

ENG425W English Seminar, Fall 2010

Feminism and Literature

Reflection ◊ Theory ◊ Practice

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TTh 11:00-12:15
VB Seminar Room
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Office hours: Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays 10-11 and by appointment

Course Description

This course will explore in depth a single theoretical approach to literature. Our topic, as the title suggests, is feminist theory, which we will examine from several different (but decidedly overlapping) angles.

In the “Reflections” portion of the course, we will consider the need for feminist theory: What is it that writers and theorists are reacting against when they attempt to articulate the importance of women’s writing, or non-masculinist ways of reading literature, or the problems with how women have been represented historically? Second, in the “Theory” section, we will read some influential (and, in some cases, quite challenging) feminist theorists. These writers seek to establish new ways of thinking about personhood, gender, writing, the body, and other foundational categories of human existence; as such, they may require us to imaginatively inhabit some very different mental spaces in order to grasp their arguments (more on this below). Finally, in the “Practice” section of the course, we will read works by five women ranging from the medieval Marie de France to Byatt and Winterson, who are still writing today. In this section of the course, we will put actual literary texts in conversation with the theoretical works in order to explore the applicability and utility of these approaches to literature.

“Conversation” is a key component of this course. My point is not to make you embrace a particular theoretical perspective (all points of view, personal experiences, and philosophical approaches are welcome topics of discussion), but rather to try on some new ways of thinking about these issues and to consider what they add—or fail to add—to our understanding of language and literature and, by extension, of the broader social structures that we inhabit. I do not expect you to agree with everything that we read, but I do expect you to try to understand where these writers are coming from and *then* to check their ideas against your own experiences and perspectives. In this way, I think that we’ll have some very interesting discussions and fruitfully explore a major literary—as well as social—issue throughout the semester.

Course Books

Byatt, A.S. *The Matisse Stories*. New York: Vintage, 1996.

Cavendish, Margaret. *The Blazing World and Other Writings*. New York: Penguin, 1994.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*. New York: Norton, 2007.

Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand and Passing*. Ed. Deborah E. McDowell. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996.

Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*. New York: Penguin, 1999.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Written on the Body*. New York: Vintage, 1992.

Expectations

I expect you to come to class on time. Frequent tardiness will affect your attendance record.

Absences: If you must miss class for any reason, let me know as far in advance as possible. If you miss more than three classes—**for any reason**—your grade may be adversely affected. **Six absences (20% of the class) will lead to an automatic F for the course.**

Participation: This class is the culmination of your English experience at Eureka, and, as such, a high degree of scholarship and engagement is expected. I expect everyone to speak frequently in class and to participate actively in discussion. Please prepare for class by doing all of the assigned readings and writing assignments, reflecting and making notes on the discussion questions that will be distributed via email, and noting issues that are of interest to you throughout the semester. The Response Papers (described below) will also be instrumental in helping you to prepare for class.

Assignments for this course consist of the following:

- *Response Papers.* For every class meeting for which there is an assigned reading, you will write a response paper of at least $\frac{3}{4}$ -page (single-spaced) in length. See the handout on response papers for more details regarding content. You must **email** me your response papers before that day's class; I will read them as time permits (i.e. if I receive one at 10:58, I won't read it before class, but it will still be considered on time), and they will be used as the basis for our class discussions; you should therefore bring a copy to class so that you can refer to it during our discussions. **Twice during the semester, you will re-submit five response papers that you would like me to grade.** These papers will make up most of the grade under this category (20% of the final grade); the remaining grade (5%) will be awarded for on-time completion of all papers. No late response papers will be accepted.
- *Paper prospectus.* Early in the semester, you will put together a prospectus for your final paper, which will be an analysis of one literary text (or small set of texts—e.g. a couple of short stories by one author). **The text that you choose to analyze need not be one that was assigned for the course,** although you certainly may use one of the works that we'll be reading together. In brief, the prospectus will require you to compile a preliminary bibliography of critical scholarship on your literary work(s) and to sketch out a tentative approach of your own. You are to use the week of September 21 and 23, when I will be out of town at a conference, to compile your bibliography and draft your prospectus.
- *Theory-grappling paper.* emphasis on "grappling." I will give you a short list of issues and your assignment will be to describe and synthesize the ways in which two theorists (of your choice, mostly) address one of those issues.
- *Draft of final paper and Workshop leading.* We will have in-class workshops on all final papers. Drafts will be graded based primarily on completion and effort. In addition,

each student will be responsible for leading the workshop for one other student's paper, and your doing so will be graded. Details to follow.

- *Final paper.* This is the paper that you will present (in shortened form) at the Capstone Presentation in December. In addition, you will submit it for consideration to the Undergraduate English Language and Literature Conference at the University of St. Francis (March 2011).
- *English Major summary paper.* This is a reflective paper in which you will review your work as an English major at Eureka; details of the assignment will be provided early in the semester.

Grades will be determined according to the following rubric:

Response papers	25%
Paper prospectus	5%
Theory-grappling paper	15%
Draft of final paper	5%
Workshop leading	5%
Final paper	30%
English Major summary paper	5%
Participation	10%

A = 90%, B = 80%, C = 70%, D = 60%; anything less than 60% is an F.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty constitutes a major breach of the trust that exists between the instructor and the student. It includes passing off another's ideas as one's own, any attempt to gain information about a test or exam prior to the test or exam date without the instructor's consent, and providing unauthorized assistance on a test, exam, paper, or other assignment to another student. Copying text directly off of the Internet, or rewriting materials found on-line in one's "own words" but without proper attribution, constitute cheating. Cheating on any assignment—no matter how seemingly trivial—will result in a failing grade for this course. Students who fail for academic dishonesty will not have the option of withdrawing. If you are in doubt about what plagiarism means, or about how to appropriately document sources in your work, please contact me; I will be happy to help.

Learning Center/ADA Statement

The Learning Center, located on the first floor of Alumni Hall, provides academic services to all Eureka College students. Consultations are available in the areas of math and writing. Study groups, individual academic counseling and course-specific tutoring are also available by contacting Jason Zimmerman at x6520 or jzimmerman@eureka.edu. *I highly recommend that you use the Writing Tutors at the Learning Center (a free service offered to Eureka students).*

Any Eureka College student with a disability or other special circumstances requiring accommodations or other consideration in order to successfully complete the requirements of this course is requested to identify himself/herself to the instructor and discuss the matter privately. This disclosure should be made within the first week of the course so proper accommodations can be made.

Course synopsis (subject to change)

Th 8/26 Intro to course

Part 1: Reflection

- Tu 8/31 Simone de Beauvoir, excerpt from *The Second Sex* (299-323);¹ Christine de Pizan, excerpt from *The Book of the City of Ladies* (13-19)
- Th 9/2 Mary Shelley, “Introduction” to *Frankenstein* (71-75); George Eliot, “Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft” and excerpt from *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists* (79-92); Eavan Boland, “Letter to a Young Woman Poet” (279-288)
- Tu 9/7 Virginia Woolf, excerpt from *A Room of One’s Own* (123-137); Tillie Olsen, “One Out of Twelve” (169-184)
- Th 9/9 Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken” (187-200)
- Tu 9/14 Joanna Russ, “What Can a Heroine Do?” (200-211)
- Th 9/16 Gloria Anzaldúa, “Borderlands/*La Frontera*” (247-257)
- Tu 9/21 Class canceled (professor at a conference): Work on prospectus
- Th 9/23 Class canceled (professor at a conference): Work on prospectus

Part 2: Theory

Note: During this portion of the course, I encourage you to use some of your response papers to reflect on how that day’s essay does (or does not) apply to your chosen literary text(s).

- Tu 9/28 Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (414-430)
Paper prospectus due
- Th 9/30 Luce Irigaray, “This Sex Which Is Not One” (437-443)
- Tu 10/5 Donna Haraway, from *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (584-601)
- Th 10/7 Susan Bordo, “Unbearable Weight” (744-757)
- Tu 10/12 Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (on e-reserve; please print a copy and bring it to class)
Suggested reading for additional context: Carolyn Dever, from *Obstructive Behavior: Dykes in the Mainstream of Feminist Theory* (772-787)
- Th 10/14 Terry Castle, “The Apparitional Lesbian” (757-772); Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” (620-629)
Five response papers to be resubmitted in hard copy today

¹ Until we reach the “Practice” section of the course, page numbers refer to the reader.

Tu 10/19 Hortense Spillers, excerpt from *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe* (630-649)

Part 3: Practice

Note: In this portion of the course, your journals should place the literary texts in conversation with the theory and reflection essays read earlier in the semester. You might even try to pick one theoretical text that does or does not “apply” to each literary text and use that as the basis for your journal.

Th 10/21 Marie de France, “Guigemar,” “Equitan,” and “Yonec”; also read Jennifer Willging’s essay on Marie de France (852-860)

Tu 10/26 Marie de France, “Les Deux Amanz,” “Milun,” “Chaitivel,” and “Eliduc”
Theory-grappling paper due; NO response paper due today!

Th 10/28 Margaret Cavendish, “A New Description of the World, Called the Blazing World” (119-bottom of 151)

During the week of 11/1-11/5, each of you will meet with me for an individual conference on your paper. A sign-up sheet will be distributed in class on 10/28.

Tu 11/2 Finish Cavendish (151-end [223])

Th 11/4 Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1-62)

Tu 11/9 Finish *Quicksand* (63-end [135]); also read Barbara Johnson’s essay on Larsen (949-957)

Th 11/11 Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (9-111, or as much of it as you can get through [111 is the first natural stopping-point])

Tu 11/16 Finish Winterson (115-end [190])

Th 11/18 Byatt, “Medusa’s Ankles” from *The Matisse Stories*

Tu 11/23 Byatt, “Art Work” and “The Chinese Lobster” (*Matisse Stories*)
Five response papers to be resubmitted in hard copy today

Th 11/25 **No class—Thanksgiving**

Tu 11/30 Workshops. **Group 1 drafts due 5 pm M 11/29.**

Th 12/2 Workshops. **Group 2 drafts due 5 pm W 12/1.**

Tu 12/7 Wrap-up and party

Capstone presentations will be held in the Gammon Room this week; date TBA. They will most likely be in the evening (at around 7:30), most likely on either Monday or Tuesday.

Final paper and English Major Summary Paper are due in my office or mailbox (#118) by 3:30 pm on Friday, 12/10.