

Expository Writing 20: Modern Love

Course Overview

“Reader, I married him.” As this famous line from Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* reminds us, writers have long been preoccupied with matters of the heart. Love stories are everywhere, from the novels of Jane Austen to the “rom-coms” of the 1980s and 1990s to essays in the “Styles” section of the *New York Times*. For centuries, marriage was primarily an economic relationship, and love outside of marriage ended in humiliation or even death. But what happens when society expands the options for living and loving? What happens to love stories when divorce has been normalized, taboos have been trampled, and the definition of marriage is ever-expanding? When couples are as likely to meet through Tinder as they are through mutual friends? In this course, we’ll explore what love stories can tell us about changing concepts of gender, sexuality, family, and freedom. We’ll start with short stories by Kathleen Collins—a playwright and filmmaker working during the 1970s and 1980s, in the aftermath of the civil rights movement and Black Power movement—and Lydia Davis, an acclaimed contemporary writer of epigrammatic short stories. In our second unit, we’ll look at a couple of love stories through the lens of feminist and queer theories. Our texts for this unit will include an essay by the black feminist poet and theorist Audre Lorde, the Academy-Award-winning film *Brokeback Mountain*, and the viral *New Yorker* short story “Cat Person.” Finally, in our third unit, students will pick a modern love story of their choosing—a novel, a memoir, a film—and, drawing on the work of critics and scholars, make an argument about what this story shows us about our society’s romantic and sexual mores.

We’ll work to understand the trials of love by discussing, and practicing, the principles of good academic writing. Over the course of the semester, you’ll learn the elements of an academic argument, develop a vocabulary for talking about writing (both yours and your classmates), and practice refining your ideas as you revise your written work. Each unit will have specific goals, and units build on each other over time. By the end of the course, you’ll be a stronger writer, with a better sense of your strengths and with a new set of skills with which you can address challenges. You’ll also find yourself to be a more creative and supple thinker; after all, writing is simply a mode of thinking. You’ll be well prepared to meet the intellectual challenges that await you at Harvard and beyond.

Required Reading and Schedule of Assignments

The course is divided into three units. In addition to all assigned reading and any class preparation (e.g. reading excerpts, providing feedback for workshop, etc.), each unit will require you to complete:

- 1-2 response papers
- 1 essay draft (including a cover letter)
- 1 draft conference
- 1 essay revision (including a revision letter)

A packet with the assignments and deadlines will be handed out before the start of each unit.

****Read the unit packet, mark your calendars, and regularly check the course website and your email! You are responsible for remembering assignment due dates AS WELL AS adjusting to any changes in the schedule****

Here's how the units break down:

Unit 1: Whatever Happened to the Love Story?

We'll start with several short stories by two different authors who are writing at the end of the twentieth century and roughly ten years apart. The stories in Kathleen Collins's collection *Whatever Happened to Interracial Love?*—published posthumously in 2016—explore how race and gender shape sex and romance. Written during and after the twentieth century's major social movements, her stories demonstrate how politics often impinge on our intimate lives. We then turn to the puzzling, extremely short stories of Lydia Davis, drawing our examples largely from her first two collections, *Break It Down* and *Almost No Memory*. We'll focus especially on how she uses form to contain—or express—the turmoil of love. The goals of this unit are to learn how to analyze texts closely, to gather evidence, and to argue a strong thesis.

Unit 2: Critiquing Courtship

In this unit, we'll look two different love stories through the lens of theories about gender, sex, marriage, and dating. We'll start by considering how Audre Lorde's essay "The Uses of the Erotic as Power" helps us understanding the casual sexual encounter depicted in Kristen Roupenian's 2017 short story "Cat Person." We'll then the film *Brokeback Mountain* (directed by Ang Lee) to enter into the historical debate about gay marriage and what kind of love is "normal." Our theoretical texts for this unit will articles from the gay marriage debate of the 1990s, by Andrew Sullivan and Michael Warner. The goals of this unit are 1) to learn how to use a secondary source to inform and develop an argument about a primary source and 2) to master the producing and refuting effective counter-arguments.

Unit 3: Choose Your Own (Romantic) Adventure

After examining the different ways courtship plots represent the trials of modern lovers, you'll be ready to scrutinize a love story of your choosing. You'll be free to select a film, a novel or collection of short stories, a TV episode (or several episodes), personal essays or other nonfiction writing, etc. You'll then engage in independent research, using Harvard's library resources, to help *contextualize* whatever love story you've chosen. The goals of this unit are to draw on secondary sources to develop an argument that is in dialogue with the work of other scholars and to learn college-level research methods.

Readings:

There is only one book you must buy or borrow for class: Kathleen Collins's *Whatever Happened to Interracial Love?* (cost approx. \$10, less if used). This book will be available at the COOP as well as at other bookstores and through online vendors. You can also borrow it from the Harvard libraries. If you have any trouble obtaining a copy, please let me know.

Additional readings will be posted on the course website (see below for policies on engaging with the website). You'll be expected to **bring the assigned book or reading to class** on the day it's discussed. The film *Brokeback Mountain* will be screened separately from class. **If you choose to**

write on this film—or any other film for the course—it will be necessary for you to download it or to use a streaming service to which you already subscribe so that you might re-watch key scenes.

Please factor these costs in to your budget for the course, and please be in touch if these costs are prohibitive.

Conferencing, Workshopping, and Revising

Writing is a process, and this course gives you the opportunity to pursue this process fully. After you turn in each draft, you'll set up an appointment to meet with me, one-on-one, and discuss how to revise your writing. I'll send you comments on the draft before our meeting, and I'll ask you to 1) read those comments and 2) come prepared with some specific ideas or questions.

Each of the first two units will include an in-class workshop. The purpose of these workshops is for you to learn how to recognize strengths and weaknesses in *your own writing* and to find inspiration for your revision.

For our third unit, you'll work in *research teams* based on shared research interests. You'll do some in-class peer editing, and you'll participate in a group draft conference, with my presence and feedback.

Your *revisions will be due seven days after your draft conference*. The revisions will be substantial, so build in time to reflect on feedback, experiment with new approaches, and, of course, to proofread your work.

Grade Breakdown

Your final essays are your only graded assignments. They compose the majority of your final grade. Essay 1 is worth 25% of your term grade, Essay 2 is worth 30%, and Essay 3 is worth 35%. The expectations for each paper increase as the term proceeds, since you'll be building off skills you developed in the prior unit. The remaining 10% of your grade reflects your thoughtful completion of response papers, your cover letters, your participation in class discussion and in workshops, and your preparation for class and for your draft conferences.

Course Policies: Expos-wide

Attendance and Lateness

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. It is an official program-wide policy that if you are absent without medical or religious excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. On your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation.

You are expected to let me know promptly if you have missed or will miss a class; you remain responsible for the work due that day and for any new work assigned. Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In those circumstances, you should contact me before class (or within 24 hours); you may need to provide a note from UHS or another

medical official, or from your Freshman Dean. Absences because of special events, such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences, letting me know in advance. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you must directly petition the Director of Expository Writing, who will grant such a petition only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Class begins promptly on the hour or half hour. Three late arrivals will be counted as an absence. A missed draft conference will also count as an absence.

Completion of Work

Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, **it is an official Writing Program policy that you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course** (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements. The letter will specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date (unless you have documented a medical problem), you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed.

Policy on Collaboration

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students or through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, *all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.*

Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite sources and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. *All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless that is explicitly part of the assignment.* Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to disciplinary action by the Administrative Board.

In each cover letter and revision letter, include a statement affirming your awareness of the honor code and testifying to the originality of your work.

Course Policies: Modern Love-specific

Submission of Work

You will submit most of your work electronically this semester, uploading it to the course website. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in **a form compatible that is readable: MS Word, Pages, or Google Docs.** I’ll be making marginal comments on your work, and I cannot do so on a pdf or a “template.”

It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

Extensions:

Once during the course of the semester, you may turn in one assignment, a response paper OR a draft, 24 hours after it is due. (All revisions are due on the stated deadline.) You must request this extension in advance of the deadline. No other extensions will be granted outside of family or medical emergency or religious observance.

Conferences

Draft conferences are a mandatory—and very helpful!—part of the course. They occur once each unit. In advance of your draft submissions, I will post the times available for draft conferences on Canvas. You will then reserve a time to meet with me for 30 minutes to discuss your work.

I make myself maximally available during conference week—but keep in mind, I am reading your draft and meeting with you over the course of only a few days. (I also have to sleep, eat, and keep various small creatures alive.) **This means that the conference times posted are the only ones available: with the exception of family or medical emergencies, I cannot reschedule conferences, nor can I find additional conference times if you cannot make the ones posted.**

How To Sign Up for a Conference on Canvas:

- Go to the course site on Canvas
- Click “Calendar” on the left
- Click “Find appointment” on the right side (under appointments)
- Select our course
- Click on the date and time you want to reserve and then click “Reserve.” I’ll know that’s your spot!

Course Website Use:

The Canvas website will be the touchstone for our work together this semester. This is where I will post all readings and course-related documents (such as the syllabus or unit packet), where I will post conference sign-ups, and where you will upload and receive your written work. Please check Canvas regularly and rely on it as the final arbiter about what is due when.

Communication Policy

One of the best things about Expos is its collaborative aspect: both between me and you and between you and your classmates. In order to collaborate—share work, schedule group conferences, etc.—we need to be in good communication with each other. This means:

- 1) **Check your (@college) email regularly**—this will be my primary means of communicating with each of you individually (e.g., I will email you with draft comments)
- 2) **When working in a group, agree upon a method of group communication** (i.e., group text) and exchange contact information right away
- 3) **Respond to communication in a timely fashion.** I will respond to all your communication within 24 hours; please do the same for all class-related communication, whether it’s from me or from your classmates

Accessibility:

We aim for our course to be accessible to all students. If you have any questions or concerns about accessibility, please do two things 1) visit the Accessible Education Office (discussed below) and 2)

come talk to me. With the help of the AEO, we can come up with a way to make the course work for you! When foresight is possible, we'll aim to have these discussions right at the beginning of the semester—but of course there are unexpected accidents and developments. What I'll ask is that you be in good communication with me when things do arise so we can make sure that there's a plan in place moving forward.

Electronics in the Classroom:

As some of our readings show, technology has changed the way we talk to each other. We're often talking to one person while also texting another person, DMing a third person, checking email, refreshing Twitter, etc. (I am guilty of this too!) But as you probably know, this way of talking can sometimes make it hard to hear or remember what someone says to you, or to think clearly yourself.

So, during our discussion periods, please do the following:

- Silence your phones and put them out of sight (pocket = fine; backpack/tote bag = even better)
- Turn off all notifications (texts, email, calendar, etc.) that could interrupt your focus
 - It may be easier simply to turn off your Wi-Fi for the class period
- Pull up the relevant readings or handouts
- Make eye contact with your classmates!

I'd encourage you to try to limit your use of technology in the seminar room. There will be the occasional class session, such as workshop, when I will ask you to go electronic-free in order to facilitate discussion. You won't need to take too many notes during discussion, and for many of you, a pen and paper will suffice for note-taking. If you have the resources for printing, consider printing the readings and handouts and marking them up by hand so as to improve your focus. I will usually be circulating the room during our class time, and if it looks like there are one-too-many tabs open on your computer screen, I will gently suggest that you return to a Word or Pages document.

If you're using an e-text for the Collins stories, please email me in advance.

Resources

Office Hours

In addition to meeting during your draft conferences, you should feel free to come meet with me during my office hours, which will be Mondays 2-4pm and by appointment. My office is located at 1 Bow Street, #224. If you're going to drop by, please give me a heads-up (in person or over email) so you don't find yourself waiting!

Writing Center

The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide; regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's web site at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr> to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

Maggie Doherty
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Expository Writing 20
1 Bow St. #224

Bureau of Study Counsel/Academic Resource Center

The Harvard College Bureau of Study Council, located at 5 Linden Street, is a great resource for students looking to improve their reading skills, study skills, time management skills, or those who are just looking for some tips and perspective on handling all that college entails. The BSC will be closing in December of 2019 and will be replaced by the Academic Resource Center, which opens in August 2019.

Accessible Education Office

Located at 1350 Massachusetts Ave, the AEO can help students with disabilities develop plans for their coursework. For example, if you require extra time for an exam, or if an injury makes it difficult for you to read, the AEO can help you determine what requests you'll want to make of your instructors. The goals of the AEO are to promote inclusivity and access at Harvard.

Harvard Guide to Using Sources

I'll ask you to consult the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* several times during the semester. It's available online: <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>.

MLA Style Guide

For this course, you'll use the Modern Language Association's Style Guide. (Your other courses may require different citation formats.) You can find a hard copy in the library or find it online through university websites. I'd also recommend a style guide like Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*.

Final Recommendations

Read attentively and take notes as you do; save and backup your work; keep a calendar of assignments and deadlines; check your email; eat well; sleep enough; move your body; hang out with friends and with no agenda; be generous with your peers and with yourself. Your time at Harvard will be very rewarding; it will also simply be one phase of your life, not your entire life. I'm always available as a sounding board, a first reader, or a reality check. Feel free to email me at any time.