

## **LIT3383: British Women Authors And British National Identity**

Fall 2013, London

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**Texts** Required:  
*The City Heiress*, Aphra Behn  
*Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen  
*Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley  
*Orlando*, Virginia Woolf  
*White Teeth*, Zadie Smith  
Recommended (on reserve or excerpted online):  
*Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*

### **Description and Goals**

This course will focus on the intersection between national identity and “female” identity in British literature. We will read woman writers from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the current day, focusing all the while on the ways women and femininity are represented in literature. Reading writers as diverse as Virginia Woolf, Aphra Behn and Zadie Smith, we will pay particular attention to how women interact with Britain herself. How do these texts represent specific spaces and landscapes in the British Isles? How they represent female national identity, be that English, Scottish, Welsh, or just “British?” And in an age of trans-, cis-, bi-, and inter-gender, what new meanings might “female” take on today in Britain?

In addition to gender relations, sexuality and sexual identity, the texts will also provide us with opportunity to discuss race and ethnicity, religion, and class.

### **Objectives**

After successfully completing this course, the student should be able to:

- 1) identify issues of gender, sexuality, and national identity as they are presented and represented in assigned literary texts;
- 2) generate an interpretation of a work of literature, integrating in that interpretation, where appropriate, issues of gender, sexuality, and national identity;
- 3) situate issues of gender, sexuality, and national identity within the cultural and historical contexts of the assigned materials,
- 4) write a critical essay focusing on issues of gender, sexuality, and national identity as they are presented and represented in assigned materials.

### **Grading, Assignments, Etc.**

Class Participation: 25%

Discussion Board Responses: 50% (10% each x 5)

Final Paper: 25%

### **Class Participation**

Your success in this class depends on your own participation and engagement. The primary requirement is that:

- You will respond to *at least one* of your peers' papers for each assignment (100 words minimum). The purpose of this is to foster class discussion and to become accustomed to receiving and giving feedback. Do you agree with this person's interpretation? Can you answer one of his/her unanswered questions or offer a different answer than one provided? Did he/she overlook anything? Replies must be substantive; merely agreeing is not substantive and will earn zero points.

However, if you want an A, you should also do the assigned reading and attend class. Plan to be on time to class, with paper, pencil, and the required reading in hand. Refrain from distracting others or yourself by using phones, personal organizers, mp3 players, or surfing on the Internet. Finally, add something meaningful to the class discussion each day.

### **Discussion Board Responses**

For each text we read, you will be required to write a 300-word paper and post this on the Blackboard course site's Discussion Board. Each of these will be worth 10% of your total grade, equaling 50%. I will give written feedback to each of these short papers. In addition, you will read and respond to at least one of your peers' papers (see above, Participation).

### **Final Paper**

For this assignment, you will write an 1800-word paper for the end of the course in which you analyze one of the texts from this semester. This is worth 25% of your total grade. In addition to your own textual analysis, you'll incorporate at least three scholarly, secondary sources<sup>1</sup> and two peer sources<sup>2</sup>.

Broad Topics: 1) Consider how 1-2 readings construct female identity. You might think about how "femininity" is defined, complicated, and/or challenged by the texts. For example, do race, gender, sexuality, and/or class influence these authors' portrayals of "femininity"? 2) Consider how 1-2 readings construct national identity. What does it mean to be English and/or British? Is this identity straightforward? Is it universally accepted and understood?

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<sup>1</sup> Secondary sources are sources that discuss your chosen literary text itself. These are usually found in peer-reviewed academic journal articles and academic books. You may not use: Wikipedia, SparkNotes, encyclopedias, dictionaries, or unscholarly websites.

<sup>2</sup> Peer sources will be drawn from your classmates' responses on the Discussion Board. Use their ideas in the same way you would scholarly sources: to back up your own points or as potential counterarguments to refute. Also cite their ideas the same way you would scholarly sources (in-text and on the Works Cited page).

**Schedule of Readings and Assignments:**

\*This schedule may be altered as the semester progresses. Also, additional readings will occasionally be posted on Blackboard and assigned in class. Readings are to be completed on the date listed.\*

T 9/3: *City Heiress*

T 9/10: *City Heiress* (Discussion Board Response Due); Walking Tour of Covent Garden

9/12-15: Cornwall Excursion with visit to Bath

T 9/17: *Northanger Abbey*

M 9/23: Juliet Stevenson reads Sylvia Plath

T 9/24: *Northanger Abbey* (Discussion Board Response Due)

T 10/1: *Northanger Abbey*; Jane Austen walk in London

T 10/8: *Frankenstein*; visit Wellcome Collection

T 10/15: *Frankenstein* (Discussion Board Response Due)

T 10/22: *Orlando*; visit National Portrait Gallery

T 11/5: *Orlando* (Discussion Board Response Due)

T 11/12: *Orlando*

W 11/13: Visit Knole House

11/15-17: York trip with Bronte House Excursion

T 11/19: *White Teeth*

T 11/26: *White Teeth* (Discussion Board Response Due)

T 12/3: *White Teeth*

**Exam F 12/6: No exam, final paper due**