Women’s Literature and the Romance

Course Description: The first question we will explore in this course is, why women’s literature? There is no equivalent “men’s literature” course, which invokes gender politics, of course, but also suggests that there is something unique about women writers, their readers and histories, that justifies studying their works in a sphere of its own. As we read short stories, novels and essays beginning in the 18th century and moving forward to the present day, we will attempt to identify what that uniqueness is, or if it even exists. Are there reoccurring themes, techniques, tensions exclusive to women’s writing? Do gender politics influence how and what a woman writes and how her product is received? What role does fantasy play in women’s literature and how does it differ from that in the male canon? Our focus will be on the popular romance, a genre created by and for women, but one that has proved to be a troublesome progeny: the celebration of love and marriage as the desirable end for reading pleasure is counter to feminists’ celebration of autonomy and the expansion of a woman’s life options beyond marriage. By reading the romance we will tap into feminist debates and evaluate the tactics and forms women writers use to negotiate politics and pleasure.

Required Texts (Please purchase the editions cited below, which are on reserve at Barnes and Noble, TAMUCC)
Atwood, Margaret. *Lady Oracle* (Random)
Bronte, Emily. *Wuthering Heights* (Penguin)
Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water For Chocolate*
Hurston, Nora Zeale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper)
Weldon, Fay. *Life and Loves of a She Devil* (Random)
Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own* (HBC Trade)
Assorted works on blackboard

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):
Students who successfully complete ENGL 4360 will be able to:
1. understand the connections between women’s literature and their social, historical, and cultural contexts;
2. analyze women’s literary texts in terms of their formal qualities, recurrent themes and issues;
3. recognize the impact of gender on women’s literature, literary criticism, and popular
notions and practices of literary canonization;
4. integrate research with their own insights to formulate conclusions about women’s writing and the romance genre.

**Grade Breakdown:**
Daily work (quizzes, impromptu writings, group work, discussion) 20%
Presentation of scholarly essay 10%
4 short studies 40%
Revising a romance 10%
Research Project 20%

**Course Responsibilities:**

- **Attendance:** I expect everyone to be in every class. I do realize, of course, that things sometimes happen that compete with academic responsibilities, such as accidents, illness, family emergencies. While I do not “excuse” absences, I have made allowances for you to miss three classes, without penalty, to compensate for that unexpected emergency. After three absences, however, your final numerical grade will be lowered two points for each additional absence—a 95 average with six absences becomes 89, a B; an 80 with four absences becomes an 78, a C.

- **Class participation:** The seminar will be discussion-based, which means that your active participation is essential for your own success as well as for that of the class. Besides your contributions to class discussion and group work, you will be evaluated on the quality of your in-class and out-of-class responses to readings.

- **Presentation of scholarly articles:** On the second day of class, I will pass around a list of scholarly articles—literary, historical and/or theoretical—relevant to the readings in the schedule. Working in pairs, or possibly triads, you will make a presentation to the class in which you summarize, evaluate, and analyze one of these texts and make links to the reading material assigned for that day. Ideally, your objective is to engage the class, either through discussion or through application of the key concepts via in-class activity. You will also individually write a one- to two-page assessment that demonstrates your understanding of the argument and the key points made by your essayist and also describes your contribution to the presentation and process of preparation. This will be due the class period immediately following the presentation—no exceptions. Your presentation/facilitation should not exceed 20 minutes. For each of these activities, I will evaluate not only the quality of the presentation but also the active participation of those in the audience. All of the articles will be stored on blackboard.

- **Short Studies:** You will develop a short critical study of each of the following literary texts: *Persuasion, Wuthering Heights, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. Each of these papers will be a two-three page (typed and double-spaced) critical analysis of a key moment or image that you
find interesting or relevant to the text as a whole. While I do not expect you to use outside sources, I do expect you to adhere to MLA style. Your grade will be based on the quality of your insights, the rigor of your argument, and your use of textual evidence. While I expect you to draw from the ideas discussed in class, I also expect you to go beyond—making a claim based on your own ideas and discoveries. While I will do not as a practice accept late papers, I will when you’ve contacted me at least two days before the due date with a late “plan.” More than one occurrence, however, will result in a hefty penalty.

- **Revising a romance:** Tapping into your own fantasy lives, each of you will create/write a 3–4 page revision of one of your favorite romances…or not so favorite. Let’s face it, the pleasure gained from reading romances is oftentimes embarrassingly antithetical to our social politics. This assignment offers you an opportunity to “fix” the social/political problematics of the romance novel for the purposes of maximizing your own reading pleasure.

- **Research project:** For your final project you will build on the knowledge gained from the readings, lectures, short studies, group presentations, and class discussions by investigating a “problem” related to women’s literature. This is your opportunity to narrow in on something that you’re not finished with, that you want to learn more about. You might want to research one of our writers or a topic related to a literary text; or you might want to investigate women’s literature from a cultural perspective: women’s literature in public schools, the Janeite phenomenon, female poets, what a “men’s literature” class would look like, telenovelas and feminism, s&m in the romance novel. You will expand your knowledge in this area of interest, but you will also demonstrate understanding of the concepts and theories utilized during the semester.

**Additional Information:**

**Keep copies of your work:** It is your responsibility to keep backup copies of all of your work in the case of an error or misplacement on my part.

**Notice to Students with Disabilities:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom, or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance.

**Academic Advising:** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the
department chair. The College's Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

**Grade Appeal Process.** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at [http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

**Reminder to English Majors:** As part of the English undergraduate capstone course (ENGL 4351), all English majors are required to submit a portfolio of writings in different discourse genres that they have completed for their college classes. To help you prepare for this assignment, you should keep a copy of all essays, research papers, literary analyses, creative and report writing, etc., so that you will have an ample selection from which to choose when the portfolio comes due.

**Academic Honesty:** Plagiarism, “the presentation of work of another as one’s own work,” is only one form of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism also includes falsification (the intentional alteration of information), fabrication (the intentional invention of information), multiple submission (using the same material for two separate assignments or courses without permission from the instructors), and abuse of academic materials (the intentional destruction of resource materials.) Sometimes students commit unintentional plagiarism (by not citing sources properly, for example) because they are unaware of the standards that apply. Because plagiarism is such a dirty word on college campuses, please see me if you have a question about violations, however minor.

**Cell Phones, Laptops:** You must turn off your cell phones before class begins. Failing to abide by this classroom protocol can affect your grade. Laptops should only be used for taking notes—enough said. If you choose to leave class to answer a phone call, do not return—coming and going is very distracting.

**The Writing Center:** The writing center is a free service for students at TAMUCC to improve their writing skills. Writing consultants work one-on-one with writers at all stages of the writing process to help them find ideas, organize their thoughts, and formulate a thesis. You can get help with grammar and general mechanical problems too. The Writing Center is located in the Center for Academic Student Achievement (CASA) in the Glasscock Building. Both drop ins and scheduled appointments are welcome. [http://critical.tamucc.edu/wiki/WC/Home/](http://critical.tamucc.edu/wiki/WC/Home/)
**Reading Schedule:** (* secondary readings accessed through blackboard. Please print out, read and bring to class).

**Thurs. August 23:** Introductions

**Tropes in Women’s Lit**

**Tues. Aug. 28:**  
* “Fantomina,” (Haywood)

**Thurs. Aug. 30:**  
* *Persuasion* (chaps 8 – end vol.1)  
* Excerpt from “Vindication of the rights of Woman” (Wollstonecraft)

**Tues., Sept 4:**  
* *Persuasion* (vol2, chaps 1 – 8)  
Presentation: “Toward a Feminist Poetics” (Showalter)

**Thurs. Sept 6:**  
* *Persuasion* (to end of vol 2)  
* “The Eight Essential Elements of the Romance Novel”

**Tues. Sept 11:**  
* *Persuasion* (to end)

**Victorian Gender Ideology**

**Thurs. Sept 13:**  
* Readings from conduct books, John Ruskin, medical discourses  
**Essay 1 due**

**Tues. Sept 18:**  
* *Wuthering Heights*

**Thurs. Sept 20:**  
* *Wuthering Heights*  
Presentation: *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels* (Thompson)

**Tues. Sept 25:**  
* *Wuthering Heights*  
Presentation: from *Madwoman in the Attic* (Gilbert and Gubar)

**Thurs. Sept 27:**  
* *Wuthering Heights*  
Presentation: “The Two Catherine” (Pykett)

**Fri. Sept 28:**  
* **Essay 2 due**

**Expanding the Canon**

**Tues. Oct. 2:**  
* *A Room of One’s Own* (Woolf)

**Thurs. Oct 4:**  
* *A Room of One’s Own*  
Presentation: “Images of Enslavement and Emancipation” (Solomon)
Tues. Oct. 9: * *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1 − 75)

Presentation: “Gender and Ambition: Zora Neale Hurston in the Harlem Renaissance (Story)

Thurs. Oct. 11: * *Their Eyes* (76 − 128)

Tues. Oct 16: * *Their Eyes* (129 – end)

Presentation: “The Erotics of Talk in Their Eyes were Watching God” (Kaplan)

**Romance Revisions**

Thurs. Oct 18: * Fairy Tales and their Revisions

Short Study 3 due

Tues. Oct 23: * *Lady Oracle* (chapters 1 − 8)

Thurs. Oct 25: * *Lady Oracle* (chaps 9 − 16)

Presentation: chapter from *My Mother/Myself* (Friday)

Tues. Oct 30: * *Lady Oracle* (17 − 23)

Presentation: “Mass Produced Fantasies for Women” (Modleski)

Thurs. Nov. 1: Lady Oracle (to end)

Presentation: “Mirror Images in Margaret Atwood’s Lady Oracle” (Givner)

Tues. Nov 6: Guest speaker: romance writer Peggy Cleaves

Romance Revision due

Thurs. Nov 8: * Life and Loves of She-Devil* (chaps 1 − 14)

Tues. Nov. 13: Conferences—no class

Research Proposal due

Thurs. Nov. 15: * Life and Loves of She Devil* (chaps 15 - 24)

Tues. Nov. 20: * Life and Loves of a She Devil* (chaps 25 to end)

Presentation: “A Comic turn, turned serious”: Humour, body modification, and the Natural” (Pentney)

**Short Study 4 due**

Thurs. Nov. 22: **THANKSGIVING**

**Female Spheres**

Tues. Nov. 27: * Like Water for Chocolate* (pgs 6 – 81)
Presentation: “Erotic Rebellion…” (Hayden))

Thurs. Nov. 29:  
*Like Water for Chocolate* (pgs 82 – 159)

Tues. Dec. 4:  
*Chocolate* (to end)  
Class Wrap

Tues. Dec 11:  
**Research projects due, my office, 4:15.**