

# Modern Women Writers: Love, Agony, Friendship

## English 1XX

Elizabeth Phillips [she/her/hers]  
One Bow Street 337  
Office Hours: TBD  
[ephillips@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:ephillips@fas.harvard.edu)

Fall 2019  
Tu/Th 0:00-0:00  
Course location  
TF: information



### COURSE DESCRIPTION

What does it mean to be, or feel as, a woman? This course will survey thirteen major female authors from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who ask these questions in their novels, plays, and essays. In our lectures, we will move through literary explorations of womanhood in Modernism, to Expressionism, the Feminist movements, and on to contemporary questions of trauma, reproductive rights, and the future of feeling like and as a woman.

The course is organized around three central modes of feeling. Our questions will spring from literary description, but be applied to wider concerns of culture and society. During our first unit, "Love," we will focus on what it means to be a woman in love, asking about the role of love in activism; different forms of sexuality and gender identity, sexual awakening, coming out, and loving men and loving women; censorship, privacy, and vulgarity; racial bias and loving women of another race. The second unit, "Agony," will interrogate female oppression, pain, sexual exploitation and abuse, and apocalyptic future projections of the female experience of suffering. In our third unit, "Friendship," we will analyze female camaraderie, platonic love, unity and support, "tend and befriend" instincts, markets and economics of "women's" entertainment, comedy, humor, and why women are funny.

The objectives of this course are to train you in the reading and analysis of literary texts, and to begin to apply the critical thinking earned by reading literature to other forms of intellectual and artistic practices. Accordingly, you will write two English papers and devise one substantial final project, due or presented before or during reading period, as detailed below.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

The below texts are available at the COOP, but may also be purchased inexpensively online. When selecting your copy, please take note of the publisher and edition so that we will all be (literally) on the same page. TV shows and soundtracks and recordings of plays will be on reserve at Lamont throughout the semester. Additional readings will be available as searchable PDFs on Canvas.

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) (ISBN 978-0385490818)  
Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936) (ISBN 978-0811216715)  
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) (ISBN 978-0544709041)  
Alice Birch, *Revolt, She Said, Revolt Again* (2016) (ISBN 978-1783197637)  
Alice Childress, *Wedding Band: A Love-Hate Story in Black and White* (1966) (ISBN 978-0573617690)  
Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend* (2012) (ISBN 978-1609450786)  
Audre Lorde, *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) (ISBN 978-0895941220)  
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) (ISBN 978-0307278449)  
Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) (ISBN 978-1616202415)  
Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie, "We Should All Be Feminists" (2015) (ISBN 978-1101911761)  
Sally Rooney, *Conversations with Friends* (2018) (ISBN 978-0451499066)  
Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own" (1929) (ISBN 978-0156030410)  
Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928) (ISBN 978-0156031516)

#### ASSIGNMENTS

In this course, you will write two substantial papers, one involving analysis of a single work, and the other employing a small set of secondary sources to analyze one or two course texts. For the final assignment, you will create an artistic work, experience, experiment, manifesto, etc. of your own design, relying on your own point of view and skills in other disciplines to engage the questions we ask in the course from a new perspective. The logic, scope, and design of your project will be approved by the instructor in a prospectus stage, and you will spend the last third of the course working on it. You may design your own final project or work in pairs.

Examples of a final project might include:

- Design your own Kilroys List.
- Write a series of epistles between Orlando and Sasha.
- Score additional numbers for the musical version of *Fun Home*, and write the lyrics. What was left out, and why?
- Stage a formal debate on a women's rights issue, complete with opening and closing statements, and invite an audience of your peers.
- Record and stream three episodes of a podcast in the style of *2 Dope Queens*.
- Update the Bechdel Test, analyze a broad set of texts according to it, and write an article about it.
- Stage a protest, performance act, or happening based on the words and philosophy of Audre Lorde.
- Construct a psychological battery to survey a type of misandrist thought.
- Write a long essay about *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Alabama abortion bans and submit it for publication in *The Crimson* or a national publication.
- Write a folio of poems from the point of view of a woman living in the world of *Far Away* and submit it for publication in a Harvard or national journal.

- Host a Paris Salon in style of Stein and Barnes the common room of your dorm and record it or take detailed minutes.
- Choreograph a *pas de deux* based on the friendship of Lila and Lenu or Bobbi and Frances and perform it in Farkas.

Paper 1 (5-6pp.)	20%
Paper 2 (8-10pp.)	25%
Project Prospectus (2-4pp. speculative plan)	10%
Final Project	25%
Participation (including attendance, presentations, short assignments)	20%

## COURSE POLICIES

*Formatting your assignments.* Please tailor your paper to length requirements *before* you finish it, and use a sensible 12-point font (such as Times New Roman or Garamond), an editable file format (.docx), and 1" margins. Editing your paper so that you can meet the required formatting will ultimately lessen the frustration of marking and grading your paper... and isn't that something you want?

*Submitting assignments.* Assignments must be submitted to your instructor via email, attached as .docx files, by 11:59pm the day that they are due. Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade per day, beginning the next day (so at 12:00AM after the deadline, an A- paper will become a B+ paper). Files that cannot be opened or are corrupted do not count as "on time," so consider pasting the text of your paper into your email.

*Absences and extensions.* You are required to prepare for each class meeting by completing the readings, and required to attend and participate in each section. Reading is not a substitute for discussing, and discussing is not a substitute for reading. Things happen: you will be allowed one excused absence throughout the semester, given 24 hours notice by email. Further absences or late assignments will require a note from your dean, proctor, or HUHS. Unexcused, undeclared, undocumented absences, late assignments, or poor preparation will be reflected in your grade.

*Attention and behavior.* I allow the use of laptops in class—live research and looking things up can be useful and exciting! But I strongly encourage longhand note-taking for the purposes of memory and synthesis (you learn more when you take selective notes! It's science!). Dilly-dallying on laptops and phones (social media, shopping) is sad and psychically expensive for everyone involved, and if you're doing it, you will be asked to leave, and this will be reflected in your participation grade.

*Disability accommodation.* Students with disabilities are encouraged to request accommodation, as soon as is convenient, through Harvard's [Accessible Education Office](#): "Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term."

*Citations.* Preferred citation styles are MLA (8th ed.) and Chicago (17th ed.). Guides for these styles are available at <https://style.mla.org/>—and [chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/home.html](http://chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/home.html). Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) has a quick guide to both: <https://>

owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue\_owl.html. Patterns of errors in citation will be marked; continued poor citation practices over the semester will be penalized.

*Academic honesty and collaboration.* Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failing grades on assignments to dismissal from the course or even more serious actions. Here's [The Harvard College Honor Code](#):

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity—that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

If you have questions about what constitutes proper collaboration, or about how to cite lectures, sections, conversations with peers, and other fleeting inspiration, ask me.

## Schedule of Course Meetings

### Unit I: Love

Loving as quintessential feminist action. What is a feminist alliance? What is intersectionality? Feminist tools for strategizing against oppression. Celebrity and the Paris salon. The lesbian lyric. Trans- and non-binary womanhood. What is the Kilroys List? Voyeurism, vulgarity, lesbianism and interracial queer relationships. Family myth, closeted queerness, biomythography. Queer female identity and fathers and mothers. What is the Bechdel Test?

#### Week 1.

Tuesday: Introduction

Thursday: Audre Lorde, *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name* (1982)

#### Week 2.

Tuesday: *Zami* continued  
begin Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936)

Thursday: *Nightwood* continued  
Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, Ch. 7, "Djuna Barnes, Rue St.-Romain," pp. 230-68. [Canvas]

#### Week 3.

Tuesday: *Nightwood* continued

Thursday: C.A. Johnson, *All the Natalie Portmans* (2019) [Canvas]

#### Week 4.

Tuesday: Virginia Woolf, from "A Room of One's Own" (1929)  
*Orlando: A Biography* (1928)

Thursday: *Orlando* continued

#### Week 5.

Tuesday: Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006)

Thursday: *Fun Home* continued (listen to soundtrack)

PAPER I DUE

## Unit II: Agony

Justice and victimhood, sexual assault and exploitation, Hollywood feminism, trigger warnings, sexual revolution, The Women's March and burnout. Women's roles in families; social expectations of comportment, behavior, and beauty. Reproductive rights.

Week 6.

Tuesday: Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)  
Juda Bennett, *Toni Morrison and the Queer Pleasure of Ghosts*, Chapter 9, "Mutable Bodies: *The Bluest Eye* Haunts Home," pp. 141-158. [Canvas]

Thursday: *The Bluest Eye* continued

Week 7.

Tuesday: Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* (1916) [Canvas]  
Caryl Churchill, *Far Away* (2000) [Canvas]

Thursday: Alice Birch, *Revolt, She Said, Revolt Again* (2016)

Week 8.

Tuesday: Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003)

Thursday: *Purple Hibiscus* continued  
Ngozi Adichie, "We Should All Be Feminists" (2015)

Week 9.

Tuesday: Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

Thursday: *The Handmaid's Tale* continued

## PAPER II DUE

## Unit III: Friendship

Kinship gestures and nation-building, friendships between white women and black women, sexism and the Black Arts Movement. Jealousy and obsession. Homosociality versus homosexuality, theories of correlation. Co-working and collaboration. Why women are funny. Black Girl Magic.

Week 10.

Tuesday: Alice Childress, *Wedding Band: A Love-Hate Story in Black and White* (1966)

## FINAL PROJECT PROSPECTUS DUE

Thursday: *Wedding Band* continued  
Selections from Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman* (1970) [Canvas]

Week 11.

Tuesday: Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend* (2012)

Thursday: *My Brilliant Friend* continued  
Beth C. Rosenberg, "Virginia Woolf, Elena Ferrante, and the Angry Modern/ist Woman" (M/m Print Plus 2018) [Canvas]

Week 12.

Tuesday: *My Brilliant Friend* continued

Thursday: Sally Rooney, *Conversations with Friends* (2018)

Week 13.

Tuesday: Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson, *Broad City* S2E5, "Hashtag FOMO"  
Phoebe Robinson and Jessica Williams, *2 Dope Queens* S1E4, "Black Nerds (Blerds)"

Thursday: Presentation of live final projects (e.g. performances, debates) – location TBD.

FINAL PROJECTS DUE