

TELLING HERSTORY: FEMALE AUTHORS OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES



I was often bewildered by the task of motherhood, that precarious balance between total surrender and totalitarianism. How could I prepare you for a world that I did not even understand? I was struck by the absurdity of my predicament as a woman. I had been excluded from the social contract that drafted and perpetuated the very rules that it fell to my lot to inculcate in you. Had it been up to me, I would have constructed a very different world for you. There would have been more laughter, more color, less struggle. But despite my reality, you have made your own world.

- J Nozipo Maraire, *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter*

Be careful what stories you tell yourselves about beauty, about otherness. Be careful what stories “count.” They will have consequences that will shiver the planet.

- Lidia Yuknavitch, *The Book of Joan*

Words are free, she used to say, and she appropriated them; they were all hers. She sowed in my mind the idea that reality is not only what we see on the surface; it has a magical dimension as well and, if we so desire, it is legitimate to enhance it and color it to make our journey through life less trying.

— Isabel Allende, *Eva Luna*

All that you touch
 You Change
 All that you Change
 Changes you.
 The only lasting truth Is Change.
 God
 Is Change.
 -Octavia E. Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*

To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there, but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances.
 - Laura Mulvey

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction—what, has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain. When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder what the words meant. They might mean simply a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontës and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticisms if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs Gaskell and one would have done. But at second sight the words seemed not so simple. The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like, or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them, or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion.
 - Virginia Woolf

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Meeting times: Thursdays 2:00 – 3:30

Blog: <https://thespoilers.blog/> This is a work in progress. The instructors will be publishing their own stuff here as well as material relevant to the books under discussion.

Course Description

Historically, women have, at best, been marginalized in, and, at worst, entirely excised from, all manner of public discourse. In politics, religion, business, the sciences, and the arts the voices of women are even now significantly underrepresented. Attempts at removing the barriers to participation have been gradual. In literature departments in the United States and in Britain, for instance, literature by women and about women became a significant field of study in part due to the consciousness-raising of second-wave

feminists during the '70s and '80s, and women writers still are often not given the attention that their works merit.

Literature professors at the NOVA Alexandria campus tend to be intentional about including authors from a range of genders, sexualities, races, nationalities, ethnicities, and genders. While that is the case, there is no denying that courses that focus on women and minority authors have been under assault by the administration, and, consequently, many of these courses are no longer offered.

For Rachel and I, then, this free class provides an opportunity to, in a small way, redress what we see as an imbalance in the college's curriculum. It is our hope that these female voices will provoke and entertain you, and cause you to envision the world in a new way.

General Course Purpose

Provides students with the opportunity to use literature as a springboard for discussion about history, psychology, sociology and the human condition.

.Course Prerequisites/Co-requisites

A willingness to read books and talk about them.

Goals:

The primary objectives of the course are:

- 1) to engender in students an appreciation female authors;
- 2) to teach students how to use literary theory (particularly postcolonial theory, feminist theory, queer theory, ecocriticism, afrofuturism, critical race theory, and postmodernism) and reading strategies to explore texts;
- 3) to help students discover the connections between the works of female authors and other academic disciplines;
- 4) to develop and foster in students the ability to think critically and to express their ideas cogently

Recommended Texts:

(Obviously, this is not a class in the traditional sense, so readers are encouraged to find whatever editions of the texts are most affordable. Also, it is likely that readings may get cut if the pacing of the class seems too hectic, so fear not.)

Textbook 1

Author: Maraire, J. Nozipo

Title: *Zenzele: A Letter for my Daughter*

ISBN-13: 978-0385318228

Textbook 2

Author: Yuknavitch, Lidia

Title: *The Book of Joan: A Novel*

ISBN-13: 978-0062383280

Textbook 3

Author: Butler, Octavia E.
 Title: *Parable of the Sower*
 ISBN-13: 978-0446675505

Textbook 4

Author: Baroness Orczy
 Title: *The Scarlet Pimpernel*
 ISBN-13: 978-0451527622

Textbook 5

Author: Jones, Gayl
 Title: *Corrigadora*
 ISBN-13: 978-0807063156

Textbook 6

Author: Allende, Isabel
 Title: *Eva Luna: A Novel*
 ISBN-13: 978-1501117084

An assortment of other texts will be provided as handouts or online.

Course Requirements

- ◆ Participation – everyone should come having done (some) of the readings, and be willing to talk about them.
- ◆ Keep a notebook – this won’t be collected (obviously), but I want to encourage everyone to keep a notebook about readings and class discussions.

Grading:

This is the best kind of class – a class for the love of learning – so there are no grades or credit to be earned. Just come and enjoy.

Class Schedule (This is a flexible schedule, which means that, as necessary, discussions may continue on to subsequent weeks. The schedule may also change, but we will inform you of any major changes in advance)

WEEK 1:	
January 17	Class introduction READ BEFORE CLASS: “Introduction: Reading the African Novel” (From Booker, M. Keith. <i>The African Novel in English: An Introduction</i> . Heinemann, 1998.) This text will be emailed to you and provided on our blog. Zenzele, pp. 1-80

WEEK 2:	
January 24	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>Zenzele</i> , pp. 80-194
WEEK 3:	
January 31	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>The Book of Joan</i> , pp. 1-134
WEEK 4:	
February 7	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>The Book of Joan</i> , pp. 135-267
WEEK 5:	
February 14	READ BEFORE CLASS: Butler, Octavia E. "Positive Obsession." <i>Bloodchild</i> , 2nd ed., Seven Stories Press, 2005, pp. 123-136 Butler, Octavia E. "Martha's Book." <i>Bloodchild</i> , 2nd ed., Seven Stories Press, 2005, pp. 187-214. Frank, Priscilla. "Your Brief And Far-Out Guide To Afrofuturism." https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/your-far-out-guide-to-afrofuturism-and-black-magic_us_5711403fe4b0060ccda34a37 These texts will be emailed to you and provided on our blog.
WEEK 6:	
February 21	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>The Parable of the Sower</i> , chapters 1-10
WEEK 7:	
February 28	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>The Parable of the Sower</i> , chapters 10-18
WEEK 8:	
March 7	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>The Parable of the Sower</i> , chapters 18 - conclusion
WEEK 9: NO CLASS	
March 14	READ: <i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i> , pp. 1-92
WEEK 10:	
March 21	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i> , pp. 92-179
WEEK 11:	
March 28	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i> , pp. 180-269
WEEK 12:	
April 4	READ BEFORE CLASS:

	<i>Corrigadora</i> , pp. 1-96
<i>WEEK 13:</i>	
April 11	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>Corrigadora</i> , pp. 96-192
<i>WEEK 14:</i>	
April 18	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>Eva Luna</i> , pp. 1-116
<i>WEEK 15:</i>	
April 25	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>Eva Luna</i> , pp. 117-210
<i>WEEK 16:</i>	
May 2	READ BEFORE CLASS: <i>Eva Luna</i> , pp. 211-349