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ENG 2009-005: Literature and Human Values: Race, Age, and Gender

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2009-005

ENGLISH 2009G (#005)
Fall 2005
MW 6:00-7:15 Coleman 3160

Dr. Chris Wixson
Office Hrs: MW 1:30-3
(Or by Appointment)

Literature and Human Values: Race, Age, and Gender

[The study of literature can provide us with] a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us.
-Adrienne Rich

This course will consider how understandings of ourselves, our desires, other people, and meaning itself are influenced by cultural notions of gender, race, and age. The syllabus is made up of texts that span genres and time periods, and, among the authors, you may recognize some of the English course "usual suspects" (William Shakespeare and Mary Shelley, for instance) side by side with less familiar names (Patrick Marber, Walter Mosley). Although not conceptualized as a survey, the course is reading and thinking intensive, necessitating a commitment to class discussion (beyond merely showing up) and courageous consideration of ideas about the central topics as well as issues of art, interpretation, culture, existence, and desire. The format of each class will be relatively fluid, changing with regard to the material, my ideas, and your interests. There will be a lot of discussion as well as the occasional informal lecture. However, this course should focus primarily on you, your questions, and opinions. Remember this is not MY class but ours and should be understood as an ongoing conversation. The learning outcomes for the course are as follows:

1. To provide strategies for reading, viewing, and appreciating works of art for the insight they provide about history and our own time, especially about issues of gender, race, and age.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage the significant issues and questions raised by the texts through writing, performance, and class discussion.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical thinking and argumentative writing.

Required Texts: William Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew
Patrick Marber, Closer
Walter Mosley, Devil in a Blue Dress
Susan Glaspell, "Trifles"
Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun
August Wilson, The Piano Lesson
Jeanette Winterson, The Passion
Helen Fielding, Bridget Jones' Diary
John Singleton, Higher Learning (film)

Assignments:

- *Two critical papers (4 pages) that focus on a particular issue that has provoked, challenged, or disturbed your thinking. Writing guidelines will be handed out in advance.

*Active, Engaged Participation in Discussion --- defined as TALKING productively.

*Two short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called “seed papers” in which you pose a productive question which relates to the inquiry issues of the course about the text and then attempt to answer it. You may be asked to present and stimulate class discussion with your question during the semester. *No* late seed papers will be accepted. You will be required to write two, due according to the first letter of your last name.

*Group Project (tied into Critical Paper #2)

*Final Exam

**During the final week of classes, you will be assigned to a smaller group who will take part of the final exam together. That time will be used for group meetings as you review and prepare for the in-class portion of the exam.

Other sundry ground rules:

Attendance

Your regular attendance is expected; be advised that exams and paper topics will draw heavily from material discussed in class. More than two unexcused absences will result in your term grade being lowered by a third for each session missed beyond two. Since coming late or leaving early is extremely disruptive, habitual lateness will also negatively affect your term grade. Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do **not** get in touch asking “for the assignment” or a “rundown of what you missed.” My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class.

Email

You should get into the habit of checking your email daily. There will be a class list on which I will post changes in assignments (if they arise), course-related announcements, and ideas that expand upon what happens in class. This list is also a great way for all of us to interact outside of class; that is to say, if you have a question or query, the miracle of technology offers us a way to discuss and address it.

Conferences

I am regularly available to meet with you during my scheduled office hours or by appointment. To make an appointment, speak to me after class or contact me via email.

Grading

Critical Papers	40%
Final Exam	20%
Group Project	10%
Two seed papers	10%
Participation/In-class Responses	20%

Plagiarism

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author--that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the dean.

Class Participation

You should come to class prepared to talk about the reading for that day. Each class session will begin with a short informal lecture and then be turned over to discussion; thus, your own questions and comments about the plays are essential to the success of the course. You will also need to have completed the assigned reading and (when noted) your typed "seed paper." If there are no questions or a lagging discussion, I will assume that you understand the text perfectly and will give a **quiz** worth as much as a seed essay. Energetic commitment and engaged participation are crucial to its success and required of *every* member.

Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

August	22	Course Introduction
	24	Gender – What is it and where is it? / 2-page response due <u>Shrew</u> background
	29 31	Shakespeare's <u>Taming of the Shrew</u> Acts 1-3 Seed #1 Due A, B <u>Shrew</u> Acts 4-5 Seed #2 Due C-E
September	5	No Class -- Happy Labor Day!!
	7	Winterson's <u>The Passion</u>
	12	<u>The Passion</u> Seed #4 Due F-L
	14	<u>The Passion</u>
	19	Still Killing us Softly video / Glaspell's "Trifles"
	21	Marber's <u>Closer</u> Seed #5 Due M-P
October	26	Marber's <u>Closer</u> Seed #6 Due R-Z
	28	<u>Closer</u>
	3	<u>Closer</u> (video)
	5	<u>Closer</u> (video) Essay #1 Due
	10	Mosley's <u>Devil in a Blue Dress</u> Seed #7 Due A-E
	12	<u>Devil</u>
	17	<u>Devil</u> Seed #8 Due F-L
	19	<u>Devil</u>

	24	<u>Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun</u> Seed #9 Due M-O, R
	26	<u>Sun</u> Seed #11 Due P-Q, S-Z
November	31	Group Meetings
	2	Group Meetings
	7	Group Presentations
	9	Wilson's <u>The Piano Lesson</u>
	14	<u>Piano</u>
	16	Essay #2 Due

THANKSGIVING BREAK

	28	<u>Higher Learning</u> (film)
	30	<u>Higher Learning</u>
December	5	Group Meetings – Fielding's <u>Bridget Jones' Diary</u> pp. 1-29
	7	Group Meetings / Exam Review

FINAL EXAM: TBA

English 2009 / Wixson
First Assignment

Requirements: Two FULL pages, typewritten Times 12 Font

Due Date: Wednesday, August 24th

Write one full page on EACH of the following topics:

Consider where we learn about definitions and expectations related to gender. Beyond observing their family, how do young children learn about gender roles and rules? If an alien from another planet were to observe our culture, where could that alien get information about our ideas about gender?

Describe an experience you have had (or friends have had) in which you were made aware of definitions or expectations related to gender. How has the experience affected you? What gender norms were you taught by your family? Have you ever had any conflicts with your parents over gender roles? If so, how did you resolve them? Are your gender-related expectations today the same as those you had when you were a child?

For Wednesday's class, the following terms will be discussed. You may want to look over the list and see how you define them and bring your thoughts to class.

Biological Sex
Gender
Social Construction
Binary Opposition
Patriarchy
"Traditional" gender roles

How to make an impact on a man

WITH BEAUTY? NOT NECESSARILY. BRAINS? THEY GET DISCOVERED LATER. ANSWER: SECRET (SEXYISH) SIGNALS. YOU CAN DO IT TOO!

What to Wear

- If your style of dress is cool and conservative, change it—at least for out-of-the-office situations. Wear body-hugging styles, lots of jewelry, vivid eye makeup and lipstick. A lush style is a sexual signater.

- When you go to parties, pin a fresh flower in your hair. That's how South Sea island girls signal their availability.

- Buy and wear tons of animal prints—leopard-patterned pants, tiger-striped tops. You'll look feral.

- If you have good legs, wear a very tight short skirt and very high heels. Bend over with your back to a man (to pick something up or look in file drawer, etc.).

- Leave the two middle buttons of your button-up-the-back blouse undone and ask him to please do you up. He'll see that you're wearing a skimpy black bra or no bra at all.

- Let him know that you never wear underwear—too confining.

- Keep your hair long and lush. Ignore women friends who tell you short is chic. Men like an abundance of tresses.

- Always wear perfume. Find a scent that works for you and spray it on pulse points when you dress. Spritz a little now and then during the day.

- If you look good in a hat, wear one. Men love hats.

- Wear a fresh flower in the lapel of your conservative suit.

- Show plenty of back—everybody knows your bosom is sexy, but a frock cut to the waist in back also has appeal. Learn to roll your shoulders elegantly.

- Wear angora, and if you have the chance, why not casually brush against his bare skin?

- Red is a very sexy color—as in red-hot. A slinky red dress would do it. Or try something a little more subtle: Wear gorgeous red underwear, and show it "accidentally"—your blouse is open a bit, so a man sees a peek of red lace bra. . . . You cross your legs and your skirt rides up to reveal a flash of red petticoat.

- Every woman seriously interested in attracting men should invest in a short black leather skirt and wear it with heels. You won't need an outrageously sexy top—the heels and leather say it all.

- Apply lipstick expertly, seductively, suggestively.

Sexy Behavior

- Catch a man's eye and then very deliberately look down at his crotch. This should be done with a playful look or smile, not as though you're about to put him through a meat grinder. He should feel deliciously flattered, not attacked.

- Immediately after you meet him—within seconds—touch him in some way, even if it's just to pick off imaginary lint. It tells him right away that you're physically aware of and interested in him.

- You can't be too sexy a dancer. Swing those hips and shake.

- Run your fingers lightly over a man's knuckles. It will send sexy shivers up and down and all around him.

- Feel his muscles.

- Order an unordinary drink, like a kir or Campari and soda.

- Cross and uncross your legs a lot. As you do, slide them up and down a bit so he hears, very faintly, the sexy sound of nylon against nylon.

- Try to act calm, even if you aren't; nothing is more appealing than a person with whom you feel relaxed.

- Kick off your shoes so he can see your lovely feet—lots of men have foot fetishes. APPEALING TO AURESES

- Give the man a warm good-bye kiss (on the cheek) even though you've just met.

- Kiss everyone—even the women—goodnight. European girls always do.

Talk Him Into Your Life

- Just after meeting a man, suggest that you find a table or quiet corner so that you can chat without distractions.

- Ask him if he's ever considered being a model—especially effective if the man isn't handsome.

- Talk sexy—or at least suggestive!

- Whisper that you heard the most flattering comment about him (make something up), but say you can't possibly divulge the source.

- Though you know him only casually, tell him you had a dream about him last night. Hint that it was wicked.

- Say something slightly inappropriate during a business lunch or dinner, such as "You look great in blue." This should be done while you are talking about something else—for example, "I was working on the Apex campaign, and did you know you look great in blue?" We don't know why, but men love this kind of thing.

- Tell a very, very funny joke (practice!) within his hearing. This takes research and perhaps a few rehearsals. A genuinely funny, entertaining woman is a turn-on; the man figures he'll never be bored.

- Become a sports fanatic—even if you loathe baseball and football. Become mistress of scads of sports data, and fake a passion that's bound to turn men on.

Go for It!

- Drop your purse, a pile of papers, anything, as you pass his desk, then stoop down to gather it up. He'll help. Lean close to him, put your hand on his shoulder to steady your balance.

- Spill a glass of wine (water, whatever) down the front of your dress while talking to him. Ask for his handkerchief to mop it up.

- Share your umbrella with a man who forgot his.

- Brush up against somebody in the elevator, in a restaurant, on the street. He may act as if he doesn't notice, but he'll love it.

- Send a bottle of wine to his table.

- One woman, not knowing how to meet an attractive man she had spotted in a bar, handed him a note with her phone number that said, "I like your shoes. Call me." The phone was ringing when she got home.