ENGL/WGST 374: Women Writers
Spring 2013
Dr. Sally Robinson
sallyr@tamu.edu

Office: 5XX LAAH Bldg.
845-8355
Office hours: T 1-3; R 11-12:00

ENGL/WGST 374: Women Writers. (3-0). History of literature by women in English; emphasis on continuity of ideas and on literary contributions; study of a variety of genres with particular attention to the significance of gender in the racial, social, sexual and cultural contexts of women writing in English.

WOMEN, WRITING, AND CONSUMER CULTURE

In this course, we will explore the complex symbolic relationship between women and consumerism. Within patriarchal cultures, women’s hunger for food, for men, for material goods is very often considered problematic; we hear about women who love too much, who shop too much, who eat too much. Even as women are often represented as out of control consumers, they also find themselves represented as the objects of consumption; women and the female body are used to sell products, women’s individual identities are often consumed by others’ needs and desires, women are frequently represented as objects to be owned, purchased, used. How have women writers approached these issues? Do novels by women critically revise, or uncritically accept, what we might call a male-oriented or masculinist take on questions of female appetite and desire? How do race and class impact how women relate to consumer culture, and how consumer culture positions women? In the last week of class, you’ll think about some of the issues about men, masculinity, and consumer culture.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Identify major women writers whose work engages with issues of gender and consumer culture.

2. Perform close readings of written and visual material.

3. Explain how women’s writing reflects the extent to which the conditions of women’s lives have changed and remained stable over time.

4. Analyze and describe complex historical and biographical contexts in which various texts by women were produced.

5. Engage in comparative analysis.

6. Formulate a thesis and develop and support their argument with textual evidence.

Core Curriculum Objectives
Critical Thinking Skills (CTS): The course will enhance critical thinking skills through consistent reading and class discussion of key ideas in women's writings about the relationship between gender and production of literary and visual texts.

Communication Skills (CS): The course enhances communication skills through small and large group discussion and writing about ideas, issues, questions, and themes central to course reading and visual texts.

Personal Responsibility (PR): The course will enhance personal responsibility through engagement with moral and thorny ethical issues that arise in class readings.

Social Responsibility (SR): The course enhances social responsibility by providing students with a cross cultural understanding of how history, region, and broader social forces have shaped the distinctive literary traditions of women.

Evaluation of Core Objectives

CTS: The evaluation of critical thinking skills will be based on exams and class participation and may include written work. Exams will be designed to allow students to demonstrate their ability to evaluate and synthesize key ideas from the assigned reading. Class room discussion will focus on helping students better understand the nuances and complexities of women's writings about the relationship between gender and consumerism.

CS: The course will help students learn how to develop a greater understanding of the history of women writing literature from classical times to the present that may involve guided writing assignments in which they will receive feedback, exams in which students will be expected to effectively convey key ideas from the course succinctly and clearly, and class room discussion in which students will learn how to express questions and thoughts about the subtleties of each text under examination. Material from this course will include written texts and such visual representations as photographs, illustrations, films, or theatrical performances.

PR: The course material throughout the semester will offer students an opportunity to reflect upon personal responsibility through such topics as the struggle between personal fulfillment and societal obligation, the relationship between marriage and wider economic conditions, patriarchy and domination, and problems related to eating disorders. Students will explore these topics through group discussion, writing assignments, and exams.

SR: The evaluation of social responsibility will be based upon an end-of-the-semester short writing assignment in which students will be asked to reflect upon how their knowledge of literatures written by women have been affected by social and cultural forces. Students will be expected to demonstrate how key insights from the course have helped broaden their understanding of how history, culture, and philosophical outlooks have shaped the literary traditions of women's writings.
REQUIRED READING:
Jane Austen, *Emma* 1814 (Dover)
Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* 1905 (Signet)
Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* 1925 (Penguin)
Nell Larsen, *Passing* 1929 (Penguin)
Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* 1969 (Anchor Books)
Connie Willis, *Bellwether* 1996 (Random)
Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 1998 (Penguin)
Sophie Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* 2001 (Dell)

Selected critical articles, all to be posted on Moodle

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Take-home exam #1, due Monday, February 25 25%
2. Take-home exam #2, due Friday, April 5 25%
3. Comprehensive Final exam, Friday, May 3 25%
4. Moodle writing assignments 25%

**Take-home exams** will be comprised of two questions, and your answer to each question must be a minimum of 1000 words (approximately 3 pages, double-spaced). Each answer must have a thesis, and must go on to support that thesis with textual evidence. Take-home exams will be submitted through Turnitin.com on Moodle. Take-home exam questions and instructions will be posted to Moodle at least one week in advance of the due date. Your answers will be graded on grammar, coherence, insight and originality.

The **final exam** will be comprised of passage identifications/commentary and essay questions.

**Writing on Moodle** These Moodle posts are meant to give you practice in the kind of writing you will do on your exams, and also serve as material for class discussion. Each post must center around an insight on that day’s reading that you deem worthy of discussion. These should take the form of a thesis statement expressing an idea of your own about the work (that is, not a self-evident fact such as “Lily Bart suffers a downward spiral in *The House of Mirth*,” but rather, “Lily’s fate in *The House of Mirth* constitutes Wharton’s critique of a culture that commodifies women”), followed by a paragraph supporting and developing that insight. Each Moodle post must be at least 250 words in length, and will earn a maximum of three points: one for satisfying the length requirement, a second for a good thesis, and a third for development/support. Because I will use these to guide class discussion, they must be submitted to Moodle no later than midnight of the day before class (for most posts, this means Monday at midnight). Also because I might use these to guide class discussion, you may be called on in class to talk about and/or read what you wrote.

**Attendance**
Please see [http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07/](http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07/) for a list of university rules regarding absences. If you miss class for medical reasons, you may submit as documentation either a completed Texas A&M University Explanatory Statement for Absence from Class form, available at [http://attendance.tamu.edu](http://attendance.tamu.edu) of a note from a health care professional affirming date and time of the visit.
Grading Policies
A= 90 – 100
B= 80 – 89
C= 70 – 79
D= 60 – 69
F= 59 and below

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement
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 contact Disability Services, in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 845-1637. For additional information visit http://disability.tamu.edu.

Academic Dishonesty
All policies, including those on academic dishonesty, outlined in TAMU’s Student Rules (http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/) apply: “An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.”

SCHEDULE
Please note: Reading is to be done on the first day we discuss the novel. All other reading is to be done by class on the day it is listed.

Week 1
Introduction

Susan Bordo, “Reading the Slender Body” (Moodle)

Week 2
Jane Austen, *Emma*
Moodle post due M 1/21 by midnight
*Emma*

Assignment: View the film *Clueless.* It is available through Media Matrix (there’s a link on our Moodle site), or you can watch it on your own.

Week 3
Film: *Clueless.* *Emma*
Moodle post due M 1/28 by midnight
*Clueless and Emma*
Gayle Wald, “Clueless in the Neocolonial World Order” (Moodle)

Week 4
Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*
Moodle post due M 2/4 by midnight

Week 5  Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*
Moodle post due W 2/13 by midnight

*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*
Susan Hegeman, “Taking Blondes Seriously” (Moodle)
Take-home exam #1 due on Moodle, by noon on M 2/25

Week 6  Nella Larsen, *Passing*
Moodle post due M 2/25 by midnight

*Passing*

Week 7  Mary Caller Balkan, “‘Dressing to Kill: Desire, Race, and Authenticity in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*’ (Moodle)
Joan Jacobs Bromberg, “The Appetite as Voice” (Moodle)

SPRING BREAK

Week 8  Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman*
Moodle post due M 3/18 by midnight

*The Edible Woman*

Week 9  *The Edible Woman*
Susan Bordo, “Hunger as Ideology” (Moodle)

Assignment: View the film *Eating: A Serious Comedy about Women and Food*. There is a link to a video stream on Moodle. Or, you can go to Evans Annex to watch the DVD.

Week 10  Film: *Eating: A Serious Comedy about Women and Food*. Moodle post due W 3/27 by Midnight.

*Eating*

Week 11  Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*
Moodle post due M 4/1 by midnight

*My Year of Meats*
Take-home exam #2 due on Moodle by midnight on Friday, 4/5

Week 12  Connie Willis, *Bellwether*
Moodle post due M 4/8 by midnight

*Bellwether*

Week 13  Sophie Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*
Moodle post due M 4/15 by midnight

*Confessions of a Shopaholic*
Jennifer Scanlon, “Making Shopping Safe for the Rest of Us” (Moodle)

**Week 14**
Malcolm Gladwell, “Listening to Khakis: What America’s Most Popular Pants Tell Us about the Way Guys Think” (Moodle)


**Final exam** will be comprised of passage identifications/commentary and essay questions. On the final exam students will be asked to answer a question in which they will have to reflect upon how key insights from the course have helped broaden their understanding of how history, culture, and philosophical outlooks have shaped the literary traditions of women writers.