Course title: British Women's Literature
Course code: LITT 3002 LNEN
Programs offering course: London Open Campus Block
Open Campus Track: Language, Literature, and Culture
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Fall Block II 2020

Course Description

This class considers how women writers have been constrained by—but have also exploited—literary traditions. It traces the indexes of conformity and subversion in their writing by placing them in contexts of prevailing discourses on femininity. Students will examine constructions of femininity in the visual arts and conduct writings. Key texts may include fiction by Eliza Haywood, Mary Wollstonecroft, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, poetry by Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and labouring women poets such as Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley, and the 'Turkish Embassy' letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Students will visit a selection of London's centers for the written word, that may include the Sir John Ritblat Gallery at the British Library and the Women's Library at the London Metropolitan University.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Compare and contrast key authors, styles, and genres of British women's writing
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the historical development of British women in literature
- Analyse how representations of women evolved in writing over the centuries
- Critically evaluate the development of the role of the woman during the period
- Develop comparative thinking about literary and creative processes across cultural boundaries
Course Prerequisites

At least one literature or critical theory course.

Methods of Instruction

The methodology of our course will be informed by critical theory, gender studies and literature. Through class discussions and debates, critical readings of key primary and secondary texts, and students’ written reactions, the students will enhance their ability to “read” approaches to critical theory and literary deconstruction. Engaged student participation is crucial and productive controversy will be encouraged.

As excursions we will visit a selection from the numerous literary museums in London.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Presentation 20%
2. In Class Debate 20%
3. Midterm Essay 20%
4. Final Essay 20%
5. Participation 20%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Presentation

Each student should present their final project in class, building on the resources the professor will have pointed to in the course. The project should include a current case study or example that shows how gender, race, sexuality and popular culture intersect. Reflecting on what students have learned, the presentation should give a possible look in the future and show how these aspects could develop.

In Class Debate

Students will be assigned a position advocating for or against the notion that Jane Austen’s novels would be considered “feminist.” Students should critically engage with themes and arguments within the text, using theories covered during the class. These debates need to include direct examples from Jane Austen’s novels to back
up your claims and some key theories from secondary sources (at least 3 primary text examples and 1 secondary source example). Your evidence and main claim statement should also be submitted to me at the end of the debate (this can be done via email or by hard copy).

Midterm Essay

Debates, discussions, text and audiovisual analysis, social dynamics – these activities will be both individual and collective. They will be assessed based on the student’s ability to compose texts and reflect on their personal progress in the construction and reflection of those texts. The essays (in the function of midterm and final) should contain key points of what students have learned and what they think are the most important insights. A case story will help to formulate an own opinion that should be justified by own arguments.

Final Essay

The Final Essay (3000 words) will be a slightly more in-depth comparative essay drawing light on the course themes through a comparison of different texts examined in the class (or of other work by authors and genres studied). I will offer you a number of topics for your paper; alternately, you may choose to write on a topic you have developed, with my permission. See course schedule for dates.

Participation

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on cocurricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Attendance
Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent.

Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to any required field placement. Students may not miss placement/work hours at an internship or service learning site unless approved in advance by the Academic Director and placement supervisor. All students must complete all of the requisite 100 minimum work hours on site at the internship or service learning placement to be eligible for academic credit.

Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences for classes will lead to the following penalties:
N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class: 1.1 Orientation

Overview of course and introduction to key authors and concepts. How has the act of reading been gendered in the 19th and early twentieth century? How has the role of women developed over time in British literature? What is today’s snapshot of women in literature?

Readings:
“Slipping into Marriage: How Heroines Create Desire by Risking Their Reputations” by Catherine England

“Women and the Consumption of Print” by Margaret Beetham, in Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900, edited by Joanne Shattock

Week 2
Class: 2.1 The “Womanly Woman”: Virtue and the Construction of Gender in the 19th Century

This week examines how women negotiated their role in society through their heroines. There was a great deal of pressure on middle class women in the early 19th century to be the moral centre of Britain, their conduct, personality, and even their thoughts were coded through popular culture, religious sermons, and etiquette book. By studying Jane Austen’s representation of the “worthy” woman, as well as the moral messages of “anti-feminist” novels from the 1860s, this week examines how social pressure designed women to conform to the feminine ideal throughout the period.

Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park and the Moral Conduct of Women


Class: 2.2 The Anti-Feminist Novel

Reading: excerpts from Clever Woman of the Family by Charlotte Yonge and “Forms of Suffering in Clever Woman of the Family” by Janice Fiamingo

ASSIGNMENT #1: In Class Debate

“Are Jane Austen’s Novels Feminist or Anti-Feminist?”

Week 3
The Outrageous Woman: Women Acting Badly with the Brontë Sisters

The extraordinary creativity of the Brontë sisters, who between them wrote some of the most enduring fiction in the English language, continues to fascinate and intrigue modern readers. The tragedy of their early deaths adds poignancy to their novels, and in the popular imagination they have become mythic figures. And yet, as this week shows, they were fully engaged with the world around them, and their writing, from the juvenilia to Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights, reflects the preoccupations of the age in which they lived. Their novels, which so shocked their contemporaries, address the burning issues of the day: class, gender, race, religion, and mental disorders. As well as examining these connections, this week also shows how film and other media have reinterpreted the novels for the twenty-first century.

Jane Eyre and Charlotte Bronte

Reading: selections from Jane Eyre, and The Cambridge Companion to the Brontes

Wuthering Heights and Emily Bronte

Reading: selections from Wuthering Heights, and The Cambridge Companion to the Brontes

Assignment: Midterm Essay

The New Woman

This week considers the transformations to women in the late 19th century to early twentieth centuries and how the so-called “New Woman” launched into public life through her writings, use of popular culture, and political speeches. By looking at the suffragette and revolutionary women of the day, as well as forays into popular culture as found in detective fiction, this week explores alternative writings and the changing face of women in Britain.
We discuss the suffragette movement in the United Kingdom

Reading: Selections from Suffragette movement speakers and writers, and “Introduction: A Revolutionary Moment” in The History of British Women Writers 1880-1920

Class: 4.2

Selections from Dorothy Sayer's Gaudy Night and “The British Female Detective Written by Women, 1890–1920” by Joseph Kestner in The History of British Women Writers 1880-1920

Week 5
Class: 5.1 Between the Wars: Early to Mid-20th Century Women’s Writing

The historical period from 1920 to 1945 is coterminous with the great achievements of literary Modernism, dating approximately from the annus mirabilis of 1922, which saw T. S. Eliot's “The Waste Land” and James Joyce's Ulysses, to the publication of Joyce's Finnegans Wake at the apex of 'high Modernism' in 1939. However, the majority of women whose work is discussed this week do not fit into a recognized version of the modernist canon. Their complex and often troubled relationship to modernity – as readers, consumers, and travelers at home and abroad – requires new critical frameworks in which to discuss their writing as well as a revision of the territory that has been staked out as the preserve of Modernism by critical theory and practice. Topics range from the feminine middlebrow novel to Virginia Woolf's modernist aesthetics, from women's literary journalism to best-selling crime fiction, from West End drama to the literature of Scotland, Ireland and Wales and poetry in small magazines.

Gender and Modernism and how these themes arise in literature.

Reading: selections from A Room of Ones Own by Virginia Woolf, and “Virginia Woolf and the Aesthetics of Modernism,” by J. Goldman.
Gender in Modernism by B. Kime Scott, all of the above in The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945 – Volume Eight. Edited by Maroula Joannou

Class:  5.2  Popular Culture and the Liberated Woman

Co-Curricular Excursion (walking tour of Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury)


Assignment: Midterm Essay

Week 6
Class:  6.1  The Impact: Summary and Discussion

Bringing together all the themes previously explored, this week presents an overview of the context and impact of 19th century British women’s writing in the present day.

Homages and re-tellings of 19th century female novels

Reading: Selections from Jean Rhys Wide Sargasso Sea, Helen Fieldings Bridget Jones Diary, and The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary

Class:  6.2  

Assignment: Final presentations

Course Materials
Readings

J. Austen 1814. Mansfield Park

Margaret Beetham, 2009 “Women and the Consumption of Print”, in Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900, edited by Joanne Shattock

Catherine England, 2014 “Slipping into Marriage: How Heroines Create Desire by Risking Their Reputations”


Patricia Ingham. 2008. The Brontës (Authors in Context)


Joseph Kestner “The British Female Detective Written by Women, 1890–1920” in The History of British Women Writers 1880-1920,


Dorothy Sayer 1935 Gaudy Night

Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith. 2006. The Oxford Companion to the Brontës