

Beyond the Domestic: Women in British Literature and Culture 1790-1930

Course Abstract

Socio-cultural ideology in the Long 19th Century manifested itself through a distinctly gendered ontology: the domestic was the domain of the feminine and the public was masculine territory. Moreover, the domestic sphere inspired a particular form of feminine aesthetics, which is distilled in the associative term “angel in the house”; pure, perfect and unfit for any other space but the domestic, Victorian women became prisoners of the dominant cultural trend of their era. The middle class need to preserve respectability and propriety amidst waves of massive political and economic changes, combined with archaic legislation, maintained this gendered status-quo. Women’s struggle to break the bonds of the domestic echoed at first only through the subversive nature of the literary works produced by female authors. Nevertheless, by the second half of the 19th century this trickle of literary voices grew stronger; women took action, the suffrage movement was formed and with it the image of the New Woman emerged, as the force we now identify as feminism came into being. This course aims to take a closer look at the struggle of women to break the bonds of the domestic in the Long 19th Century through the examination of the literature and treatises produced by women authors and thinkers of the era. From the onset of feminist thought in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, through the reflection of the problematic nature of the domestic in works by Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Sylvia Townsend Warner, changes in cultural attitude, and the historical and political circumstances that formed the background of these shifts will be explored.

Texts:

Mary Wollstonecraft: “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” (1792) – selected passages
Maria, or the Wrongs of Women (1798) – selected passages
Jane Austen: *Persuasion* (1817)
Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights* (1847)
M.E. Braddon: “The Face in the Glass” (1886)
Sarah Grand: “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (1894)
Mona Caird “The Yellow Drawing Room”
Virginia Woolf *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) – selected passages
Sylvia Townsend Warner: *Lolly Willowes; or The Loving Huntsman* (1926)

Additionally, we will read scholarly material by: Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Gillian Beer, Carol Senf, Rosemarie Tong, and Lena Wånggren.

Course Plan

Lecture 1	Unit 1	General Intro – The Long 19 th Century: Culture, Politics and Economy
Lecture 2		General Intro – The Long 19 th Century: Women in Literature and

		Culture
Lecture 3	Unit 2	Women's 'space' and the effects of a changing world: Jane Austen's <i>Persuasion</i>
Lecture 4		<i>Persuasion</i>
Lecture 5		<i>Persuasion</i>
Lecture 6		Election Day – No Lecture
Lecture 7	Unit 3	The changing faces of womanhood: Emily Bronte and <i>Wuthering Heights</i>
Lecture 8		<i>Wuthering Heights</i>
Lecture 9		<i>Wuthering Heights</i>
Lecture 10	Unit 4	Turning points: the women question and <i>fin-de-siècle</i> : E.M Braddon's "The Face in the Glass"
Lecture 11	Unit 5	The Suffrage Movement and the idea of the New Woman: Mona Caird's "The Yellow Drawing Room"
Lecture 12	Unit 6	War and Awakening: Sylvia Townsend Warner's <i>Lolly Willowes</i>
Lecture 13		<i>Lolly Willowes</i>