



MADWOMEN IN THE ATTIC

WOMEN have written in all genres of literature, published their work, and been widely read. Historically, some even far exceeded the popularity of the men who continue to dominate the so-called “canon” of Western literature. Over time, however, many female novelists, poets, dramatists, and essayists were obscured by academic scholarship that favored white, male, middle-class writers. Beginning in the 1970s, a dedicated effort of recovery began placing these women writers firmly back into literary history. One such groundbreaking critique, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, articulated this longstanding gendered elision: “The poet’s pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis.” What happens to our understanding of storytelling when we obscure that penis? What transpires when we read an exclusive heritage, or sisterhood, or community of women writers? In this course, we will encounter texts from the late 18th century to today which engage with the diverse ways that women-identified bodies and minds are shaped by, and shape, the world. Through this collection of literature in English, we’ll examine intersectional identities through a variety of characters and narratives, prompting us to discuss issues of gender and sexuality as well as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, culture, socioeconomics, and other structures that shape these stories.

COURSE INFORMATION SPRING 2020

ENGL / WMST 218-52
Madwomen in the Attic
 (Literature, Gender & Sexuality)

Class time: MW 12.00–1.15pm
 Location: Rockefeller Hall 112
 Professor: Dr. Talia Vestri (she/her)
 Email: tvestri@vassar.edu
 Office: Sanders Classroom, Room 103

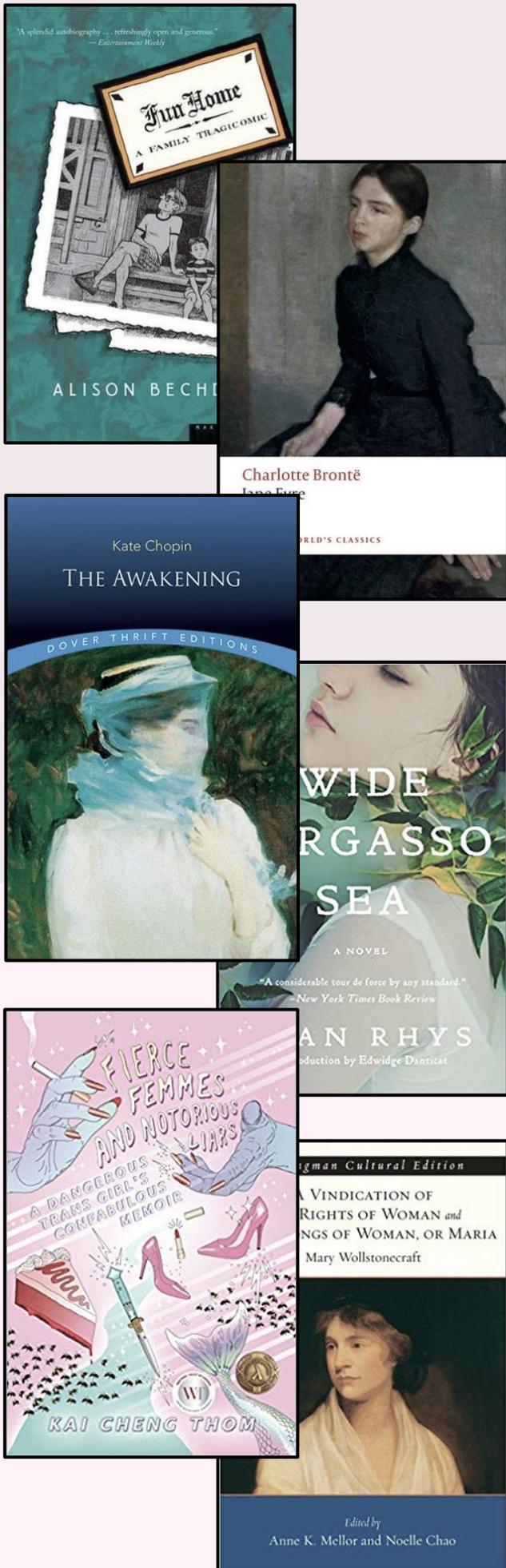
COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through this course, students should expect to:

- Read closely a variety of novels, short stories, poetry, and essays, paying attention to rhetorical and narrative elements such as diction, imagery, characterization, narration, and plot.
- Explore how women-identified writers address issues of identity, gender, sexuality, race, religion, nation, and culture; how they dramatize, assess, critique, illustrate, and explain their experiences.
- Increase familiarity and fluency with the conversations invoked by feminist and queer literary theory and criticism.
- Develop abilities needed to craft persuasive essays, including effective thesis claims, insightful analysis, and precise prose.

Where do I find information about...?

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COURSE MATERIALS

- Alison Bechdel *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
Mariner 9780618871711
- Charlotte Brontë *Jane Eyre*
Oxford 9780198804970
- Kate Chopin *The Awakening*
Dover 9780486277868
- Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea*
Norton 9780393352566
- Kai Cheng Thom *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars: A Dangerous Trans Girl's Confabulous Memoir*
Metonymy 9780994047137
- Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*
Longman 9780321182739

Access to Texts

Printed editions, new or used, can be purchased at the College Store or online. Copies have also been placed on [Course Reserve](#) at [Main Library](#), available for 2-week checkout periods at the Circulation Desk. Other versions remain on the shelves and can be located through [the Library Catalog](#). If no volumes are available at VC, you can also request a copy through [Connect NY](#) or [Interlibrary Loan \(ILLIAD\)](#) services; just give yourself ample time to receive the physical book.

COMMUNICATION

Moodle



Our Moodle site hosts course info and details, updates, FAQ's, and PDF/online readings, along with key documents such as syllabus and assignments.

Email



I do my best to respond to email within 24 hours, though my self-care practice is to refrain from checking my inbox between 8pm and 8am and over the weekends.

Office



My office is located in Sanders Classroom, room 103. Please free to stop by any time Monday through Wednesday. If my door is open, then I'd be happy to speak with you.

Chat Hours



In addition, I dedicate these time slots to meeting with my students on a drop-in basis:
M 4-5pm @ the Retreat
W 10-11.30am @ Sanders 103
F 12.30-1.30pm via Email
Bookings are optional

CONTRIBUTIONS

Engagement

Our classroom sessions will be driven by collaborative discussions and workshops. As a student in this course, you will be responsible for: a) Sharing your impressions and interpretations of course texts; b) Asking and answering questions that will generate effective critical conversations; and c) Selecting and highlighting passages that you would like to discuss in class. If you are uncomfortable speaking in these settings, please meet with me so that I can help you develop strategies to effectively engage in class. My objective is that we involve the widest range of ideas and perspectives by hearing from a large number of voices each day.

#Slack

You are required to download the Slack app and to join the course's workspace, "ENGL 218 Madwomen," for which I will send you an invite link by email. At least once per week, you'll post a thought, question, or impression that you have while engaging with the course readings. You might choose to respond directly to another person's comment, though you must add something substantive to their remark. Feel free to be as fun, creative, serious, and/or imaginative as you want to be with these entries (GIFs and memes are encouraged!). Each entry may earn up to 5 quality points based upon the originality, conciseness, and thoughtfulness of the contribution. My intention here is to open dialogue about course readings prior to meeting in the classroom and to get a better sense of who you are. Your posts will also help to shape our classroom conversations.

Writing

We will compose three (3) essays ranging in length from 3 to 8 pages. Each assignment will be preceded by a detailed assignment sheet, which will be posted on Moodle and discussed in class. Essays should be approached not as exams, where you reiterate content that has been discussed in class in order to demonstrate your comprehension of such information. Rather, essays should be considered a space where you have the opportunity to *expand upon* and *extend* the conversations that we hold together. Express your *own* thoughts, analyses, ideas, arguments, and close readings of a unique selection of literary evidence.

Feedback

A long-standing practice in the English Department is that individual papers [do not receive quantitative marks](#). This tradition is based upon the theory that a literature course forms a conversation between students and teacher, and that letter grades detract from this conversation. Instead, you will receive comments from me on each essay, returned to you electronically, and this feedback should be attended to from one essay to the next.

Deadlines

Each student will be granted a Time Bank of two (2) days from which you may choose to extend an essay deadline: either one deadline extended by two 24-hour periods (1 x 2) or two deadlines by one 24-hour period each (2 x 1). No further extensions will be permitted, so please plan accordingly. You are responsible for emailing me prior to the original deadline to notify me that you will be using a Time Bank option. Papers submitted after a deadline without validated use of the Time Bank or beyond your remaining allotted time will be marked late. Late papers receive no feedback, and each late mark will reduce your course grade. Please note that all written work must be submitted in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Your presence in class is expected at all times. If you need to miss, please alert me in advance if possible—a brief email is adequate; you need not share with me details of your personal wellbeing. If you are aware of special obligations (religious observance, family travel, varsity athletics, etc.), please notify me as soon as possible. More than three absences, whether excused or unexcused, will lower your course grade by one full letter. Five absences result in failure of the course.

Academic Integrity

Submitting a paper with your name on it implies you claim responsibility for all of its words and ideas. Integrating material from other sources, whether online or in print – or the “helping hand” of a friend or family member – violates this policy. Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, will not be taken lightly. Should an issue of plagiarism arise, the Dean of Studies will be alerted and disciplinary action may be taken.

Technology

Being “present” in the classroom goes far beyond occupying a seat. It requires your focused attention, which cannot be shared well with technology. Please store phones, tablets, and computers on silent and in your bags. You may be counted as missing a class (absent) if you choose to communicate with electronic counterparts rather than the peers around you.

Respect

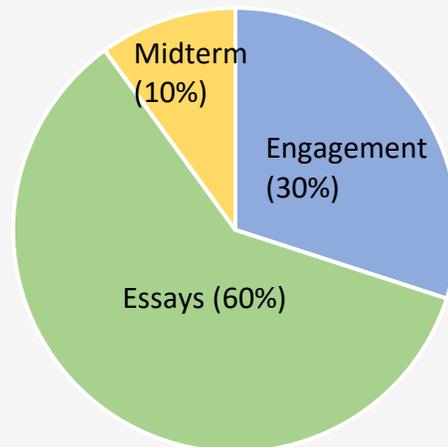
The classroom can be a challenging space, and our course material may present controversial, sensitive, or divisive material. As such, we will prioritize respect for our fellow participants. I expect each of you will share the goal of creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome. If you do find yourself feeling uncomfortable with any aspects of our class, including assigned readings as well as the behavior or words of others, I invite you to speak with me or to seek resources that support you.

Examinations

We will hold one in-class midterm exam for this course, which will include a series of quotation identifications, short answer questions, and mini-essays. The objective of this examination will be to determine whether you comprehend how parts of texts relate to the whole—how specific passages manifest the ideas, themes, and concerns of a piece of literature in its entirety. The mini-essays will give you the chance to think more concretely about how texts relate to each other.

EVALUATION

Your final course grade will reflect your performance—including efforts, evolution, and improvement—across the entire semester. According to the standards set by both the English department and the College, a passing grade—a C—requires that you be familiar with the content and methods of the course and participate fully in it. Performance at a B or A level indicates achievement of high order or distinction. Further details can be found [on the Department's website](#).



Accessibility and Educational Opportunity

If you feel that you have a physical or mental impairment, whether visible or not, for which you would like support, you have a right to accommodations. The AEO Office provides support and resources for students diagnosed with a range of learning differences, psychological disorders, chronic health conditions, sensory loss, mobility or orthopedic impairments, substance abuse needs, and more.

Old Laundry Building 125 845-437-7584 aeo@vassar.edu

READING SCHEDULE

ENGL/WMST 218 MADWOMEN IN THE ATTIC

Spring 2020

Notes: Reading assignments are due on the class date noted below. These readings will be found in the required course texts, with the exception of materials that have been placed on Moodle, which are indicated below with an (M) designation. Please note that this schedule may change to accommodate the class's needs; updates will be disseminated by email and Moodle. Details regarding essay assignments and page/chapter designations can also be found on Moodle.

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| Jan. 22 W | Introductions |
| Jan. 27 M | Virginia Woolf, selections, " A Room of One's Own " & " Professions for Women " (M) Alice Walker, " In Search of Our Mother's Gardens " (M) Toril Moi, " I Am Not a Woman Writer " (M) Ta-Nehisi Coates, " The Damned Mob of Scribbling Women " (M) |

Unit 1 Spaces for "Madwomen": Prison, Attic, Cage, Page

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| Jan. 29 W | Mary Wollstonecraft, selections from <i>Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> (see M for pages) Wollstonecraft, <i>Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman</i> (Chapters 1-5) |
| Feb. 3 M | <i>Maria</i> (Chapters 6-end) |
| Feb. 5 W | Charlotte Brontë, <i>Jane Eyre</i> (Volume I, Chapters 1-9) |
| Feb. 10 M | <i>Jane Eyre</i> (Chapters 10-17 / Vol. 1, Ch. 10 – Vol. 2, Ch. 2) |
| Feb. 12 W | <i>Jane Eyre</i> (Chapters 18-22 / Vol. 2, Ch. 3 – Vol. 2, Ch. 7) |
| Feb. 17 M | <i>Jane Eyre</i> (Chapters 23-29 / Vol. 2, Ch. 8 – Vol. 3, Ch. 3) |
| Feb. 19 W | <i>Jane Eyre</i> (Chapters 30-38 / Vol. 3, Ch. 4 – Vol. 3, Ch. 12) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, excerpts from <i>Madwoman in the Attic</i> (M) |
| Feb. 24 M | Essay #1 Due (3-4 pages) Jean Rhys, <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> , Part One |
| Feb. 26 W | <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> , Parts Two and Three |
| Mar. 2 M | Charlotte Perkins Gilman, " The Yellow Wallpaper " and " Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper' " (M) |
| Mar. 4 W | Midterm Exam |
| Mar. 7-22 | Spring Break |

Unit 2**Breaking the Molds: Resistance, Refusal, Revision**

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| Mar. 23 M | Kate Chopin, <i>The Awakening</i> |
| Mar. 25 W | <i>The Awakening</i> |
| Mar. 30 M | Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic" (M) Angela Carter, "The Bloody Chamber" (M) |
| Apr. 1 W | Leslie Marmon Silko, "Yellow Woman" (M) |
| Apr. 6 M | Jhumpa Lahiri, "This Blessed House" (M) |
| Apr. 8 W | Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek" (M) |
| Apr. 13 M | Louise Erdrich, "The Reptile Garden" (M) |
| Apr. 15 W | Essay #2 Due (5-6 pages) Alison Bechdel, <i>Fun Home</i> |
| Apr. 20 M | <i>Fun Home</i> |
| Apr. 22 W | Kai Cheng Thom, <i>Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars</i> |
| Apr. 27 M | <i>Fierce Femmes</i> |
| Apr. 29 W | <i>Fierce Femmes</i> |
| May 4 M | Watch: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story" (M) |
| May 8 Su | Essay #3 Due (7-8 pages) |

A Reminder of On-Campus Resources:**Writing Center**

Library Room 122
Open Sun-Thurs 3-11pm

Consultants offer free one-on-one and small-group sessions that focus on any aspect of writing, from brainstorming to developing thesis claims and polishing prose.

Academic Support

Library Basement
845-437-5789

Academic Support Specialist, Karen Getter, works with students to develop academic skills, both in general and in the context of specific courses or assignments.

Counseling Services

Metcalf
845-437-5700

Free, confidential services including counseling, crisis intervention, and mental health. Helps students with concerns about roommates, transitioning to college, procrastination, relationships, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, eating concerns/disorders, and more.

Sexual Assault and Violence Prevention / Response Team

SAVP: Metcalf, 845-437-7863
SART: 845-437-7333 (Safety & Security)

Vassar is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students, free of discrimination and harassment, including sexual assault, relationship abuse, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) have experienced or experience any of these incidents, know that you are not alone, and that Vassar has staff trained to support you.