
Women & Fiction: Short Stories by and about Women

OSHER 724-001

Dates: Thursdays, 1/22/15 – 2/26/15

Times: 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Location: Commander's House, Fort Douglas

Instructor: Sally Smith

Course Overview

Class 1

A consideration of the differences between the woman in Doris Lessing's "To Room 19," her classic story about a woman's boredom, and Grace Paley's large-spirited protagonist in "An Interest in Life" can lead to a sense of the differences between English sensibility and American sense, or... between cerebration and celebration as two contrasting modes of consciousness.

Cahill, Susan. Women & Fiction: Short Stories by and about Women. New York: Signet Classics, 2002.

Class 2

Joyce Carol Oates's "in the Region of Ice" and Alice Munro's "The Office" have to do with virginity, real and symbolic, as ways of both preserving and and losing one's humanity. Celibacy and human intercourse emerge as two ways of being to be [in the world] to be evaluated by the reader.

ibid

Class 3

The social differences between the women in the stories by Maeve Brennan and Julie Hayden are significant, but both the Irish mother who has lost her first baby in Brennan's "The Eldest Child" and the young woman who has had an abortion in Hayden's "Day-Old Baby Rats" are defined by loss.

ibid

Class 4

In "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" by Gertrude Stein and "Cousin Lewis" by Jean Stubb, and in Colette's "The Secret Woman," each writer is concerned in different ways with the mystery of sexual definition. Stein and Colette treat the subject of their characters' sexuality with a playful elusiveness. Jean Stubbs's story, however, unfolded against a more complex psychological background, arrives at a more profound truth.

Class 5

"The Other Two" by Edith Warton explores the theme of the affluent society as a moral wasteland, particularly with regard to marriage and divorce.

The first sentence of Kay Boyle's "Winter Night" states the theme: "There is a time of apprehension which begins with the beginning of darkness, and to which only the speech of love can lend security." In a world at war, children and adults alike suffer from the dearth of words of love.

Class 6

Flannery O'Connor had a penchant for writing stories of "redemption through catastrophe." Her story "Revelation" takes place in a doctor's waiting room, where Mrs. Ruby Turpin is forced to confront her own high opinion of herself, and it is uncertain how she will react to this new knowledge. Edna O'Brien does not care for the social virtues, and, because of her frank portrayal of human sexuality, many of her works are still banned in Ireland. In "A Journey," a middle-class girl picks up a working man and goes on an overnight trip with him. In this story disaster never actually overtakes the lovers, but the writing is on the wall.

The text, Women and Fiction edited by Susan Cahill (isbn 978-0-451-52827-8) is available at Frost's Books, 1980 E. 2700 South (\$8.95) or online from Amazon.com

Be prepared to discuss the first two stories on the first day of class.