ENGL/WMNS 315A: Survey of Women’s Literature
Class No. 4099

Course Description and Learning Objectives: Much of women’s literature has portrayed women within the space of the home and in relation to the family. However, women have also actively engaged with spaces like streets to protest against injustice. These kinds of spaces like the home and the streets cannot be separated out into private space and public space as some critics have done. During this semester, we’ll study the intersections of such spaces where gender injustice at home is intimately tied to political protests on the streets. We’ll think together about how the representations of women’s lives bring the private into intimate conversation with the public sphere. Throughout the course we will critically engage with the following questions: How does a feminist frame of reference offer us alternative understandings of women’s lives? What is the relationship between the historical tradition of women’s writings and a feminist tradition of such writing? How do we connect our explorations of these issues to our driving question: Why do we need to define a survey course introducing women writers exclusively?

Using various genres of literature such as fiction, poetry, and essays, together we will survey the history of women’s literature from the medieval period to the present day. These writings by women are drawn from canonical British and American literature as well as more diverse ethnic and world literature. I will ask you to examine intersections of different types of spaces to interpret texts focusing on figures of women. We will bring a feminist critical lens to these texts, but this lens will also bring into dialogue critical race studies with its emphasis on not only class, but also race. Together we will also explore the purposes of primary and secondary research to help you carry out well-researched writing. I will, in the process, ask you to formulate convincing and coherent arguments through informal and formal critical writing, a short paper, a longer research paper, oral presentations, and class participation. This survey course aims to lay the intellectual foundation for more specialized courses in women’s literature for students who will later on pursue advanced courses in this terrain. At the same time it will offer a basic but comprehensive understanding of women’s literature to students.