

University of Waterloo, Winter 2010
Department of English Language and Literature
Course: ENGL 108E, cross-listed with Women's Studies 108E
Women in Literature

Lecture dates and times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11:20am

Course location: PAS 1241

Instructor: Susie DeCoste

Office: PAS 1062

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1145-1pm and by appointment

Contact: susiedecoste@gmail.com

Course description: This course asks students to engage with a selection of texts and media from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries to examine the roles and representations of women in literature. We will explore Canadian, British, and American texts by male and female authors to determine how certain representations of women were continued, challenged, and/or changed through women's struggle for autonomy as people, and as writers. The texts we will examine will help us to establish how femininity has been constructed in various contexts, how society has responded to those constructions, ways in which those constructions are textualized, and how texts must be continually re-written as concepts of gender evolve. The course aims to establish feminism's significance in its ability to bring questions about the discursively-constructed nature of identities to light.

The course material will be presented in lectures and analyzed in discussion in class. Students are expected to be prepared to discuss the readings assigned for each class. A number of essay-writing workshops (30-45 mins) will be given throughout the term during class time to prepare students for the writing assignments in this course and beyond.

Course objectives:

- To become aware of the ways women have been represented, and have represented themselves, in British, Canadian, and American literature from the mid 19th century to the 21st century.
- To recognize, and to exercise, the significance of re-vision as a literary strategy for women/feminist writers.
- To be introduced to the basic tenets of feminist literary discourse.
- To gain practice and expertise in critical thinking through writing.
- To improve analytical skills in reading literature and constructing informed, formal arguments.
- To sincerely consider how the historical representations of women in literature relates to your own life and times.

Required texts (available in the UW bookstore):

A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf (1929)

Autobiography of a Face Lucy Grealy (1994)

Wide Sargasso Sea Jean Rhys (1966)

The Handmaid's Tale Margaret Atwood (1985)

NOTE: other required readings will be deposited on UW-ACE and available in an optional coursepack in the UW bookstore

Evaluation:

Short Essay (due Jan 26): 15 %

Creative Re-Write (due February 25): 25 %

Final Paper (due Apr 1): 30 %

Final exam (date TBA): 30%

Short essay (750 words, 3 pages): 15% (DUE JANUARY 26)

- Students will write a short essay on the first two chapters of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Students are expected to give particular attention to the introductory paragraph of their essay. The introductory paragraph must focus on the given topic, provide a cogent thesis statement (the thesis statement must be underlined for this assignment), and indicate aspects of the argument that is to come in the rest of the essay. More details, including a list of possible ways to approach the text, will be provided in an in-class workshop on writing introductions to academic essays.
 - **NOTE:** Students are to meet with me individually to pick up and discuss their essays on February 2. A sign-up sheet will be provided in class.

Creative rewrite assignment: 25% (DUE FEB 25th)

- This is a two-part assignment:
- **PART ONE:** In keeping with the spirit of Adrienne Rich's essay "When We as Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," students will creatively re-write an aspect of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* or Alice Munro's "The Office" to expose or argue an aspect of the treatment of women in the original text. Your revision must be at least 500 words, and no longer than five pages (1250 words). If you are writing a lyric poem, for instance, 500 words may be all you need.
 - Questions to consider:
 - How are women represented or constructed in your chosen scene, character, or other literary aspect?
 - How will you change this representation or construction?
 - Do you wish to change the form of the text?
 - How might the form change the reception of your revised text?
 - Will you choose to imitate Margaret Atwood's voice and style, or will you re-present them?

- **PART TWO:** In 750-1000 words (3-4 pages double-spaced), analyze your text in comparison to the original.

- Questions to consider:

- What has been re-visioned?
- What techniques have been employed?
- How does your text respond to Rich's text? Atwood's/Munro's text?

Students may refer to any other re-visions we have studied in their analysis to compare their own strategies with other re-visionist writers.

- **NOTE:** Remember to model your introduction to the analysis on the introduction assignment (cogent thesis statement, indication of the argument that is to come in the rest of the essay, focus on the topic at hand).

Final paper (1500 words, 6 pages): 30% (DUE APRIL 1)

Building upon your interpretative and analytical skills learned in the first two writing assignments, and beginning with an introductory paragraph modeled on the introduction assignment (cogent thesis statement, indication of the argument that is to come in the rest of the essay, focus on the topic at hand), students will construct an argument concerning the representation, construction, or roles of women in particular course texts. A list of possible topics will be provided. Students may choose their own topics if they have their topic approved in writing at least 2 weeks before the assignment is due.

- **NOTE:** Students must address texts that they have not already addressed in depth in previous assignments.

Final Exam (date TBA): 30%

- The exam will be in three parts:
 - a choice of passages to identify by both author and title, followed by an explanation of the significance of that particular passage to the text as a whole
 - a series of short answer questions for identifying the definition of literary terms used often during the course
 - a choice of essay questions: students will choose one
- The final class will be dedicated to course review and specific details on the exam format if required.

COURSE SCHEDULE: (Readings may occasionally spill over into the following class; essay writing workshops take place during class and will take up 1/3 of the allotted class time)

| Date | Unit | Readings | Important notes |
|------------|--|--|---|
| January 5 | Introduction | | |
| January 7 | Women and literary tradition | Virginia Woolf <i>A Room of One's Own</i> Ch 1-2 | |
| January 12 | | Gilbert and Gubar "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship" | |
| January 14 | | Adrienne Rich "Diving into the Wreck" Dorothy Livesay "The Three Emilys" | Essay writing workshop: thesis statements and introductory paragraphs |
| January 19 | Women as art | Lord Alfred Tennyson "The Lady of Shallott" Robert Browning "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess" | |
| January 21 | | Christina Rosetti "Song" and "After Death" | (note: no office hours Thursday January 21) |
| January 26 | Re-vision | Adrienne Rich "When We as Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" Alanis Morrisette and The Black Eyed Peas "My Humps" (in-class video screenings) | Short essay due sign up for individual appointments |
| January 28 | | Alice Munro "The Office" | |
| Feb 2 | no class | individual appointments | |
| Feb 4 | Motherhood: biological determinism and commodity | Margaret Atwood <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> | |
| Feb 9 | | Margaret Atwood <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> | Essay writing workshop Feb 9: introducing and explaining quotations |
| Feb 11 | | Margaret Atwood <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> | |

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| Feb 15-19 | no classes | reading week | reading week |
| Feb 23 | Madness in the Attic | Jean Rhys <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> | |
| Feb 25 | | Jean Rhys <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> | Creative Re-write assignment due |
| March 2 | | Jean Rhys <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> | Essay writing workshop: student's choice (bring questions or concerns about the writing process to class) |
| March 4 | Beauty and Self Image | Sue Goyette "I Know Women" Marlene NourbeSe Philip "Meditations on the Declension of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheek Bones" | |
| March 9 | | Elizabeth Bishop "In the Waiting Room" | |
| March 11 | | Lucy Grealy <i>Autobiography of a Face</i> | |
| March 16 | | Lucy Grealy <i>Autobiography of a Face</i> | |
| March 18 | | Lucy Grealy <i>Autobiography of a Face</i> | Essay writing workshop: making transitions |
| March 23 | Women and literary tradition | Virginia Woolf <i>A Room of One's Own</i> Ch 3-4 | |
| March 25 | | Virginia Woolf <i>A Room of One's Own</i> Ch 5 | March 25: peer editing of final papers- bring a complete draft of your final essay |
| March 30 | | Virginia Woolf <i>A Room of One's Own</i> Ch 6 | |
| Apr 1 | review, reflect | | Final paper due |

CLASSROOM POLICIES:

- Arrive on time.
- Respect your fellow students' opportunity to engage in the course (turn off cell phones, refrain from speaking/whispering unless called upon to do so, if using a laptop please sit near the back of the room so others are not distracted, do not begin packing up before I have dismissed the class).
- If you must miss a class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed from a classmate; I do not provide notes for missed classes.
- Speak up: ask questions, engage in the course material, allow yourself to be challenged by the texts.

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE:

- Students should feel free to use email to contact me about any aspect of the course that is not explained in this syllabus that does not require extensive explanation. For broader questions or concerns, or for questions requiring a longer or detailed response, please make an appointment, or see me during my office hours (Tuesdays and Thursdays 1145-1pm).
- Please include the course number (ENGL/WS 108E) in the subject line of any email correspondence.
- I normally read email during business hours (9am-5pm) Monday through Friday, and respond to email within 48 hours. Last minute questions or concerns about assignments should be sent at least 48 hours in advance to guarantee a response.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ASSIGNMENTS:

- Assignments must be submitted in person at the beginning of class on the date the assignment is due. If an assignment is handed in during or after class, it will be considered late by one day and will immediately be deducted 5%.
- Students are expected to be familiar with, and to follow, MLA guidelines for formatting research papers. Refer to the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (available at the library and campus bookstore) or visit the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
- All submitted assignments must be typed, double-spaced, in 12pt Times New Roman font. Staple sheets together on the upper left hand corner; please do not submit assignments in folders, portfolio covers, or clips.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

- With the exception of extenuating circumstances (family emergency, medical reasons), late assignments will be deducted 5% per day **including** weekends and holidays.
- Late assignments must be submitted to the English Department Assignment Drop Box (2nd floor Hagey Hall).
- **No assignment will be accepted after April 9.**

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity [check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/] to avoid committing an academic offence, 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 instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate Associate Dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances) (other than a petition) or Policy 71 (Student Discipline) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 (Student Appeals) www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.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, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm. When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.