Twentieth-Century Women Writers
English 208E
Winter, 1999

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Course Description:
This course explores the work of women writers in the twentieth century, paying particular attention to contemporary themes and innovations in literary form. We will examine several generic forms – novels, short stories, poetry, an essay, and a play – and discuss both the writers’ uses of these forms, and the issues raised in and by their work; in other words, we will make both the matter and the manner of writing the objects of our study. The works under our consideration span most of the twentieth century, and we will draw on discussions of literary developments in the twentieth century (such as Modernism and Postmodernism) to enrich our discussion. We will also use a course theme, the idea of conversation, to ask questions about how the works we study might “talk” to one another, and to organise our own class discussion, which will follow a seminar model, rather than a lecture format. Participants in the class will engage in active learning procedures, such as peer teaching and self-evaluation, since such active learning has been demonstrated to promote the development of critical thinking skills. By the end of the semester, participants will have practised skills associated with close reading and responding, literary analysis, research, presentation, and writing.

Texts:
Atwood, Margaret: Lady Oracle
Erdich, Louise: Love Medicine
Macdonald, Anne-Marie: Goodnight, Desdemona (Good Morning, Juliet)
Morrison, Toni: Jazz
Woolf, Virginia: Mrs. Dalloway
A course reading packet available in the bookstore
A handbook of your choice

Required Work:
Close reading exercise plus evaluation – 20%
Group presentation plus evaluations – 35%
End-of-term research project plus evaluation – 20%
Final examination – 25%

Notes:
– work for the group presentation will be divided fairly to avoid lazy people taking credit for
other people’s work
– groups will work on their projects at least partly during class time to avoid the problem of
group members being unable to find time to work together
– all work submitted will be accompanied by participants’ own self-evaluations; guidelines for
these will be provided
– course participants will evaluate presentations, and these evaluations will factor into the final
grade; guidelines for these will be provided

Some Course Policies:

Extensions
Since presentations will comprise much of class activity after a certain point, they cannot be
rescheduled; if participants are ill enough to be absent on their presentation day, they may – with
medical documentation – be able to design an extra-credit assignment to compensate for the
absence. Extensions for other work may be possible, if participants negotiate an extension
privately, before the assignment is due.

Class Contribution
Since most of the course work will be, in one way or another, collaborative and carried out
during class time, participants should be prepared to attend class and contribute regularly to
class proceedings.

Schedule:
(Note: this schedule is approximate and subject to change, if we decide it is necessary.)

Jan. 5 – hand out syllabus
  7 – Berkinow*¹

  12 – Berkinow and Woolf
  14 – Woolf

  19 – Woolf
  21 – Woolf

  26 – Woolf and Parker*
  28 – Atwood

Feb. 2 – Atwood
  4 – Atwood

  9 – Atwood and Rich*
  11 – Rich and Plath*

¹All selections marked by an asterisk can be found in the course reading packet.