

Gender Perspectives in the Contemporary European and Spanish Literature

Academic Year: (2018 / 2019)

Review date: 05-12-2018

Department assigned to the subject:

Coordinating teacher: NOWAK-MCNEICE , KATARZYNA

Type: Compulsory ECTS Credits : 6.0

Year : 1 Semester :

REQUIREMENTS (SUBJECTS THAT ARE ASSUMED TO BE KNOWN)

Since the course is offered in English, proficiency in English is required. A basic competence in the humanities is recommended.

OBJECTIVES

This course starts with the assumption that gender provides a crucial critical perspective to approach contemporary literature, and that, in turn, literature itself represents a vital means of expression and reflection on contemporary society and the problems it faces. Even though the term 'gender', used to mean a socially constructed set of preoccupations and expectations that one performs to be identified as a man or a woman, has a relatively short history, its critical importance is undeniable. Judith Butler argues for a reconsideration of the category of gender to go beyond merely prescriptive notions of masculinity and femininity which produce and solidify the norms of hierarchy and exclusion. Especially in the context of the recent #MeToo movement, or the banning of Gender Studies by right-wing regimes in Central Europe, it appears more pressing than ever to situate gender as a central critical category in literary and cultural studies.

Even if only tentatively, the course intends to offer possible answers to the questions: How does the category of gender enrich our reading of literature and other texts of culture?; What does literature contribute to the representation of a world in which the written word has been losing dominance?; Do women write / read differently than men?; How can the status quo of the power relations between men and women be challenged? etc. The course will be organized around the readings of narrative and dramatic texts, organized in pairs, complemented with poetic texts, essays, audiovisual materials, etc., through which various aspects of gender and literature will be studied in blocks or thematic axes. A brief description of each of these blocks is offered below; however, the examination of the texts will evolve to propose a non-linear development of the critical perspectives, with the meaning deriving from each student's engagement with the texts rather than a prescriptive approach.

At the end of the course, the students will be able to define the critical terminology for the course, such as gender or feminism; examine and critically assess literary and philosophical approaches to gender and within gender studies; and apply the given methodological apparatus to the readings of literary texts. The students will also be able to offer an evaluation of the literary and critical texts, using the critical tools offered by gender studies and literary theory.

The competences provided by the course include abilities to analyze, compare and contrast given literary texts and other texts of culture, while providing a critical explanation of one's stance, using the vocabulary and terminology offered by gender studies.

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS: PROGRAMME

The course invites the students to think, after Slavoj Žižek, that 'another world is possible', and it is with this assumption that the course will critically examine the category of gender and its application to literary critique. The examples of literary production will be drawn from European literature, including authors of British, German, Polish, Romanian, and Ukrainian descent, with special emphasis placed on a new generation of Spanish artists (playwrights). Because of the short nature of the course, it is not meant to serve as a panorama of literature in Europe, but rather, as a representative sample of the literary production that displays an interest and concern with gendered perspective, in various parts of the continent. In the case of Spanish texts, where a translation into English is not yet available (Blasco, Liddell), students will be provided with translated fragments to allow them access to the meanings the texts might generate.

The first thematic axis is centered round Gender and the representations of the Body and Sexuality. The analysis offered focuses on Oksana Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* and Lola Blasco's *Siglo Mio Bestia Mia*. The discussion will include a revision of the importance of various narratorial points of view and the focalization, as well as the polyphonic aspect of the narrative and inclusion of different voices. The students will be encouraged to consider such topics as the role of popular culture in creating the

notions of beauty, desirability, romance; gender and imperialism, colonialism, and racism; gender and language; Écriture feminine; mimesis, masquerade, playfulness and disguise; gender and performativity, and various categories of identity.

The second thematic axis concerns Gender and Ageism, Disability Discrimination and Speciesism. The analysis offered focuses on Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* and Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*. The students will be invited to discuss such topics as the aging and ailing body in the context of Disability Studies; representations of age and femininity in literature; gender and other markers of identification: class, nationality, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity; ageism, speciesism and other -isms; gender and body, age, and illness; compulsory heterosexuality, queer challenge to essentialism.

The third thematic axis revolves around Gender and the Personal / Political. The analysis of textual examples focuses on Angelica Liddell's *La casa de la fuerza* and Herta Müller's *The Appointment*. It focuses on challenging the distinctions between the political and the private, offering instead an understanding of these as interrelated categories. The students will be asked to consider such topics as the banality of evil; dystopian and utopian visions of gendered identity; marginality, terror and melancholy; gendered subject construction, voice, and desire in psychoanalytical terms; backlash and postfeminism and the sexist discourse; the cyborg, cyberfeminism and the postmodern digital revolution.

The distinctions between these thematic axes remain rather fluid, and the readings within one category should be treated as enhancing the critical approach to the other categories. Interconnections and dependencies between various theoretical angles will be explored, taking into consideration such perspectives as those offered by Postcolonial Studies, Ecocriticism, Feminisms, and Queer Studies. Whenever possible, the discussion of the literary sources and critical materials will be complemented with the use of visual examples, reaching to such artists as Marina Abramovic, Louise Bourgeois, the Madrid duo Cabello/Carceller, Tracy Emin, Andrea Fraser, Anna Jonsson (Seville), Sarah Lucas.

The discussion of the literary examples of both novels and dramatic literature will be preceded by a theoretical introduction, whose aim is to provide the students with critical tools and language to enter the current debate on gender in literature. Thus, in the first two classes of the course, an overview of the category of gender and the development of Gender Studies as a scholarly perspective will be offered, with the discussion of such defining terms as Suffragists, Suffragettes, the Second and Third Wave of Feminism, Womanism, Gynocritics. It will focus on providing an introduction to the writings of such critics as Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Elaine Showalter, among others.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND METHODOLOGY

The first two classes of the course will provide an overview of the category of gender and the development of Gender Studies as a scholarly perspective.

The following weeks of the course will be devoted to a discussion of the primary and secondary courses, enumerated in the basic bibliography. The classroom discussion will be implemented with explication of the lecturer, as well as presentations by the students. The activities in the classroom will involve work in small groups, classroom discussion, as well as individual activities related to the analysis of the literary and critical texts.

ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The assessment during the course will be divided into three parts: the written assignments, the group presentation, and the final in-class paper. Students will be asked to submit three written commentaries on any of the primary sources, of 1-2 pages. This task, assessed continuously throughout the semester, will have the accumulative value of 30%. The short commentaries are due no later than the last class when the given text is discussed. Each student will be asked to participate in a group presentation, in a group of 4-6 students, on a chosen literary text. The second class of the discussion on each literary text will be assigned to the group presentation. This task will constitute 30% of the final grade. The remaining 40% of the grade will be assigned on the basis of the in-class paper, written during the last week of the course. The paper will be a commentary on the critical text, discussed previously during the semester. The students will be given four quotations from the critical texts, and they will be asked to choose two to comment on. Given the current nature of the covered topics and the assumption that each student will formulate his or her opinions on the basis of the materials provided and the guidance offered, classroom discussion will be highly encouraged.

BASIC BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Kane, Sarah *4.48 Psychosis*, Bloomsbury, 2008
- Liddell, Angelica *La casa de la fuerza*, La Uña Rota, 2014
- Müller, Herta *The Appointment*, Metropolitan, 2001

- Tokarczuk, Olga Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead, Fitzcarraldo, 2018
- Zabuzhko, Oksana Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex, Amazon Crossing, 1996

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Carol J. The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory, Continuum, 2010
- Barad, Karen Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning, Duke UP, 2007
- Bhabha, Homi The Location of Culture, Routledge, 1999
- Braidotti, Rosi. Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory., Columbia UP., 1994.
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- Walters, Margaret. Feminism: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford UP, 2006.
- Wolf, Naomi. The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women, Morrow, 1991
- Woolf, Virginia. A Room of One¿s Own, Houghton Mifflin, 1989 [1929].
- ¿¿¿ek, Slavoj. Demanding the Impossible, Polity, 2013.