

Topics in Feminist Theory through Literature and Film: WGS 350

Class Hours: TTH 9.40-11.10 am

Office Hours: After class hour or by appointment

Course Description

Our purpose in this course is to explore and analyze a variety of topics in feminist discourse, to which we'll apply the lens of Literary and Film studies. We'll explore topics such as the structure and maintenance of patriarchy as a social system; masculinity and femininity; social construction and essentialism, sex, gender, and sexuality; and intersectional analyses across culture, race, disability, and class. Our discussion of these varied topics will hopefully illuminate the ways in which structures and concepts of feminist theory are produced, problematized, maintained, or deconstructed in literary and cinematic arenas. In order to explore these connections and to develop a critical lens, we'll work with primary literary and theoretical texts. We'll also discuss our theories in relation to our actual lives, both in terms of the Literature and Film we enjoy, and the ways in which activism works interdisciplinarily in these discourses.

Course Objectives

1. You will develop an interdisciplinary awareness and understanding; concepts from feminist theory don't exist solely within that discourse, they can be applied and analyzed in every aspect of life. More specifically, you will be able to identify, in a given literary/cinematic text, the social forces that shape that text in relation to feminist theory.
2. You will become familiar working with primary documents. In other words, we'll be reading real literature and watching real films. This will not only increase your understanding of the texts themselves, but will also give you the tools to for broader social analysis and criticism.
3. You will make connections between our class and the real world; our discussions will transcend the ivory tower of academia to relate theory to your own lives.
4. You will practice and hone your writing skills through a variety of exercises; the goal of this is to be able to eloquently discuss and analyze an aspect of the discourse.

Required Assignments and Activities

1. Papers: There will be three papers over the course of the semester, relating to the assigned literary and theoretical texts. The last paper will be due during the scheduled final exam hour and will replace an in-class exam.
 - a. Paper 1: Introductory paper. This paper will require you to simply choose one of the theoretical texts we've read and use it as a lens to analyze one of the literary texts or films. The paper should be between three and four pages, using MLA style.
 - b. Paper 2: Dialogue. This paper will require you to find two literary texts or films that you establish a dialogue; these could be anything that we've read or viewed thus far in the course. Analyze the ways in which your chosen texts inform each other, address different aspects of a similar issue, or another dialogue you find. This paper should be between four and five pages, using MLA style.

- c. Paper 3: Final Paper. For your final paper, you should choose a particular aspect of the course (patriarchy, social construction, etc.) and explain how the texts that we've studied illuminate this feminist theoretical concept, both within the texts and as a societal force. This paper should be between five and six pages, using MLA style.
2. Weekly writing: There will be short weekly writing assignments due every Thursday. For these assignments, find either a literary text that you have recently read (it can be something you read for a different class, or it can be outside of the coursework) *OR* something that you have recently watched (a film or T.V. Show), and apply some of the theories that we've recently discussed in class. These responses should be between one and two paragraphs, and should include references to both the literary/cinematic and theoretical texts. Weekly writing assignments will begin during the second week of classes. There will be no weekly writing assignments during weeks when a paper is due. These assignments will be graded based on whether or not you adequately applied the theories to the text you found; in other words, you can choose almost anything, as long as the analysis is well-developed.
 3. In-class participation in draft workshops, discussion, free-writes, and small-group activities: Participation is expected and encouraged. Because the class is structured around discussion, a productive and engaging learning environment depends on active student participation. Come to class with questions or ideas that you may have about the reading; we will often start class with a free-write to focus our minds on the material for the day. Attendance will not be graded; however, students are expected to participate in class discussion regularly and must therefore attend class regularly.

Required Texts

Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan Eds., Literary Theory: An Anthology, 2nd Edition
Wendy Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski Eds., Feminist Theory: A Reader, 2nd Edition
Alison Booth, J. Paul Hunter, Kelly J. Mays Eds., Norton Introduction to Literature, 9th Edition
Additional readings available online

Grading Policy

In-class Participation: 15%
Weekly Writing: 15%
Paper 1: 20%
Paper 2: 25%
Paper 3: 25%

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Week 1- Introduction to the Discourses

Tuesday

Course Introduction, In-Class reading/discussion of Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess" (NIL 1076-1077)

Thursday

Leslie Marmon Silko, "Storyteller" (Selections TBA, Online)
Eudora Welty, "Why I Live at the P.O." (NIL 155-163)

Week 6- Intersectionality Cont., Disability

Tuesday

Susan Wendell, "The Social Construction of Disability" (Online)
Ruth Hubbard, "Who Should and Should Not Inhabit the World" (Online)

Thursday

Writing Assignment #5 Due
Film- *X-Men*, Discussion in relation to Disability

Week 7- Intersectionality Cont., Class and Social Systems

Tuesday

Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women" (LTA 770-794)
Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union" (FT 356-365)

Thursday

Writing Assignment #6 Due
Octavia Butler, "Amnesty" (Online)
Margaret Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" (Selections TBA, Online)

Week 8- Patriarchy

Tuesday

Allan Johnson, "Patriarchy, The System: An It, Not a He, Them, or an Us" (Online)
Antonio Gramsci, "Hegemony" (LTA 673)
Kolmar & Bartkowski, "Power" (FT 52-53)

Thursday

Writing Assignment #7 Due
Film- *Pride and Prejudice*, Discussion in relation to Patriarchy

Week 9- Essentialism vs. Post-Structuralism

Tuesday

Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism" (FT 426-437)
Diana Fuss, "The 'Risk' of Essence" (FT 455-464)
In-Class Draft Workshop, Paper 2

Thursday

Zora Neale Hurston, "Their Eyes Were Watching God" (Selections TBA, Online)
Paper 2 Due, 4-5 Pages

Week 10- Masculinity

Tuesday

Catherine MacKinnon, "Sexuality" (FT 475-488)
Susan Bordo, "Reading the Male Body" (Online)
Michael Kimmel "Consuming Malehood" (Online)

Thursday

Writing Assignment #8 Due

Film- *Casino Royale*, Discussion in relation to Masculinity

Week 11- Femininity

Tuesday