

English 199/Romancing the T(w)een: A Critical Look at Romantic Love, Sex, and Gender Ideology in Popular Young Adult Literature

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Spring 2015
CRN 32010, STB 253
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I can also meet you by appt. if necessary.

Course Overview: While always popular, in the last decade young adult literature has exploded in popular culture, becoming one of the most potent forces in publishing. J.K. Rowling became our world's first billion-dollar author, and screaming fans lined up for each installment in the film adaptations of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. As might be expected in literature written for youth ages 12-18, romantic love is often the driving force in the lives of the book's characters, and figures strongly in the plots of many young adult novels. In this course we will closely analyze contemporary young adult literature made expressly for pre-teen and teenage readers, usually girls, and examine different cultural ideals of romantic love, sexual relationships, and gender norms. We will read at least four young adult novels in a variety of sub-genres, including paranormal romance and sci-fi, searching for ways that authors reinforce or challenge traditional ideas about love, sex, and what it means to be a girl or boy in American culture.

Some questions we will examine are:

- In what ways are traditional ideals of romantic love upheld (i.e., love is forever, every person has one soul mate, etc.)?
- Are these ideals realistic? Are they merely a harmless way of exploring romantic fantasies, or do they pose any danger to young readers first exploring romantic relationships?
- In what ways is sex depicted, and are these depictions similarly realistic? Do they reinforce any cultural ideas about the role of sex in everyday life – in other words, is sex dirty? Forbidden? Shameful? A consistent source of pleasure? Something to be abstained from? Explored?
- Furthermore, how do these constructs inform the treatment of gender roles? How do characters of the opposite sex view and assess each other? Can we as readers identify patterns in YA literature that reinforce outdated views of rigid gender roles? Does YA literature ever challenge traditional views of what it means to be masculine? Feminine? Are these attempts successful?
- In what ways do the main characters “come of age” and transition from boy to man, or girl to woman? Do characters adopt similar traits to signal this change? Is sex usually a part of this transformation?
- In what ways is a character's sexual orientation depicted? Are stereotypes upheld or challenged? How do characters view and assess other characters who are gay or bisexual? Does YA literature ever challenge discriminatory or false notions of what it “means” to be gay or bi?

Implicit in our discussion of these questions is the need for you, the student, to decide what you feel about love, sex, and gender. In other words, what do you feel is a healthy and realistic view of these topics? In addition, you will be asked to evaluate if popular young adult literature, often viewed by adults as “lite” reading, can convey deeper (and perhaps, damaging) messages about how our culture wishes to view romance in all its permutations, especially as it pertains to the lives of teenagers.

Course Objectives: By the end of this course, you will not only have improved your understanding of cultural ideals of romantic love, sex, and gender in contemporary literature, you will also be able to critically analyze written texts. You will become more familiar with scholarly work written on popular culture, and you will gain significant practice composing college-level argumentative and analytical essays. In addition, you will develop your ability to engage in serious, academic discussion in which you ask questions, offer arguments, and both critique and support those arguments. This can take place either in class, via online message board discussions, and through peer feedback on your classmates’ written essays. Finally, you will become more familiar with locating credible research sources and using various library tools.

Required Texts/Materials:

Books:

Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*

Judy Blume, *Forever*

Lish McBride, *Hold Me Closer, Necromancer*

E. Lockhart, *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*

David Levitahn, *Boy Meets Boy*

TBD

Additional reading will include scholarly articles on the topic, scholarly work on theories of gender and textual analysis, and different reviews of the above books from different sources (scholarly, mainstream, religious, etc.).

Course Assignments: Along with active participation in all discussions, the course requirements are:

- Five blog posts in response to course reading (six available)
- Two blog comments per book, for ten total (150 word minimum, each)
- Ongoing in-class writing assignments
- Small group presentation on a particular question at issue in a selection of the assigned reading (40 minutes, including class discussion)
- A final 5-7 page critical analysis paper about an outside book

Paper formatting: For all papers, the margins should be standard margins in Microsoft Word: 1 inch on top and bottom, 1.25 inches on left and right. The font should be 12-point Times New Roman. The author’s name, the course, the assignment type, and the date should be single-spaced at the top of the left-hand corner on the first page. The remainder of the document should be double-spaced. There should be no line breaks between the title and the start of the essay or between paragraphs. Most of your work will be submitted via email or Blackboard,

unless otherwise specified. (Make sure to bring paper copies for peer review.)

Participation: Active participation is necessary for this course to succeed. This includes speaking in large and small groups and facilitating discussions. If speaking in a group is difficult for you, come see me *early in the term* to discuss strategies for participation.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to show up *on-time and prepared* for every class. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence after the first will result in the final course grade being lowered by one half. Absences will be excused only if you have official documentation from a credible authority of illness or other emergency. If you must be absent, you are responsible for turning in all assignments *by the start of the missed class session*. Assignments are typically turned in via Blackboard. You are also responsible for any homework assigned on the day of your absence. It is your responsibility to find out about missed assignments from classmates, Tina or Blackboard.

Late Assignments: Late work will not be accepted.

Grading:

Participation and in-class writing	15%
Blog comments	20%
Small Group Presentation	20%
Blog posts	20%
5-7 Page Paper	25%

Plagiarism: All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course.

Access: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me in week one if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Blackboard: The discussion board is located on the Blackboard website: <http://blackboard.uoregon.edu>. All assignments, course documents and information are also available on the Blackboard website. You will need to log into Blackboard ASAP. If you have trouble accessing the Blackboard site, contact the Computing Center Micro Services at 346-4412.

Tentative Course Schedule

The schedule is subject to change. All assignments are DUE on the date they appear.

Week 1

3/30	Syllabus & Intro, assignments explained Why do we read YA?
4/1	Defining YA literature; How to Critically Read Mainstream/Popular Texts

Selections from *Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature, 1990–2001*; *Good Girl Messages: How Young Women Were Misled by Their Favorite Books* (see Blackboard)

Week 2

4/6

Read *Twilight*, through Chapter Nine; “*Twilight* is not Good for Maidens” by Silver

Due: Blog posting

4/8

Read *Twilight*, through Chapter Sixteen; “Bite Me! (Or Don't)”; “*Twilight*, Elitism, Feminism and Romanticism” by Jaffe/ Partial film viewing: *Twilight*

Due: Two blog comments

Week 3

4/13

Finish *Twilight*

Small Group Presentation 1

4/15

Read through Chapter 12, *Forever*; Read “Now and Forever: The Power of Sex in Young Adult Literature”; “The Secret Source” by Pattee
Partial film viewing, *Let's Talk About Sex*

Due: Blog posting

Week 4

4/20

Finish *Forever*; “Going All the Way” by Perez

Small Group Presentation 2

Due: Two blog comments

4/22

Read through Chapter “, *Hold Me Closer, Necromancer*; “The Changing Boys' World in the 20th Century: Reality and ‘Fiction’” by Bereska

Due: Blog posting

Week 5

4/27

Finish *Necromancer*; Reading TBD

Due: Two blog comments

Small Group Presentation 3

4/29

Preparing to write your essay: research, quoting, and analysis

Due: Final Paper – Selection of book due with one paragraph explanation of choice

Week 6

5/4

Read to page xx in *Disreputable...*; “Throwing Like a Girl” by Young
In-class exploration of how men and women move their bodies

5/6

Read to page xx in *Disreputable...*: Read “Panopticism” by Foucault

(see Blackboard)
Due: Blog posting

Week 7

5/11

Finish *Disreputable*

Due: Two blog comments

Small Group Presentation 4

5/13

Break for Writing: Bring **three** copies of the first three pages of your Final Essay to class

Week 8

5/18

Boy Meets Boy, first half (pages TBD)

Read: "Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction" by Crisp

Due: Blog posting

5/20

Boy Meets Boy, second half (pages TBD); additional reading TBD

Due: Two blog comments

Week 9

5/25

NO CLASS

5/27

Reading TBD

Week 10

6/1

Reading TBD

Comparison of female and male protagonists, from *Twilight* to present

6/3

Peer Review Day: Bring a complete draft of your Final Essay to class; Wrap-up

Finals Week: **Final draft of final paper due Monday, June 8 by 5 pm via Blackboard**