

ENGL 466 Meeting 1 Outline

35 minutes – “Cat Person” (Kristen Roupenian)

- Discussing the significance of the age difference between Margot and Robert
 - Margot’s feeling of safety
 - Margot’s ability to give and take away consent
 - Margot’s perception of norms and her relationship with her sexuality
 - Is there significance to Margot’s desire to playfully laugh about Robert in the future when her sexual encounter with him was “the worst life decision”?

- Focusing on pages 12 and 13
 - The fetishization of virginity, young(er) girls
 - “her revulsion turned to self-disgust and a humiliation that was a kind of perverse cousin to arousal” (pg. 12)
 - “This is the worst life decision I have ever made! And she marvelled at herself for a while, at the mystery of this person who’d just done this bizarre, inexplicable thing.” (pg. 12)
 - “The whole time, he was stroking her hair and trailing light kisses down her shoulder, as if he’d forgotten that ten minutes ago he’d thrown her around as if they were in a porno” (pg. 13)

- Discussing the themes represented in the end of the story (text conversation)
 - Relationships vs. “casual sex”
 - How social media empowers and shelters harassment
 - How social media empowers deception
 - Online disinhibition effect
 - How does the title “Cat Person” speak to this?

25 minutes – “Difficult at Parties” (Carmen Maria Machado)

- Discussing the use of pronouns
 - The paragraph starting with “The next morning,” (pg. 235)
 - The paragraph starting with “Two people stumble in,” (pg. 241)

- Discussing the significance of the “adult films for loving couples”
 - Pgs. 224-225, 233, 234, 236-237, 238-240

- Discussing the significance of the camera, the VCR, and the DVD player
 - The camera at the party
 - The passage: “It sits there, quietly, but it holds me inside, somewhere, for precious seconds that I cannot take back. A face that I have yet to

really look at, resting deep in the coils of its mechanical mind.” (pg. 230)

- Discussing the significance of the voices
 - “I begin to listen.” (pg. 241)
 - “Do they know what they are thinking . . . Do they hear it? Do they know? Did I know? I cannot remember.” (pg. 236)
- Discussing how the use of pronouns, the adult films, the camera, VCR, DVD player, and the voices build a story
 - Why do we never find out the name of the narrator?
 - What is the relationship between Paul and the narrator? How and why does it evolve?

5 minutes – break

30 minutes – “The Husband Stitch” (Carmen Maria Machado)

- Discussing “(If you read this story out loud,)”
 - First person central vs. third person limited (“Cat Person”)
 - Breaking the fourth wall
 - “There’s a classic, a real classic, that I haven’t told you yet.” (pg. 28)
 - Pg. 31: why is the final “If you are reading this story out loud,” the only time it is not in parentheses?
 - The ribbon – “you may be wondering . . .” (pg. 31)
- Discussing the ribbon(s)
 - “No ribbon. A boy.” (pg. 16)
 - “perhaps men have ribbons that do not look like ribbons. Maybe we are all marked in some way, even if it’s impossible to see.” (pg. 21)
 - “He is not a bad man, and that, I realize suddenly, is the root of my hurt. He is not a bad man at all. To describe him as evil or wicked or corrupted would do a deep disservice to him And yet–” (pg. 30)
- Discussing the stories
 - Why does Machado often refer to “the moral of the story”?
 - “Everyone knows these stories—that is, everyone tells them, even if they don’t know them—but no one ever believes them.” (pg. 5, 6)
 - What do the order and placement of the stories do for *this* story?
 - “I once heard a story . . .” (pg. 4)
 - “I have heard all of the stories about girls like me,” (pg. 7)
 - “I have always been a teller of stories.” (pg. 8)
 - “There is a story they tell,” (pg. 9)
 - “There is a story I love . . .” (pg. 13)

- “There is a story about a woman . . .” (pg. 16)
- “Of all the stories I know about mothers,” (pg. 18)
- “One of my favourite stories . . .” (pg. 23)
- “There’s a classic, a real classic, that I haven’t told you yet.” (pg. 28)

25 minutes – secondary source, connections

Secondary source: Aligning human rights and social norms for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights

(MLA):

Buller, Ana M. and Schulte, Marie C. “Aligning human rights and social norms for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights.” *Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 26, no. 52, 2018, pp. 38-45.

<https://ezproxy.capilanou.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/26605063>

- Discussing the secondary source, some interesting passages:
 - “Creating a new norm of “adolescence” as a critical biological, cognitive and psychosocial developmental stage between childhood and adulthood – one that involves increased autonomy and capacities, but also heightened vulnerabilities – offers a clear first step towards shifting local attitudes, beliefs, practices, and norms in which all family and community members can play a role in upholding [adverse adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights]” (Buller and Schulte 40)
 - “Children’s rights to participate in decisions that affect them directly, to freedom of expression and access to information, often collide with local norms and worldviews, constricting what is socially acceptable for a girl or boy to say or do in the presence of an adult woman or man in a family or healthcare context.” (Buller and Schulte 39)
 - “Inequitable gender normative socialisation processes intensify for girls and boys during and after puberty, as parents and peers strongly influence and regulate girls’ and boys’ conformity or resistance to gender normative behaviour during this period. Norms to control and regulate adolescent girls’ sexuality often combine with conservative ideologies against girls being sexually active before marriage.” (Buller and Schulte 39)

Connecting to the course:

- How do social norms concerning what is considered “speakingable” and “unspeakable” make it more difficult for adolescents to explore their sexuality in safe and consensual ways and/or to disclose forms of sexual abuse?

Works Cited

Buller, Ana M. and Schulte, Marie C. "Aligning human rights and social norms for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights." *Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 26, no. 52, 2018, pp. 38-45.

Machado, Carmen M. "Difficult at Parties." *Her Body and Other Parties*, Graywolf Press, 2017, pp. 219-241.

Machado, Carmen M. "The Husband Stitch." *Her Body and Other Parties*, Graywolf Press, 2017, pp. 3-31.

Roupenian, Kristen. "Cat Person." *The New Yorker*, 4 December 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/cat-person>.