

Feminist Fictions

Instructor: Tess McNulty

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Office Hours: Tue 2-4pm, Lamont Café

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 Elena Ferrante, Toni Morrison, Kathy Acker, Naomi Alderman, Ursula LeGuin, and Han Kang, but it will also feature some poetry (e.g. by Audre Lorde), films (Fishtank, Town Bloody Hall), 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 choice.

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.

Assignments:

1. One 5-7 page paper, due in the fifth 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; you should also make reference, at some point, to one work of criticism (ideally but not necessarily in the introduction, framing the topic/thesis); this work of criticism may come from the course syllabus, or you may locate it on your own (you will have had practice, during the prior week, finding your own work of criticism).
2. One 2 page prospectus and annotated bibliography with 8-10 sources for the 20-25 page final paper, due in the 8th week.
3. 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). Students will receive a set of more specific guidelines three weeks in advance of the draft deadline, as well as writing instruction throughout the semester.
4. The 20-25 page final paper, due during reading week (official deadline TBA)
5. One 5 minute conference presentation (ungraded) on your paper, to be delivered to your peers.
6. 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, handing in a draft of your paper, etc.

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, most likely during weeks 2,4, and 6, dates TBA.

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 will be excerpted or posted on canvas):

The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath

The Left Hand of Darkness, Ursula LeGuin

Paradise, Toni Morrison

Blood and Guts in Highschool, Kathy Acker

The Black Unicorn, Audre Lorde

The Fall of Imam, Nawal El Saadawi

Days of Abandonment, Elena Ferrante

The Vegetarian, Han Kang

The Power, Naomi Alderman

*All critical works will be excerpted, see the unit titles in the course syllabus for more information on the topics/approaches these critical works represent

Unit 1, Basic Questions, Major Feminisms (Also: Intro to Literary Critical Research)

Week 1: What is Feminist Fiction?

Excerpts of the following texts, with representative answers to the question, in handout form:

Cixous, “The Laugh of Medusa”

Spivak, Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching

Johnson, Joyce and Feminism

Week 2: What is Gender?

Read: *The Bell Jar*, by Sylvia Plath and “Daddy”

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, excerpts

Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex”

*Mandatory, Junior Tutorial Program Wide Meeting (date TBA)

Week 3: Race and Gender (plus research tutorial)

Read: *Paradise*, by Toni Morrison

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

Grillo, Trina and Stephanie Wildman. "Sexism, Racism, and the Analogy Problem in Feminist Thought," in *Racism in the Lives of Women*

Week 4: Queer Feminisms

Read: *The Black Unicorn*, by Audre Lord

Excerpts: Eileen Miles, *Chelsea Girls*

Eve Sedgwick, "Epistemology of the Closet" *Epistemology of the Closet*, 67-90

Judith Halberstam, "Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" Special Issue of *Social Text*, co-edited with David Eng and Jose Munoz (Vol. 84–85 Fall/Winter 2005), pp. 1-17

*Assignment: Using the skills acquired in last week's research tutorial, find one work of literary criticism (essay or book chapter) on one of the texts that we've read so far that interests you. Make an outline of the work's argument, reducing it to a series of claims. Be prepared to summarize the essay's argument, and how it proves that argument, in class. If you cannot find an academic article that interests you (the pool will likely exist, but may be small), you may summarize the argument of 2-3 online reviews/review essays.

*Mandatory, Junior Tutorial Program Wide Meeting (date TBA)

Week 5: Global Feminisms

Read: *The Fall of Imam*, Nawal El Saadawi

Uma Narayan, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspective from a Nonwestern Feminist" *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*

Ingersoll, Earl, "The Fall of Imam and the Possibility of Feminine Writing"

****Short (5-7 page) Paper Due**** (see instructions above)

Week 6: Cyber and Futurist Feminisms

Read: *The Power*, Naomi Alderman

Donna Harraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*

Yaszek, Lisa, "Afrofuturism in American Science Fiction"

*Assignment: By this week I would like you to have thought about which literary text, or topic, you might like to focus your final paper on. In order to do so, you may want to read ahead in the course, if one of the later weeks seems to cover a text/topic that particularly interests you. Next week, I'll ask you to discuss preliminary ideas with me in a formal way.

*Mandatory, Junior Tutorial Program Wide Meeting (date TBA)

Unit 2: Female Concerns
(And: Planning and Write a Research Paper)

Week 7: Performance and Intersectionality

Read: *The Left Hand of Darkness*, by Ursula LeGuin
Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (excerpts)
Crenshaw, Mapping the Margins

*Assignment: By this week come up with one or a few potential, concrete ideas for your essay text/topic, to be discussed with me in an individual meeting. You should also begin to look for secondary sources related to your topic.

Week 8: Rage, Emotion, and Revenge

Read: *Days of Abandonment*, Elena Ferrante
Excerpts: Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*
Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoy" in *The Promise of Happiness*

Prospectus with Annotated Bibliography Due

Week 9 Beauty, Food, and Fat

Watch: Alexander McQueen, Spring Summer 2001 collection fashion show
Read: Excerpts, *Hunger* by Roxanne Gay
Lauren Berlant, "Two Girls, Fat and Thin" in *Cruel Optimism*

Week 10: Radicalism/Radical Feminisms

Read: *Blood and Guts in High School*, Kathy Acker
SCUM Manifesto, Valeria Solanas
Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (excerpts)

Assignment: 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) in literary critical arguments (what are the arguments that critics are making?) b) in relevant contextual information (e.g., information about the author's biography, publication history, 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 rise of the internet or globalization)

Week 11: Women and Animals

Read: *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang
Watch: Fishtank
Adams & Donovan, "Introduction," *Animals and Women*
Assignment: Come in with a mock thesis and outline for your essay

Week 12: Draft Week/Workshop, no reading

This week we'll hold a workshop to collectively discuss essay drafts; I will also be providing you with my own comments on your essay drafts, for revision.

****Essay Draft Due****

Week 13: Female Writing Now; Women and the Literary World

Watch: *Town Bloody Hall*

Hungerford, "McSweeney's And the School of Life"

So and Piper, Women Write About Family, Men Write About War

VIDA.org

****Final Essay due during reading week, date TBA by Junior Tutorial Program****

Course Policies

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), academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Attendance: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole; so is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. 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, being late really disrupts the work we're doing together: 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have attenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in 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. If, well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

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.”*