

Western University Canada
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Department of English and Writing Studies
ENGL 2240G Feminist Literary Theory (0.5 credit)

January 2015

Tuesdays 2:30-3:30pm and Thursdays 1:30-3:30pm in KB-K106

Instructor: Donna Palmateer Pennee, PhD

Office: Arts and Humanities Building (AHB) 2G19A

Office Hours: Tuesdays 5:30 -6:30pm; Thursdays 3:30-5:30pm; or by appointment arranged by e-mail

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Course Description:

An introduction to critical debates in twentieth- [and twenty-first] century feminist literary theory. Students will study (1) the diversity of feminist approaches to literature, literary production, the politics of language, questions of genre and subjectivity; and (2) the intersections among feminist literary theories, postcolonialism, Marxism, anti-racist criticism, queer theory, and post-structuralism.

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of [English 1020E](#) or [1022E](#) or [1024E](#) or [1035E](#) or [1036E](#) or both [English 1027F/G](#) and [1028F/G](#), or permission of the Department.

Course Design: Tuesday classes will tend to be interrogative lecture-based teaching and learning: their quality will depend in significant part on your preparedness for class. Thursday classes will be divided between interrogative lecture and seminar-style (or tutorial-based) teaching and learning; they will provide opportunities for “hands-on” work (in-depth discussion, comparison, differentiation, synthesis of the readings and matters addressed therein; peer review of draft writing, etc.). The quality of classes on Thursdays will depend in significant part of your preparedness for class. Questions are encouraged in class, and everyone is encouraged to use office hours. (If the office hours posted conflict with significant numbers of students’ class schedules, they can be changed. Otherwise, conflicts with office hours should be handled by request via e-mail for an appointment at an alternate time.)

Required Reading:

In order to keep your expenses down and to maximize the fees you already pay to cover access to copyright materials for educational use, all course readings will be accessible under licensed use through Western Libraries or fair educational use in

the course site itself. We will not be using an anthology or a course pack in ENGL 2240G (W15).

The weekly **Schedule of Readings** will be posted to the OWL course site prior to the start of classes in January 2015. Everyone will receive an e-mail message from the “postmaster” when this schedule is posted. (If you wish to read ahead over the late December - early January break, please see “Research Paper” below and the three short novels identified there for your choice.)

Learning Objectives:

Working from the basic Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, the course provides opportunities for students to pursue the following learning objectives: to

- know,
- comprehend,
- apply,
- analyze,
- synthesize, and
- evaluate

selected readings and debates in twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminist literary theory. To learn what these objectives mean in general and kinds of activities and processes that can be used in particular to assess them, see the following url:

<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/pdfs-docs/teaching/RevisedBloomsHandout.pdf>

By the end of this course you will have had ample opportunity to work toward meeting the learning objectives listed above: taken together, these learning objectives help you to develop sound academic judgement for completing work outside of class and contributing meaningfully to work in class time.

Your part in facilitating your own ability to meet these learning objectives will be to bring the following to the course:

- a willingness to make and take the time to read more than once the assigned materials for this course (the reading list is limited to accommodate this necessity); and
- an ethic of preparedness, attentiveness, engagement, discipline, rigor, and commitment to what is studied and taught, all the while recognizing that writing, reading, and other skills vary from individual to individual, and may vary within a single individual’s own work over time.

Needless to say, regular attendance can also facilitate your capacity to meet the learning objectives, though attendance alone will not suffice without the other items listed above as part of *your* role. Absences from class may hinder your progress in meeting the learning objectives (as well as prevent you from being able to write the final examination).

Methods of Assessment:

10%

Bi-weekly short contributions to the learning and communal environment of the course:

- 6 small but relevant contributions, posted to a public forum in the OWL course site, to enrich and vary everyone's learning between classes
- 6 small (2-3 sentence) responses to the postings (uploaded to your Drop Box in the OWL course site), as below:

On a bi-weekly (every second week) basis, for a deadline of not later than 6pm on Mondays, everyone will post to a designated location in the OWL course site *something short but of interest and relevance to our learning for this course (see below for examples)*. Half of the class list will be assigned to post in weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12; the other half of the class list will be assigned to post in weeks 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13. During the same weeks you are assigned to post, you will also submit (upload to your Drop Box) a brief response in which you will identify a "favourite" posting (most interesting, most controversial, most relevant, most humorous; you define what makes it stand out for you—and your favourite may sometimes be your own), with a few (2 to 3) sentences to explain why you have chosen that particular posting.

The schedule for postings will be provided in the OWL site prior to the beginning of classes in Winter 2015.

Suggested examples of contributions to OWL course site postings:

- an anecdote of something you have just experienced (or read or viewed) that demonstrates why feminist analysis is still important in 2015;
- an url to an internet site with some brief comment on why you think we should visit it in relation to what we're studying for this course;
- a recommended reading (or viewing or listening) with some brief comment on why you have recommended it for us in this course;
- a quotation that you think will inspire or motivate or inform our learning in feminist literary theory;
- a "eureka" moment in your understanding for this course (the moment might occur in another course), which could lead others to "eureka" moments in our course;
- a particular page or paragraph or passage that you think is most important or illuminating in one of the week's readings and why;
- a brief follow-up to one of last week's readings (a question arising, a particular similarity or difference you see with another reading on the course that helps to illuminate or clarify a concept, etc.);
- in short, something you've found (or written yourself, perhaps a poem) that you think is "good to think with" for a course in feminist literary theory.

What will we do with these contributions? Remember that postings will be available for everyone to read *not later than 6pm every Monday* (starting in Week 2), so you

will have time to *read the postings by Thursday's class each week*. In the same week that you need to post something for everyone to read, you will also submit to your own Drop Box (any time after 6pm on Mondays but no later than 1:30pm (class time) on Thursdays) a very brief statement of which posting was your favourite for that week *and why*. Every Thursday class will begin with some discussion of selected postings. By these means we can maximize everyone's contributions to the course: everyone who takes this component of the course seriously will acquire a sense of the rewards and pleasures of engaging with your own learning outside of the classroom *and* contributing to everyone's learning inside the classroom. You will also be engaged in research, reflection, evaluation (to determine relevance), and writing to complete this component of course work.

Your grade for this component of the course will be determined by the

- clarity,
- relevance,
- required number of postings, and
- required number of responses.

Everyone will begin the course with 10% for this portion of your grade, but you will lose 1% for each missing or late post, 1% for each missing or late response to the posts, and 1% for each post the relevance and commentary on which is not clear. These posts and responses are *small tasks that do not require a lot of time; so long as you are paying attention to what can be learned in the course, you should find it easy and interesting to post and respond every second week in relation to what we are studying*. Note that you will have lots of time (two weeks) between postings, so the need for extensions or make-up opportunities should not arise. Should a genuine need for academic consideration arise, the usual channels for pursuing it are open to you through the academic counselling office. Instructors do not grant academic consideration or accommodation.

20%

Summaries of selected readings:

- 2.5% due in Week 2: 75-100 word summary of one paragraph of one theoretical text (to be assigned) from the reading list
- 5% due in Week 4: 200-250 word summary of one section of a theoretical text (to be assigned) from the reading list
- 10% due in Week 6: 500 word summary of (all of) one theoretical text (to be assigned) from the reading list, followed by a 250 word abstract of the text you have summarized in 500 words (i.e., a further condensation of the most important information from the article, designed for other researchers who will be using your abstract as a tool to determine whether or not they wish to read the text in full for their own research)

These summary assignments assess your capacity

- to read theoretical and critical texts closely, with the same care you take to read primary texts closely, looking to details,

- to comprehend and translate into your own words the theoretical, underpinnings and methods of the assigned reading (i.e., the larger picture served by the details),
- to judge what is most important to summarize,
- to integrate and synthesize components of an argument or explication, and
- to write accurately, concisely, and clearly.

This 20% of your grade gives you opportunities

- to practice how to read theoretical texts and to hone the skills you will need for understanding the readings on the course,
- to practice and hone the skills you will need for writing the analytical essay (see below),
- to get early and regular feedback on your writing skills in small assignments, at small weights
- to earn formal grades for the kind of reading and reflection activities that you will be engaged in throughout the course (i.e., the same kind of reading and reflection is required to study each item on the reading list for in-class learning, application to out-of-class activities, and preparation for the final examination).

Details about format, deadline, etc. for these three summary assignments will be posted to the OWL course site in advance.

30% Analytical Essay (1800-2000 words) due in Week 10, based on the following prior stages of research and reading:

- prepare and submit (in the most recent MLA format) a working bibliography of up to 10 feminist scholarly journal articles and/or book chapters on a single literary text (see three choices of short novels below);
- after reading these 10 articles to see the range and type of analyses they provide, you will choose 2 articles to explain, analyze, and evaluate as examples of *theorized* practice of feminist literary criticism

For the writing of this essay, your tasks are to

- identify and explain how these articles “approach” the novel: what constitutes their “feminist” and their “literary” reading practices?
- i.e., identify and explain what their theoretical assumptions or theoretical models are (they may be explicitly stated in the articles or you may have to interpret them from the methods the scholars use); explain how these assumptions or models inform their methods and produce their interpretations of the literary text: what are the results and implications of the theories that underwrite or inform their practice?
- evaluate your chosen 2 articles/book chapters on the novel: Are there unintended consequences of the positions or methods used taken? Blindspots or contradictions in their arguments? Are they “good” (or “effective” or “convincing”) and on what terms? According to what expectations? (i.e., determining your answers to these evaluative questions will require you to ask: what are *your* assumptions about what constitutes “good” or “effective” or “convincing” feminist literary criticism)

Further instructions and deadline information for the stages of research, reading, and writing will be posted in advance to the OWL course site.

Choices for primary literary texts for the analytical essay about feminist literary scholarship on one of these novels:

These novels are all short, easily available, quite possibly already studied by you in another class, *and* have been written about extensively by feminist literary scholars, so you shouldn't have trouble finding relevant research about them:

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Note: These short novels will not be discussed in class: you must read them on your own in order to do a responsible and informed analysis of selected examples of feminist literary criticism about them. Discussion of the novel you choose is, of course, always possible with the instructor and with classmates who have chosen to work on the same text. Other readers, especially in the same course, can make great resources for meaningful conversations. (Our Thursday seminar-tutorial class time will facilitate getting to know your classmates to enable such conversations outside of class.)

40%

Comprehensive Final Examination

- 20% of the weight of this examination will be for creating your own "sample" essay question for this exam, with a brief preface that explains why you think this is a good exam question for this course. You will bring a copy of this question and preface to the examination: you will write the answer to your question in the final examination time slot.

Keep this component of the exam in mind from the beginning of the course, for the following benefits:

- it will give added purpose and focus for completing weekly readings on time;
- it will encourage readiness to participate in and learn from informed discussion of the readings in a cumulative (rather than last-minute) way;
- it will encourage you to reflect on what is important in what you are learning, and thus how to develop and organize your thinking about what you are reading and learning (i.e., it will encourage you to develop metacognitive awareness of how to study and how to improve and retain your learning);
- it will maximize your learning from the readings by developing your capacity to differentiate and integrate key issues, questions, concerns across different readings (and help you to remember what you've read);
- it will encourage you to reflect on how your learning might fairly but rigorously be tested or examined; and
- it will encourage you to be engaged with your own learning, and
- it will give you explicit ownership of half of the value of the final examination (or, 20% of your course grade).

Further information about the above and the remaining 20% component(s) of the exam will be posted to the OWL course site in advance of the registrar-scheduled examination.

Official Stuff You Need to Know for this Course

Senate, Departmental, and Course Policies:

STUDENTS MUST PASS BOTH TERM WORK AND THE FINAL EXAMINATION (IN COURSES WITH FINAL EXAMINATIONS) IN ORDER TO PASS THE COURSE. STUDENTS WHO FAIL THE FINAL EXAMINATION (REGARDLESS OF THEIR TERM MARK) AUTOMATICALLY FAIL THE COURSE.

Students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the relevant Senate and departmental policies on such matters as:

- when and how to request academic accommodation for missed or late work;
- what constitutes plagiarism and how to prevent it;
- consequences of absenteeism (*you may be prevented from writing the final examination, for example*);
- and other rights and responsibilities.

These and other policies and helpful information are conveniently publicized for students on the Department of English website: select the “Undergraduate” item on the top horizontal tool bar on the Department of English website, then select “Information and Resources” from the drop-down menu, or go to the following URL: **<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/info-for-students.html>**

Students who are in **emotional/mental distress** should refer to MentalHealth@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

All out-of-class work for this course must be submitted to the OWL course site.

Do not slide work under the instructor’s or GTA’s office door. Do not deposit work in the departmental drop-off box. The final examination is scheduled by the Registrar’s office, not by the instructor, and as such cannot be changed.

Late work will be penalized at a rate of 10% (of the value of the late assignment) per day or part thereof, including Saturdays, Sundays, and religious and statutory holidays, except where academic accommodation is granted by the Academic Counselling Office. (I.e., an assignment worth 20% of your grade will be penalized 2% per day or part-day late.)

For **missed work** for grades, you must seek accommodation through the Academic Counselling Office. *Instructors and departments do not grant academic accommodation: it must be sought using the appropriate procedures, documentation, and forms through the Academic Counselling Office.*