

Feminist Fictions

Instructor: Tess McNulty

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Office Hours: TBD

Course Description: In this course, we will survey late twentieth and early twenty-first century fiction by and about women that might, for various reasons, be called feminist. The course will focus primarily on novels written in English or in translation by authors like Zora Neale Hurston, Kathy Acker, Zadie Smith, Arundhati Roy, and Claire Messud, but it will also feature memoirs (Nelson, Gay), short stories (Butler), poetry (Plath, Lorde), films (Fishtank), and fashion shows (McQueen). Through an examination of these works, alongside seminal works of feminist theory (Beauvoir, Butler, bell hooks, etc.) we will ask: What is feminism? What makes a work feminist? How do different artists translate feminist ideas into aesthetic forms? How do they navigate interactions between gender, sexuality, race, class, and empire? How do they treat a variety of feminist themes, like food, beauty, love, and rage? By the end of the course, students will produce a 20-25 page research paper on a feminist fiction and topic of their choosing.

Course Goals:

- To understand feminist fiction, theory, and their interrelations (see blurb, above)
- To learn how to write an upper level, long form (20-25 pg) work of literary criticism.
- To learn how to identify and engage with criticism related to a literary work
- To learn how to identify and engage with other relevant secondary sources
- To learn how to write in a clear, well-structured fashion, at length.

Major Assignments:

1. Due week 5: One 5-7 page paper, due at the end of the fourth week of the course. In this paper, you should close read one aspect or passage of one of the literary texts read in the course thus far, making reference to one work of criticism –further instructions forthcoming.
2. Due week 8: One 2 page prospectus and annotated bibliography with 8-10 sources for the 20-25 page final paper, due in the 8th week. For lengthier descriptions of this assignment see week 8 and forthcoming handout.
3. Due week 12: One full draft of the final paper, due during week 12; This full draft of the final paper, of 20-25 pages in length, will be returned with comments for revision promptly (within a week).
4. Due Date TBD: The 20-25 page final paper, due during reading week
5. Due Date TBD: One 5 minute conference presentation (ungraded) on your paper, to be delivered to your peers.
6. Due throughout the semester (see week by week calendar for more info): A number of mini-assignments, all designed to help you reach milestones in your researching/writing process – i.e., things you would have to do anyway. These will include, for example, finding one piece of criticism on a novel early in the course, choosing and reading a novel on the syllabus you may like to write on, reporting on research, outlining your

paper, revising your outline, etc. These exercises will be informal, and worth only 10 percent of your grade, but essential to complete.

7. Preparation and Participation – showing up having read, and ready to speak and participate, at every course section.
8. Mandatory program wide meetings – there will be a few junior tutorial program wide meetings, beyond the final paper conference on Dec. 11. They will include a welcome meeting on September 11, a library session during week 6, and a presentation by former writers of junior papers on Oct. 9.

Grade Breakdown:

Final paper – 40%

Final paper draft – 10%

Prospectus and annotated bibliography – 10%

Short, 5-7 page Paper – 15%

Mini Assignments – 10%

Participation and Preparation – 15%

Conference presentation and mandatory program wide meetings- ungraded

Course Texts (other works, and critical works, will be excerpted or posted on canvas):

NOTE: At your convenience please order the following editions (indicated by ISBN number) of these texts from Amazon – if you copy and paste any/either of the indicated isbn numbers into the amazon search bar you will get, as the first search result, the appropriate edition)

The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath (ISBN-13: 978-0060837020, ISBN-10: 0060837020)

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston (**ISBN-10:** 0061120065)

The Argonauts, Maggie Nelson (Page Numbers Source ISBN: 1555977073)

The Black Unicorn, Audre Lorde (ISBN-10: 0393312372, ISBN-13: 978-0393312379)

Blood and Guts in Highschool, Kathy Acker (ISBN-10: 0802127622, ISBN-13: 978-0802127624)

The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy (**ISBN-10:** 0812979656)

Her Body and Other Parties, Carmen Maria Machado (ISBN-10: 155597788X, ISBN-13: 978-1555977887)

Days of Abandonment, Elena Ferrante (ISBN-10: 1933372001 ISBN-13: 978-1933372006)

On Beauty, Zadie Smith (**ISBN-10:** 0143037749)

Unit 1: Major Feminisms

Plus: Introduction to Literary Critical Research

Week 1: What is Feminist Fiction? Plus, a Brief History of Feminist Lit Crit

Reading: Excerpts of the following texts, with representative answers to the question, which will be distributed in class via handout

Jeri Johnson, *Joyce and Feminism*

Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa"

Gayatri Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"

Week 2: What is Gender? Or, the first phase: white, hetero-feminisms

Reading: *The Bell Jar*, by Sylvia Plath and two poems: "Daddy," "Lady Lazarus" (you can read these poems online, by way of google, at www.poetryfoundation.com)

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, excerpts (canvas – read de Beauvoir's introduction and the first 5-7 pages of the chapters, in part 2, called "Childhood" and "Girlhood")

Optional Further Reading:

Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (canvas)

The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory, chapter 7 (Hollis)

Lesson/Workshop: Beginning Research Tutorial, How to Find Relevant Articles

****Mandatory Event: time date TBA: Welcome and Overview**

Week 3: Gender and Race, or, Multicultural feminisms

Reading: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston

bell hooks, *Ain't I a woman?*, excerpts (canvas)

Kimberle Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins* (canvas)

Optional Further Reading:

Carby, Hazel, "White Woman Listen!" (canvas)

Cambridge Companion, chapter 11

Lesson/Workshop: Discuss the articles you found

***Assignment:** Using the skills acquired in last week's research tutorial, find one work of literary criticism (article or book chapter) on one of the texts that we've read so far, or will read in the next few weeks (You may want to choose the author you feel most likely to write your first, close reading essay about). Be prepared to summarize the essay's argument, and provide a brief outline of how it presents that argument, in class. If you cannot find an academic article that interests you (though you should be able to), you may – with my permission - look at recent book reviews instead (maybe if working on Nelson).

Week 4: Gender and Sexuality, or queer/trans feminisms

Reading: *The Argonauts*, by Maggie Nelson

Selected poems from *The Black Unicorn*, by Audre Lorde

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Preface and chapter 1 (canvas)

Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz, "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" (canvas)

Optional Further Reading:

Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (book, find in Hollis, read intro)

Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet* (canvas)

Cambridge Companion ch. 13

****Week 3, Date TBD: Short (5-7 page) Paper Due****

**Unit 2: Major Feminisms, Continued
Plus: Choosing a Topic and Beginning Research**

Week 5: Postcolonial and Global Feminisms

Read: *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy
Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (canvas)

Optional Further Reading:

Gayatri Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak? (canvas)
Cambridge companion ch. 11

Workshop/Tutorial: Introduction to the Long Research Paper

*Assignment: Choose one sample junior paper, make a reverse outline of it (i.e., make a map, or outline, of its parts or sections based on reading it), and be prepared to discuss in class

Week 6: Free Week for Reading Ahead/Topic Selection and Library Session (plus: Women and Literary Marketplace)

Read: Any Text of Your Choosing From Later in the Course that you May Want to Write your Final Essay on, if you desire.

Plus, a few short texts on women and today's literary industry:

So and Piper, Women Write About Family, Men Write About War (google, read in new republic online)

Hungerford, "McSweeney's And the School of Life" (canvas)

VIDA.org (peruse website)

*Assignment: This is a largely free week for you to select a course text – potentially one from a later week in the course - that you may want to write your final essay on. Select and read a text (if you haven't already read it already) and come to class/this week's library session with an idea about 1-2 topics, related to that text, that you may want to write about. You can also, if you like, choose a text not on the syllabus, with my approval, if there's a topic you'd like to write on that we don't cover. The text/topic you choose is by no means a binding contract! Just to get you start thinking. You will meet with me, sometime this week, about your topic selection, and begin sample research on the topic during our library session.

*Mandatory Event: Library Session: date, time, TBD. This session, along with the conferences I have with you about potential topics, will either replace our usual seminar meeting or cut it down to 30 min-one hour.

*Mandatory Event: Date TBD, Seniors Tell All

Week 7: Posthuman and Futurist Feminisms, E-Literature

Read: Samples of electronic feminist literature, to be sent out via email

"Bloodchild," Octavia Butler (canvas)

Excerpts, My Mother Was A Computer, Katherine Hayles (canvas)

Rosi Braidotti, Posthuman Feminist Theory (canvas)

Yaszek, Lisa, "Afrofuturism in American Science Fiction" (canvas)

Optional Further Reading:

Donna Haraway, Cyborg Manifesto (canvas)

Workshop/Tutorial: The art of the prospectus, share the beginning results of your research

*Assignment: Research report number 1 -Begin research on the (tentative) topic that you are working with, and come to class ready to report on the type of things/criticism you are finding. After a shallow dive, what does the criticism on this topic look like?

Week 8: Radical Feminisms

Read: Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in Highschool*

Valerie Solanas, *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* (pdf)

Andrea Dworkin, Intercourse (canvas – read section called “Repulsion”)

Workshop/Tutorial: share prospectus topics

****Week 7, Tuesday, Prospectus with Annotated Bibliography Due****

Unit 3: Female Concerns

Plus: Researching and Writing the Final Essay

Week 9: Rage, Emotion, and Revenge

Read: Elena Ferrante, *Days of Abandonment*

Excerpts/images: Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself* (canvas; you can view the whole artists book at the fine arts library, or, if you really love it – and who wouldn't? - order as a coffee table book from amazon for \$66)

Ahmed, Sara, Intro and “Feminist Killjoys” in *The Promise of Happiness* (canvas)

Workshop/tutorial: share research reports, Intros, Arguments, and Lit Reviews

*Assignment: Research Report #2: Come in ready to report on some secondary research that you have conducted for your essay, most likely in one or both of two areas a) iliterary critical arguments b) relevant contextual information (e.g., information about the author’s biography or other works, information about the history/recent trajectory of the genre of novel in question, information about some relevant piece of historical context, like the advent of contraception or queer lib movement etc. etc.). Overall, try to be ready to explain how your choice of topic, and potential argument, relates to prior scholarship. Does it a) extend it, b) agree with it c) disagree with it? d)revise it? e) talk about something entirely different? Etc.

Week 10: Beauty, Bodies, Food, and Fat

Read/Watch: *On Beauty*, Zadie Smith

Her Body and Other Parties, selections

Alexander McQueen, Fashion Show (link to be provided, or screening)

Lauren Berlant, “Two Girls, Fat and Thin” in *Cruel Optimism* (Hollis ebook)

Read, Optional: Excerpts, *Hunger* by Roxanne Gay (canvas)

Workshop/Discussion: Discussion of argument and basic outline, Essay structure

*Assignment: Come in with idea of a basic argument and outline for your essay, to be shared

Week 11: Free Week: Outline meeting, draft writing

Take this week off to a) meet with me about (revised) versions of your outlines and b) write drafts of your essays, due before thanksgiving break)

Date TBD: full essay drafts due

Week 12:Female Adolescence

Watch: Fishtank (Film)

Workshop/Tutorial: Share your current essay drafts in progress, structure, pt. 2 and conclusions

Week 13: Feminisms Today: #MeToo, Pop Feminisms, Harassment, and Rape

Read: "Adrien Brody," by Marie Calloway; "Now, More than Ever," Zadie Smith

Workshop/Tutorial: Tutorial essay conference, Final Revisions

*Assignment: Complete a draft revision. Come in ready to give a very casual (messy as need be) flash 5 minute presentation on it, to prepare for the conference

Date TBD: Final Papers Due!

Date TBD, Junior Tutorial Conference

Course Policies

Attendance: I will allow each student a "free" tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have attenuating circumstances, communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Participation: Good participation in section comes in many forms: it's great to make a brilliant comment, but it's also helpful to ask a question, propose a new topic, flag a passage, or synthesize points that have already been made. The important thing is that you make your voice heard multiple times in every (or nearly every) class. If you think that you might be reluctant to speak up, for any reason, let me know when we meet next week. This is something that we can work on together.

My Availability/Email: I will be holding office hours at some time TBD, but you should email me to set up appointments whenever. Email is good for logistical questions (when is the essay due?) but I prefer to deal with all substantive issues (Would you say Butler's argument is wrong because...?) in person. I will also comment on drafts of arguments, outlines, essays etc. in person but not over email, so if you'd like me to look at them, email me to set up an appointment. I hope you will come meet with me, throughout the semester, many times!

Laptops/Phones: No laptops or phones in section, except on 1-2 exception days when we will be doing research tutorials. So please do print out all readings in hard copy to bring to class.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Assignments are due at the precise times listed on the schedule. Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. Extensions are strongly discouraged by the Junior tutorial board. If, very well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension for serious reasons, please talk with me.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS'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."*

Collaboration: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others' work. In individual assignments (which may include midterm or term papers, short writing assignments, homework or reading questions and responses, or take-home exams), collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: *"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, (DATE). 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."*