

English 4378: Women Writers

Fall 2013

Dr. Patricia Lee Yongue

713-743-2944; email via Blackboard

Emergency email: plyongue@uh.edu

Office: 221C, Hours: T-2:30-3:30 and by appointment

Description

For the majority of the semester, we shall study some of the works of two nearly contemporary American women novelists, Edith Wharton (born 1862) and Willa Cather (born 1873). Both writers had a Victorian upbringing, were responsive to the naturalist and modernist movements in literature, traveled between the American East Coast and France frequently, and emphasized women's conditions within a patriarchal world and patriarchal narratives, and yet had nothing to do with one another. Class was partly responsible for their aloofness from one another (Wharton came from old money, Cather from middle class background), but it was not uncommon, in fact was all too common, that female writers shunned one another's company, a situation we might explore. Nonetheless, as well as considering their unique narratives and lives, we shall also consider what their fiction shares. Cather likely had Wharton's *The House of Mirth* in mind, for example, when composing *A Lost Lady* (as well as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, and Chopin's *The Awakening*). Finally, we shall consider the stunning, disturbing novel, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, by Jean Rhys, who was born in Dominica, one of the Windward Islands, to a Welsh father and a Creole mother (a white West Indian), and who moved to England when she was sixteen. Perhaps the purist of the three modernists, Rhys writes both transnationally and about British characters. Like all of the novels we are reading, *Mackenzie* explores woman's dependency on men and their money for survival.

We will also consider dimensions of various feminist theories especially as the theories apply to the novels.

Note: English 4378 satisfies three advanced credit hours of elective for the English major and minor and is also applicable to the Women's Studies Minor.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students participating responsibly will achieve familiarity with three prominent female novelists of the modernist period.
2. Students participating responsibly will learn aspects of feminist, cultural, and biographical criticism and methodology.
3. Students participating responsibly will gain experience in critical thinking and writing critically and in participation in group discussion.

Required Texts

Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*
Cather, *A Lost Lady*
Cather, *My Mortal Enemy*
Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*

Exams, Writing Assignments

There will be a midterm and a final (the final accounting for 50% of the final grade) and a series of written responses.