



## ENG4617: Studies in Literary Theory and Criticism IV: Feminist Theory

**Dr. Ann-Barbara Graff**

Department of English Studies

Office: H132

Tele: 705-474-3461 ext. 4337

Email: [annbg@nipissingu.ca](mailto:annbg@nipissingu.ca)

Office Hours—January to April 2004

Mondays 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Fridays 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

I am also available by appointment.

### Course Description

This advanced course will facilitate discussion of the key issues in the development of modern feminist (literary) theory. Students will examine questions of literary tradition, gender and genre; the politics of language, reading, writing, and seeing; articulations of race, sexuality, gender and class; as well as writing of and about “the body” in order to consider the conceptual relationship of **feminist praxis and theory**. Generally, we are in pursuit of the multiple ways in which theory “opens up” and sometimes “collapses” texts and, conversely, the ways texts can enforce, illustrate, or confound theory.

The readings for this course are historically, geographically, and formalistically discrete, but they represent the tremendous diversity of women’s critical and literary output. One objective of the course is to promote discussion of the ways in which different theoretical schools/traditions privilege different responses to a text.

### Required Texts in Order of Study

Graff, Ann-Barbara. *Course Reader*. Nipissing University, 2004.  
Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Broadview Press, 2003.  
Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. 1929. Ed. Deborah McDowell. Rutgers UP, 1986.  
Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Our Sister Killjoy*. Longman, 1997. [If time permits.]  
Jackson, Shelley. *Patchwork Girl*. Eastgate, 1995. [electronic hypertext]

### Recommended Texts

*A Glossary of Feminist Theory*. Eds. Sonya Andermahr, Terry Lovell, and Carol Wolkowitz. Oxford UP, 2000.

### Evaluation Criteria

Assignment	Due Date	Value
Short Response to Theory (2 pages)	February 10, 2004	15%
Critical Essay (10-12 pages)	April 1, 2004	30%
Web Assignment	March 25, 2004	20%
Seminar Leadership and Report	From Jan 20 – March 30, 2004	20%
Participation/Engagement	On-going	15%

**Short Response to Theory Reading (February 10, 2004)**

15%

This is a two-page or 500-word short essay on one of the following topics.

1. Select one of the four images in the course pack (Gheerhaerts, Manet, Kahlo, Sarr) and provide a reading showing how two theoretical schools might “see” different things.
2. Paul Morrison’s modern phrase “domestic carceral” provides us with a way into *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Braddon did not have access to the phrase, but she clearly had an intuitive sense about what it means. (a) Explore the operation of the domestic carceral in *Lady Audley’s Secret*; or, (b) explore the operation of an equally modern theoretical concept which Braddon seems to be exercising in the text.
3. Discuss female agency in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. This might well evolve into a short paper about whether the text is a feminist one or not.
4. Freud, “Femininity,” and the Seductivity of an Idea. A critical response.
5. Gilbert and Gubar and the question of authority.
6. The Gaze and *ekphrasis* in *Lady Audley’s Secret*.
7. The homosocial and the homosexual in *Lady Audley’s Secret*.
8. Topic of your choice. Must be approved by instructor by January 29, 2004

**Critical Essay (April 1, 2004)**

30%

This is a long research essay (2500-3000 words; 10-12 pages—but I would be happy to mark a longer paper, up to 15 pages; MLA style) that involves both close textual analysis and secondary research. Each of the topics asks you to think about the ways in which theories contend with each other. Since the essay topic asks you to focus on the theoretical, rather than the literary, you are free to use any or all of the primary texts required in this course to support your argument.

1. Can a woman be represented without being objectified? Can a woman be the bearer of the gaze, instead of or in addition to its object? Can the concept of the gaze operate outside the heterosexual economy of men’s looks at women? Can women be sexual subjects? What are the dominant responses and what do you think?
2. Is there a “women’s language”? What is the context for this query? What is the relevance of the answer?
3. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* writes, “One is not born a woman; one becomes one.” Is gender essential (in either or both senses)?
4. What does female power look like, i.e., how is represented in art or society? Is there such a thing?
5. Is the cyborg where theory is tending? Is it the answer to various theoretical conundra?
6. Is textual authorship a way to challenge the dominant patriarchy or evidence of submission to it?
7. “Othering” and the displacement of identity complicate any understanding of self. How do they work (technically); after all, no one wakes up in the morning and says, “I will loathe myself today,” or “I will feel a profound sense of disconnection my own values, knowledge, experience”?
8. In 1975, Cixous wrote, “Write yourself. Your body must be heard.” What would it mean for the body to have a language? What would the body say? For French feminists like Cixous, Irigaray, Wittig, and Kristeva, isolating the body from language is impossible. At the heart of *l’écriture féminine* movement is a refusal to accept the traditional Western separation of mind and body. In other feminist traditions, analysis of the body is grounded in specific histories, i.e., the racialized and enslaved body; the captive body with its history of dominance and resistance; or in anatomy, i.e., the maternal body and women’s reproductive function. In other words, in feminisms other than French, the body is usually relegated to its material context. Explore the multiple ways of thinking about “body” especially in light of the how different approaches effect the reading of one of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, *Passing*, or *Patchwork Girl*.

9. Liberal humanism privileges the individual self. Marxist-based theories privilege the collective. Cora Kaplan urges that the feminist critique avoid such polarization and “come to grips with the relationship between female subjectivity and class identity.” What are the consequences of the tension? Is this a productive tension? What would the avoidance of polarization look like?
10. All of the “novels” in this course end ambiguously or at least problematically. How do the resolutions of these texts contribute to a discussion of theory?

### **Web assignment (March 25, 2004)**

20%

In groups of two, students will be prepare and upload instructional modules on-line for first-year students in the School of Literature, Language and Culture at Georgia Tech (Atlanta, GA) studying *Patchwork Girl*. This assignment is an opportunity for you to test your ability (a) to make clear to first-year undergraduate students (with little experience of feminist theory) a text that does not conform to many of their expectations; (b) to translate the theories we are studying in way that helps others understand a text; and, (c) to experience the medium of the Web as an instructional environment. For your information, the students at LCC/GTech have read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* this term, among other Gothic texts. I will provide help with Web design, access to Dreamweaver, and anything else that you need.

### **Seminar Leadership and Report**

20%

Students will be given the opportunity to work in groups of two to coordinate a seminar exploring the ways in which a literary text exemplifies, contradicts, and/or simultaneously challenges the “theory.” For instance, a seminar on the topic of “History” and *Lady Audley’s Secret* might explore the ways in which Braddon challenges conventional notions of history and the reasons why—this might open up into a discussion of class and Braddon’s use of class to make ambiguous the moral centre of the text; it might then expand outward to look at the relationship of First Wave feminism, liberalism, and the role gender played in the construction of the political subject. Alternatively, the seminar might be structured around the idea of women’s madness. Certainly, the question must be asked, is *Lady Audley’s Secret* a feminist text? If so, what do we mean by feminism? etc. There are no limits on the ways in which the topics can be selected, but I am available for consultation with the group.

Students will organize their groups and sign up for their Seminar in the first week of class. The role of the seminar group will be to provide the class with a **Seminar Guide Sheet** outlining their thesis, approach, theoretical texts, any instructions for the class, and providing 3 guiding questions *the week before the class* and to lead the discussion on the relevant day. Seminar leaders will be evaluated on their **preparation** (do they demonstrate an understanding of the theory/theories and its/their application; do they exhibit a thorough understanding of how the text and theory work in conjunction; is there evidence of a planned approach to the critical essay and a clear learning objective for the class; is the Seminar Guide Sheet useful, attractive, correct); **collaboration** (are the 2 seminar leaders working together coherently and in a coordinated way; is the division of labour equitable; do all seminar leaders have a thorough grasp of the material); and skill in **discussion leading** (are students participating meaningfully; do seminar leaders respond to student input with good follow-up questions; is discussion guided in a meaningful way; is it clear that students have understood the critical essay and its theoretical approach to the literary text). As well, you are required to submit a **one-page précis** (300 words) of the discussion that followed, highlighting the points you did not expect or that seemed most intriguing intellectually to follow up.

**Participation and active engagement in class discussions**

15%

Students are expected to attend every class, to complete the readings for each week before the class, and to be prepared to participate actively in class discussion. Participation grades are based on attendance, preparation, and meaningful contribution to class discussion. Because the course is significantly structured around seminars there is an expectation that you will actively participate in creating a dynamic and congenial learning environment. Moreover, since your critical essay assignment asks you to synthesize material from the full span of the course, it is important that you prepare to participate routinely in seminar.

I encourage you to prepare a one-page (typed, double-spaced) outline that engages with the reading for that week. The purpose of the outline is to ensure active preparation for class discussion and to allow you to make connections, over the course of the term, between the disparate topics of weekly discussions and between class work and their own interests. Use the outline as an opportunity to teach yourself something about the material you have read: define a central term; develop a question; analyze a particularly striking passage, image, or idea; work through a portion of the reading that you do not understand. Outlining, in this case, functions as both discovery and invention.

---

Generally, assignments will be assessed against the following criteria:

- evidence of intellectual discrimination: ability to pick out key points; to show a sense of the issues;
- evidence of intellectual control: mastery of the material; coherent organization; sensitivity to the use of concepts; ability to construct an argument/interpretation;
- evidence of incisive style: the ability to say what you mean, and to say it logically, coherently, sequentially, and concisely;
- correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- For essays, students will be assessed on their originality; for seminar presentation, students will be assessed on their cogency.

**Policies Regarding Submissions and Attendance (Fine Print):**

- No late papers will be accepted without the instructor's permission.
- All papers must be submitted in person.
- Please refer to p. 55 of your Academic Calendar for the university's policy regarding attendance.
- Nipissing University maintains a strict policy on all forms of academic dishonesty and subscribes to a plagiarism detection software program ([turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com)) in order to ensure the integrity of the academic enterprise. Students must be prepared to submit their work electronically to turnitin.com at the request of their instructor. Assignments must be original work that has been produced by the student only for this course. All referencing must be complete and accurate for both direct and indirect quotations. Cases of academic dishonesty will be treated very seriously and dealt with according to the regulations outlined in the Academic Calendar.
- To ensure that assignments and essays are not lost, students are required to keep an extra hard copy of their assignment before submitting it to the instructor. In the event that any questions arise concerning the sources and documentation of any written assignments, students should also keep all their research notes and drafts until the completion of the course.



**Schedule:**

Week	Topics and Assignments	Readings
<i>LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET</i>		
Jan 6-15	<p><i>Lady Audley's Secret</i> and HIS/HERSTORY: The great deeds of great men; chronological accounts of battle and borders, treaties and territories: this is what "history" connoted through much of the twentieth century.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How has historiography departed from the diachronic narratives of political and military "events"?</li> <li>▪ What were the goals of Early Modern feminism?</li> <li>▪ What did women want? What did activism look like?</li> <li>▪ What were the theoretical paradigms in which these debates were waged?</li> <li>▪ Before Marx (and after), what was the role of class and economics, the dominant ideology, capitalism, and social and political struggle?</li> <li>▪ How did "Woman" emerge from this First Wave of feminist activism?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>📖 Mary Wollstonecraft [1792]. From <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>. In <i>Norton Anthology of Writing by Women</i>, 258-75.</li> <li>📖 Karen Offen. "Reclaiming the Enlightenment for Feminism." <i>European Feminism</i>. Stanford UP, 2000. 31-76.</li> <li>📖 Sigmund Freud. "Femininity." <i>New Introductory Lectures of Psychoanalysis</i>. Norton, 1965. 112-35.</li> <li>📖 Virginia Woolf [1929]. From <i>A Room of One's Own</i>. In <i>Norton Anthology of Writing by Women</i>, 1338-44.</li> <li>📖 Judith Lowder Newton. "Power and the Ideology of 'Woman's Sphere.'" <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 880-95.</li> </ul>
January 20-27	<p><b>Authority, Authorship, Agency</b> Terry Eagleton writes, "The text is, as it were, ideologically forbidden to say certain things; in trying to tell the truth in his own way, for example, the author finds himself forced to reveal the limits of the ideology within which he writes."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What does women's authorship entail?</li> <li>▪ What is the canon and what is its effect of women writers?</li> <li>▪ What is required to call one's self into being through the process of writing, and are there implicit restrictions on women's self-expression?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>📖 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. "Infection in the Sentence: the woman writer and the anxiety of authorship." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 21-32</li> <li>📖 Barbara Christian. "The High and the Lows of Black Feminist Criticism." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 51-56.</li> <li>📖 Shari Benstock. "Authorizing the Autobiographical." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 1138-54.</li> </ul>
<i>PASSING</i>		
Jan 27-Feb 2	<p><b>Gaze and Desire</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is so political about just looking?</li> <li>▪ How do we move from looking to surveillance?</li> <li>▪ How is sexuality enforced through the gaze?</li> <li>▪ How is gender policed through the gaze?</li> <li>▪ How would a Marxist think about the gaze, as opposed to a psychoanalytic critic, or postcolonial, or radical feminist like Camille Paglia?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>📖 Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 438-448.</li> <li>📖 E. Ann Kaplan. "Whose Imaginary? The Televisual Apparatus, the Female Body and the Textual Strategies in Select Rock Videos on MTV." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 410-23.</li> <li>📖 Andrea Dworkin. "Pornography." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 325-27.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the scene of ekphrasis in <i>Lady Audley's Secret</i> point to the operational mechanics of the gaze?</li> <li>Think about the way you look at the four images in the coursepack. Is it different now then when you looked at them 3 weeks ago?</li> </ul>	Recommended Additional Readings: Mary Louise Pratt and Johannes Fabian on the ethnographic gaze.
Feb 5-12	<p><b>BODY</b> In 1975, Cixous wrote, "Write yourself. Your body must be heard."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What would it mean for the body to have a language? What would the body say?</li> </ul> <p>In feminisms other than French, the body is usually relegated to its material context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is meant by "material context" and how does that inform an definition of body?</li> <li>Why, when thinking about [women's] bodies, it is probably also useful to think about "the body politic," that Early Modern metaphor to describe the functioning of the nation, as well as more modern expressions of violation of the sanctified body, i.e., tattooing and body piercing, plastic and cosmetic surgery, exercise and anti-aging creams, cyborg augmentation?</li> </ul>	<p>📖 Luce Irigaray. "This Sex Which is Not One." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 363-69.</p> <p>📖 Donna Haraway. <i>Selections From Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan @_Meets_OnceMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience</i>. Routledge, 1997.</p>
<i>OUR SISTER KILLJOY</i>		
Feb 24 – March 2	<p><b>RACE AND ETHNICITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do race and gender function in conjunction with each other (and other variables)?</li> <li>Do postcolonial and Anglo-American theories of race work differently or produce different conclusions?</li> <li>Is class the new race?</li> </ul>	<p>📖 Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 91-96.</p> <p>📖 Elizabeth Spelman. "Gender and Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought." <i>The Inessential Woman</i>. Beacon Press, 1988. 114-32.</p>
March 4	<p><b>CLASS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the tradeoffs between liberal humanism and Marxist feminisms?</li> <li>What is the value of difference? As a theoretical construct, what is it?</li> </ul>	<p>📖 Joan W. Scott. "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism." In <i>Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives</i>. Eds. Carole McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim. 378-90.</p>
<i>PATCHWORK GIRL</i>		
Mar 9-16	<p><b>LANGUAGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can women speak? What do they say?</li> </ul>	<p>📖 Hélène Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 347-62.</p>

Week	Topics and Assignments	Readings
Mar 18-25	<p><b>GENDER AND SEXUALITY</b> Recall Robert Audley and George Talboys, and Irene and Clare. At the time both <i>Lady Audley's Secret</i> and <i>Passing</i> were written, the critics did not seem to notice the references to the characters' homosexuality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have we only recently invented homosexuality?</li> <li>▪ What are complications associated with thinking about gender?</li> <li>▪ How much of a role does biology play in the formation and maintenance of a sexual identity?</li> <li>▪ Is gender static?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>📖 Monique Wittig. "One is not Born a Woman." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 220-26.</li> <li>📖 Hélène Cixous. "Sorties." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 231-35.</li> <li>📖 Judith Butler. "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 278-85.</li> <li>📖 Helena Michie. "Not One of the Family: The Repression of the Other Woman in Feminist Theory." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 55-58.</li> <li>📖 Siobhan Somerville. "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual." <i>The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy</i>. Routledge, 1997. 37-52.</li> </ul>
Mar 30 – April 1	<p><b>THEORY AND REVIEW</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the role of feminist theory?</li> <li>▪ What is the relationship of theory and praxis?</li> <li>▪ What is next?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>📖 Teresa De Laurentis. "Upping the Anti (sic) in Feminist Theory." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 326-39.</li> <li>📖 Jane Flax. "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 170-78.</li> </ul>

