

Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom

Peer-Reviewed Syllabus

Peer Reviewer: Amy Wong

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ENGLISH 325: NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S LITERATURE

Professor Ryan Fong

Fall 2022

Required Texts

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*
- Zitkala-sa, *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*
- Anonymous, *The Woman of Colour: A Tale*
- Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy*
- Readings posted on Teams course site

Course Description

The nineteenth century was a period that saw the rapid expansion of the British and American empires. Indeed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, virtually every area of the globe contained at least one British colony, leading to the adage that “the sun never set on the British empire,” while the United States invaded and claimed territories from the Atlantic to Pacific. In this course, we will be traversing many of these places and spaces—England, North America, the Caribbean, and South Asia—in order to think about how the imperial project intersected with the norms and structures of gender and sexuality. We will ask what role women played in building, shaping, debating, and contesting these empires. Furthermore, as we interrogate these questions, we will trouble any monolithic category of “women,” as we read texts by racially diverse women writers who were writing in the nineteenth century and who offer complex views about race and imperialism that are grounded in their own cultural contexts. Throughout, we will work to understand how these literary sources provide gendered accounts of race and imperial power in the nineteenth century, in addition to articulations of how these structures were resisted and remade.

Course Goals

This course is a 300-level English course and is, therefore, one of our “Applied Theory” courses. As such, this class is designed to help you deepen and expand the knowledge you gained about the historical study of literature in our 200-level classes and the skills and critical frameworks that you developed in the Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism”. Furthermore, like all courses in our program, it aims to improve the skills central to the English major and to a liberal arts education. These skills include:

- *Critical reading*: the ability to make connections between literary form and content, and between literary text and historical context.

- *Critical discussion*: the ability to take part in a thoughtful, provocative discussion of a text through pertinent questions/comments and thus help enlarge our collective understanding of a text.
- *Critical writing and research*: the ability to construct an argument with a thesis, to build that argument by synthesizing textual and contextual evidence with scholarly sources, to locate credible sources, and to write clearly and persuasively.

Finally, as an “Applied Theory” course, this class aims to improve your abilities at:

- *Theoretical application*: the ability to understand theoretical frameworks and concepts and apply them to a literary text.

Grading Contract

As part of the feminist/queer/antiracist/anticolonial praxis that is shaping this class, I will be utilizing a grading contract to assess your work, which means you will receive a grade for the labor you put into the class and the dedication you show to working on your writing and your own learning. Below, you will see the specific requirements for earning an A, B, or C. You must complete ALL of the assignments in a given grade bracket to receive that grade. Anything below the requirements for a C will receive a failing grade.

While this might be a new or different system of assessment for you, using this form of grading will allow all of us to focus more intently on our collective efforts to learn together and achieve the goals of the class. This grading system also means that I will be evaluating and crediting the labor and effort you put into this class, rather than just the “quality.” Grading based solely on “quality” often rewards whatever forms of privilege and preparation you might have had before taking this course — so a grading contract helps ensure that every student is on equitable footing and finding ways to grow as a thinking and scholar. It also allows you to take some control and agency over your education and learning in this class.

As you consider this class and the term, I encourage you to think carefully about what “track” you’d like to be on. While it’s fairly easy to “scale down,” it will be less easy to move up — especially once deadlines pass. I am happy to discuss this decision and any aspects of the contract grading system with you.

A few notes:

First, plusses and minuses will be handled on a case by case basis. For example, if you met all the requirements for the B track but also showed excellent progress in your writing quality or taken admirable intellectual risks, you may receive a B+, at my discretion. Conversely, if it is apparent that you are just doing the bare minimum to complete the B track, you may receive a B-.

Second, this contract exists *in place of* other grading methods like letter grades, point values, percentages, etc. None of your work this quarter will receive letter or number grades or percentages. You will receive substantive feedback on all work you submit as an

individual, but my comments will be about what you accomplished in your assignments and what you can do to improve your writing skills and analytical abilities.

Third, all major assignments for this class will have prompts that further elaborate what the minimum expectations are and what you need to do to achieve an A, B, or C.

Fourth, this contract can be renegotiated on an individual basis, but ONLY if a health or other personal emergency comes up during the quarter. This can involve offering flexibility around deadlines and attendance, with alternative assignments given as necessary. Please know though, this option is only meant as a way to address situations of acute crisis in the quarter – including if you or a family member gets sick with COVID.

To earn an A, you must...

- Miss no more than two days of class discussion, be consistently on time, and make at least two substantive comments during EACH discussion.
- Participate fully in the “pod” assignments given throughout the course
- Complete the final paper (and all the parts leading up to the final product), at the expectations in the prompt listed for the A track.
- Complete the “Non-Exam,” at the expectations listed for the A track.
- All assignments are completed by the scheduled deadline or by an extension that we have negotiated together.

To earn a B, you must...

- Miss no more than three days of class discussion, be consistently on time, and make at least one substantive comment during EACH discussion.
- Participate fully in the “pod” assignments given throughout the course
- Complete the final paper (and all the parts leading up to the final product), at the expectations listed in the prompt for the B track.
- Complete the “Non-Exam,” at the expectations listed for the B track.
- All assignments are completed by the scheduled deadline or by an extension that we have negotiated together.

To earn a C, you must...

- Miss no more than four days of class discussion, be consistently on time, and make at least one substantive comment during EACH WEEK in our discussions.
- Participate fully in the “pod” assignments given throughout the course
- Complete the final paper (and all the parts leading up to the final product), at the expectations listed in the prompt for the C track.
- Complete the “Non-Exam,” at the expectations listed for the C track.
- All assignments are completed by the scheduled deadline or by an extension that we have negotiated together.

Sensitive Topics and Difficult Conversations

Every work of art has political stakes and is embedded within its surrounding context — both when it was written and when it is read. This is true for the texts that we will be reading in this class. I fully recognize that we are living in a moment of multiple

overlapping crises, and that our class materials might raise sensitive topics and may even sometimes be triggering, depending on your histories and what's going on in your life. Please, do what you need to do in order to protect and ground yourself as you read and find meaningful ways to engage. When participate in our discussions, please do so in ways that respect our class community. For this reason, I will not tolerate hate speech of any kind — including the use of slurs, derogatory language, or defenses of oppressive or violent beliefs. I will also expect that you all are generous with one another, even as we work through points of disagreement and discomfort. Remember that critiques are fine, but personal attacks are not.

Disability and Emergency Accommodations

In general, I can only make accommodations for disabilities that have been registered with the Office of Student Development. However, if there are specific concerns around histories of trauma, especially in terms of needing specific content warnings, I'm also willing to work with you and a mental health provider to find ways for you to access the course materials. Also, if an emergency situation comes up in the course of the term, please let me know ASAP. I will try to provide the accommodations that I can, but know that participating in class discussions is where the heart of learning in the course lies.

Due Dates and Reading Schedule

Week 1

Monday, September 12

Edward Said, from *Culture and Imperialism* (Teams)

Selected readings from and about Potawatomi treaties (Teams)

Wednesday, September 14

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Land as Pedagogy” (Teams)

Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Goldenrod and Aster” from *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Teams)

Friday, September 16

Selected poems by Bamewawageshikaquay/Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (Teams)

Week 2

Monday, September 19

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Chapters 1-9 (63-148)

Wednesday, September 21

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Chapters 10-15 (149-225)

Friday, September 23

Nick Estes, selections from *Our History is the Future* (Teams)

Zitkala-Ša, *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings* (1-63)

Week 3

Monday, September 26

Zitkala-Ša, *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings* (68-117)

Penelope Myrtle Kelsey, “Zitkala-Ša, Sentiment, and Tiošpaye” (Teams)

Wednesday, September 28

Sharon Marie Brunner, selections from *Michigan Indian Boarding School Survivors Speak Out: A Narrative History* (Teams)

Selected readings on residential schools in Indigenous children’s literature (Teams)

NOTE: You will be working in your pods on a brief presentation for today

Friday, September 30

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Chapters 16-20 (229-302)

Week 4

Monday, October 3

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Chapters 21-26 (303-384)

Wednesday, October 5

Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” (Teams)

Frances E.W. Harper, “The Two Offers” and “The Triumph of Freedom—A Dream” (Teams)

Friday, October 7

Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” (Teams)

Week 5

Monday, October 10

Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (Teams)

Kerry Sinanan, “Mary Prince’s Back and Her Critique of Anti-Slavery Sympathy” (Teams) *POD 1 Presentation*

Wednesday, October 12

Harriet Jacobs, selections from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Teams)

Friday, October 14

NO CLASS—MID-QUARTER BREAK

Week 6

Monday, October 17

Ann Pratt, “Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, and What I Saw” (Teams)

Wednesday, October 19

Anonymous, *The Woman of Colour*, Volume 1 (53-127)

Friday, October 21

Anonymous, *The Woman of Colour*, Volume 2 (128-189)

Brigitte Fielder, “*The Woman of Colour* and Black Atlantic Movement” (Teams) *POD 2 Presentation*

Week 7

Monday, October 24

Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, Introduction-Chapter 11 (61-127)

Wednesday, October 26

Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, Chapters 12-23 (127-198)

Friday, October 28

Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, Chapters 24-33 (198-252)

Koritha Mitchell, "No, Really: a Home of One's Own" (Teams) *POD 3 Presentation*

Week 8**Monday, October 31**

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Chapters 27-32 (387-473)

Wednesday, November 2

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Chapters 33-38 (474-556)

Elaine Freedgood, "Souvenirs of Sadism" (Teams) *POD 4 Presentation*

Friday, November 4

Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (Teams)

Full Proposal for Final Paper DUE BY 11:59 PM

Week 9**Monday, November 7**

Krupabai Satthianadhan, *Saguna*, Chapters 1-5 (19-86) (Teams)

Wednesday, November 9

Krupabai Satthianadhan, *Saguna*, Chapters 6-9 (87-164) (Teams)

Friday, November 11

Sandra Gilbert, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress" (Teams)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (Teams)

Narin Hassan, "Jane Eyre's Doubles?" (Teams)

Optional: Draft of Final Paper Due by 11:59 PM

Week 10**Monday, November 14**

Rassundari Devi, *Amir Jiban* (Teams)

Wednesday, November 16

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream” (Teams)

Chitra Ganesh, “Her Garden, A Mirror, The Kitchen” and Illustrations to “Sultana’s Dream” (Teams)

Friday, November 18

FINAL SYNTHESIS DAY

Non-Exam DUE IN CLASS

**FINAL PAPER DUE
ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20 BY 11:59 PM**