

THEORIES OF LITERATURE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

REQUIRED TEXTS

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688)
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899)
Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington* (1817)
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
Tillie Olsen, *Yonnondio* (1930s)

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism & the Problem of Domination*
Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*
Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*

SCANNED READINGS ON COURSE SITE

Most readings for the seminar – including all of the theoretical and critical readings, and some of the shorter literary works – will be available as scanned pdf files on Course Site. Each of you should purchase the five book-length literary works (in any unexpurgated edition) listed above as Required Texts. We encourage you to purchase the book-length theoretical works of which we will be assigning substantial portions, listed as Recommended Texts above, but excerpts will be available on Course Site.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to theories of literature and social justice. We will explore questions such as these: What is literature? What is social justice? How are literary forms (and literary criticism) distinctive in the ways in which they grapple with questions of social justice? How do literary works reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies? In what ways do literary works provide tools to map exploitative or oppressive social and economic formations? In what ways do they create practices for imagining human flourishing and more just ways of living? How do literary works produce varying emotions in readers that might serve to promote (or undermine) social justice? What role have literary works played in emancipatory and egalitarian political movements? We will consider a range of reading, writing and teaching strategies as practices of social justice. In pursuing this inquiry, we will focus mainly on critical and theoretical readings, but we will also read a sampling of literary texts to provide common ground for our collaborative inquiry and to provide opportunities for methodological experimentation in your critical practice.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation

This is an experimental seminar in literary theory and method. We hope the seminar will create an exciting and open-ended process of exploration and that each of you will discover new paradigms for thinking, writing and teaching about literature and social justice. We will expect your full and active participation in each meeting of the seminar. This will require, of course, your having read carefully all the assigned readings. The more demanding theoretical readings may require multiple readings and careful note-taking so that you can come to class prepared to participate fully in our conversations.

Weekly Postings

Each of you should post once on Course Site on each week's reading. Your postings will enable us to construct an agenda for discussion that is responsive to your interests and questions – and they will enable you to see what has captured others' attention. You must post each week by Sunday night before our Tuesday discussion of those readings. Your postings each week should be succinct and carefully considered. On those weeks for which theoretical and critical readings have been assigned, please post a brief response and, if you are inclined, a specific question about the reading. On those weeks for which a literary work has been assigned, please post a single, focused question about that text.

Writing Requirement

Each of you will write three essays over the course of the semester. You will write **one short essay** (7 pages) in response to the first unit of the seminar (on race) and a **second short essay** (7 pages) in response to the second unit (on class). For each essay, you should offer a careful, detailed and precise explication of one of the theoretical or critical paradigms you encountered in the reading for that unit. You will then offer a brief indication of how that critical or theoretical paradigm might enable you to approach some aspect of one of the literary works you read in that unit. Given the brevity of these essays, we do not expect lengthy or detailed readings of the literary work: your focus should be on the explication of the critical paradigm or theoretical argument with which you are concerned. The first short essay will be due in class on March 7 and the second on April 4.

Each of you will then write a **longer final essay** (15 pages), in which you will offer a similarly detailed explication of one or more of the critical or theoretical texts – and then a more sustained analysis of one or more of the literary works in relation to those conceptual arguments. This final essay might respond to the material in the final unit of the course (on gender and sexuality). You are also welcome to develop your final essay as an extension or elaboration of one of your short papers. Your final essay will be due May 9.

What will you learn this semester?

This is a theory and methods seminar designed to introduce you to some influential paradigms for conceptualizing the relationship between literature and social justice – and to enable you to experiment with employing those conceptual models to enhance your analysis of literary works.

American higher education is currently being deformed by an “outcomes assessment” ideology imported from the corporate sector. This regulatory regime requires instructors to state in advance intended (standardized) “learning outcomes” that can then be measured quantitatively at the end of a course. We will have occasion, toward the end of the semester, to consider the political and social implications of this ideology (see, in particular, Paolo Freire). But for now, we wish simply to state that, like any seminar in the humanities, your learning process will *not* be uniform nor can it be fully predicted in advance or mechanically measured afterward. Each of you will bring distinctive life experiences and investments to seminar – and you will, as a result, pose distinctive questions and learn different things. As in any rich learning process, we will make room for surprise, discovery, serendipity and improvisation. You will not only learn things we have decided on in advance: your interests, concerns, and evolving preoccupations will shape our agenda. The best “outcomes” will probably be unanticipated and non-quantifiable.

Nevertheless, we have designed the seminar with some goals clearly in mind. In order to satisfy the regulators (and to ensure our compliance in the accreditation regime), we list the following goals of the seminar. If we do our work together well, with discipline and pleasure:

- 1) You will acquire a familiarity with some influential theoretical and critical paradigms for conceptualizing the relationship between literature and social justice. These conceptual models should enable you to think about the ways in which literary works embody (or legitimate) structures of racial domination, economic exploitation, gender hierarchy and sexual normalization – and how literary works can challenge these structures of power and imagine freer and more just ways of life.
- 2) You will learn to summarize pithily and accurately theoretical and critical paradigms.
- 3) You will learn to *employ* these conceptual models in your analysis of individual literary works.
- 4) You will learn to participate effectively in collective discussion of sophisticated ideas.
- 5) You will gain from our discussion enhanced admiration of your peers, appreciating their insights, concerns and aspirations, recognizing their vulnerability, and valuing their eloquence and humor. If all goes well, you will feel increased affection and respect for one another and imagine ways of changing the world together.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tues Jan. 24

Introductions.

- 1) *Why Write? Pursuing Beauty, Pursuing Justice*
 - George Orwell, "Why I Write" (1946)
 - Natasha Trethewey, "'Why I Write': Poetry, History & Social Justice" (2010)

- 2) *Telling Stories to Break the Silence of Injustice – at Lehigh, in America*
 - No Longer Silent LU (2013): <http://nolongersilentlu.tumblr.com>
 - Derrick Bell, "Prudent Speculations on America in a Post-Racial Epoch" (1990)

- 3) *What Is Social Justice & How Do We Conceptualize How To Get There?*
 - Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age."

RACE

Tues Jan. 31

Whiteness, Blackness

- 1) Literature & Whiteness: White Constructions of Race
 - Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992).

- 2) Conceptualizing Consciousness & Cultural Practice within the African Diaspora: Responding to White Racism.
 - W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).
 - Paul Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" from *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993).

Tues Feb. 7

Representing Black Women in 18th-Century England and early 19th-Century America: What's at Stake – for Whom?

- Roxanne Wheeler, "The End of Climate" from *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in 18th-Century British Culture* (2000)
- Kim Hall, "Reading What Isn't There: 'Black' Studies in Early Modern England," *Stanford Humanities Review* 3 (1993): 22-33

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), Chapters 1-2.
- Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in 19th-Century America* (1997): Intro & Chapter 1.
- Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987). [continued next page]

- Recommended: Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003): “Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester’s Scream.”

Tues Feb. 14

Using Black Women to Write for Which Cause?

- Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688)
- Aphra Behn, *The Adventure of a Black Lady* (1697)
- Lyndon Dominique, *Imoinda’s Shade*, Chapter 5, pp. 185-192.

Tues Feb. 21

Black Women in the Era of Slavery: Imagining Freedom, Writing for Justice

- Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
- Sojourner Truth, “Aren’t I A Woman?” (1851)
- Maria Stewart, “Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall” (1832)

CLASS

Tues Feb. 28

Raymond Williams’ Cultural Materialism: Literary Criticism as Socialist Practice.

- Williams, “Culture is Ordinary” (1959).
- Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Part II Chapters 4-10; Part III Chapters 1-3).
- Williams, *The Country and the City* (Chapters 1-4 & 24-25).

Tues March 7

Fredric Jameson: Literature as Cognitive Mapping & Utopian Speculation

- Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping” (1988)
- Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” (1979)

*** **1st Essay Due in Class**

Tues March 14

No Class – Spring Break

Tues March 21

Class, Race, Religion & Citizenship: Who Belongs to the Nation?

- Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington* (1817) Introduction and complete novel.
- William Hogarth: *Harlot’s Progress* (1732), *Four Times of the Day*: “Noon” (1736); “Beer Street” and “Gin Lane” (1751).

[-Selected Sonia Sanchez poems, in preparation for Revolutionary Sister Tea: March 22; time and location TBA]

Tues March 28 **Modernism and Economic Inequality: Working-Class and Bourgeois Literary Visions**

- Tillie Olsen, *Yonnondio*
- modernist poems by Pound, Frost, Eliot, Hughes
- Eugene Debs, Speech at Canton, Ohio (June 1918)

[follow up discussion about Revolutionary Sister Tea]

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Tues April 4 **Feminist Philosophy, Feminist Psychoanalysis: Conceptualizing Justice**

- Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (Chapters 1,2, 4 and conclusion).
- Iris Marion Young, “Displacing the Distributive Paradigm”; “Scaling of Bodies” from *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990).
- Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age” (revisited from first class).

*** **2nd Essay Due in Class**

Tues April 11 **Queer Criticism, Queer Theory**

A Debate about Female Masculinity in the 18th Century

Judith Halberstam, “An Introduction to Female Masculinity,” from *Female Masculinities* (1998)

Jean Bobby Noble, “Sons of the Movement: Feminism, Female Masculinity and Female to Male (FTM) Transsexual Men,” *Atlantis* 29 (2004): 21-28.

Anonymous, “The Female Soldier” (1750)

A Debate Within Queer Theory: Mourning, Melancholia, Justice

- Douglass Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy” (1989)
- Heather Love, *Feeling Backward* (2009) (introduction)

Tues April 18 **Queering Audience Identification**

- Henry Fielding, *The Female Husband* (1746)
- Rictor Norton, “A Female Husband Exposed” and other anonymous female husband texts.
- Lynn Hunt, “Torrents of Emotion” from *Inventing Human Rights* (2007)

Tues April 25

Modernist Awakenings: Giving Names to Injustice – and Liberation?

- Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899)
- Angelina Weld Grimke poems (1920s)
- Sherwood Anderson, “Hands,” from *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)
- Emma Goldman, “Marriage and Love” (1910)

Tues May 2

How Do We Teach Literature to Foster Social Change? Teaching for Justice; Public Humanities; Universities as Engines of Democracy.

- Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Chapters 1-2 .
- Doris Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities* (2014): Prologue and Chapter 1.
- Seth Moglen, “Sharing Knowledge, Practicing Democracy: A Vision for the 21st-Century University” from *Education, Justice & Democracy* (2013).
- No Longer Silent LU tumblr website
- Public Humanities at Lehigh: some current projects under way

Tues May 9

Final Essay Due by 5pm.