

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 18, 2012 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

SESSION 2G

RADICAL MOVEMENTS FROM CICERO TO BANASSI, WAGNER TO THE GHANAIAI CONCERT PARTY

Session Moderator: Julie Villegas, English

Mary Gates Hall 251

3:30 PM to 5:00 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

The Literature of Sexuality: Evolving British Attitudes through the Later 20th Century into Contemporary Times

*Sher-Min Yang, Senior, Applied Music (Orchestral
Instruments), English*

Mentor: Sydney Kaplan, English

Examining three of Booker prize winner Ian McEwan's novels *Atonement*, *At Chesil Beach* and *Saturday* provides a passage into his exploration of changing attitudes and viewpoints regarding female sexuality during the later 20th and early 21st century. Utilizing the genre of historical fiction, McEwan explores the various sociological and cultural influences such as improving neonatal care, contraceptives and improved birth control options that severed the previously inescapable link between sexuality and motherhood. Additionally, the rise of women in higher education and sectors of the workforce beginning in the 1930s onwards contributed to the autonomy and, as these novels indicate, increasing sexual freedom of women. Each novel explores the 1930s, 1950s and 2000s respectively as critical turning points in British culture. In the 1935 pre-WWII setting of *Atonement*, the prevalence of women in college and independent professions challenge gender norms. Against this backdrop, McEwan examines reciprocal sexual desire against victimization and societal attitudes towards women as equally desirous individuals. *At Chesil Beach* explores the physical relationship of a newly married couple during the 1950s and the emergence of clinical contraceptives. Finally, *Saturday* examines the attitudes of a mother and daughter in a post-sexual revolution setting and explores issues of generational differences as well as the link between sexuality and victimization still present in a contemporary time period. Ultimately, critically examining the attitudes and historical contexts of each novel against other

scholarly work provides a literary interpretation of the evolution of attitudes regarding female sexuality, and sub issues of autonomy, consensual desire, the role of women and victimization, spanning from a pre-WWII era to contemporary society.