

Metamorphoses

Narratives and Theories of Becoming in Contemporary Feminism

Description of the Course

The source of inspiration for this course needs to be traced back to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, a seminal text that has invited us to shift the emphasis in our understanding of (female) subjectivity from biology to history and culture. In arguing that "one is not born, one becomes a woman," Beauvoir does not simply draw attention to the social discourses/practices through which what is normally taken as an "essence" (i.e. "Woman") is constructed. She also throws light on the multiple *possibilities* of women (rather than "Woman"), their potential for what she calls "transcendence:" in other words, their ability to move beyond the limits imposed on them and imagine/re-create themselves *otherwise*. The aim of this course is to trace the legacy of Beauvoir's shift of focus from being to becoming in the work of contemporary women theorists, writers and artists. Particular effort will be made to examine how this legacy is revised and re-invested in the fast-changing scenery of our global, post-industrial society where the traditional boundaries between man/woman, animal/human, human/machine, mind/body, natural/artificial are increasingly being transgressed.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge & Understanding (Theory Component)

- Appreciate the need to understand human subjectivity in general and female subjectivity in particular as the product not of biology but of history and culture;
- Develop an understanding of the key concerns of contemporary feminism and trace the legacy of Simone de Beauvoir in the work of post-1960s women theorists, writers and artists.
- Examine the connections between contemporary feminist concerns and postmodern philosophical debates on the nature and distinctness of the "human", its relation to nature and animality, its dependence on techne/technology and artifice.

Key Skills (Practical Component)

- Draw on existing knowledge of textual and cultural analysis to produce theoretically-informed readings of selected literary texts or artworks.
- Apply the required skills in scholarly research and citation to write academic essays.
- Compose informed responses to the competing theoretical perspectives in contemporary feminism.
- Debate the validity of arguments in the primary and secondary theoretical material.
- Develop effective presentation skills.

Required Texts

Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*
Fay Weldon, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*
Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*
Jan Morris, *Conundrum*

Note: All other texts are included in your course-packet.

Useful Secondary Material (all on short loan)

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier (London: Vintage Books, 2011).

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London & NY: Routledge, 1990).

Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).

Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London & NY: Routledge, 1989).

Janet Price & Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1990).

Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit, eds. *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

Toril Moi, *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press, 1999).

Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London & New York, Routledge, 1995).

Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

Susan Stryker & Stephen White, eds. *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London & New York, Routledge, 2006).

Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (Teachers' College Press, 1994).

Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Susan Ostrov Weisser, ed. *Women and Romance: A Reader*. (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

Linda Christian-Smith, *Becoming a Woman through Romance*. (London & New York, Routledge, 1991).

Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs*. (Zed Books, 1996).

Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

Grading

The final grade for this course will be based on: a) the completion of assigned reading *before* each meeting, b) *active* participation in class-discussions, c) *regular* attendance, d) a 20-minute oral presentation (plus a 1.000-word essay based on the presentation) and e) a 2.500-word essay due on the day of the final exam (a one-page outline of your main argument plus working bibliography sheet due in week 13).

Please note that academic honesty is absolutely required: ***plagiarism is unacceptable*** in any form and will automatically lead to your failure in the course.

Outline of the Course

Week 1: ***Introduction***

"One is not Born, One Becomes a Woman"

Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction," *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Books, 2011). 3-17.

Week 2: Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction" (cont.)

The Project of Becoming

Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 35-49.

Week 3: Judith Butler (cont.)

Toril Moi, "The Body is a Situation: Simone de Beauvoir," *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999). 59-83.

Week 4: Toril Moi (cont.)

Kimberly Peirce, *Boys don't Cry* (film)

Week 5: Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*

Week 6: Angela Carter (cont.)

Week 7: ***Incredible Performances***

Judith Butler, "From Interiority to Gender Performatives," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London & NY: Routledge, 1990). 134-141.

Judith Williamson, "Images of 'Woman': The Photography of Cindy Sherman," Helen Crowley & Susan Himmelweit, eds., *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992). 222-234.

Arthur Coleman Danto, "Cindy Sherman," *The Nation*, August 15/22, 1987: 120-126.

Week 8: ***Metamorphoses: Cinderella Revisited***

Jan Morris, *Conundrum*

Week 9: Jan Morris (cont.)

Metamorphoses: The Other Side

Judith Halberstam, "F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity," *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999). 125-133.

Week 10: Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*

Week 11: Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* (cont.)

Week 12: ***Metamorphoses: Cinderella meets Frankenstein***

Kathy Davis, "'My Body is My Art': Cosmetic Surgery as Feminist Utopia?" *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999). 454-465.

Discussion of the artist Orlan

Fay Weldon, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*

Week 13: Fay Weldon (cont.)

Anne Cranny-Francis, "Feminist Romance" in *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). 177-192.