Ashley Miller

Professor Laura Buchholz

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Course Reflection

**Part A**

Over the course of this spring semester in Women Writers, I would like to highlight three authors I found crucial to analyzing the female voice in literature and contributing to criticisms of gender and cultural stigmas of the time period.

Navigating the course chronologically by the authors and their text presented, I would like to address Jane Austen and her work into the conversation of performing gender and how the text *Persuasion* speaks to conforming or contesting feminine convention. While I actually enjoy Jane Austen’s writing and consider diving into her literary pieces as a comforting and easy selection, I would not consider her characters, especially when considering *Persuasion*, as overtly feminist or rebelling against societal expectations. I believe the narrative and the characters construct a storyline that allow Austen to highlight the limitations of women and the social conventions that steer the trajectory of their life, but ultimately do not succeed in presenting a transgressive female figure withstanding patriarchal influence.

Instead in *Persuasion*, the aspects of class structure and how individuals attempt to ascend their place in society are more central to the text for women’s role and how they “perform gender”. The commentary and overall assumptions towards different levels of class or distinctions towards different professions in regards to improving social standing and what would be considered traditionally valued play a large part in the context of the novel, and what I assume, attempts to challenge or defend Austen’s own views of class structure in early nineteenth-century British society.

Austen’s work reveals, both socially and culturally, the confining roles women were defined to and defined by. However, her work, while providing commentary to traditional values of the domestic sphere and pressing the importance of social standings, subverts her characters inclinations and returns them to a role fitting of their social and gender sphere that would be accepted by her audience. Rather, I wanted to mentioned Austen and her work as significant to Women Writers not because of an overt and nonconformist stance exhibited by the heroines of her text, but because of Austen’s own presence as a female author. I think it’s note-worthy in itself and contributes to females surpassing societal expectations for the fact that Austen did not marry and pursued writing as a career.

The next author in the course I would like to include is Zora Neale Hurston. Similar to my interpretation of her text *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, I think it’s incredibly crucial how Hurston structures the entirety of the text and presents the feminine perspective through immense detail. How gender is represented through the main events and relayed by the protagonist provides value to understanding the character’s struggles, not only through the feminine voice illustrated but also through the “double oppression” the text navigates.

In this regard, I think navigating both gender and racial criticisms for Hurston was all the more difficult but essential to contributing to the discussion of intersectionality and feminist writing as a whole.

I think it would be a disservice not to include Hurston in this brief reflection of authors over the course as I believe her work is crucial to the influence of Black literature and Black womanhood being brought into the conversation. Her writing is representative of Black vernacular and gives insight into dually-imposed challenges for women of color.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize Toni Morrison and her literary work. I find Morrison’s work not only essential and foundational to literature, but also fascinating in general. The way she treats gender, race, and sex when illustrating both male and female characters to provide commentary and elucidate concepts in her work is thoroughly complex and evocative. I find it hard to contextualize whether she is subverting patriarchal expectations and limitations because, to me at least, she is creating a literary genre all her own that while notes the dualistic oppression of characters and the history that forms the trajectory of their life, overall has more to say then simply if they’re abiding by social and cultural conventions. This is why Morrison’s work holds the most value for me, she challenges my interpretation of the text and her characters by cultural standards even I’ve become too accustomed to and presents a literary narrative that forces you to consider more than just a White and narrow reception.

**Part B**

While working on completing the research essay, the assignment really allowed me to get intimate with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. By examining the text through an intersectional lens and delving into just how the horror of the slave experience leaves an everlasting impression and how that is exemplified fictionally to speak on trauma and its aftermath towards women of color really just brought home the gruesome illustration to the conditions of traumatic violence black women experience. Even now I don’t feel justified to speak on this or empathize an understanding because it’s truly something I will never be capable of, regardless of the critical race theory and articles I read on addressing racial traumatic violence and gendered racism. If anything, I’m grateful to have been able to explore Beloved for these complexities that elucidate such a brutal reality and prompt the discussion for these points of problematized healing women of color often navigate. Sara Kaplan’s “Love and Violence/Maternity and Death: Black Feminism and the Politics of Reading (Un)Representability,” and Shawn Arango Ricks, “Normalized Chaos: Black Feminism, Womanism, and the (Re)definition of Trauma and Healing,” really helped me grasp a semblance of these issues and how Beloved is key to bringing an attention to and addressing intersectionality, black women and feminism, and giving voice to the Black female slave experience.

In regards to my finished research paper, I’m content in how it turned out and allowed me to explore these issues in relation to *Beloved*.