

English 108E: Women in Literature  
Tues/Thurs, 1:00-2:20 HH150  
Victoria Lamont  
HH 236; [vlamont@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:vlamont@uwaterloo.ca)  
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 3:00-4:00, or by appointment

### **Course Description**

In this course we will study four American novels about women that span the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Through lectures and class discussion about these novels and their contexts, I plan to introduce you to some of the key issues in the study of women in literature, including notions of ideal womanhood, marriage and domesticity, and women's relation to traditionally male arenas such as work, art, and rationality. I have chosen to focus on novels by women writers (with the exception of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*), and plan to situate the novels we read in the broader context of the history of women's writing.

A secondary focus of this course will be to introduce you to university-level essay writing in the discipline of English. Using Katherine Acheson's *Writing Essays About Literature* as a guide, we will spend class time discussing and practicing all phases of the essay-writing process, including research, drafting, documenting, and polishing.

Note: This course requires a substantial amount of reading. It is a course well-suited to students who enjoy reading literature and are prepared to invest significant time in reading every week. If you are taking more than a full-course load, work full-time, or engaged in a lot of extra-curricular activities, you might want to think about taking a different course.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course you should be able to identify key issues in the study of women in literature, critically analyze the way these issues are represented in the assigned literary texts, and present your analysis in essay form. You should be familiar with all phases of the essay preparation process, including the research, composition, documentation, and polishing phase. For the final exam, you should be able to discuss all of the assigned texts in detail and in ways that relate to the content of lectures and class discussion.

### **Required Texts (Available in the Bookstore)**

Note: please bring your literary texts to class, and use the assigned editions. You will need your texts for in-class writing assignments and as reference during lectures and class discussion.

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. Broadview Press edition.  
*Little Women* was one of the most widely read novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as is now regarded as a classic of children's literature, but don't let the label "children's lit"

fool you. This is a very sophisticated and pioneering work of women's literature that addresses issues of marriage, work, female friendship and community, and women's roles. This rich novel raises the questions and concerns that the later novels in the course continue to take up. It is most well-known for its main character Jo, regarded as the first literary tomboy.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Broadview Press edition.

Published in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on the cusp of the achievement of woman suffrage, *The Awakening* was one of the first novels to sympathetically portray a woman who is unhappy in her role as wife and mother, leaves her family, and pursues a career as an artist as well as personal sexual fulfillment. It was a controversial book in its time and was widely criticized for challenging the belief that marriage and family represented the only possible destiny for women.

Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep*. Vintage edition.

*The Big Sleep* is a hardboiled detective novel that inaugurated the figure of the femme fatale in American culture. The femme fatale is a highly sexualized but powerful woman who threatens the male detective's ability to solve the crime. The femme fatale figure was created during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a period when women were making significant political and economic gains in North American society. They could now vote in elections, run for political office, and had more opportunities in the workplace. *The Big Sleep* is in part a kind of backlash against these developments, an expression of anxiety about the possibility that women were out of control, and that society was breaking down as a result.

Kim, Suki. *The Translator*. Picador edition.

*The Translator* is a recent, award-winning detective novel about a young Korean-American woman who finds herself investigating the murder of her parents. I chose this text for two reasons: First, this course follows the historical development of women's writing from the nineteenth century into the contemporary period; one of the most significant developments in contemporary women's writing is the growth of writing by non-Anglo women such as Kim, who emigrated to the United States from Korea at the age of 13 and writes from her perspective as a member of the Korean-American community. Second, I wanted a novel that would be a good counterpoint to *The Big Sleep*. Suki Kim takes many of the conventions of the hardboiled detective novel and turns them on their head by engaging a female detective's point of view.

Acheson, Katherine. *Writing Essays About Literature*.

Many students see the English essay as this mystical thing that some people "get" and others don't. In fact, there is a method to a good essay, and I believe that every student is capable of writing a good essay if they have the tools to do it. In this course, we will be following the method outlined by Katherine Acheson based on her many years of experience writing essays and teaching English students.

*The Little Brown Compact Handbook*.

This is the English student's Bible. It explains the composition process, common grammatical errors, how to document and format essays, and so on.

### Classroom Etiquette

This is a small, discussion-based class and your attention and courtesy is expected. Please arrive for class on time, and turn off your cell phones and put them away. You are welcome to use laptops for taking notes in class or for other class-related activities; otherwise please put them away. If you have to leave class early, please let me know ahead of time as a courtesy and sit by the door to avoid undue disruption of the class.

### Assignments

The penalty for late submission is 3% day. No extensions except in the case of documented medical or mental health emergencies.

#### 1. In-class writing assignments (20% of course mark):

Every Tuesday, you will spend the first 20 minutes of class writing about the assigned literary reading, based on a question that I will provide in class. Often, I will ask you to write about a specific passage from the text, so you will need to bring your text to class and use the assigned edition. Each assignment will be given a mark out of 10. You are allowed to miss two in-class writing assignments without penalty. For these assignments I will be looking for clear evidence that you have prepared the assigned reading.

#### 2. Writing diagnostic (10% of course mark, due Oct. 1, submit to the Learn dropbox:

This assignment is designed to give first-year students an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the expectations for university-level writing in the discipline of English. For this assignment, write a paragraph on the following topic: Choose one character from *Little Women* and explain how that character contributes to one theme or idea developed in the novel (e.g. women and art, women and work, gender and parenting, etc. ). Your paragraph should strive to follow Acheson's "Features of Strong Paragraphs" (Acheson 115).

**Note:** This assignment is mandatory for first-year students and students who have not taken an English class before. Other students may skip this assignment and add the value to the essay assignment. You must notify me if you plan to choose this option.

#### 3. Thesis statement and annotated bibliography (20% of course mark, due Oct. 29, submit to the Learn dropbox).

For this assignment, you will choose one of the assigned literary texts and follow the essay preparation process mapped out in Acheson, chapters one through six. You will hand in a thesis statement together with an annotated list of secondary sources that you plan to use in your essay. An annotation is a brief summary of the content of the source. Your annotated bibliography should follow MLA documentation format for the list of works cited (explained in the Little Brown handbook). Each

annotation should, in a few sentences, summarize the purpose or argument of the source and explain how it will be used in your essay.

You annotated bibliography must include the following:

- a. Two reference sources (see Acheson chapter 3; may include the apparatus of the assigned text where relevant)
- b. Two sources on the relevant historical or social context (see Acheson chapter 4)
- c. Two sources (peer-reviewed articles or scholarly article) on the current critical assessment of literary works (see Acheson chapter 5).

I will evaluate the thesis statement on the basis of the originality and importance of the argument, the clarity of the expression of the argument, the logical progression of ideas, sentence structure, word-choice, grammar and spelling, formatting and presentation. I will evaluate the annotated list of secondary sources on the basis of the relevance of the secondary sources to the argument, the composition of the annotations, formatting and presentation.

4. Essay (30% of course mark). Length: 8-10 pages or 2000-2500 words. Submit to dropbox on Learn. Due. Dec. 3)

For this assignment, you will revise your thesis based on my feedback, and complete the body of your essay (see Acheson chapters 8-11).

I will evaluate essays on the basis of the improvement on the thesis and research preparation, the originality and importance of the argument, the progression of ideas between paragraphs and within paragraphs, sentence structure, word-choice, grammar and spelling, formatting and presentation.

Note: Written assignments will be screened for correct documentation using Turnitin.com. If you do not wish to have your essay run through Turnitin.com, you may submit your essay directly to me, accompanied by all notes and drafts produced in the process of preparing the essay. You will have an opportunity to use Turnitin to check that your essay is appropriately documented before submitting a final draft.

5. Final Exam (20% of course mark, to be written during the exam period.)

For the exam, you will write two essays based on a choice of questions. You will be required to write about texts *other than those you wrote about for your essay*. You will be asked to recall material from lectures and class discussion, and to contribute your own original arguments about the texts. You should be able to support your analysis with references to specific characters, events, and passages, or other aspects of the primary texts.

## Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Milestones

### Week 1 (Sept 11/14)

**Start thinking about your final essay:** *Choose the target text for your essay NOW. I recommend that you choose the text that interests you most; that way, you will be more motivated to learn more about it. Begin the process of reading and researching within the text as described in Acheson chapter 2. If you set aside a little time each week to do this, you will have a great head start on your final essay.*

#### Tues

Introductions to each other and the course

#### Thurs

*Little Women* Chapter I; Acheson Chapter 1

### Week 2 (Sept. 18/20)

#### Tues

*Little Women* through ch. XVI (up to p. 200 in Broadview edition);  
Acheson Ch. II  
In-class writing.

#### Thurs

Acheson Chapter III; Introduction to *Little Women* in Broadview scholarly edition.

### Week 3 (Sept 25/27)

#### Tues

Reading: *Little Women* chapters VII-XX (to page 350); Acheson chapter four  
In-class writing

#### Thurs

Acheson chapter five  
*Little Women* cont'd.

### Week 4 (Oct 2/4)

•Writing diagnostic on *Little Women* due Oct 1.

#### Tues

*The Awakening* chapters I-XX (to pp. 105 in Broadview edition); Acheson chapter six  
In-class writing

#### Thurs

"Introduction" to *The Awakening*

### **Week 5 (Oct 9/11).**

Tues

*The Awakening* to end; Acheson chapter seven

In-class writing

Thurs

*The Awakening* cont'd.

### **Week 6 (Oct 16/18)**

Tues

*The Big Sleep* chapters 1-15 (to pp. 89 in Vintage edition);

In-class writing

Thurs

*The Big Sleep*

### **Week 7 (Oct. 23/25)**

Tues

*The Big Sleep* chapters 16-25 (to p. 169 in Vintage edition);

In-class writing

Thurs

*The Big Sleep* cont'd.

### **Week 8 (Oct. 30/Nov 1)**

•**Thesis statements with annotated list of secondary works due Oct. 29.**

Tues

*The Big Sleep* to end; Acheson Chapter 8

Thurs

*The Big Sleep*

### **Week 9 (Nov 6/8) No classes.**

### **Week 10 (Nov 13/15)**

Tues

*The Interpreter* chapters 1-8 (to pp. 99 in Picador edition); Acheson Chapter 9; In-class writing

Thurs

*The Interpreter* cont'd.

## **Week 11 (Nov 20/22)**

### Tues

*The Interpreter* chapters 9-15 (pp. 100-204 in Picador edition); Acheson Chapter 10;  
In-class writing

## **Week 12 (Nov 27/29)**

### Tues

*The Interpreter* to end; Acheson Chapter 11

### Thurs

*The Interpreter* cont'd.

**Essays Due Dec. 3.**

## **Other Important Information**

The University of Waterloo requires that I include the following information on my course syllabus:

***Cross Listed Courses:*** Please note that a cross-listed course will count in all respective averages no matter under which rubric it has been taken. For example, a PHIL/PSCI cross-list will count in a Philosophy major average, even if the course was taken under the Political Science rubric.

***Academic Integrity:*** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

***Discipline:*** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline,

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>.

***Grievance:*** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm>.

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals,

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm>.

**Academic Integrity website (Arts):**

[http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic\\_responsibility.html](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html)

**Academic Integrity Office (uWaterloo):**

<http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/>

**Note for students with disabilities:** The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

**Turnitin.com:** Plagiarism detection software (Turnitin) will be used to screen assignments in this course. This is being done to verify that use of all material and sources in assignments is documented. In the first week of the term, details will be provided about the arrangements for the use of Turnitin in this course.