THE LITERATURE OF FEMINISM  
WSS 550 (17265)

Fall 2010  
Wednesdays, 4:15-7:05 pm  
Humanities 116

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
What makes a literary work “feminist”? Who could we identify as a “feminist writer”? What, if any, is the connection between the literature of feminism and the politics of feminism? Does one precipitate the other? Is feminist writing an example of feminist theory, feminist practice, or does it reflect both in “feminist praxis”?

This course aims to address these complex questions as we explore different literary genres and writers from diverse backgrounds who examine issues of gender and its interplay with race, class, sexuality, and nationality. From content to literary form, we will discover that such writers, whether engaging in poetry, drama, essay-writing, novel-writing, or filmmaking, are committed to telling stories in ways that challenge and disrupt power dynamics. Whether this is reflected in gender roles, race relations, colonial rules, or different abilities, all works studied this semester engage this subject with a vision of liberation and empowerment. We will determine how successful these projects are in articulating a literature of feminism and what the future holds for such praxis.

REQUIRED READINGS
Shange, Ntozake. For colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf. New York: Macmillan, 1975.

These books are available for purchase at the University bookstore. Additional readings are available on Blackboard.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation (40% of grade)

Student-led Discussions: (25%) Each session will feature a student leading discussion over reading assignments. Discussion leaders will come to class prepared with a 10-15-minute presentation on the context for the text(s) studied (e.g. author’s biography, critical and audience reception of the text, events taking place during the time in which the text debuted, etc.). S/he will also lead discussion of the reading assignment(s) by selecting 3-5 of the best questions posted on Blackboard by classmates (see below) to facilitate the ensuing discussion. Be prepared to turn in materials related to your presentation.

Blackboard Discussions: (15%) Students who are not scheduled to be discussion leaders that week will instead post a discussion question on Blackboard (in the designated Discussion Thread) based on the reading assignment(s).

Feminist Literary Criticism: An Imagined Anthology – theme for the following assignments (60% of grade)

For the purposes of this course, imagine that you are given the opportunity to edit a volume of literary criticism from a feminist perspective. You have the option of selecting a feminist writer, a specific literary work, or a feminist theme explored in this course. Next, propose an edited volume project based on research of documents (e.g. journalistic articles and interviews relating to the author and/or literary work) and/or literary criticism produced about the writer/literary work or on the selected theme. See below:

Proposal (10%): In a 250-word letter addressed to your instructor, propose an edited volume that will focus on 1) a feminist literary work studied in class; 2) a feminist writer studied in class; or 3) a feminist theme explored in class. Describe other feminist anthologies that it would be similar to, but explain what will make your volume unique and relevant to our contemporary times and to a literary and feminist tradition. Assignment Due: October 27.

Annotated Bibliography (20%): Research 8-10 articles/essays, relating to your selected feminist writer, feminist literary work, or feminist theme in their original publications. Imagine assembling these essays in an original anthology/volume. Present an analytical summary of each article/essay that you have researched in an annotated bibliography. Be sure to use Chicago or MLA format for your citations. Assignment Due: November 17.

Introductory Essay (30%): In this imagined volume that you will be editing, write an Introduction of no more than 15 pages (a minimum of 10 pages, typed and doubled-spaced) contextualizing and analyzing your select 8-10 articles/essays for the volume. Be prepared to give a 15-minute presentation of your draft of this essay in class, from December 1-8 (distribute your imagined book cover art and table of contents to classmates). Final Draft Due: December 15.
EXPECTATIONS
You are expected to attend these weekly seminars on a regular basis. Once you miss two sessions, you will not earn higher than a “B” for this course. Exceptions will be made for illnesses and family emergencies. Keep in mind that you need a “B-” to pass a graduate course. Once you miss four sessions or more, you will receive an automatic “E” for this course.

You are also expected to submit assignments on time. Late assignments will receive a letter grade reduction for each day late, with an “E” grade administered after two days late. Please note that plagiarism is a university offense, which will result in a failing grade and disciplinary action.

TO AVOID PLAGIARISM:
Understand what it means: plagiarism results when someone uses the ideas or writings of another and presents these ideas or writings as her or his own.

When citing sources, it is best to present ideas using your own original words. If you fully understand a source, you will be able to completely describe its themes and ideas in your own words and from your own perspective. However, if you copy a passage that someone else wrote and only change a few words around, it becomes plagiarism.

When quoting directly from sources, it is best to use direct quotes only if the phrasing is apt and powerfully stated; be sure to include proper citation. If the quote is not revelatory or eloquent but simply provides some useful information, then it is best to explain the information completely in your own words while providing proper citation.

COURSE SCHEDULE
Sept. 1 Course overview and introduction.

Sept. 8 holiday – no class.

Unit One: Writing as Feminist Praxis
For colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf.

Sept. 22 The Dream of a Common Language.

Sept. 29 Dictée.

Oct. 6 Woman, Native, Other.
SCREEN: “Reassemblage” (Trinh, 1983).

Unit Two: Whose Story is This?
Oct. 13 Beloved.
Oct. 20  \textit{Free Enterprise}.

Due: Proposal.

Nov. 3  \textit{The Guardians}.

\textbf{Unit Three: Writing the Body}

Nov. 10  \textit{W;t}.

Due: Annotated Bibliography.

Nov. 24  holiday – no class.

Dec. 1  SCREEN: “Against a Trans Narrative” (Rosskam, 2008).

\textbf{Conclusion}

Dec. 8  Presentations continued.

Introductory Essay Final Drafts are due \textbf{December 15, 5 pm} in my mailbox.