

620:034:02 critical writing about Literature Fall 2006
American Women Writers: Self and Society

Instructor: Dr. Anne Myles
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Office hours:

My regular office hours are Wednesdays from 3:30 or 4:30 to 5:00 (start time depends upon whether or not I have a meeting 3:30-4:30) and Thursdays 1:00 to 3:00. If these times don't fit your schedule, please contact me and we can arrange something else. I am frequently in my office at other times besides scheduled office hours; feel free to knock anytime you see my door cracked open.

Course Description:

This course is the required foundation for UNI's English literature major; it also an introduction to reading and writing about literature that counts as part of the Liberal Arts Core. The course goals include:

- To give students opportunity to enjoy, discuss, analyze, and interpret a variety of literary texts in the English and/or American literary tradition;
- To help students gain a basic sense of the formal elements of literature, of the conventions of various literary genres, and of the vocabulary of literary study.
- To expose students to a variety of approaches to interpreting and writing about literature, which will prepare them for various methodologies they may encounter in other literature courses.
- To allow students to refine the skills necessary to thinking critically about literature or any humanities field: reading closely, asking questions, making connections, researching secondary sources, being aware of one's own subject position as reader.
- To practice the skills necessary to writing critically about literary or other texts: generating significant questions and theses, drawing evidence from the text, incorporating secondary sources, developing logical arguments.
- To practice the strategies of all clear writing: formulating well-focused paragraphs, composing sentences, undertaking large-scale revision, editing prose to eliminate errors.

Each section of 034 is different. This section focuses on the work of four American women writers writing in periods from the 1660s to the 1980s, whose work (in the forms of poetry, short story, and novel) addresses in one way or another women's and men's drives for self-expression and intimacy and the social structures that prevent or nurture their individual fulfillment. It will also include an introduction to several critical theories that are important in contemporary literary studies and will expose you to very different ways of conceiving what writing about literature is.

Prerequisite: Completion of 620:005, College Reading and Writing, or the equivalent.

Books to Purchase:

- * Steven Lynn, *Texts and Contexts: Writing about Literature with Critical Theory*, 4th ed.
- * Anne Bradstreet, *To My Husband and Other Poems*
- * Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Early Poems*
- * Rebecca Harding Davis, *Life in the Iron-Mills*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Bedford Cultural Edition)
- * Toni Morrison, *Beloved*
- * William Andrews & Nellie McKay, eds., *Beloved: A Casebook*
- * **Recommended:** Joseph Garibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*
[This will be useful throughout your career as an English major. Buy it if you don't already own a book with equivalent information.]

Main Graded Assignments:

There will be three main papers in the class. For each of these, you will write a draft and a final version, with feedback (from me and/or other class members) in between. The due dates for these papers are listed in the syllabus (they're subject to change if we agree that it's helpful or necessary, but will probably remain as stated). I will give you much more detailed information about the papers and other assignments as we prepare for them individually, but here's an overview of what's ahead:

- **Paper 1:** A close reading of a poem by Anne Bradstreet or Edna St. Vincent Millay, in which your reading of the poem is designed to support a claim that answers one of a choice of questions I will offer you. This paper will give you practice in working closely with a text and using evidence to support an argument about a work of literature.
- **Paper 2:** A discussion of the story *Life in the Iron-Mills* that places the work in the context of several other period sources included in the Bedford Cultural Edition, drawing on the methodology of New Historicism or Cultural Studies. I will give you the framework of the assignment, but (with the help of classmates) you will have to develop your exact argument and select the sources to explore it. This paper will give you practice in integrating multiple sources within an argument and in approaching literature in a contextual/historical way.
- **Paper 3:** A researched essay that explores some interpretive issue in the novel *Beloved* by drawing on what several literary critics have said about the novel as well as your own reading of it. As a preliminary stage in this paper, you will

submit a **topic proposal** that outlines the issue you are exploring and an **Annotated Bibliography** that presents the relevant literary critical sources you have found and briefly explains what they say and how they bear upon your topic. This paper will give you practice in research and in integrating others' perspectives within an interpretive dialogue about a complex work.

Grading procedure – individual papers:

Each of your papers will be returned to you with a rubric sheet that assigns a certain number of points for different aspects of the paper (such as overall argument, handling of evidence, paper organization, sentence-level writing and mechanics, etc.), so you will be able to see exactly where the overall numeric grade you got comes from and where your execution was strong or had problems. I will add some notes to these items, if clarification seems necessary, will write an overall comment on the paper, and will write comments on the margins in the paper itself, which you should be sure to read, as they'll give you a clearer idea of how I responded to your paper as I was reading through it.

Each of your three main papers is worth 100 points. 10 points of this is based on your submitting the paper draft on the day it is due; the final version will be graded on a 90-point scale. In other words, you lose 10 points from your grade outright if you do not turn in the required draft on time. (Exceptions may occasionally be made for emergency cases.)

Grading procedure – overall course grade:

Your final course grade will be determined by the percentage of points that you earn out of the possible total for the semester, as outlined below. Especially strong class participation or hard work and improvement during the course of the semester may strengthen your final grade if your grades for written work do not seem to me to fully reflect your overall performance in the course.

Short exercises and in-class writing, collected in portfolio:	25 points
First Paper	100 points
Second Paper	100 points
Annotated Bibliography	25 points
Third Paper	100 points
End of semester self-reflection	15 points
Attendance/participation	35 points
<i>[Also note the extra credit opportunities listed in this syllabus]</i>	
Total possible for semester (not counting extra credit)	400 points

Your semester grade will be calculated based on the following standard percentage scale out of the total points possible:

A	95%	B-	80%	D+	67%
A-	90%	C+	77%	D	64%
B+	87%	C	74%	D-	60%
B	84%	C-	70%		

If you are unable to complete all the work by the end of the semester and wish to receive a grade of I (Incomplete) you must request this of me specifically before the beginning of finals week. However, I will *not* give Is to people who have vanished for much of the semester and make a sudden late reappearance. According to University policy, the final date you may drop the class and receive a W on your transcript is Friday, October 27.

Deadlines:

Work is due on the date specified—this includes paper drafts as well as final versions. Papers are normally due at the beginning of class, but I will not penalize you so long as they are in by 5 p.m. on that day. Do not skip class because you're having trouble with your printer, left the paper in your room, etc.! There will be subtractions from your grade for late work, increasing with the length of time the paper is late. In those cases I will give the paper a “merit grade” which lets you know how I responded to the paper in itself, and the official “recorded grade” which factors in the lateness. I am willing to negotiate extensions requested at least one class in advance, preferably more.

E-mail submission of a paper is acceptable if (and only if) you have it completed but absolutely can't make it in to campus on the day it's due. It is your responsibility to bring a hard copy as soon as possible, and it's your problem, not mine, if the paper does not arrive on time due to some e-mail glitch (as seems to happen pretty frequently, especially if you're using non-UNI e-mail).

Note: even if a piece of work is very late, it is always better to turn it in that not; I won't refuse it and will always give you *some* credit. As a rule I will not, however, accept written work from earlier in the semester after the end of the last week of regular class; only end-of-semester work may be turned in during finals week.

Revision Policy:

Yes, you are welcome to revise your first and/or second essay if you are dissatisfied with the grade -- so long as there is time left in the semester to do so. If I give the revision a higher grade, it replaces the old grade. However, you are required meet with me first to go over my comments and your revision plans. I expect substantial rethinking/rewriting in a revised paper; except in special, mutually agreed-upon cases, I will return unmarked a revision that contains only mechanical or sentence-level changes. When you submit a revised essay, you must also attach the original copy of the first version along with my comments and grade sheet; I cannot evaluate your changes otherwise. Due dates for revisions are generally negotiable/flexible, since I realize you need to juggle due-dates for other papers, but I will not accept revisions after the last week of regular class (i.e., no last-minute revisions of earlier work will be accepted during finals week; I have too much to grade then as it is!). I will not typically accept revisions of short response papers or other informal writing.

In general, if you are unhappy with your marks on written work you have submitted, please consult with me and we'll determine whether, and how, you might improve your

score on these or your ultimate grade in the class. Obviously, the earlier in the semester we discuss this, the more opportunity there is for you to make a meaningful difference in your grade.

I am always willing to look at your paper drafts or meet with you about paper ideas. I encourage you to come to my office hours or make individual appointments at other times for this purpose. I can almost always give you feedback that will help you write a better paper. If time is tight for scheduling an individual meeting, you can e-mail me your draft as a Word attachment; that way I'll probably get it quickly and I can send it back to you with comments as soon as I've read it. But I make no promises about work sent to me the day before the paper is due.

Format for Submitting Class Work:

All essays must be word-processed/typed in a plain, average-sized font, double-spaced, with approximately 1" margins on all sides, on 8 1/2" x 11" plain paper. I recommend Times Roman 12-pt. font (as in this syllabus) or something similar. No special effects!

No separate title page is necessary. At the top of the first page of your paper (I don't care which corner[s]), include your name, the name of this course, and the date. Centered beneath that, give your paper a title that gives some idea what it is about – do not use just the title of the work you are writing about. Double-spacing between the title and the beginning of the text makes it easier to read. Also, please number your pages -- do so by hand if you forget to do it on the computer.

In a separate page at the end of your paper, list all the texts you have used in the paper in correct MLA style. There are guides to MLA style in any writer's handbook and on countless websites, and we will review it in class. If you have a question, please ask.

All quotations from the text or direct references to passages in the text of the work(s) you are writing about must be followed by page references (or line references, when you are quoting poetry). I expect prose, poetry, and dialogue to be quoted in the correct form(s) once we have reviewed these in class.

Proofread your paper carefully (spell-checkers help but won't do the whole job [*see?*]); numerous typos and other errors you could easily have fixed make you look careless or indifferent and will detract from your grade, probably more than one or two honest mistakes in syntax will.

Also, be sure to save all your work on a disk or a flash drive, both completed papers and important writing in progress. On occasion papers do get misplaced during the grading process – or your computer may crash. Don't let this become a crisis!

Attendance:

Expected and required. I do take attendance in class, and more than a few absences will cause you to begin losing points from the 25 allotted in the course for attendance and participation. Legitimate reasons for missing class include your own illness; a death or medical emergency in your immediate family; your required attendance at an official University-sponsored event; or dangerous driving conditions. If one of these pertains to you, please notify me by e-mailing me or leaving a message on my office voice-mail, if possible before the class you will miss.

If a situation arises that will cause you to miss a number of classes, notify me as soon as you reasonably can so that we can discuss how we will handle it. If you are going through a personal or family crisis that wreaks havoc with your ability to participate in the class, I strongly urge you to withdraw from it: see the reading and assignment schedule for the last date this semester on which you may withdraw with a "W." Every semester a few students have problems and ask for Incompletes: in my experience few of them ever complete their coursework later. You will spare yourself and me future headaches by not getting yourself into this situation. There is no stigma attached to withdrawing from a course.

Academic Ethics:

All students are expected to abide by the University's official policy on academic ethics. You can review this policy at <http://www.uni.edu/pres/policies/301.html>. If you have any question about what would constitute plagiarism in relation to your use of a particular source, please consult with me or, if I am not available, with another faculty member. Keep a record of the sources you consult while doing research for a piece of writing; you should be able to retrieve all sources consulted if an issue should arise.

Any work you submit that appears intentionally plagiarized (you attempt to pass off language, ideas, or a complete text from another source as your own, assuming or hoping I won't be able to tell) will be graded F, and *at minimum* you will have to redo the assignment from the beginning on another topic, under close supervision. I reserve the right to automatically fail any student from the course for wholesale or repeated plagiarism. All cases of plagiarism are required to be reported to the Department Head and University Provost and become part of the student's record.

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability requiring special accommodation in the classroom or for exams or other assignments, please contact me early in the semester so we can work out the appropriate adjustments. Please bring some kind of official documentation if possible; I should receive this directly from the university, but I may not have it at hand.

Preliminary Schedule of Readings and Assignment due dates

August

- T 22 Introduction to course; discussion of what “literature” is and different ways of approaching it.
- Th 24 Read Steven Lynn, *Texts and Contexts*, chaps. 1-2. Experiment with applying different critical approaches to a short sample text.
- T 29 Read Lynn, chap. 3 (New Criticism). Begin reading Anne Bradstreet, “To My Dear and Loving Husband” (1); “A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick Employment” (4); “To her Father with some Verses” (6).
- Th 31 Continue Bradstreet; read all the poems on pages 1-18, plus “The Flesh and the Spirit” (46-68); we will pay particular attention to the three elegies on 16-17. Go over correct form for quoting poetry in an essay.

September

- T 5 Read Lynn, chap. 8 (Feminist Criticism, etc.). Read Bradstreet, “The Prologue” (70-72); “The Author to Her Book” (viii); “In Honour of . . . Queen Elizabeth” (62-65).
- Th 7 Begin reading Edna St. Vincent Millay (including Introduction to *Early Poems*, paying particular attention to xvii to xxi), “Renascence” (3-10), poems on pages 24-41.
- T 12 Continue Millay, sonnets on pages 42, 43, 46, 47, 72, 74, 76, plus some later sonnets I will provide in Xerox form; read Introduction xxxv-xxxvi.
- Th 14 Continue Millay, poems on pages 51-54, “Spring” (79); “Weeds” (95); “Passer Mortuus Est” (96); “Song of a Second April” (101); “Ebb” (115); “Wild Swans” (139); sonnets on pages 140, 141, 143, 144, 146, 151. In-class writing: practice analysis of a sample poem.
- T 19 Come to class with a clear idea of the question and poem(s) you want to focus on in your paper, and a written paraphrase or summary of what your chosen poem is literally saying (plus an indication of any lines that you have questions about) that you will turn in to me. In class, discussion of writing effective introductions; time for drafting and sharing a provisional introduction for you paper.
- Th 21 **Complete draft of Paper 1 due.** Read Lynn, chap. 4 (Reader Response Criticism). Freewriting exercise.
- T 26 Paper workshopping (in class).

Th 28 Paper workshopping (small groups).

October

- T 3 **Final version of Paper 1 due.** Read Rebecca Harding Davis, *Life in the Iron-Mills* (the story itself [39-74] is all that's required, though you might want to start reading the Introduction [3-25], required for next week).
- Th 5 Lynn chap. 6 (Historical and Cultural Studies). Bring *Life in the Iron-Mills* to class as well.
- T 10 *Life in the Iron-Mills*: read "Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background" (3-25) and "Work and Class" section introduction (77-83), plus selected sources: Longfellow (83-84), Tocqueville (85-88), Campbell (88-92), Glazier (92-97), Layton (123-131), Carnegie (147-156). In class discuss sources and how they can be related to the story.
- Th 12 *Life in the Iron-Mills*: read and discuss "Social Reform and the Promise of the Dawn" section intro (203-209) and further selected sources: Brownson (209-220), Beecher (221-226), Strong (250-255), Whittier (271-272), Stowe (272-274). Come to class with a 1-2 page written discussion of how one passage from any of today's sources might be related to one passage in (or some more general aspect of) Davis's story.
- T 17 *Life in the Iron-Mills*: discuss further selected sources in small working groups (you'll have a choice to focus on the topics of "factory girls," art and artists, or women and writing).
- Th 19 Review of citing sources using MLA style. Group brainstorming/shaping of potential paper topics.
- T 24 **Draft of Paper 2 due (multiple copies). If you wish to receive written comments from me on your draft by Thursday 10/26, you must send me your draft as an attachment by 9:00 a.m. Monday 10/23.**
Begin discussing Toni Morrison, *Beloved* read author's Foreword and pages 1-33); also read May, "Margaret Garner and Seven Others" (a 19th-C account of the event the story is based on) in *Beloved: A Casebook*, ed. Andrews & McKay (25-36).
- Th 26 Workshop drafts in small working groups.
- F 27 *Last day to withdraw from course without an F*
- T 31 **Final version of Paper 2 due.** Continue discussing *Beloved*; I will give you page assignments as the time approaches.

November

- Th 2 Continue discussing *Beloved*.
- T 7 Finish *Beloved*. Come to class with at least one idea for a paper on the novel that involves researching what other critics have written about it (that is, what do you think is an important/interesting interpretive question that others have probably written about and that you or someone else might like to pursue?). Discussion of what an Annotated Bibliography is.
- Th 9 I will be out of town at a conference. Required library orientation on electronic resources for literary study (using MLA Bibliography, Expanded Academic ASAP, JSTOR, and others). Read Lynn, chap. 9 (Research and Documentation).
- T 14 Reading literary criticism: read Rushdy, “Daughters Signifyin(g) History” and Krumholz, “The Ghosts of Slavery” in *Beloved: A Casebook*. Outside class, you should be gathering sources for your Annotated Bibliography and refining the idea for your topic proposal.
- Th 16 Reading literary criticism: read Harris, “Beloved: Woman, Thy Name is Demon” in *Beloved: A Casebook*.
- T 21 **Paper 3 Topic Proposal and Annotated Bibliography due.** Continue discussing literary criticism or another activity as it seems useful.
- Th 23 Happy Thanksgiving Day!
- T 28 Group sharing of research resources, interpretive findings in *Beloved* criticism. Make sure you’ve really *read* the sources on your Annotated Bibliography by this point. Discussion of how to gracefully incorporate other critics’ voices in your writing (hopefully without drowning out your own).
- Th 30 **Self-reflection for semester due in class, in a folder along with all informal writing from the semester.** In-class course evaluation. I will be available in the classroom for individual consultation.

December

- T 5 No regular class; available for individual meetings in my office.
- Th 7 No regular class; I will be available in my office. **Paper 3 due by 3 p.m. today in my office or the English office.**
- W 13 8:00-9:50 a.m., official exam period; no exam, but I will hand back Paper 3 in my office.

Extra Credit Opportunities:

The first extra credit opportunity is available while we are working on the poetry, the second while we are working on *Life in the Iron-Mills*, the third while we are working on *Beloved*. The fourth may be done at any time when there is an appropriate event.

Completed by Tuesday, Oct. 3: Come to my office and successfully recite for me a poem by Bradstreet or Millay that you have memorized. The poem must be at least 10 lines long. (3 points extra credit)

Completed by Thursday, November 7: Write a reflective essay, 3-4 pages, in which you consider how your “subject position” as a reader of one or more of the texts we’ve covered is shaped by one or more of the following: your gender; your/your family’s class/economic position; your ethnic, racial, or regional background; your attitudes towards religion and/or sexuality (what factors in your experience shaped those attitudes?); or any other category of identification or experience you think significantly influences you as a reader of literature. (4 points extra credit)

Completed by Tuesday, Dec. 5: Watch the film version of *Beloved* (Dir. Jonathan Demme, 1998) and write a response of 2-3 pages, discussing the film as an adaptation of the novel or reflecting on how viewing the film affected your response to the novel. (4 points extra credit)

Any time in the semester, but completed no later than Dec. 5: Attend one of the plays performed at Theatre UNI, or a poetry reading or other literary event sponsored by the English Department (I’ll try to announce these as I receive notices of them), or other literature-related events in the community or surrounding area (subject to approval by me). Write a response discussing the event and your experience of it. (3 points extra credit; only one such event may be counted towards your semester grade.)

620:034:02 Critical Writing about Literature F 06 Myles

First Paper – Close Reading a Poem

For this paper, you need to perform a *close reading* of a single poem by Bradstreet or Millay. Your goal is a paper that A) articulates an overall argument about the poem, and B) supports your thesis by a detailed, observant discussion of the poem. You need to show that you understand what the poem is literally saying—its “prose sense”—and also show sensitive attention to such elements as images, metaphors, word choice, tone, etc. You are also expected to use the correct form(s) for quoting poetry, which we will review in class, and to identify the lines you quote by line numbers. The paper should be at least three pages long—but it may well take you more space to discuss a poem fully. Concentrate on doing justice to your idea and the nuances of the poem, not on achieving a certain page limit.

The questions below set up various starting points for discussing a poem by the poet you choose. Note that they all require you to make an argument about a poem. I am more concerned that you make a coherent argument about a poem and do a good reading of the text than that you address the question exactly as I asked it, so it is allowable to redefine the topic slightly to fit what you have to say (but if you feel like you’re redefining it a *lot*, it would probably be wise to check with me). It is also more important that you offer an insightful discussion of a poem than that you precisely follow one critical theory: as I’ve no doubt said in class, in actual practice critics typically mix modes.

For Bradstreet or Millay

Using a poem from one of the writers as your focus, attempt a New Critical reading of the poem, one that in some way addresses the three “steps” outlined on page 46 of Lynn. (Remember, these are conceptual steps in developing an interpretation, *not* a sequence of issues you can use to structure the progression of your paper.) Because New Criticism privileges texts with complexities and ambiguities, you should choose a poem you think contains some; not all poems will lend themselves well to this critical approach (which has, as well, often marginalized women writers).

Anne Bradstreet

Some (typically older) literary critics find in Bradstreet’s poetry a struggle between Bradstreet’s voice/perspective as a woman, who loves strongly and feels grief and anger at loss, and her voice/perspective as a Puritan, who knows she’s not allowed to question her society’s religious beliefs openly and is expected to submit to God’s will. Other (typically more recent) literary critics say that we cannot find such ambivalence in Bradstreet’s work: her struggles with “the flesh” are an expected part of every Puritan’s spiritual journey, and she speaks as a Puritan woman who fully embraces her faith. Using a poem of your choice as your focus, make an argument supporting one or the other of these perspectives, using a close reading of the poem’s details and tone to support your case.

Bradstreet, another option

Write a paper that performs a feminist reading of Bradstreet's "The Prologue." Can you resolve the seemingly contradictory attitudes Bradstreet expresses about herself as a woman poet? How do you read her tone in the poem—is she sincerely self-critical? Playfully self-deprecating? Satirical towards potential male critics? To come up with an argument about what the poem is saying about women and writing will require attending not just to what Bradstreet is literally saying but how she is saying it and what she expects her readers to hear. (It may be helpful to know that we have no record of anyone in fact criticizing Bradstreet for her writing, though she could not necessarily anticipate this when she wrote the poem.)

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Millay is a poet who writes in traditional poetic forms, yet often with a non-traditional perspective. (She is also, as Peppe points out in the Introduction, non-traditional in writing love sonnets from a modern woman's point of view.) Using a poem of your choice (probably but not necessarily a sonnet) as your focus, make a case for how Millay brings something new to the conventions of the love sonnet by using the form to express a distinctively modern, liberated, *and/or* female-centered perspective on love or some other experience.

Emily Dickinson

251

Over the fence –
Strawberries – grow –
Over the fence –
I could climb – if I tried, I know –
Berries are nice!

But – if I stained my Apron –
God would certainly scold!
Oh, dear, – I guess if He were a Boy –
He'd – climb – if He could!