

GWS 350: Special Topics in Gender and Literature

Women Writers and Social Fictions in 20th Century Literature

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TuTh 11am-12:15pm Sterling 2301

Office hrs: Th 12:30pm-2:30pm Sterling 3409

Canvas Course URL <http://www.canvas.wisc.edu/courses/448812>

Course Description

Analyzes 20th century transnational literature by women writers *about* women writers and creative women. Authors portray female characters who are in the process of writing or other artistic endeavors and, through the characters, show them grapple with gendered “social fictions” regarding women’s roles, creativity, and power. Focusing on literature that portrays women who write and women who are creative, we will examine how women’s written works of art are shaped by social fictions regarding domestic labor, pregnancy, motherhood, sexual repression, woman as visual/representational, and more. We will also examine different forms of creativity and different access to the creative realm among women in literature. What historical, institutional, and systemic obstacles have shaped what women write and which women write? How does the portrayal of writerly/creative female characters vary based on their gender, race, sexuality, and locationality?

“**Unit One: Creativity and Procreativity**” addresses the binarization of women’s creativity and procreativity as an ideological separation of mind and body. Women have been marginalized from the creative sphere, and specifically from authorship, by the patriarchal notion that women create children with their bodies rather than create art with their minds. Also, women artists grapple with the pragmatic restrictions that mother’s work puts on creative work while also acknowledging that children can inspire creativity and agency. How do representations of artistic women address this separation of body and mind, motherhood and authorhood, babies and books, woman and writer?

“**Unit Two: Race and (Re)Writing**” considers how racial histories of degradation, violence, hypersexualization, and silencing have shaped African American women authors’ representations of creativity. Black women encountered institutional racism when trying to be recognized as writers, as well as narrative racism through their marginalization or omission within popular literature. In response, they portray creative female characters through motifs that reflect both racial oppression and new forms of racial expression. How do black women writers address the creative process differently? How do they re-write previous texts and notions of women’s artistry?

“**Unit Three: Picturing Women Writing**” considers the dominance of women as representation and muse, but marginalization as author and artist. Women dominate the imagistic realm, from the female nude in art to women’s bodies in mass media today, yet men traditionally author these representations. For example, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, less than 5% of the artists in the modern art section are women but 85% of its nudes are figures of women. By looking at how female authors portray creative women in the genre of the graphic novel specifically, we can ask: What does it mean when women visually represent women in literature? What does the imagistic component of the graphic novel lend to questions of female representation, authorship, and creativity? Does the autobiographical graphic novel redefine notions of the nude, the muse, and the artist for women?

Required Course Textbooks

A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf.

Foe by J.M. Coetzee.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker.

Push by Sapphire.

Fun Home by Alison Bechdel.

Persepolis Books 1 & 2 by Marjane Satrapi.

Course Assignments

In-class posts and group participation (10%)
In-class quizzes (15%)
3-page essay (15%)
5-page essay (20%)
Midterm (20%)
Final Exam (20%)

Final Letter Grades

A 93-100
AB 88-92
B 83-87
BC 78-82
C 70-77
D 60-69
F below 60

Six novels, six timed in-class quizzes, six short in-class posts, two essays, two exams, group participation.

Content Alert/Trigger Warning

The readings for this course discuss and depict sexual activity (*Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Fun Home* by Bechdel), sexual violence (*The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Push* by Sapphire), rape and incest (*The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Push* by Sapphire), and attempted suicide (*Persepolis Books 1 & 2* by Marjane Satrapi). It is recommended that students who feel they may be unable to read about, view, discuss, and write about sexual topics and violence in a safe, healthy, critical, and responsible manner do not take this course.

Course Learning Outcomes

Content: You will learn how writers represented the idea of women's writing across transnational texts and explore how the meaning and possibility of creativity differs for different groups.
Writing: You will learn how to write original, coherent, and compelling arguments that move beyond summary to analysis through independent and critical thinking in clear prose.
Critical Reading: You will become more attentive and productive readers of literary texts.
Critical Thinking: You will gain proficiency in assessing textual evidence, structuring complex arguments, asking pertinent questions, and making nuanced distinctions and connections.

Course Expectations

All class work will be demanding in terms of reading, writing, and thought. It is essential that you keep up with the assigned readings, since falling behind will leave you without exposure to the concepts I will cover and build upon. Essay assignments are meant to foster both critical writing and critical thinking abilities through sustained focus on one topic. Exams are meant to achieve the comprehensive coverage and comparative thought that essays are too narrow for. Be mindful of the scope of these two assignment genres as it will affect your grade.

Course Policies

Please bring your books and computer to every class meeting. Access to our Canvas course page during class is required as we will take timed quizzes and exams in the classroom on Canvas. All submitted written work must be uploaded to Canvas on time.
Attendance at all classes is expected. After three unexcused absences your final grade will be lowered by one half letter grade for each additional absence. Students are expected to be punctual. Consistent, timely readings and assignments, and active participation in discussion is expected. One half letter grade will be deducted per day for late papers.
Please turn off or silence cell phones. Ringing phones will not be tolerated, nor will text messaging.

Course and Credit Designations

This 3-credit course meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the Spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. At UW-Madison, one credit is the learning that takes place in at least 45 hours of learning activities, which include time in lectures or class meetings, in person or online, labs, exams, presentations, tutorials, reading, writing, studying, preparation for any of these activities, and any other learning activities.

The Writing Center

Learning to write clearly, compellingly, and coherently should be a major goal of yours in this class. Writing Center instructors are trained to work with inexperienced as well as advanced student writers. If you would like some help organizing ideas for your paper or some constructive criticism of a draft, please make an appointment to see a Writing Center instructor. To schedule an appointment, you may go to the Writing Center in person (6171 Helen C. White Hall) or call 263-1992. There are also satellite Writing Center locations in Chadbourne, Liz Waters, and elsewhere for your convenience. On the website you can also find information about helpful classes for student writers: <http://www.wisc.edu/writing>.

Plagiarism

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Plagiarism, or taking credit for words and ideas not your own, constitutes academic misconduct, will result in disciplinary action ranging from failing the course to suspension. If we think you have plagiarized, we will meet with you and submit evidence of your crime to the Dean of Students Office, where it will go in your file. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. If you have a diagnosed disability and need instructional accommodations, you must inform Prof. Lemaster by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Prof. Lemaster will work directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. <http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>

Diversity and Inclusion

Institutional statement on diversity: Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world. <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

Sexual Harassment and Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct

As an instructor, I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation. UW-Madison offers a variety of resources for students impacted by sexual misconduct. If you wish to seek out free, confidential support, there are a number of services available on campus and in the community. If you would like to report sexual misconduct to the campus, a number of reporting options are available. In addition, each department has staff members, known as Responsible Employees, who can assist you. The Department of Gender & Women's Studies has the following Responsible Employees: Department Chair, Dr. Judy Houck (jahouck@wisc.edu), Department Administrator, Jamie Gratrix (jamie.gratrix@wisc.edu), Graduate Coordinator, Duachi Yang (duachi.yang@wisc.edu), Undergraduate Advisor, Lachrista Greco (lachrista.greco@wisc.edu).

Course Calendar

“Unit One: Creativity and Procreativity”

January

Week 1 Tues 21: Course Overview

Thurs 23: “Shakespeare’s Sister” section of Chapter 3; begin with “Be that as it may..”

<https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200791h.html#ch3>

Week 2 Tues 28: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, Chapters 1&2 pp.3-40

Thurs 30: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, Chapters 3&4 pp.41-78

February

Week 3 Tues 4: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, Chapter 5 pp.79-94, **in-class post**

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/09/where-are-all-the-women-wikipedia>

<https://hbr.org/2016/06/why-do-so-few-women-edit-wikipedia>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/25/wikipedia-women-american-novelists>

Thurs 6: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf Chapter 5&6 pp.95-114, **Quiz**

Week 4 Tues 11: *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, Section 1 pp.1-40

Thurs 13: *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, Section 2 pp.41-103

Week 5 Tues 18: *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, Section 3&4 pp.105-149, **Quiz**

“Unit Two: Race and (Re)Writing”

Thurs 20: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.1-58

Week 6 Tues 25: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.59-126, “In Search of Our Mothers’

Gardens” by Audre Lorde (group work)

Thurs 27: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.127-210, **in-class post**

March

Week 7 Tues 4: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.211-294, **Quiz**

Thurs 6: **Essay 1 Due**

Artist and Mother documentary, **in-class post**

Week 8 Tues 11: **Midterm Exam**

Thurs 13: *Push* by Sapphire, Sections 1&2 pp.3-66

Week 9 Tues 18: *Push* by Sapphire, Sections 3&4 pp.67-140, **in-class post** (local artist)

Thurs 20: *Push* by Sapphire, Life Stories, “The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America”

by June Jordan, **Quiz**

Tues 25: Spring Break

Thurs 27: Spring Break

“Unit Three: Picturing Women Writing”

April

Week 10 Tues 1: *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, Chapters 1&2 pp.1-54

Thurs 3 *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, Chapters 3&4 pp.55-120

Week 11 Tues 8: *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, Chapters 5&6 pp.121-186 **in-class post**

Thurs 10: *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, Chapter 7 pp.187-232, **Quiz**

Week 12 Tues 15: *Persepolis Book 1* by Marjane Satrapi, “The Veil”-“The Sheep” pp.3-71

Thurs 17: *Persepolis Book 1* by Marjane Satrapi, “The Trip”-“The Dowry” pp.72-153

Week 13 Tues 22: *Persepolis Book 2* by Marjane Satrapi, “The Soup”-“The Veil” pp.1-78 **in-class post**

Thurs 24: *Persepolis Book 2* by Marjane Satrapi, “The Return”-“The End” pp. 92-187, **Quiz**

Week 14 Tues 29: **Essay 2 Due**

Persepolis film, class party

May

Thurs 1: Review day

Week 15 Wed 7: 12:25pm **Final Exam**