

AY2025 – 2026 HL3024 Contemporary Women's Writing Course Outline and Schedule

Thursdays 9.30am-12.20pm, HSS Seminar Room 8

Tutor: Dr. Ng Soo Nee (soonee.ng@ntu.edu.sg)

“When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.”

“I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We’ve been taught that silence would save us, but it won’t.”

“What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?”

— Audre Lorde

Course Description

This course aims to critically read and examine the literary and generic elements and features of women's writing in the late 20th and 21st century. How are women's lived experience in contemporary societies depicted, explored, (re)imagined, and problematised? What are the factors that contribute to the construction and mediation of female identity – with its associated aspects of body, voice, space, and relations – in recent years? Is there still a necessity to carve out a space to read women's writing in this new millennium?

This course will engage with texts authored by women, covering a variety of contexts as well as characters that illuminate gender tensions within postfeminist and post-postmodern milieus. Reading across literary genres comprising short stories, the novel, and the autobiography, students will gain an in-depth and critical appreciation of the primary preoccupations of women's writing in our contemporary societies.

This course deliberately adopts a wider selection of texts beyond mainstream sources as far as possible, to offer students the opportunity to read works that deviate from canonical authors and hegemonic issues.

Students signing up for this course should:

- Be ready to critically appreciate literary texts centering on female experiences across a range of cultural, racial, and national spaces;
- Be familiar with literary critique and elements of major literary genres;
- Be familiar with elements of postmodern artistic movement;
- Be committed to complete reading their primary texts, as well as some of the recommended secondary readings, for each seminar week;
- Be open to challenging debates, and having their beliefs interrogated in class discussions.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will

- Identify the key features of major literary-critical ideas relevant to the period of late 20th and early 21st centuries, namely postmodernism, postcolonialism, (post)feminism, posthumanism, and intersectionality.
- Describe the principles and perspectives of women's literature, and how female characters are represented by their writers to be interpellated by societies, communities, families and institutions.
- Identify and describe literary elements such as -- but not limited to -- the following: characterisation, setting, plot trajectory, type of narrator, motif, symbol, metaphor, theme, and imagery.

- Critique how various literary genres – and their associated generic techniques – studied in the course contribute to meaningful reading of female concerns and issues.
- Compare and evaluate the primary texts for insights into shared themes and issues, and divergences that reflect the intersectional identities of femininity.
- Raise critically-informed questions (in class discussions, presentations, an essay abstract, and research abstracts)

Primary Texts:

The Autobiography of My Mother, Jamaica Kincaid (1996)
The Vegetarian, Han Kang (2000)
Milkman, Anna Burns (2018)
Her Bodies and Other Parties, Carmen Maria Machado (2018)
The Tower, Thea Lenarduzzi (2025)
Carrion Crow, Heather Parry (2025)

Secondary Texts¹

Critical Foundation Texts:

1. *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1949).
2. *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan (1963).
3. *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer (1970).
4. *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt (1970).
5. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Laura Mulvey (1975)
6. “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Helene Cixous (1976).
7. *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag (1978).
8. *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979).
9. *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, Caroline Ramazanoglu (1980)
10. *Women, Race and Class*, Angela Davis (1981).

Critical Contemporary Texts:

1. *We Should All be Feminists*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014) (also Tedtalk)
2. *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, Mary Beard (2017).
3. “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity,” (1993) Bordo, Susan.
4. *Gender Trouble* (1990), and *Who’s Afraid of Gender* (2024), Judith Butler.
5. *Sisters Outsiders*, Audre Lorde (2007), especially “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (1984).
6. *What is a Woman? And Other Essays*, (1999) and “I Am Not a Woman Writer” (2008), Toril Moi.
7. “Men Explained Things to Me,” (2014) Rebecaa Solnit
8. “I Am My Own Heroine: How Marie Bashkirtseff Rewrote the Route to Fame”, Sonia Wilson

Secondary Literary Texts:

1. “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1890), “The Androcentric Culture: or Our Man-Made World” (1911), and *Herland* (1915), Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
2. *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf (1929)
3. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, Angela Carter (1979)

¹ These are texts students should be familiar with at this stage of their tertiary studies. **If not, it would be good to read some of them before the course commences; this will reduce the amount of reading to be done during term time.**

Assessment:

10% - **Class Presentation and Participation**

40% - **Final Research Essay** (argumentative essay of 3000-3500 words, including citations on a subject agreed with tutor)

50% - **Final Exam** (testing a broad range of literary-critical skills, across a range of materials drawn from the primary texts in the course, and relevant theories.)

Seminar Schedule

Week	Topics	Texts
I 15 Jan Seminar 1	Introduction to Contemporary Women's Writing: contemporary literary and cultural theories (feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism)	Overview of Course Discussion: Excerpts from primary and secondary texts
2 22 Jan Seminar 2	Focus: Race & Gender, Resistance & Power, Language & Writing, the Other/Alien, Mother-Daughter relationship. Genre: Autobiography	Pr. Text: <i>The Autobiography of my Mother</i> , Jamaica Kincaid Critical Reading: <i>Sisters Outsiders</i> , and "The Master's Tools...", Audre Lorde; <i>Women, Race, Class</i> , Angela Davis
3 29 Jan Seminar 3	Focus: Consumption and Food (Carnophallagocentrism); Patriarchal Delineation of the Female Body, Silencing and Subversion, Violence and Oppression.	Pr. Text: <i>The Vegetarian</i> , Han Kang Critical Reading: <i>Women & Power</i> , Mary Beard; <i>Ways of Seeing</i> , John Berger
4 5 Feb Seminar 4	Focus: The Uncanny, The Male Gaze, Metamorphosis, Institutional patriarchy and systemic control of bodies. Genre: First-person narrative: Is there a protagonist in <i>The Vegetarian</i> ?	Pr. Text: <i>The Vegetarian</i> , Han Kang Critical Reading: Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity"; "The Uncanny," Sigmund Freud.
5 12 Feb Seminar 5	Focus: Domesticating the Female Body; Violence; Liminal Space; Hysteria & Madness Genres: Short Stories/ Postmodern Text	Pr. Text: <i>Her Body & Other Stories</i> , Carmen Maria Machado Critical Reading: "The Laugh of the Medusa", Helene Cixous; "What is a Woman...", Toril Moi.
6 19 Feb Seminar 6	Issues: (De)Construction of Feminine Appearance; Sexual violence; Capitalist Delineation of female body Genres: Speculative Fiction / Fairy Tales & Folklores / Gothic Horror	Pr. Text: <i>Her Body & Other Stories</i> , Carmen Maria Machado Critical Reading: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey
7 26 Feb Seminar 7	Issues: The Male Gaze; Sexual predation; Gender Role and Performativity	Pr. Text: <i>Milkman</i> , Anna Burns Critical Reading: <i>Gender Trouble</i> , Judith Butler
8	Recess (2/3 – 6/3)	
9 12 Mar Seminar 8	Issues: Societal expectations and censure; Silencing and Reclaiming the Female Voice. Genre: Stream-of-consciousness narrative Abstract Due	Pr. Text: <i>Milkman</i> , Anna Burns Critical Reading: <i>Who's Afraid of Gender?</i> Judith Butler; "Men Explained Things..." Rebecca Solnit.

I0 19 Mar Seminar 9	Issues: Re-telling fairy-tales; Illness and Gender; Story-telling; Abuse of power. Genre: Fairy tales; Memoir	Pr. Text: <i>The Tower</i> , Thea Lenarduzzi Critical Reading: <i>The Mad Woman in the Attic</i> , Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar
I1 26 Mar Seminar 10	Issues: Depicting and Reading the Female Body; Articulating the Female Lived Experience	Pr. Text: <i>The Tower</i> , Thea Lenarduzzi Critical Reading: <i>Illness as a Metaphor</i> , Susan Sontag; "I Am My Own Heroine," Sonia Wilson
I2 2 Apr Seminar 11	Issues: The Female Grotesque; Madness and Incarceration; Research Essay Due	Pr. Text: <i>Carrion Crow</i> , Heather Parry Critical Reading: "
I3 19 Apr Seminar 12	Issues: Mother-daughter relationship; Angel in the House/Domestic Goddess; Consumption and Food. Genre: Gothic narrative	Pr. Text: <i>Carrion Crow</i> , Heather Parry Sec. Texts: "The Yellow Wallpaper" (short story), Charlotte Perkins Gilman
I4 16 Apr Seminar 13	Revision Review of Research Essay	

Course Policies:

Attendance and Participation: The success of any seminar depends on the active participation of all its members. Barring illness or emergencies, you should make it a point to attend every seminar. You must arrive on time, having done the required readings and any assigned work, and be ready to participate in the class discussion. Failure to do so will reduce your participation grade significantly. **If you need to miss a class, you must get in touch with me before that week's meeting.**

Late Work and Extensions: If your essay is late, it will be marked down by one third of a letter grade for each day that it is overdue (i.e. a paper that would have received an A will receive a A-). No work will be accepted more than three days late without prior permission. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances, including documented illness or genuine emergency.

Seeking Help Outside Class: You are encouraged to use any form of legitimate aid to help you write papers and research topics that interest you. Obvious sources of legitimate assistance include your tutors, the coaches at the LCC Communication Cube, and the subject librarians at the library. If you work on a paper with a writing coach, you are eligible for a two-day extension. Please speak to me if you would like to take advantage of this!

Generative AI: Generative AI (such as ChatGPT) is **not allowed** for this course.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Don't do it! If I find that you have misrepresented someone else's work or wording as your own you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. If you are unsure of how or when to cite a source, please ask me or refer to the university's academic integrity resources online.