

ENGL190-02 – Contemporary Women Writers

Spring 2015 – TR 2pm-3:15pm – Clough 300

Professor Amanda Dykema

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Office: Palmer 309B

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 9-10:30am, Monday 3:30-4:30pm, & by appointment

Required Texts & Materials

The following texts have been ordered at the Rhodes Bookstore and are available online. Please purchase the editions specified. Please also note that there will be additional important readings, all available to be downloaded on Moodle (moodle.rhodes.edu).

Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991). Algonquin. 978-1565129757

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006). Mariner. 978-0618871711

Danticat, Edwidge. *The Dew Breaker* (2004). Vintage. 978-1400034291

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). Vintage. 978-0307278258

Truong, Monique. *The Book of Salt* (2003). Mariner. 978-0618446889

Yamashita, Karen Tei. *Tropic of Orange* (1997). Perseus. 978-1566890649

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

This course expands the scope of conventional literary study to incorporate the voices of contemporary women writers, many of them writers of color—certainly a worthwhile objective. Yet the course title itself prompts a series of questions. Why study literature exclusively by women? Is there an elusive female voice that can be isolated and evaluated as representative of “women’s experience”? Is the experience of women that uniform? In this class, we will do our best to be mindful of these questions, attempting to analyze these works for how they represent the cultures about which and within which they were written but also being careful not to assume that these works tell the entire story about a culture or the female experience.

Our primary focus will be works of contemporary literature written in the United States that address the experience of **kinship**—intimate and family relations that shape who we are and how we interact with the world. This emphasis will allow us to explore the ways familial relations complicate clear distinctions between private and public, self and other, social and political, history and the imagination (to paraphrase literary scholar David Palumbo-Liu). We will consider the ways kinship relationships activate feelings of belonging and exclusion, and how those relationships map onto larger cultural and national identities.

Under the Rhodes College Foundations curriculum, this course satisfies the F2 and F4 requirements. This means that our official learning outcomes include reading and interpreting literary texts and developing excellence in written communication. In more concrete terms, this course is designed to facilitate your practice of critical thinking, writing and reading to interpret texts, your skill in making arguments supported by textual evidence, and your familiarity with certain literary strategies contemporary women writers employ.

Course Policies & Requirements

Papers. The essays in this course are designed to allow you to develop your own readings of our texts and to practice close reading—the careful analysis of the how the details of a text’s language and form shape its meaning. You will write three papers: a close reading of a single passage (approx. 3 pages); a literary analysis of a novel/collection (approx. 6 pages); and a comparative essay (approx. 6 pages) that analyzes an essay and a literary work in relation to one another. For each essay, I will provide specific assignment sheets to explain the essays in greater detail. **All documents are due at the beginning of class on the date listed on the syllabus.** Please note that technology failure is not an acceptable excuse for late work; make sure to save your drafts frequently and back up your work. Unless alternate arrangements are made with me before the due date, late papers will lose one grade increment (ex. A to A-, C+ to C) per day.

Revision Opportunities. My teaching philosophy values revision opportunities: I prefer to offer comments on your writing during the writing process, while they can still be helpful to you, rather than after a final grade has been earned. Therefore, for each major assignment in this course, students will have the option of turning in an early draft to me for comments. These optional early submissions are marked on the course calendar. If you take advantage of this option, on the first version, you will receive thorough comments geared toward revision but no grade. The second, revised version will receive a grade and fewer comments. Please note: the original version with my comments is required to be turned in along with the second version, so take care to keep track of it.

Submitting work. All out of class work for this course should be typed and submitted in **hard copy form** (not email) unless you are otherwise instructed. Formal essays must use correct MLA format (title, page numbers, 1-inch margins, 11 or 12 point Times New Roman or Calibri font, etc.).

Grade Distribution. Your grade in this course will be determined out of 1000 possible points.

Participation & Workshops	150
Homework & Quizzes	150
Paper 1 - Close Reading	150
Paper 2 - Literary Analysis	300
<u>Paper 3 - Comparative Essay</u>	<u>250</u>
Total:	1000

(A+: 980-100, A: 930-979, A-: 900-929, B+: 880-899, B: 830-879, B-: 800-829, C+: 780-799, C: 730-779, C-: 700-729, D+: 680-699, D: 630-679, D-: 600-629, F: 500 or below)

Class Participation. You are expected to come to class prepared for discussion, which means reading the assigned text carefully and marking significant pages/paragraphs before class so you can contribute to the discussion using specific textual evidence (quotes, references to specific page numbers, etc.). Please **bring your copy of the assigned text** to every class. If there is a reading assigned from Moodle, you should print it and bring it to class as well. In-class discussion may often include your general reaction to a text – always a good way to begin – but is ultimately meant to lead you to the ability to construct literary arguments that reflect the complexity of each assigned text. Participating and listening carefully to your classmates on a regular basis should help you strengthen your ability to develop and support an argument about a literary text, skills you will need to succeed on the essays that make up 70% of your final grade.

Courtesy. Please be respectful of everyone's opinions, presence, and person in this course. A primary purpose of this class is to give you the opportunity to practice developing interpretations of the texts, and while you are encouraged to offer differing ideas, you should do so in a thoughtful manner. Further, I am committed to creating an academic climate that is safe, respectful, and appreciative of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic background, ability, religion, or any other aspect of one's identity. A climate of mutual respect allows us to ask difficult questions and to participate in honest discussions, even in the context of strong disagreement. Creating this kind of open, honest, and respectful climate is our mutual responsibility.

Quizzes. I will often give short quizzes as incentive for staying current on the reading. Most of these quizzes will be in class, but I may administer certain quizzes via Moodle. If so, these will be announced ahead of time and will go live at 5 p.m. the day before class.

Attendance. Please come to class on time. Regular attendance and class participation are essential for this course. In general, I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. **Each absence after the third class missed will lower your final course grade by 50 points (half a letter grade).** Students with college-sanctioned extracurricular activities (athletics, mock trial, etc.) or religious observances that

will require them to miss one or more classes during the semester should talk to me in advance of their anticipated absence. All such absences that are not approved in advance will adversely affect your grade.

Technology. **Turn off cell phones** and other electronic devices before class. I expect that computers will be used only for class-related work. Get in the habit of regularly checking your email, as I will send out announcements and assignments this way. Email is also the best way to contact me (though please give me up to 24 hours to respond). Depending on your question, I may recommend that we discuss it in person. Please also regularly consult our course space on Moodle at www.moodle.rhodes.edu, where you can view the syllabus, access assignments and other course materials, and communicate with me and your classmates.

Intellectual Honesty. All work turned in for this course is to be completed in accordance with Rhodes' Honor Code; it must be your own work, produced exclusively for this course. Plagiarism is a violation of the integrity of the occupation of learning and a serious act of disrespect toward me as professor and toward your fellow students. "Plagiarism" means directly copying someone else's work, paraphrasing someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit, or having someone else do your work for you. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, failure to cite the source of quoted/paraphrased/borrowed text and ideas) may likewise result in failure of the course, regardless of the Council hearing outcome. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not intentional plagiarism, will be penalized as I deem appropriate. If you have any concerns that your actions might violate this course's academic integrity policies, speak with me early in the assignment for help and clarification.

Special needs. If you have a registered disability that will require accommodations, please see me within the first two weeks of class so we can arrange for the resources you need. If you have a disability and have not yet registered with the Office of Student Disability Services, you should do so immediately (901-843-3885, <http://www.rhodes.edu/disabilityservices/>)

Course Calendar

Readings should be completed by the day on which they are listed. Readings marked (M) can be accessed on Moodle at moodle.rhodes.edu and should be printed out and brought to class. This calendar may be subject to change during the course; all changes will be announced in class and via Moodle.

JANUARY

- Thurs 15** Class Introduction/Syllabus Overview
- Tues 20** Joanna Russ, “What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can’t Write” (M)
Julia Alvarez, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* pp. 3-23
- Thurs 22** Alvarez, *HTGGLTA* pp. 24-103
- Tues 27** Alvarez, *HTGGLTA* pp. 107-194
- Thurs 29** Alvarez, *HTGGLTA* pp. 195-238

FEBRUARY

- Tues 3** Alvarez *HTGGLTA* pp. 239-end
Edwidge Danticat, “Bicentennial” (M)
- Thurs 5** Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* pp. 3-68
- Tues 10** Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* pp. 69-164
- Thurs 12** Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* pp. 165-end
- Tues 17** Monique Truong, *The Book of Salt* pp. 1-84
- Thurs 19** Truong, *The Book of Salt* pp. 85-152
Optional: Paper 1 Drafts Due to Professor
- Tues 24** Truong, *The Book of Salt* pp. 153-215
- Thurs 26** Truong, *The Book of Salt* pp. 216-261

MARCH

- Tues 3** **Paper 1 Due – Close Reading Essay**
Truong, “Real and Flawed” (M)
- Thurs 5** Zadie Smith, “What Does Soulful Mean?” (M)
Roxane Gay, “Feminism (n.): Plural”, “Beyond the Measure of Men” (M)
- Tues 10** **SPRING BREAK – No Class**
- Thurs 12** **SPRING BREAK – No Class**
- Tues 17** Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* pp. 3-96
- Thurs 19** Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* pp. 97-136

Tues 24 Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* pp. 137-210
Optional: Paper 2 Drafts Due to Professor

Thurs 26 Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* pp. 211-268

Tues 31 **Paper 2 Due – Literary Analysis**
“Karen Tei Yamashita Interview” (M)

APRIL

Thurs 2 **EASTER BREAK – No Class**

Tues 7 Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth*, “Unaccustomed Earth,” “Hell-Heaven,”
“A Choice of Accommodations” pp. 3-127

Thurs 9 Lahiri, “Only Goodness,” “Nobody’s Business” pp. 128-219

Tues 14 Lahiri, “Once in a Lifetime,” “Year’s End,” “Going Ashore” pp. 223-333

Thurs 16 Lahiri Discussion continued
Paper 3 Topic Proposal Due

Tues 21 Bechdel, *Fun Home* Ch. 1-3

Thurs 23 Bechdel, *Fun Home* Ch. 4-5

Tues 28 Bechdel, *Fun Home* Ch. 6-7

Thurs 30 Roxane Gay, “Bad Feminist: Take One” and “Bad Feminist: Take Two” (M)
Paper 3 In-Class Workshop

PAPER 3 DUE by Monday, May 4 at 5:30 p.m. (scheduled final exam period)