**Course Title:** Women’s Voices: British and Irish Women Novelists from Anne Radcliffe to Virginia Woolf  
  
**Course Length:** 12 weeks

**Course Description**

This course explores major prose works by British and Irish women writers from the late 18th to early 20th centuries. We will examine how women used the novel form to engage with questions of gender, authority, domesticity, and literary tradition. From the Gothic to Realism to Modernism, the course emphasizes changing literary styles and the evolving position of women as writers and subjects. Students will be introduced to feminist literary criticism and will learn how to apply these approaches to the texts in preparation for their own academic writing.

**Course Goals**

* Develop an understanding of the historical and literary contexts shaping women’s writing in Britain and Ireland.
* Read major women novelists within and against canonical traditions.
* Apply feminist and other literary theories to the interpretation of novels.
* Consider the construction of gender, class, and national identity in fiction.
* Support students in developing independent critical essays.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1: Introduction: Women, Fiction, and the Canon**  
Readings:

* Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (excerpts)
* Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (excerpts)
* Elaine Showalter, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”  
  Discussion: Canon formation, feminism, and literary value

**Week 2: Gothic and Gender**  
Primary: Anne Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (excerpts)  
Secondary: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*  
Topics: Sensibility, patriarchy, female fear, genre

**Week 3: Austen and the Gothic: Irony, Morality, Marriage**  
Primary: Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*  
Secondary: Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (excerpts)  
Topics: Satire, gender roles, reading practices

**Week 4: Realism and the Female Subject**  
Primary: Jane Austen, *Persuasion*  
Secondary: Mary Poovey, “ The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer”  
Topics: Realism, sentiment, female desire

**Week 5: The Madwoman in the Attic**  
Primary: Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*  
Secondary: Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (chapter on *Jane Eyre*)  
Topics: Bildung, hysteria, domesticity, rebellion

**Week 6: Passion and Alienation**  
Primary: Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*  
Secondary: Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (excerpts)  
Topics: Romanticism, nature, madness

**Week 7: The Woman and the Industrial Novel**  
Primary: Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*  
Secondary: Deirdre David, “Gaskell and Class” (excerpts from *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing*)  
Topics: Class, nation, woman’s role in the public sphere

**Week 8: Duty, Morality, and Realism**  
Primary: George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*  
Secondary: George Eliot, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists”  
Topics: Female education, ambition, moral choice

**Week 9: Irish Women and Empire**  
Primary: Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*  
Secondary: Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism* (chapter on Edgeworth)  
Topics: Nation, class, colonialism, narrative voice

**Week 10: Feminist Modernism I**  
Primary: Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*  
Secondary: Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* (excerpts)  
Topics: Time, memory, trauma, gender

**Week 11: Feminist Modernism II**  
Primary: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*  
Secondary: Rachel Bowlby, “Walking, Women and Writing”  
Topics: Art, interiority, modernist style

**Week 12: Rewriting the Canon: Feminist Theory and Rereading**  
Secondary: Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (Introduction); Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”  
Review discussion: Rereading classic texts through feminist lenses

**Assessment**

* Participation and attendance: 20%
* Response papers (2 x 500 words): 20%
* Presentation (10 minutes + handout): 20%
* Final essay (2000–3000 words): 40%

**Preparatory assignments for the final essay:**

* Week 7: Short proposal (200 words) outlining topic and approach
* Week 9: Annotated bibliography (4–6 entries)
* Week 11: Draft thesis statement and outline
* Week 12: Peer review and feedback session

**Secondary Reading List**

**General & Theoretical Frameworks**

* Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*
* Elaine Showalter, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”
* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Introduction)
* Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Introduction)
* Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Introduction and chapter on Austen)
* Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time”
* Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”

**Week-by-Week**

* Week 2: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*; Tania Modleski, “The Women Who Knew Too Much”
* Week 3: Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*
* Week 4: Raymond Williams, *The English Novel* (ch. on realism)
* Week 5: Adrienne Rich, “Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman”
* Week 6: Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power*; Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*
* Week 7: Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*
* Week 8: Nancy Henry, *The Life of George Eliot*; Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*
* Week 9: Esther Wohlgemut, *Maria Edgeworth and the Question of National Identity*
* Week 10: Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (excerpts)
* Week 11: Rachel Bowlby, “Walking, Women and Writing: Virginia Woolf as Flâneuse”
* Week 12: Toril Moi, “From Femininity to Finitude”; Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*