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 suggests that there is something unique about women writers, their readers and histories, that justifies studying their works in a sphere of their 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. What are some of the recurring themes, techniques, tensions exclusive to women’s writing? How 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 romance (popular and canonical), a genre created primarily 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)
- 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 readings 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 context;
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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of scholarly essay</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 short studies</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revising a romance</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 in-class quizzes</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Project</td>
<td>25%</td>
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**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, 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. Active participation means completing the reading before class and bringing with you to class insights, ideas, questions to help stir class discussion.

- **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 you will make a presentation to the class in which you summarize, evaluate, and analyze your chosen text and make links to the literature assigned for that day. Your objective is to “teach your text”, but also to make it relevant to the literature and to women’s studies through practice, either Q & A or a class activity. On the class day following your presentation you will each turn in a one to two page assessment that includes a summary of the argument and key points of the critical essay and that describes your contribution to the presentation and process of preparation. Your presentation/facilitation should not exceed 20 minutes. All of the articles will be stored on黑board.

- **Short Studies:** You will write four short critical studies of the following literary texts: *Persuasion, Wuthering Heights, Their Eyes Were Watching God, and Life and Love of a She-Devil*. Each of these papers will be two to three pages in length (typed and double-spaced) and contain a 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 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.

- **Mid-term:** The mid-term will be a take home exam. You will have one week to complete it. This will give you the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of concepts discussed in class, make links between texts, primary and secondary, and review the course content for potential application in your research paper.

- **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 through research, 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.

**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/wikiWC/Home/](http://critical.tamucc.edu/wikiWC/Home/)
**Reading Schedule:** (* secondary readings accessed through blackboard. Please print out, read and bring to class).

Wed. Sept 4:  Introductions

**Tropes in Women’s Lit**

Mon. Sept 9:  * “Fantomina,” (Haywood)

Wed. Sept 11:  * Persuasion (chap 1 – 8)

Mon. Sept 16:  Persuasion (chap 8 – end of volume 1)

Presentation: “Toward a Feminist Poetics” (Showalter)

Wed. Sept 18:  Persuasion (vol 2, chap 1 – 7)

Mon. Sept 23  Persuasion (to end)

* “The Eight Essential Elements of the Romance Novel”

**Victorian Gender Ideology**

Wed. Sept 25:  * Mrs. Ellis, John Ruskin

Short study 1 due

Mon. Sept. 30:  Wuthering Heights (including Charlotte Bronte’s preface)

Wed. Oct 2:  Wuthering Heights

Presentation: Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels (Thompson)

Mon. Oct 7:  Wuthering Heights

Presentation: from Madwoman in the Attic (Gilbert and Gubar)

Wed. Oct 9:  Wuthering Heights

Fri. Oct 11:  Short study 2 due

**Expanding the Canon**

Mon. Oct 14:  A Room of One’s Own (Woolf)

Wed. Oct 16:  A Room of One’s Own

Presentation: “Images of Enslavement and Emancipation” (Solomon)

Mon. Oct 21:  Their Eyes (1 – 75)
Presentation: “Gender and Ambition: Zora Neale Hurston in the Harlem Renaissance (Story)

Wed. Oct 23: Their Eyes (76 – 128)

Mon. Oct 28: Their Eyes (129 to end)
Presentation: “The Erotics of Talk in Their Eyes were Watching God (Kaplan)

Romance Revisions
Wed. Oct 30: * Assorted fairy tales
Short study 3 due

Mon. Nov 4: * Feminist revisions of fairy tales
“Feminism and Fairy Tales” (Rowe)
Group Presentation: Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis of Snow White

Wed. Nov 6: * Margaret Atwood’s “True Trash,” “Happy Endings,” “There Was Once”
Midterm due

Mon. Nov. 11: Romance revisions due. Class presentations

Wed. Nov. 13: She-Devil

Mon. Nov 18: She-Devil
Research proposal due

Wed. Nov. 20: She-Devil
Presentation: “A Comic turn, turned serious”: Humour, body modification, and the Natural” (Pentney)

Fri. Nov 22: Short study #4 due

Mon. Nov. 25: Conferences, no formal class
Annotated Bibliography due

Wed. Nov 27: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon. Dec. 2: Like Water for Chocolate
Presentation: “Erotic Rebellion…” (Hayden))

Wed. Dec 4 Like Water for Chocolate

Mon. Dec 9: Like Water for Chocolate
Mon. Dec 16: Research projects due
Presentations