

## Queer Quixotism: Gender, Sexuality, and Race in the Legacy of *Don Quixote*

Instructor: Olivia Carpenter

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Office Hours: TBA

Tutorial Description: With *Don Quixote* (1615) Miguel de Cervantes founded an enduring and unapologetically quirky literary mode often dubbed “quixotism” or the “quixotic,” characterized by an idealistic or naïve protagonist ready to embark on a quest, a cast of unruly minor characters who sometimes steal the show, and hilarious twists and turns that defy readers’ expectations. This course looks at that literary tradition through a queer lens, taking inspiration from quixotic literature’s commitment to convention-breaking, gender-bending, and narrative surprise.

We will embark together on a journey through the wonder and whimsy of the legacy of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, beginning with a deep dive into several excerpts of Cervantes’s original text, with stops throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and ending at last at our contemporary moment. Our class will examine *Don Quixote* and its literary aftermath through the lens of queer theory, gender studies, and critical race studies. We’ll use the legacy of *Don Quixote* to view an entire kaleidoscopic range of approaches to literature, with an eye to such topics as the queer origins of the modern novel, the literary history of queer representation, and the relationship between literature and queer critique. We’ll also think together about what it means to “queer” something, and about how *Don Quixote* – and texts that fall within its legacy – accomplish this. Texts authored by writers of color will be particularly central to our work, as we think through questions of who engages the quixotic literary mode, how, and why.

### Tutorial Goals:

In this course, we will:

- Work together to define quixotism
- Investigate a rich literary legacy through the lens of queer theory
- Gain a deeper understanding of the history of the novel-- and its politics

### Research/Writing Goals:

- Produce a substantive research paper of 20-25 pages in preparation for a senior thesis
- Design and implement a research question based on individual interest
- Develop a critical bibliography to engage primary and secondary sources in service of that question
- Hone argumentative and writing skills

### Assignments and Breakdown

**Short Paper (10%):** Due week 4, please complete a 5-page, thesis-driven paper based on a close reading of Cervantes in relation to one of our secondary/theoretical texts

**Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (10%):** Due week 8, please submit a one-page prospectus outlining your idea for your final research paper, how you plan to execute that idea,

why your research is necessary, and what you imagine will be your greatest challenge as you undertake your research. Please also submit an annotated bibliography with a minimum of eight sources, each with a few sentences detailing how and why each source is in conversation with your research and fits into your project.

**Junior Essay Draft (10%):** Due in class on Week 10, please come prepared with a first draft of your research paper to be workshopped in class. At least 50% of your research paper *must* be in draft format to present to myself and a peer in class in order for you to receive credit.

**Junior Essay (40%):** Your final research paper of 25 pages in length, to be submitted to the English department at a date TBA

**Attendance/Participation (30%):** We are a small group, and this means we will need you to show up for us in class, not only by being present during our meetings but also by arriving prepared and ready to engage in active, deliberate, and vibrant discussion. We create the intellectual community in which we can best thrive and grow when we show up for one another.

## Schedule

### PART I: *DON QUIXOTE* AND INTRO TO QUEER THEORY METHODS

#### **Week 1: Foundation: Methods, Questions, and Introductions**

**Primary Readings:** In-class close reading exercise with *Don Quixote*

**Secondary Readings:** Selections from *Queer Theory in Fiction and Film* and *Contemporary Fiction and Cultural Theory*

#### **Week 2: What makes a work of fiction “quixotic?” What’s queer about quixotism?**

**Primary Readings:** Selections from *Don Quixote* Part 1

**Secondary Readings:** “Towards a Counter-Poetics of Quixotism” by Aaron Hanlon  
Excerpts from *The Order of Things* by Michel Foucault (parts that discuss *DQ*)

#### **Week 3: Getting to Know the Man of La Mancha – What’s queer about Don Quixote?**

Primary: Selections from *Don Quixote* Part 2

Secondary: “Introduction” and “Queer Art of Failure” chapter in *The Queer Art of Failure* by Jack Halberstam

#### **Week 4: Working Women in *Don Quixote* – Quixotism and Feminist Critique**

Primary: Selections from *Don Quixote* Part 3

Secondary: “*Don Quixote’s* Ana Félix: The Virile Morisca Maiden and the Crisis of Imperial Masculinity” by Lucas Marchante-Aragón

“Is Sex Work Queer” by Corina McKay

**Week 5: Developing Methods: No reading****Library Visit!**

\*\*\*\*\*Short Paper Due\*\*\*\*\*

## PART 2: QUIXOTISM AND GENDER IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

**Week 6: Feminizing the Eighteenth-Century Quixote**

Primary: *The Female Quixote* and excerpts from *Tristram Shandy*

Secondary: "No Penis? No Problem: Intersections of Queerness and Disability in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*" by Jarred Wiehe

"Feminizing Quixotism" by Dragos Ivana

**Week 7: Punishing the Queer, Female Quixote?**

Primary: *Madame Bovary*

Secondary: Eve Sedgwick "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl"

"Morsels of Body: Photographic Love and the Queer Gaze in *Madame Bovary*" by Jenn McCollum

## PART 3: QUEERING RACE

**Week 8: Race, Queer Theory, and the Quixotic**

Primary: "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*" by Jorge Luis Borges; *An Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson

Secondary: "Return from the Future: James Weldon Johnson's Autobiography" by Valerie Rohy in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*

Excerpts from *Queering the Color Line* by Siobhan Somerville

**Week 9: Does Racism Have a Sex Life?**

Primary: *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* by Ishmael Reed

Secondary: "What If I Write Circuses" by Artur Jaupaj

Excerpts from *The Erotic Life of Racism* by Sharon Holland

**\*\*Prospectus and Bibliography Due\*\*****Week 10: Race, Quixotic Quests, and Queer Families**

Primary: *Oreo* by Fran Ross

Secondary: “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” by Hortense Spillers

#### PART 4: QUEERING FORM, QUEERING CONTENT

#### **Week 11: Queer Quixotism(s) and the Postmodern Novel – Finding the Language to Talk about Gender**

Primary: *Don Quixote* by Kathy Acker

Secondary: “Queering the State” by Lisa Duggan

“Flogging a Dead Language: Identity Politics, Sex, and the Freak Reader in Acker’s *Don Quixote*” by Nicola Pitchford

“The Traffic in Women” by Gayle Rubin

#### **Week 12: In-Class Writing Workshop: Draft 1**

#### **Week 13: Contemporary Postcolonial Fiction and the Legacy of *Don Quixote***

Primary: *Quichotte* by Salman Rushdie

Secondary: Excerpts from *Indian Sex Life* by Durba Mitra

#### Course Policies

**Inclusion:** As we engage this rich material together, my top priority is to learn together in an environment that is safe, welcoming, and productive for our entire group, no matter what background we come from, how we identify, or what accommodations we may need in order to succeed in the class. Though we have room for passionate, even heated discussion around topics that are often sensitive – race, gender, sexuality, etc., we have no room for hatred, personal attacks, or disrespect. Respect comes first. Together we can and will foster an actively anti-racist and inclusive space for learning together as a community.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** I want everyone to be able to thrive in our course. If you would like, you are very welcome to meet with me, and together we can map out how best to meet your specific needs and what works and what does not work for you as a learner. We can certainly work together to find ways to ensure not only that you can take the course but that you can also access a rich, fulfilling experience. I will also copy Harvard’s policy here: “Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head’s inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”

**Academic Honesty:** We thrive best in an academic community in which we can respect and trust one another. To that end, this course follows all other courses at Harvard in expecting you to abide by Harvard’s Honor Code: “Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries,

interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs."

**Attendance:** You will be allowed one unexcused absence without penalty. This is an absence without prior notification, no questions asked. All other unexcused absences will result in the deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. A to A-). You will also be allowed up to 2 excused absences, with at least 24 hours prior notice and a documented reason that you will be unable to join us. You are also allowed one instance of lateness (more than seven minutes late). All subsequent instances will automatically result in the loss of one percentage point from your grade (e.g. If your grade is at an A- at a 90%, it could become a B+ at 89% over that lateness...)

**Extensions and Late Assignments:** I can grant extensions on a case by case basis in exceptional circumstances for all assignments except the final paper and the final paper draft. These will need to be ready by their respective deadlines in order for you to receive full credit for them. The final paper, in particular, is a non-negotiable deadline set by the English department. For any assignments turned in late without an extension, I will deduct 1/3 letter grade per day late (e.g. an A paper gets an A- after 1 day late, a B+ after 2 days late, a B 3 days late, etc.)