



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

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Office Hours—January to April 2005

M and W 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

T and Th 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

(Subject to Change)

Please feel free (and encouraged) to make an appointment to discuss your work.

Course Description

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

The readings for this course are historically and formalistically discrete; they represent a small part of the diversity of women’s literatures. Consider this course an **intensive introduction** to some key questions and concerns in feminist theory, but not a comprehensive overview or survey. Not only does feminist theory take many forms, but its histories as well as disciplinary variants cannot be “covered” in a term.

The primary questions directing the thematic focus of the course are as follows:

- What is theory? What is feminist theory? What are the goal(s) or role(s) of feminist theory?
- How have various feminist theoretical traditions defined issues and imagined change?
- What are the similarities and differences amongst the “waves” and theoretical traditions of British, American, French, and Emerging World feminisms?
- What is the relationship of theory to “reality” and “action”?

Required Texts in Order of Study

Graff, Ann-Barbara. *Course Reader*. Nipissing University, 2004.

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Penguin, 2003.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. Penguin, 1999.

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. Ed. Deborah McDowell. Rutgers UP, 1986.

Churchill, Caryl. *Top Girls*. Methuen Student Edition, 2003.

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 Essay, Response to Theory (2 pages)	January 27, 2005	15%
Short Essay, Response to Theory (2 pages)	February 24, 2005	15%
Critical Research Essay (12-15 pages)	March 29, 2005	40%
Seminar Leadership and Report	Sign up sheet will circulate in January	20%
Participation/Engagement	On-going	10%

Short Response to Theory Reading (January 27, 2005)

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 *Northanger Abbey*. Austen 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 *Northanger Abbey*; or, (b) explore the operation of an equally modern theoretical concept which Austen seems to be exercising in the text.
3. Discuss female agency in *Northanger Abbey*. This might well evolve into a short paper about whether the text is a feminist text or not.
4. Discuss the female imagination in *Northanger Abbey*. You might want to address whether Austen is arguing for or against essentialist notions such as this, but you need not.
5. Topic of your choice. Must be approved by instructor by January 15, 2004

Short Response to Theory Reading (February 24, 2005)

15%

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

1. Select one of the historical essays/documents we have read in whole or in part (Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Declaration of Sentiments, Freud, Woolf) and discuss one of the flaws or problems of the argument.
2. Define the “anxiety of authorship” and discuss how (as a concept) it identifies a very particular set of circumstances out of which Larsen and Gilman wrote their works.
3. Given Gilman’s prescription for society in *Herland*, to what is Gilman responding? Pick one or two for sustained discussion.
4. Discuss the relationship between sex, gender and race in *Passing*.
5. Topic of your choice. Must be approved by instructor by February 15, 2004

Critical Essay (March 29, 2005)

40%

This is a long research essay (2500-3000 words; 12-15 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. You are required to use at least three (3) secondary sources.

1. Why do some feminists ask, 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. “One is not born a woman; one becomes one.” (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*). Is gender essential?
4. What does female power look like, i.e., how is represented in art or society?
5. Are feminisms ultimately post-modern? Is the cyborg where theory is tending?
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.” Since then there have been continual attempts to sort out just what it means! 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” changes or affects the reading of one of *Northanger Abbey*, *Herland*, *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?

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 “imagination” and *Northanger Abbey* might explore the ways in which Austen challenges conventional notions of fantasy and the reasons why—this might open up into a discussion of class and Austen’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 *Northanger Abbey* 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 to help with the development of a VERY FOCUSED thesis.

A seminar is an active exchange of ideas! This is a chance to argue about what is going on in a text and the larger conceptual/theoretical significance. It is a chance to make and test claims that you will persuade others of. It is not extended summary, it is not an exercise in the picaresque. Since you are working in groups of 2, one of the benefits should be that you can help each other develop ideas and imagine the responses the class might make. Working in two means that you are doubly sure to be exacting and topical.

Students will organize their groups and sign up for their Seminar in the first weeks 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- to two-page précis** (500 words) of the

discussion that followed, highlighting the points you did not expect or that seemed most intriguing intellectually to follow up. Your précis should not be a summary of what occurred in seminar; nor should there be any comments about your preparation, level of satisfaction, etc. The précis should really address what IDEAS were exchanged.

Participation and active engagement in class discussions

10%

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 in seminars.

On one level I ask you not to worry about what you say! This is a class about questions, how to frame them, how to engage many works and different ideas in different traditions. Some of the material will be shocking or surprising, some will be banal. Think, think, think about how you turn your responses to the work and ideas into questions that can generate discussion.

For your Participation Mark, you will be assessed on your contribution to class discussions, i.e., your readiness and eagerness to engage actively in discussion, your display of familiarity with the readings, your preparedness for discussion and also your willingness to ask questions. Please be aware of the following scale:

8-10/10 = student always has something interesting to say or work through with the help of the class.

7/10 = student more often than not participates in discussion generated by others.

6/10 = student occasionally participates in discussion; does not always demonstrate a grounding in the material, i.e., perhaps has not read all of the assigned material.

0-5/10 = student does not participate in class discussion, for whatever reason.

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) 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>NORTHLANGER ABBEY</i>		
<p>Jan 4-13</p>	<p><i>Northanger Abbey</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"> ▪ How has historiography departed from the diachronic narratives of political and military “events”? ▪ What were the goals of Early Modern feminism? ▪ What did women want? What did activism look like? ▪ What were the theoretical paradigms in which these debates were waged? ▪ Before Marx (and after), what was the role of class and economics, the dominant ideology, capitalism, and social and political struggle? ▪ How did “Woman” emerge from this First Wave of feminist activism? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Jean-Jacques Rousseau. From <i>Emile</i>. In <i>The Struggle for Women’s Rights: Theoretical and Historical Sources</i>, 20-25. 📖 Mary Wollstonecraft [1792]. From <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>. In <i>The Struggle for Women’s Rights: Theoretical and Historical Sources</i>, 33-51. 📖 Karen Offen. “Reclaiming the Enlightenment for Feminism.” <i>European Feminism</i>. Stanford UP, 2000. 31-49. 📖 Sigmund Freud. “Femininity.” <i>New Introductory Lectures of Psychoanalysis</i>. Norton, 1965. 112-35. 📖 Virginia Woolf [1929]. From <i>A Room of One’s Own</i>. In <i>Norton Anthology of Writing by Women</i>, 1338-44. 📖 Judith Lowder Newton. “Power and the Ideology of ‘Woman’s Sphere.’” <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 880-95.
<i>HERLAND</i>		
<p>January 18-27</p>	<p>Authority, Authorship, Agency 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"> ▪ What does women’s authorship entail? ▪ What is the canon and what is its effect of women writers? ▪ 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 <i>Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Seneca Falls</i> (1848). 📖 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 📖 Shari Benstock. “Authorizing the Autobiographical.” <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 1138-54. 📖 Barbara Christian. “The High and the Lows of Black Feminist Criticism.” <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 51-56.
<i>PASSING</i>		
<p>Feb1 – Feb 10</p>	<p>Gender and Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do race and gender function in conjunction with each other (and other variables)? ▪ Do postcolonial and Anglo-American theories of race work differently or produce different conclusions? ▪ Is class the new race? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Elizabeth Spelman. “Gender and Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought.” <i>The Inessential Woman</i>. Beacon Press, 1988. 114-32. 📖 Joan W. Scott. “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” <i>The American Historical Review</i>, Vol. 91, No. 5 (December 1986) 1053-75.

FILM: TBA		
<p>Feb 22- March 3</p>	<p>Gaze and Desire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is so political about just looking? ▪ How do we move from looking to surveillance? ▪ How is sexuality enforced through the gaze? ▪ How is gender policed through the gaze? ▪ How would a Marxist think about the gaze, as opposed to a psychoanalytic critic, or postcolonial, or radical feminist like Camille Paglia? ▪ 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 438-448. 📖 Donna Haraway. Selections From <i>Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan ©_Meets_OnceMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience</i>. Routledge, 1997. 📖 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. 📖 Andrea Dworkin. "Pornography." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 325-27.
TOP GIRLS		
<p>Mar 8 – Mar 17</p>	<p>BODY</p> <p>In 1975, Cixous wrote, "Write yourself. Your body must be heard."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What would it mean for the body to have a language? What would the body say? <p>In feminisms other than French, the body is usually relegated to its material context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is meant by "material context" and how does that inform an definition of body? ▪ 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 augementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Luce Irigaray. "This Sex Which is Not One." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 363-69. 📖 Hélène Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 347-62.

PATCHWORK GIRL		
<p>Mar 22-29</p>	<p>Gender and Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do race and gender function in conjunction with each other (and other variables)? ▪ Do postcolonial and Anglo-American theories of race work differently or produce different conclusions? ▪ Is class the new race? <p>Gender and Sexuality Recall Irene and Clare. At the time <i>Passing</i> was written, the critics did not seem to notice the references to the characters' lesbian attraction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have we only recently invented homosexuality? ▪ What are complications associated with thinking about gender? ▪ How much of a role does biology play in the formation and maintenance of a sexual identity? ▪ Is gender static? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Elizabeth Spelman. "Gender and Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought." <i>The Inessential Woman</i>. Beacon Press, 1988. 114-32. 📖 Joan W. Scott. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," <i>The American Historical Review</i>, Vol. 91, No. 5 (December 1986) 1053-75. 📖 Monique Wittig. "One is not Born a Woman." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 220-26. 📖 Hélène Cixous. "Sorties." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 231-35. 📖 Judith Butler. "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 278-85. 📖 Siobhan Somerville. "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual." <i>The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy</i>. Routledge, 1997. 37-52.
<p>Mar 31</p>	<p>THEORY AND REVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the role of feminist theory? ▪ What is the relationship of theory and praxis? ▪ What is next? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📖 Teresa De Laurentis. "Upping the Anti (sic) in Feminist Theory." <i>feminisms</i>. Warhol and Herndl, 326-39. 📖 Jane Flax. "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory." <i>Feminisms</i>. Kemp and Squires, 170-78.

