

WRITING GAY MEN'S LIVES

GNDR_ST 361 & ENGLISH 385

WINTER
2024



Everywhere you look, queer sexuality and queer lives are in the news, and not always in a good way. On the one hand, people of all kinds are finding the courage and the power to come out and live their authentic lives. On the other, book bans targeting LGBTQIA+ titles have gained momentum. Back on the first hand, we're living in a time of unparalleled visibility for LGBTQIA+ people in media of all kinds and on screens large and small. On the other, gender-affirming care for trans people has come under attack in states across the country.

Things are complicated. We can't solve these problems in a single quarter. But what we will do in "Writing Gay Men's Lives" is gain a historical understanding about how "we" came to be where "we" are today. (As we will see, it's a complicated and changing "we.") What is the long background to these anti-gay and anti-trans initiatives? How can a look back at history help us to understand the progress we have made?

We'll consider writings from the last 150 years on a range of topics, including the HIV pandemic (AIDS as "a gay disease" and as the disease of gayness); the 1950's and 1960's (periods often seen, respectively, as those of normative heterosexuality, and of the sexual revolution); early twentieth-century characterizations of gender "inversion"; and nineteenth-century versions of male-male amorous attachments, especially in the writings of gay poet Walt Whitman. We'll study the terms in which "gay men" have written about themselves in diaries, novels, letters, poetry, and journals, as well as how they have been written about in various discourses of power—legal, medical, sociological, and theological—in the 130+ years since the word "homosexual" first appeared in English. We'll look at movies and TV to see the ways in which popular media has depicted gay people. We'll finish the quarter with an understanding of what is old and what is new about where LGBTQIA+ people are today. And in that way we'll be better able to formulate ways to bring about the necessary change.

Jay Grossman

TTh 2-3:20pm
Kresge 2-335