GWS 350: Special Topics in Gender and Literature
Women’s Work/s: Women Writers and Social Expectation in 20th Century Literature

Professor Tracy Lemaster, tlemasterphd@gmail.com
TuTh 2:30pm - 3:45pm, Van Vleck B223, Office hours: Tues 12:15pm-2:15pm

Course Description
This course examines how women’s written works of art are shaped by social expectations of “women’s work,” i.e. gendered domestic labor, pregnancy, motherhood, sexual repression, Woman as representation, and more. We will focus on 20th century transnational literature that portrays women who write and women who are creative. We will look at how female characters portray women's artistic status in society as a framework for examining implied societal expectations about women's creativity, minds, expression, agency, and power. We will also examine different forms of creativity and different access to the creative realm among women in literature. What historical, institutional, and systemic obstacles have shaped what women write and which women write? How does the portrayal of writerly and creative female characters vary based on their gender, race, sexuality, and locationality? Is “womanhood” central in defining the “woman writer” or do differing identity constituents shape, de-centralize, or surpass gender identity? Readings consist of fiction by women, nonfiction articles by women discussing artistry, and fiction by men on this topic.

“Unit One: Creativity and Procreativity” addresses the binarization of women’s creativity and procreativity as an ideological separation of mind and body. Women have been marginalized from the creative sphere, and specifically from authorship, by the patriarchal notion that women create children with their bodies rather than create art with their minds. Also, women artists grapple with the pragmatic restrictions that mother’s work puts on creative work while also acknowledging that children can inspire creativity. How do representations of artistic women address this separation of body and mind, motherhood and authorhood, babies and books, and woman and writer?

“Unit Two: Race and (Re)Writing” considers how racial histories of degradation, violence, hypersexualization, and silencing have shaped African American women authors’ representations of creativity. Black women encountered institutional racism when trying to be recognized as writers, as well as narrative racism through their marginalization or omission in popular literature. In response, they portray creative female characters through motifs that reflect both racial oppression and new forms of racial expression. How do black women writers address the creative process differently? How do they re-write previous texts and notions of women’s artistry?

“Unit Three: Picturing Women Writing” considers the dominance of women as representation and muse but marginalization as author and artist by looking at how female authors portray creative women in the graphic novel. What does it mean when women visually represent women in literature? Women dominate the imagistic realm, from the female nude in art to women’s bodies in mass media today, yet men traditionally author these representations. For example, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, less than 5% of the artists in the modern art section are women but 85% of its nudes are figures of women. What does the imagistic component of the graphic novel lend to questions of female representation, authorship, and creativity? Does the autobiographical graphic novel redefine notions of the nude, the muse, and the artist for women?

Course Readings
A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf.
Foe by J.M. Coetzee.
The Color Purple by Alice Walker.
Push by Sapphire.
Fun Home by Alison Bechdel.
Persepolis Books 1 & 2 by Marjane Satrapi. Texts available at A Room of One’s Own Bookstore.
Course and Credit Designations
Level: Intermediate  
Breadth: Literature  
L&S Credit Type: C  
Section-level Honors available
Credit Range: 3  
Cross-Listed Subjects: ENGL, GEN&WS

How Credit Hours are met by the Course:
This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the Spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. At UW-Madison, one credit is the learning that takes place in at least 45 hours of learning activities, which include time in lectures or class meetings, in person or online, labs, exams, presentations, tutorials, reading, writing, studying, preparation for any of these activities, and any other learning activities.

Course Learning Outcomes
Content: You will learn how writers have represented the idea of women’s writing across transnational texts and explore how the meaning and possibility of creativity differs for different groups.
Writing: You will learn how to write original, coherent, and compelling arguments that move beyond summary to analysis through independent and critical thinking in clear prose.
Critical Reading: You will become more attentive and productive readers of literary texts.
Critical Thinking: You will gain proficiency in assessing textual evidence, structuring complex arguments, asking pertinent questions, and making nuanced distinctions and connections.

Course Requirements
3 page essay (15%)  
5 page essay (25%)  
Midterm (20%)  
Final Exam (30%)  
Attendance and active participation (10%)  
All work must be submitted to achieve a passing grade.

Key Course Concepts
intersectionality, intertextuality, identity politics, feminist re-vision, and the kunstlerroman

Course Expectations
All class work will be demanding in terms of reading, writing, and thought. It is essential that you keep up with the assigned readings, since falling behind will leave you without exposure to the concepts I will cover and build upon. Essay assignments are meant to foster both critical writing and critical thinking abilities through sustained focus on one topic. Exams are meant to achieve the comprehensive and comparative thought that essays do not allow room for.

Content Alert
The readings for this course discuss and depict sexual activity (Foe by J.M. Coetzee, The Color Purple by Alice Walker, Fun Home by Bechdel), sexual violence (The Color Purple by Alice Walker, Push by Sapphire), rape and incest (The Color Purple by Alice Walker, Push by Sapphire), and attempted suicide (Persepolis Books 1 & 2 by Marjane Satrapi). It is recommended that students who feel they may be unable to read about, view, discuss, and write about sexual topics and violence in a safe, healthy, critical, and responsible manner do not take this course.
Course Policies
Attendance at all classes is expected. After two absences your final grade will be lowered by one half letter grade for each additional absence. Students are expected to be punctual. Excessive tardiness (over ten minutes) will be treated as a half-absence.
Consistent preparation of readings and assignments and active participation in discussion is expected.
All submitted written work must be typed, stapled, with pages numbered. MLA Paper formatting guidelines must be followed.
One full letter grade will be deducted per day for late papers.
Please bring your books to every class meeting. Please turn off or silence cell phones. Ringing phones will not be tolerated, nor will text messaging.

The Writing Center
Learning to write clearly, compellingly, and coherently should be a major goal of yours in this class. Writing Center instructors are trained to work with inexperienced as well as advanced student writers. If you would like some help organizing ideas for your paper or some constructive criticism of a draft, please make an appointment to see a Writing Center instructor. To schedule an appointment, you may go to the Writing Center in person (6171 Helen C. White Hall) or call 263-1992. There are also satellite Writing Center locations in Chadbourne, Liz Waters, and elsewhere for your convenience. On the website you can also find information about helpful classes for student writers: http://www.wisc.edu/writing.

Plagiarism
By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Plagiarism, or taking credit for words and ideas not your own, constitutes academic misconduct, will result in disciplinary action ranging from failing the course to suspension. If we think you have plagiarized, we will meet with you and submit evidence of your crime to the Dean of Students Office, where it will go in your file. Since plagiarizing casts doubt on your overall academic honesty, we reserve the right to review and assess the originality of your other work for this course if we have found that you have plagiarized. Be aware that plagiarism includes "cutting and pasting text from the web without quotation marks or proper citation; paraphrasing from the web without crediting the source" and "using another person's ideas, words, or research and presenting it as one's own by not properly crediting the originator." For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. If you have a diagnosed disability and need instructional accommodations, you must inform Prof. Lemaster by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Prof. Lemaster will work directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.” http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php
Course Calendar

“Unit One: Creativity and Procreativity”

January
Week 1 Tues 22: Course Overview
   Thurs 24: “Shakespeare’s Sister”
   <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91r/chapter3.html>
Week 2 Tues 29: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, Chapters 1&2 pp.3-40
   Thurs 31: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, Chapters 3&4 pp.41-78

February
Week 3 Tues 5: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, Chapter 5, excerpts *The Pink Guitar* by Rachel Blau DuPlessis pp.79-94
   Thurs 7: *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, Chapter 6 pp.95-114
Week 4 Tues 12: *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, Section 1 pp.1-40
   Thurs 14: *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, Section 2 pp.41-103
Week 5 Tues 19: *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, Section 3 pp.105-143
   Thurs 21: *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee, Section 4 pp.145-149, excerpts *Of Woman Born* by Adrienne Rich *Artist and Mother* documentary

“Unit Two: Race and (Re)Writing”
Week 6 Tues 26: **Essay 1 Due** *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.1-58, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” by Audre Lorde
   Thurs 28: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.59-126

March
Week 7 Tues 5: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.127-210
   Thurs 7: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, pp.211-294
Week 8 Tues 12: **Midterm Exam**
   Thurs 14: *Push* by Sapphire, Sections 1&2 pp.3-66
Week 9 Tues 26: *Push* by Sapphire, Sections 3&4 pp.67-140

“Unit Three: Picturing Women Writing”
April
Week 10 Tues 2: *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, Chapters 1&2 pp.1-54
   Thurs 4: *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, Chapters 3&4 pp.55-120
Week 11 Tues 9: *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, Chapter 7 pp.187-232, excerpts *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger
Week 12 Tues 16: *Persepolis Book 1* by Marjane Satrapi, “The Veil”–“The Sheep” pp.3-71
   Thurs 18: *Persepolis Book 1* by Marjane Satrapi, “The Trip”–“The Dowry” pp.72-153
Week 14 Tues 30: **Essay 2 Due**, Review Day

May
   Thurs 2: Party and Film

Week 15 Thurs 9: **Final Exam**