ENG 3903-001: Women and Literature

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Course Policy

Goals: This course will be organized around a series of questions about the relationship between literature and the women's movement. We generally make the distinction between political argumentation and literary writing, to such an extent that literary texts which are explicitly political are sometimes dismissed as non-literary. For critics who believe in such an absolute distinction, feminist literature is by definition non-existent, and because literature is understood to be apolitical, a feminist critical perspective has little to offer literary studies. On the other hand, feminist criticism is one of the most vital and productive areas of literary studies, and it has been used to reclaim such unlikely figures, for feminism, as the marquis de Sade.

Is there such a thing as feminist literature, and if so what is it? Is there anything about women's writing that is inherently feminist? Does women's literature or women's language use have any particular character of its own? How and what kind of literature can we expect to have a political impact in the world, and how will this happen? These are the kinds of questions we will approach this semester.

Because these questions are big ones and can be approached from many different directions, I have set the class up so that you can, at least in part, be guided by your own interests. And with your presentations, you can help to guide the class, too. It is an important part of feminist pedagogy to acknowledge that important ideas and information doesn't always come from the top down. I've had the opportunity to read and learn and think about things that you haven't explored yet, but you have experience and reading, interpretation, and research skills that you can and should make available to the class.

Attendance and Lateness: I will not count off for missed classes, but you will not be let off the hook for any missed exams (of course!!) or presentations. If you miss one of these, you need to have a doctor's excuse. Otherwise, missed classes will count against your classroom participation. I will always be nice to you and respectful, no matter how many absences, excused or unexcused, you have. Do not mistake my demeanor for the intention to overlook absences. I will not hesitate to fail you for classroom participation, or to give you a D, if you are not here. If you have more than three unexcused absences, you should start to worry. Also, if latenesses become a problem, I will begin to count latenesses as absences.

Late papers: You will have only three papers assigned to you, and I will give the assignment sheets to you well in advance. I will read drafts of papers and I will counsel you about papers over the phone, but I will not accept late ones. Computer problems can be worked out in advance if you plan ahead. Give yourself a due date two or three days before the due date I give you. That way, you can work on the printing of the paper ahead of time, and if you have problems, you will still have time to solve them.

Assignments:

*Journal: You need make only one entry per week, but that entry should be thoughtful and detailed—*at least* two hand-written pages. Each entry should be in response either to an event attended, literary critical/feminist article or piece of literature read. At
least one long paragraph of the entry should summarize the content (if you go to a campus event, you should take notes). The rest of the entry should describe what is interesting about the reading/event, how it relates to language/reading issues we face, why the reading/event is relevant for the course and/or how it relates to the issues we have talked about in class.

Note: At least four of the entries should relate relevant campus events.

Note: Journal entries should be used to get you started on papers/presentations.

*In-class writings: I will only give you checks, check minuses, and check pluses. I will keep track of these, however, and will use them to help me determine classroom participation grade. For example, a person who is always present in class, participates verbally, and makes check pluses gets an “A” for classroom participation. A person who is weaker in one area is likely to get a “B,” and a person who is weak in two areas is likely to get a “C” for classroom participation. In-class writings will always be based on assigned readings.

*Papers: You will write two papers— one three-page and one eight-page paper. The first paper will be the summary and critique of a literary critical or feminist article relevant to the class. The second will be an exposition about a feminist/woman writer and his/her work along with a more extended feminist/critical reading of a novel, play, series of poems from the body of his/her work.

*Presentations: You will be asked to present each of the papers you write to the class. You will not be expected to do any additional research/reading for the presentation, but I will expect you to be prepared. You should come in with detailed note cards or outline on the day of your presentation.

*Exam: There will be only one exam, and it will be COMPREHENSIVE. I will give you a study guide, but I will not repeat information given to you at the beginning of the semester. The factual information will include information given in the first few days of class!!!

**Grades:**
15% first paper
20% final paper
5% combined grade for presentations
20% journals
20% final exam
20% classroom participation

I will grade papers on their thoroughness, thoughtfulness, clarity, mechanics, organization, and focus. Exam essay questions I will grade primarily on their thoroughness, thoughtfulness, and accuracy. Journal entries will be graded on detail and thoughtfulness.

**Problems:** If you have any problems regarding scheduling, grades, papers, etc., please call me at home, come to office hours, or make an appointment with me. I'd be happy to talk to you about any of your concerns.

**Students with disabilities:** Students with disabilities can receive help. Contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services at 6583.

**Syllabus:**

M J 13 introduction
W J 15 hand-outs
F J 17 Making Face 223-226; Piercy

W J 22 Piercy
Piercy

Rich 165-176
Rich 177-194; 203-223

hand-outs; catch-up
conferences


journals due; Rich poems from Diving into the Wreck

Rich "Twenty-one Love Poems"
first paper due; presentations

presentations
Making Face xv-xxviii; 46-54
Zami

hand-outs
Making Face 245-254
Women and Language 134-152

Women and Language 280-291
Women and Language 78-93
journals due; Women and Language 94-100

catch-up
hand-outs
hand-outs
hand-outs

hand-outs; second paper due
presentations
presentations

presentations
presentations
journals due; presentations