course. A lot of your in-class and out of class course work will be directed toward its production. I am requiring you to workshop a first draft in your small group. **Your work in the draft workshops will determine 10% of the grade. The final essay will determine 30% of the grade.**

Small Group Work

Much of the work of this class will be done in small groups. The assignment of students into small working groups will allow each student to absorb more of the assigned reading than would be possible for individuals, as groups can trade off assigning the theoretical readings to different group members from week to week; the group member in charge of a week's theoretical reading will be responsible for explaining the main ideas to other group members. Small groups will also meet once or twice in a workshop format to read and respond to group members' drafts.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. I will take roll with every class meeting. Students may permissibly miss up to five class meetings in cases of illness or emergency. These absences are granted to everyone by fiat; I do not need to see doctor's notes or other evidence of their validity. Conversely, if you have missed five classes already, evidence of a calamity, however severe or unanticipated, is irrelevant. **The final grades of students missing six or seven class meetings will be reduced by one half grade per absence. Students missing more than seven class meetings will receive an F for the course. Missed workshop days count double. Students missing more than four classes before midterm will be dropped from the class.**

The Final Grade Breakdown:

Class Participation: 20%
Short Essays: 40% (10% x 4)
Draft workshop: 10%
Final Essay: 30%

IV. Plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's ideas, construction, organization, words or phrases in one's writing. It does not matter if the material came from a published scholar, your roommate, or the Encyclopedia Britannica; if ideas or words that originated with someone else are included in your work without acknowledgment, that is plagiarism. Avoid it by acknowledging the source of all ideas, words or organization in your writing that did not originate with you. In my classes, students submitting work with phrases or ideas that are not theirs without acknowledging their debt with quotation marks and correct bibliographic citation may receive an F for the course.

Plagiarism is against the rules of all learning communities because it short circuits learning. A learner can only grow if s/he actually struggles at his/her level.

Misrepresenting your skills ultimately cheats you, since by doing it you prevent your professors and peers from offering feedback to you as you are, thus cheating yourself of the feedback and guidance you need.

V. Course Format

Each course meeting will begin with an opportunity for students to announce on-campus or community events that may be of interest to others in the class, and with a chance for anyone to ask questions about any "nuts and bolts" aspects of the class – assignment due dates, reading assignments, etc. I am available before or after class on either day, during my office hours, by appointment, and via email or on the phone.