FYSEM-UA 754 Rural Queerness in Literature and Film
Monday 12:30-3:00

Prof. Patrick Abatiell
pja272@nyu.edu
19 University Place, B19
Office Hours: Tuesday Monday 10:00-11:00 or by appointment

Course Description
How do queer lives and communities form in rural spaces? How is the lived experience of rural queers taken up in literature and film? What particular vulnerabilities, risks, pleasures, possibilities, and social forms contour queer life outside the city? Urban spaces have long held a privileged position in literature and critical theory as sites of queer possibility. We reexamine that narrative by looking at the complex relationship between the country and the city, and investigate the ways in which our particular geographies determine what queerness means, and how it is experienced and made visible. We also focus on more directly "urban" texts—especially the literature of New York City—to ask what role figures, fantasies, and myths of the rural, the natural, or the agrarian play in producing queer desires, fantasies, and communities within the city limits.

Objectives
This class will enable us to develop a critical vocabulary for analyzing literature and for theorizing queerness as a rural formation. We do this by putting pressure on key terms such as “urban” and “rural,” and tracking their deployment by writers from different times and places. We will also introduce a coterie of attendant concepts in order to disrupt our familiar understanding of how the urban and the rural relate, and how they generate, dislocate, or unsettle queer being and belonging. We will think of the rural, then, alongside such notions as the rustic, metropolitan, cosmopolitan, pastoral, local, and suburban. In doing so we seek to also think about queerness not just as a marker of identity, or a matter of sexual desire, but also as a type of relation, attitude, affect, inclination, tendency, stance, or ethic.

We will put this critical vocabulary to use in our weekly discussions, and in various writing assignments. These assignments are all intended to allow you to both ask broad theoretical questions about the meanings and implications of queerness in the literature we discuss, and to focus your analytical attention on the contours of a given text through close reading. This means you will hone your ability to read a literary text carefully and analytically, and to use your observations to develop strong, compelling arguments.

Throughout this class, we will insistently work from a place of unabashed confusion, and flagrantly rely on our misunderstandings, mistakes, digressions, and questions as a way of connecting to one another and with the material at hand. This class prioritizes inquiry over mastery, and curiosity over conviction.
**Attendance Policy**

Regular attendance and participation are crucial for the success of a seminar. You are allowed one absence; each additional absence will result in a reduction of 1/3 letter grade from your final grade. Attendance during the final week of class is mandatory. Exceptions will be made in the case of religious observance, but in the case that you need to miss class, it is always best to let me know ahead of time so that you do not fall behind on reading, course content, and assignments.

Because this class depends on an engaged, detailed discussion of literary texts, you are required to bring physical copies of each day’s reading to class with you. If you neglect to bring in the reading, you will not be counted as present.

**Assignments**

**Weekly Writing Exercises**

Each week in class, you will respond in writing to a prompt or brief passage from the assigned reading. These responses should demonstrate a substantive engagement with the text in question based on your careful reading in preparation for class. If you have to miss class for any reason, you will still be able to make up the writing assignment outside of class.

**In-Class Presentations**

In groups of two, you will be responsible for one brief (10 minutes or less) in-class presentation focusing on one of the works on our syllabus. You will begin discussion by introducing important themes from that day’s reading, outlining key terms and concepts you’d like us to focus on, directing us to key passages, and offering some preliminary questions to structure our conversation.

**Papers**

You will be asked to write three papers and a short creative writing exercise over the course of the term, with specific prompts to follow later. The papers will be approximately 3 pages, 5 pages, and 7 pages, respectively. We will hold an academic writing workshop during class in preparation for your first paper, and I encourage you to reach out to me at any point in the semester to discuss writing. I will not be able to read full drafts of papers via email before they are due. However, I strongly recommend you make an appointment to meet in office hours in preparation for writing deadlines, to discuss paper ideas and writing strategies.

Your first two papers will ask you to develop an argument based around a close reading from a key passage or passages from one of our texts. Papers should be based around a strong central claim, substantiated with ample and relevant textual evidence. Your final paper will carry this work one step further by asking you to analyze two texts in relation to one another, or in relation to a key term or concept introduced in the class, or in the “Further Reading” section of this syllabus.
If you make an appointment to discuss writing, please come with at least some written content for us to discuss (even if it is only an outline or early draft). I cannot read drafts sent via email. Paper deadlines are available on the course syllabus. I can occasionally grant extensions due to emergency circumstances; however, all extension requests must be made at least 48 hours before the paper deadline.

Additional writing help is available to you in the NYU Writing center, located on the 4th floor of 411 Lafayette St. You can make appointments over the phone or online; they also hold walk-in sessions.

**Creative Writing Assignment**

For this assignment, you will be asked to thoughtfully engage with both the poetry of Frank O’Hara, and the contemporary geography of New York City. O’Hara was a city poet who often relied on figures and tropes of rural life to describe gay experience. His poetry is replete with proper nouns, place names, and other markers of the environment that determined his life as an urban gay poet. His poems often bear specific markers of time and place.

The question at the heart of this assignment will be: Is this kind of poetic practice still possible, decades later, in a rapidly changing New York? Is the language of pastoral, of rustic remove, or rural calm, still useful for describing a queer geography in the city?

You will begin the assignment by cruising. Graze the O’Hara volume and hone in on a poem or set of poems that bears some specific geographic or cultural marker (the East Village, the Frick, MoMA, the subway, the movies, “lunch,” Columbus Circle, Fire Island), and travel there. In a 3-page paper, reflect on your experience. You should provide both a capsule analysis of the poem, and a set of reflections on the changes you perceive. Are the queer spaces of O’Hara’s poems still “queer” or “queerable?” Are they still open to pastoral inflection? To dalliance? What styles of delight do they provide? What restrictions? What opportunities for contact and connection and willful ignorance and thought and sarcasm and intuition? Have fun (as O’Hara reminds us, “It is Spring the ice has melted the Ricard is being poured”).

**Academic Integrity**

Please review NYU’s full statement of academic integrity, available online at [https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html](https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html). Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade and will be reported to the relevant dean for disciplinary action. If you have any questions on proper citation of scholarly sources, consult the NYU Library’s Citation Guide ([https://guides.nyu.edu/citations](https://guides.nyu.edu/citations)) or ask me. Please keep in mind that the university considers plagiarism a matter of fact, not intention. Learn what it is, and don’t do it.

**Accommodations**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
Laptop and Cell Phone Policy
Laptops are not allowed during class meetings except by special dispensation by the Moses Center. Cell phones must be silenced and cannot be used in the classroom.

Grade Distribution
Weekly Writing Exercises: 10%
First Paper: 10%
Second Paper: 25%
Final Paper: 25%
Creative Writing Assignment: 10%
In-Class Presentation: 10%
Class Participation: 10%

Required Texts
William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*
Frank O’Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara*
Brian Teare, *Companion Grasses*
Mab Segrest, *Memoir of a Race Traitor*
Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House*
Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*
Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*
Derek Jarman, *Modern Nature*
Toni Morrison, *Sula*

Required texts are available in the NYU Bookstore. If you choose to purchase these texts online or elsewhere, please be sure you purchase the required editions. Kindle or e-reader editions are not acceptable substitutes.

All other course readings are posted in .pdf or .doc form on our NYU Classes site and indicated on the syllabus by an asterisk (*). We will hold group film screenings [TBD]. These screenings are optional. If you cannot make it to a screening, films are available on reserve in the Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media in Bobst Library.
Schedule

Monday January 27
- Introductions
- Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies, ed. Marcy L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley (2016), pg. 1-21*
  Note: This short reading will be distributed via email to all enrolled members of the class before the beginning of the term. Please come to the first class prepared to discuss the reading.

Monday February 3: Genres of Queer Life: Rural Realism and Metronormativity
- Jack Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives (2005) pg. 12-35; 61-79*
- Film: Kimberley Pierce, Boys Don’t Cry (1999)

Monday February 10: To Begin
- Theocritus, from Idylls (c. 260 BCE)*
- Virgil, from Eclogues (c. 40 BCE)*
- Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (1973), pg. 1-54*

Monday February 17: Playing Rural, Playing Queer
- William Shakespeare, As You Like It (1599)
- Film: John Waters, Pink Flamingos (1972)

Paper 1 Due: Sunday February 23 by 5PM

Monday February 24: Genres of the Rural
- Bruce Snyder, “Where Are All the Rural Gay Poets?” LitHub (22 September 2017)
- Annie Proulx, Brokeback Mountain (1997)*
- Film: Ang Lee, Brokeback Mountain (2005)

Monday March 2: Urban Pastoral and Queer Ecologies
- Frank O’Hara, Selected Poems
- Brian Teare, Companion Grasses (2013), pg. 49-100
- Film: James Bidgood, Pink Narcissus (1971)

Frank O’Hara Creating Writing Assignment: Due Sunday March 8 by 10PM

Monday March 9: Affiliations
- Mab Segrest, Memoir of a Race Traitor (1994), pg. 1-86
Monday March 16
- *No Class: Spring Recess*

Monday March 23

Monday March 30: Queer Lifeways
- Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (1918), Books 1-2
- Film: Claire Denis, *Beau Travail* (1999)

**Paper 2 Due: Sunday April 5 by 5PM**

Monday April 6
- Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House*, Book 3
- Film: Xavier Dolan, *Tom at the Farm* (2013)

Monday April 13: Queerness, Suburbia, and the Globe
- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)

Monday April 20: Elsewhere: Gardens
- Derek Jarman, from *Modern Nature* (1991), pg. 3-25; 120-159; 269-314

Monday April 27: Disability, Identity, Advocacy
- Eli Clare, from *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (1999), pg. 1-64; 123-138

Monday May 4: Intimacy, Kinship, Community
- Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973), pg. 1-85

Monday May 11
- Toni Morrison, *Sula* pg. 89-174
- Film: Alain Guiraudie, *Staying Vertical* (2016)

**Final Paper Due: Thursday May 10 by 5PM**
Further Reading


