The Queerness of Love

Additional Details:

The words "I love you" may come from the heart, but they are nonetheless a citation, even a cliché. What the heart would speak is no more than a commonplace. Utterances of love, it might be said, are always already somebody else's. What is dearest and most heartfelt is thus rendered wholly unoriginal and certainly not one's own. The nature of love is thus self-estrangement; the lover, if (s)he truly is in love, can be nothing other than queer. But queer is not an easy term to define. If the term is embedded in the politics of gender, just as certainly does queer describe a relationship in which lover and loved do not relate. They remain inexplicably something "other" to each other and to themselves.

In this course, we will attempt to trace the limits and possibilities of queer love in the West, particularly since around 1800. Is it the
absolute form of love Plato describes in the “Symposium” and what the 18th and 19th centuries smugly referred to as “platonic” or is it simply monstrous as in Frankenstein? To explore these possibilities we will look at works from the Harlem Renaissance (Nella Larsen) to the indie film circuit (the Wachowski sisters and Cheryl Dunye) to Barry Jenkins’s Moonlight. We will conclude the course with a discussion of the AIDS quilt. What is the nature of love in the face of inexpressible loss? How do the assembled panels of strangers who died of a “queer’s disease” overcome the ambiguity of the words, “I love you”?

Students can expect to learn the following from the course: an understanding of the historical contingencies that shape any expression of love, skills for close, analytical reading of a text, and ability to shape a convincing argument based on evidence collected from a close reading.

Catalog Description:
Studies of culture and ethics with aesthetic, literary, and philosophical tools of analysis, with special attention to issues of identity, diversity, civil rights, environmental justice, and multiculturalism. Readings and discussions in English.

GE Requirements:
Diversity (DIV)
Individuals and Societies (I&S)

Credits: 5.0
Status: Active

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