

**Unsex'd Females and New Women:
Literary Feminism at the Turn of Two Centuries**

ENGL 3924/WGST 3720 · Fall 2017 · M/W 3:30-4:50 pm · LANG 209

Professor Nora Gilbert
Email: nora.gilbert@unt.edu

Office: LANG 408-E
Office hours: M/W 12:45-1:45 pm

Course description:

In 1798, Richard Polwhele wrote a scathing poetic indictment of what is now considered to be the onset of first-wave feminism. The poem, called “The Unsex’d Females,” criticized a specific group of women writers for their radical political ideals and their “impious” personal conduct. Similar attacks were mounted against women writers at the turn of the following century as well—writers who participated in what was sometimes positively, sometimes pejoratively referred to as the New Woman movement. In this course, we will move back and forth between these two dynamic periods in the history of feminist resistance and reform, and will put them both into conversation with the various forms of resistance and reform that are ongoing today. Paying particular attention to the roles that race, class, nationality, science, and religion played in the literary output of women writers of the 1790s and 1890s, we will consider how these writers’ experiences and ideas both reflected and shaped the trajectory of the women’s rights movement. Though the majority of our readings will focus on the literature of the British Empire, we will turn to U.S. texts at the end of the semester to see how the same sorts of issues were addressed on the other side of the Atlantic.

NB: While I will certainly guide our class discussions and make sure that we cover all of the textual and historical ground that I consider to be the most interesting and the most important, I will not be lecturing at you. We will be working through these materials together, and your participation and thoughts and questions are not only desired but required.

Required texts:

Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (Broadview, ISBN 9781551115108)
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Other Stories* (Oxford, ISBN 9780199536948)
Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (Oxford, ISBN 9780199555406)
Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (Broadview, ISBN 9781551113807)
Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter* (Broadview, ISBN 9781551112367)
Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Oxford, ISBN 9780199538010)
Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* (Norton)
Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman* (Benediction, ISBN 9781849021357)

Grade breakdown:

Participation/attendance/effort: 20%
Reading grade (determined by quizzes): 20%
Close reading assignment: 10%

Historical context oral presentation: 10%

Critical essay: 20% (+ 5% for turning in full first draft on time)

Final exam: 15%

Participation, attendance, and effort: Because your participation is so crucial to the fabric of this class, it will comprise 20% of your grade. Attendance obviously affects your ability to participate, so all missed or significantly tardy classes will result in losing one percentage point out of the possible 20. I do understand that personal and medical emergencies arise on occasion, and I will try to be understanding about these issues if they do not substantially undermine your ability to learn the materials. You must let me know ahead of time whenever you are going to miss class; I can only be understanding about absences if I understand what's going on. I will also take into account the overall effort you have put forth in the class when determining this part of your grade.

Reading grade: You cannot participate if you don't come to class, but you also cannot participate if you don't do the reading. To give you extra motivation to keep up with the reading on a weekly basis, there will be reading-content quizzes at the beginning of class. Glancing over a Sparknotes or Wikipedia summary will not enable you to do well on these quizzes; reading the actual texts, however, will make this portion of your grade a breeze. No quizzes may be made up, but the lowest score of the semester will be dropped.

Close reading assignment: Half way through the semester you will write a short paper (~ 3 pp.) in which you will perform a close reading of a text of your choice. I will provide more detailed instructions for this assignment later on.

Historical context oral presentation: In order to make the two literary periods that we'll be discussing this semester come more multidimensionally to life, every Monday will be Historical Context Presentation day. On each presentation day, one student will spend 5-6 minutes covering a given topic from a 1790s historical standpoint and one student will spend 5-6 minutes covering it from an 1890s standpoint. Please make your 5-6 minutes as engaging and informative as possible, utilizing audio and/or visual aids.

List of topics:

1. *War/Revolution* (French Revolution/French Revolutionary Wars; Boer Wars)
2. *British government* (Royal sovereigns and major parliamentary figures/developments leading up to the 1790s and 1890s)
3. *Family/marital/property law* (major legal developments leading up to 1790s & 1890s)
4. *Literary movements* (Romanticism in 1790s; Aestheticism/Decadence in 1890s)
5. *Illness/Medicine* (major diseases/epidemics, common treatments of physical and mental illnesses)
6. *Social protest movements* (Abolition in the 1790s; Suffrage in the 1890s)
7. *Transportation/Travel* (developments in land and sea travel options; travel literature)
8. *Fashion* (clothing and hairstyles, of men, women, and children from different classes)
9. *Childbirth and childrearing* (predominant social customs of 1790s and 1890s)

Critical essay: The major assignment of this class is a 5-6 pp. (double-spaced) critical essay exploring one or more of the texts on the syllabus; I will provide more detailed instructions for this assignment later on. You will first turn in a *complete* draft of the paper (worth 5%) and I will provide detailed feedback on it, but no grade. If you do not turn in your paper by the first draft due date, you forfeit your right to that feedback. You will then revise and resubmit the paper in light of my comments, and I will assign a grade to the final product at the end of the semester.

Final exam: The final exam will be your way of showing me what you're coming away with at the end of the semester. It will take place in our regular classroom on 12/13 from 1:30-3:30 pm.

Course policies/other information:

Email: I will, at times, send important messages via my official class email list; please begin checking your UNT email address on a regular basis if you are not already doing so. On the other end of the equation, I make it a policy to respond to student emails within 24 hours except on weekends; if by any chance you do not receive a response within that time frame, please resend your email to make sure it did not somehow disappear in the internet ether.

Laptops and cell phones: Because this class is discussion/idea-based (rather than lecture/fact-based) and because you are required to purchase hard copies of all the assigned novels and I will provide handouts of all the assigned shorter readings, you will be freed from the modern dependence on technology for the three hours you are with me each week. Please make sure you bring a notebook and pen to class every day, as I often assign short writing tasks prior to discussion.

Plagiarism: If you fail to give full credit to the sources you are citing, lift a paper off of the internet, reuse a paper that was written for another class, or have someone else write any part of your paper for you, you are plagiarizing and I will catch you doing so. (All papers must be uploaded to turnitin.com via the course's Blackboard page.) Plagiarism will result in failure of the course and permanent documentation on your academic record. Zero tolerance policy.

Students with Disabilities: Anyone with a disability requiring accommodation must present a written accommodation request to me within eleven days of the first class session. Copies of the school's ADA Compliance Policy, Policy on Auxiliary Aids and Reasonable Accommodation, and the ADA Grievance Procedures are available through the main office of the School of Library and Information Sciences (940-565-2445). It is also recommended that you register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (940-565-4323).

Sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault: UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. Renee LeClaire McNamara is UNT's Student Advocate and she can be reached through e-mail at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students' office at 940-565-2648.

Discussion schedule:

- 8/28: Course introduction
- 8/30: Introduction to the “Unsex’d Females” of the 1790s (Handout)
- Mary Wollstonecraft, from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
 - William Godwin, from *Memoirs of the Author of Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
 - Richard Polwhele, “The Unsex’d Females”
 - Katherine Binhammer, from “The Sex Panic of the 1790s” (pp. 409-421 only)
 - In-class poem: Anna Letitia Barbauld, “The Rights of Woman”
- 9/4: LABOR DAY
- 9/6: • Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman* (Preface – Ch. 8)
- In-class poem: Helen Maria Williams, “The Bastille, A Vision”
- 9/11: • *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman* (Ch. 9 – Conclusion)
- Presentation: War/Revolution
- 9/13: Introduction to the “New Woman” of the 1890s (Handout)
- Mona Caird, “Marriage” & “Does Marriage Hinder a Woman’s Self-Development?”
 - Sarah Grand, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” & “The Man of the Moment”
 - “Donna Quixote” from *Punch Magazine*
 - Talia Schaffer, “Nothing but Foolscap and Ink: Inventing the New Woman”
- 9/18: • Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Preface – Part I, Ch. XIII)
- Presentation: British government
- 9/20: • *The Story of an African Farm* (Part II, Ch. I – Part II, Ch. II)
- In-class poem: Dollie Radford, “From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town”
- 9/25: • *The Story of an African Farm* (Part II, Ch. III – Part II, Ch. XI)
- Presentation: Family/marital/property law
- 9/27: • *The Story of an African Farm* (Part II, Ch. XII – End)
- In-class poem: Toru Dutt, “Our Casuarina Tree”
- 10/2: • Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter* (Ch. I – Ch. XXV)
- Presentation: Literary movements

- 10/4: · *The Natural Daughter* (Ch. XXVI – Ch. XXXIII)
- In-class poem: Charlotte Smith, “The Female Exile”
- 10/9: · *The Natural Daughter* (Ch. XXXIV – End)
- Robinson, from *A Letter to the Women of England* (pp. 41 – ?)
 - Presentation: Illness/Medicine
- 10/11: · Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (Ch. I – Ch. VI)
- In-class poems: Michael Field, “It was deep April” and “A Girl”
- 10/16: · *The Story of a Modern Woman* (Ch. VII – Ch. XIX)
- **CLOSE READING ASSIGNMENT DUE**
 - In-class midterm reflections
- 10/18: · *The Story of a Modern Woman* (Ch. XX – End)
- George Egerton, “A Cross Line” (Handout)
- 10/23: · Hannah More, “The Sorrows of Yamba” (Handout)
- Amelia Opie, “Black Man’s Lament; or, How to Make Sugar” (Handout)
 - Presentation: Social protest movements
- 10/25: · Guest lecture: Patricia Matthew, “Blood Sugar Boycotts, Gender, and British Abolitionist Literature”
- 10/30: · Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (Preface – Vol. I, Ch. XXVIII)
- Presentation: Transportation/Travel
- 11/1: · *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (Vol. II, Ch. I – Vol. II, Ch. VII)
- In-class poem: Ann Yearsley, “The Indifferent Shepherdess to Colin”
- 11/6: · *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (Vol. II, Ch. VIII – End)
- Presentation: Fashion
- 11/8: · Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (Preface – Ch. VII)
- In-class poem: Alice Meynell, “Parentage”

- 11/13: · *The Woman Who Did* (Ch. VIII – End)
- Presentation: Childbirth and childrearing
- 11/15: · Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* (Letter I – Letter XVI)
- **FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER SUBMITTED TO BB BY 3:00 PM**
 - Peer workshop opening paragraphs
- 11/20: · *The Coquette* (Letter XVII – Letter LV)
- 11/22: · *The Coquette* (Letter LVI – End)
- **FIRST DRAFT RETURNED WITH FEEDBACK**
- 11/27: · Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Ch. I – Ch. XXIX)
- 11/29: · *The Awakening* (Ch. XXX – End)
- In-class poem: Amy Levy, “A Ballad of Religion and Marriage”
- 12/4: · Pauline Hopkins, “Some Literary Workers;” “Higher Education of Colored Women in White Schools and Colleges”
- 12/6: · Final exam prep/end-of-semester reflections
- 12/8: · **FINAL PAPER SUBMITTED TO BB BY 5:00 PM**
- 12/13: · **FINAL EXAM, 1:30-3:30 PM**