

# FEMINISM: SILENCES AND ABSENCES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE – 5 creds.

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a hands-on course on how feminist epistemologies can be applied to literary texts across genres and history to generate readings that underscore, enhance, shift and/or problematise the received interpretation of texts. This is addressed in three sections, each of them taught by a lecturer specialised in the literary works chosen for analysis from a feminist perspective. We have joined our strengths to add to the solidity of the course, and have taken special care to harmonise our teaching methodology and evaluation criteria.

The first section appropriately brings the more solid theoretical component, which is nevertheless made not only reader-friendly but engaging by interspersing theory with selected texts illustrating very specific concepts, establishing a pattern of critical reading which is to be followed for the whole course. Students will become familiar in very general terms with French feminist theories (Cixous, Irigaray and Kisteva) and gynocriticism (Showalter, the latter with an application of selected fragments of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"), thus gaining a brief yet comprehensive theoretical framework that they will be to apply to the selected literary readings for the course.

The second part taps into feminist ideas and channels them into a more unfamiliar, perhaps even unexpected, territory in this field. Now that students have gained a foothold on feminist readings, two new paradigms - genre and period - are introduced in the study of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*. Precisely due to the very remoteness of the poem, straddling two very different, even antagonistic cultures and worldviews, this Old English poem lends itself very aptly to feminist scrutiny. Applying this perspective to *Beowulf* will help "establish the unspoken in the text" (C. Belsey). After helping students bridge the time gap with Anglo-Saxon times by taking an updated look at a fascinatingly exotic and surprising society, attention will be brought to the two different societal constructions of gender clashing in *Beowulf*: the Germanic-derived one vs. the Christian recoding of womanhood. This polarity, which will underpin the whole poem, will take us to accounting for some of its conflicts and ambivalence, and ultimately will point towards a female-based structural symbolism in the poem.

The third section will start with a brief introduction of the concept of power in literary and visual discourse. Attention will be devoted to the issues of feminist reconstructions of official canons, re-readings of canonical texts (both literary and visual texts) and feminist methodologies for the critique of representation. There will be two sessions dealing with the structures of the gaze, women as visual signs and the politics of spectatorship and visual pleasure. The concepts will then be applied to a selection of visual and written which will include Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Sally Potter's *Orlando*.

## CONTENTS

### Part 1 (Prof. Gerardo Rodríguez)

1. Feminist theories. Introduction.
  - Gynocriticism. Showalter and Woolf
  - Womanism. Walker
  - Poststructuralist Feminism: Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous
  - Postmodern Feminism
  - Performativity. Butler
  - Cyborg Theory. Haraway
  - Nomadic Subjects. Braidotti

### Part 2 (Prof. Adelina Sánchez)

2. Gender, art and literature: the representations of women in literary and visual discourse.
  - The WASP canon. Feminist writings; feminist readings.
  - Feminist re-readings of canonical texts.
  - Women, Literature, Art and Power.
  - The critique of representation.
  - The structures of the gaze: women as visual signs, spectatorship and visual pleasure. Illustration: Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*
  - Adapting the gaze: from literature to film. Two case studies: Jane Campion and Sally Potter.

### Part 3 (Prof. María-José de la Torre)

3. From pagan folklore to Christian tradition: tracing two different constructions of the female gender. Ambivalence and ideological conflict on women's identity in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The case of *Beowulf*.
  - Relevance of the Feminist Approach.
  - Women's Studies in the Early Ages.
  - Vestiges of women's prominence in Germanic societies (archaeology, myth, folklore, etc.)
  - Pagan & Christian gender identities
    - a) Christian re-coding of female gender.
    - b) Misogynistic categorisation of women
  - The social centrality of violence and war.
    - a) Women as "peace-weavers."
    - b) Dual reading of the female role as peace-weaver in the "comitatus".
  - Character analysis.

## EVALUATION

Class attendance and active participation are mandatory. The final grade will be awarded on consideration of both on a 10/90 ratio.

The student's performance will materialise in the oral presentation which must be submitted (either individually or in groups) at the end of any of the course sections taught by Profs.

Sánchez and De la Torre. The oral presentation topic must be discussed with and approved of by the lecturer in question, and its progress will be checked in supervision tutorials as often as determined by them.

Marks will be given to aspects such as:

- design or plan;
- clear, consistent and illustrated argumentation;
- an appropriate use of sources;
- attention to supervisor's guidelines/corrections;
- keeping deadlines;
- effective group work, when appropriate;
- clear, fluent delivery.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Part 1

BUTLER, Judith. 1990. "Bodies That Matter". *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Nueva York: Routledge. 1-34.

MORRIS, Pam. 1996 (1993). "Writing as a Woman: Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and *Ecriture Féminine*". *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford: Blackwell. 113-135.

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RODRÍGUEZ SALAS, Gerardo. 2006. "La imitación intencionada (I): el feminismo 'restaurador' y Julia Kristeva". *La marginalidad como opción en Katherine Mansfield: posmodernismo, feminismo y relato corto*. Granada: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Granada. 367-392.

---. 2007. *Hijas de la Diosa Blanca: Ginocrítica y Feminismo Restaurador en la narrativa de Katherine Mansfield*. Oviedo: Septem.

### Part 2

#### Readings

Mulvey, Laura. 1975;1989. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Visual and Other Pleasures*. London: Macmillan. Pp. 14-26.

Sánchez Espinosa, Adelina. 2011. "Feminist Approaches to Close Reading". In

Buikema et al. Eds. *Researching Differently. Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research*. Series: *Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality*. London and New York: Routledge

Sánchez Espinosa, Adelina & Costa Villaverde, Elisa. 2011. "The film text as palimpsest: translating women's gaze from page to screen. *The Portrait of a Lady* as a case in point" in Federici, Eleonora. Ed. *Translating Gender*. Amsterdam et al.: Peter Lang.

Smelik, Anneke. 2007. "Feminist Film Theory." In Cook, Pam. Ed. *The Cinema Book*. London: British Film Institute. 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition. Pp. 491-504. Online

#### Viewings

Campion, Jane. 1995. *The Portrait of a Lady*  
Hitchcock, Alfred. 1960. *Psycho*  
James, Henry. 1881. *The Portrait of a Lady*

**Part 3 (Specific selections will be found on SWAD, “BIBLIOGRAFÍA GRAL. Y ESPECÍFICA”)**

- AGUIRRE, M. (1993) "Ring-giver, Hoard-guardian: Two World Views in Beowulf" > Proceedings of the IV International Conference of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature. Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago, 9-18.
- ALBANO, R.A. (1994) "The Role of Women in Anglo-Saxon Culture: Hildeburh in Beowulf and a Curious Counterpart in the Volsunga Saga". *English Language Notes*, 32, 1: 1-10.
- ANDERSON, C. (2001) "Gaest, Gender and Kin in Beowulf: Consumption of the Boundaries". *The Heroic Age*, 5, 18 pp.
- BLOOMFIELD, J. (1994) "Diminished by Kindness: Frederick Klaeber's Rewriting of Wealtheow". *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 93, 2: 183-203.
- CARR PORTER, Dorothy (2001) "The Social Centrality of Women in *Beowulf*: A New Context". *The Heroic Age*, 5, 12 pp.
- DE LA TORRE (2006) "La invisibilidad del cuerpo femenino en Beowulf: transferencias metonímicas y simbólicas del poder femenino orientadas a su ocultación y demonización", en *Cuerpos de Mujer. Miradas y representaciones*. Granada: Universidad de Granada.
- DE LA TORRE (2012) "["Through the mists of ancient time": una aproximación a las mujeres anglosajonas desde el Paganismo germánico al Cristianismo temprano](#)" > *Into Another's Skin: selected essays in honour of María Luisa Dañobeitia* (M. Aguilera, M.J. de la Torre & L. Torres, eds.). Granada: Servicio de Publicaciones, 3-18.
- FEE, Christopher (1996) "Beag and Beagbroden: Women, Treasure and the Language of Social Structure in *Beowulf*". *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 97, 3: 285-294.
- FRANK, Roberta (1991) "Germanic Legend in Old English Literature" *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Malcolm Godden & Michael Lapidge, eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 88-106.
- HERBERT, Katherine (1997) *Peace-Weavers and Shield-Maidens: Women in Early English Society*. Anglo-Saxon Books.
- LOCHRIE, K. (1994) "Gender, Sex, Violence and the Politics of War in the Old English Judith" > *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections* (G. Overing & B. Harwood, eds.). Bloomington e Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 1-42.
- NILES, John D. (1998) "Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief", *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (M. Godden & M. Lapidge, ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 126-141.
- OSBORN, Marijan (1999) "The Wealth They Left Us: Two Women Author Themselves Through Others' Lives in *Beowulf*". *Philological Quarterly* 78, 1 & 2: 49-76. (Available as Electronic Journal in the Faculty's Library)
- OVERING, Gillian (2000) "The Women of *Beowulf*: A Context for Interpretation" > *The Beowulf Reader* (P. S. Baker ed.). Londres y Nueva York: Garland, 219-260.
- POTKAY, M.B. (1997) "Redeeming Ornament: Women in Old English Literature" > *Minding the Body. Women and Literature in the Middle Ages, 800-1500* (M.B. Potkay y R.M. Evitt). Londres: Prentice Hall, 31-46.

- ROBINSON, F.C. (1998) "Beowulf" > *Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (M. Godden & M. Lapidge, ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 142-159.
- SHIPPEY, T.A. (2001) "Wicked Queens and Cousin Strategies in Beowulf and Elsewhere". *The Heroic Age*, 5, 18 pp.
- TAYLOR, K.P. (1994) "Beowulf 1259a: The Inherent Nobility of Grendel's Mother". *English Language Notes*, 31, 3: 13-25.

