

GENG 221: Gender and Literature

Burruss 0034 – MWF 3:35-4:25



INSTRUCTOR

Julie Sorge Way (English, Women's Studies)

Office Hours:

Keezell 412 – MWF 12:10-1:20, 4:30-5:00

Contact: geng221@gmail.com

Course website:

<http://sites.google.com/site/sorgewayjmu/geng221>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Was Eve framed? The so-called battle of the sexes is a story just about as old as literature itself. What makes up our ideas of “feminine” or “masculine” has certainly changed over time – for example, while flipping channels, have you ever run across a Sean Connery James Bond movie from the 1960s or an black-and-white rerun of a 1950s family comedy like *I Love Lucy*? Maybe it played and you didn't think about the plot much at all – but chances are pretty good that when you paid attention there were moments where you found yourself laughing – or maybe cringing – at the “outdated” ways that ideas of femininity (and masculinity) were portrayed. How is it even possible that what was once mainstream entertainment, the pop culture of a different time, can be so different from what people find enjoyable, compelling, or interesting today?

Or is it, in fact, much different? In this class we're going to explore these types of questions every single day, by tracing the history of how gender has been portrayed in English language literature from different periods. This will be an active class – you'll be reading several books (of course), but also reading articles and some feminist theory, seeing movies, analyzing popular music, writing reviews, and presenting a creative project. By the end of the course, I hope you'll approach the cultural texts in your own life with your eyes wide open and a little more understanding of how the complicated concept of gender works in the world around us.

READINGS AND RESOURCES FOR GENG 221

Required Textbooks:

Great Poems by American Women ISBN 9780486401645

Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson ISBN 9780316184137

Women and Fiction (Ed. Cahill) ISBN 9780451528278

Lysistrata by Aristophanes ISBN 9780486282251

The Awakening and Other Stories by Kate Chopin ISBN 9780199536948

Mrs Dalloway by Virginia Woolf ISBN 9780156628709

We Have Always Lived in the Castle by Shirley Jackson ISBN 9780140071078

The Color Purple by Alice Walker ISBN 9780156028356

Fun Home by Alison Bechdel ISBN 9780618871711

Suggested Textbooks (everyone will choose one):

Middlemarch (Penguin Classics) by George Eliot ISBN 9780141196893

Jane Eyre (Penguin Classics) by Charlotte Bronte ISBN 9780141040387

Pride and Prejudice (Penguin Classics) by Jane Austen ISBN 9780141040349

Additional class readings will be available via the course website – these include book chapters, news articles, short stories, song lyrics, poems, and essays. Most are available as PDFs. You can print a

copy to mark up for class, which is probably preferable, or bring a computer with you to read along as we go through it together.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through reading, discussion, analytical papers, group projects, and reviews, we will:

- Study literature using a gender studies lens that recognizes the social construction of gender, power inequities, and the intersectionality of gender and sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class
- Gain familiarity with the history of feminism and gender studies, learning the vocabulary of this discipline.
- Read and analyze literary works from various historical periods, watching for the evolving ways (historical and cultural, local and global) that gender is constructed in each text.
- Connect the ways society has changed and continues to change in our texts, and what the roles of literary texts might be in societal change.
- Critically analyze the books we read in terms of the assumptions and biases they show, and also compare these books to each other to illuminate changes in society.
- Identify the ways that biases and injustice in our contemporary world relate to literary texts – they are signs of the beliefs of their historical moment, and they are also creators of their moments.
- Frame useful questions about new texts outside of class using the terms we've learned with our readings, and identify the similarities between the biases and injustice of our current world and those of other periods.
- Appreciate human of diversity through the study of literature and develop skills of critical thinking.
- Apply your improved critical thinking skills of examination of biases and assumptions in texts to your own ways of thinking about gender.

PARTS OF THE COURSE:

Participation

Daily Learning Activities – To help you learn to read and interpret our readings well through discussion and in-class activities

Preparation – To help you come ready for our activities, every class day you'll have an SRP (reading response, see p. 6 for details) due, along with some reading quizzes at the beginning of class

Classroom Contribution – To add to our learning environment, this includes your thoughtfulness, helpfulness, sensitivity, and investment in the material as demonstrated during class

Examinations – To help you demonstrate that you know the material and are able to apply it, you will have a midterm exam (during 1 class period) and cumulative final exam (in the final exam period) which each include a section of short answer and/or multiple-choice questions and a larger section of essay questions. At least one take-home application essay question will be given out ahead of time.

Project/Presentation – To expand your learning beyond the scope of our readings, near the end of term, you'll be completing a project in which you relate what we've been learning to contemporary texts around you in the real world. You'll turn in your research to me, and share your findings in a short presentation.

Critical Papers – To practice the vital skill of critical thinking and the practice of interpretation and analysis of literature, you will be writing two critical papers around 2000 words each, analyzing literature for the impacts and implications of gender.

GRADING PROCEDURES

Missed work policy –

Late work receives a grade of zero in this course unless we have made arrangements prior to its due date. If we have agreed upon prior arrangements, deadlines and exams missed because of illness or emergencies may be made up at instructor discretion. Remember that computers are not always reliable. Programs crash and printers malfunction. Please note that computer failure is not a valid excuse for turning in late work. Be sure to print your papers with plenty of time to spare before class. Every major assignment must be completed in order for you to pass this class. With genuinely extenuating circumstances, come see me and we'll talk. University policies on adding/dropping courses, incomplete grades, and withdrawals can be found at <http://www.jmu.edu/registrar/FAQ.shtml>

Rubrics –

The creative projects, critical papers, and essays you turn in with your exams will be graded according to grading criteria which will be made available to you. Please don't hesitate to ask for clarification so that you fully understand what is expected.

Weighting of final grades:

Participation	25% of course grade
Midterm Exam	10% of course grade
Cumulative Final Exam	15% of course grade
Project	15% of course grade
Critical Paper 1	20% of course grade
Critical Paper II	25% of course grade

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE

Since every activity and project in this course stems from your readings, it's important for us to talk about what reading and preparing well for class really means.

This isn't just reading for content, as you might do with a math textbook or science article. Quite often, the style of the writing itself is what matters, just as much or even more than the topics or plot. Sometimes you'll need to read the selections once to get an idea of what the writer is doing, and a second time to pull out meaningful points for discussion, your responses, or things you noticed that you might use in your papers and project later. This will get easier as the semester goes on, and you will probably find your own best system, but here are a few tips for getting started:

1. Select your surroundings – We are all so used to multitasking, but meaningful reading isn't easy, and it isn't something that can be done well with distractions and interruptions. For some people, reading well means consciously turning off your phone, closing that browser window with Facebook in the background, or going to a room where no one else can bother you. There are dozens of rooms like this in the libraries, if your home space doesn't offer it. Consider what lighting, seating, and sound do to your productivity, and adjust your environment accordingly.
2. Interact with the reading – It's easy to forget what you learned and noticed on your own by the time you get to class. To help prevent this, I recommend that you always read with a pen in your hand. Underline things that stand out to you, put question marks, stars, and short comments in the margins of your text, so that when you come back to it during class you can build off what you were learning and thinking as you read. Some people always read with a notepad or Word document open so they can jot down ideas for their response papers as they go. Some people keep the *Oxford English Dictionary* website popped up while they work so it's easy to figure out what unknown words and

phrases mean without having to interrupt their reading much. Make it straightforward for yourself to get to the knowledge you need, and find a way to write it down so you can get to it again when you need to.

COURSE CALENDAR

A Typical Week of GENG 221 will look something like this:

Weekend	Monday	Between Mon & Wed	Wednesday	Between Wed & Fri	Friday	Weekend
<p>Read: A section of a novel</p> <p>A PDF article</p> <p>A web link</p> <p>Write: A reflective SRP entry</p>	<p>In Class: Quiz</p> <p>Activity based on reading</p> <p>Preview questions for next class</p>	<p>Read: A section of a novel</p> <p>A web link</p> <p>Write: A reflective SRP entry</p>	<p>In Class: Quiz</p> <p>Activity based on questions from last time</p> <p>SRP sharing in groups</p>	<p>Read: A section of a novel</p> <p>A PDF article</p> <p>Write: A guided SRP entry – from prompt on the website</p>	<p>In Class: Activity based on guided SRP prompt</p> <p>Critical thinking practice for next paper</p>	<p>Read: A section of a novel</p> <p>A PDF article</p> <p>A web video</p> <p>Write: A reflective SRP entry</p>

Dates to Remember

These won't change, barring catastrophe.

- Critical Paper 1 – Oct 7
- Midterm exam – Oct 17
- Critical Paper 2 – Nov 14
- Project proposal – Nov 16
- Projects/Presentations – Dec 2-9
- Final exam – Wed Dec 14 1:00pm-3:00pm

Grading Scale:

- A 93-100
- A- 90-92.99
- B+ 87-89.99
- B 83-86.99
- B- 80-82.99
- C+ 77-79.99
- C 73-76.99
- C- 70-72.99
- D 60-69.99
- F 0-59.99

What is an SRP?

SRPs

Every class day, starting with your very first readings on day 2 of class, you will bring a typed, printed, one-page SRP with you to class in response to the day's assignment. This will contain:

- **Synopsis:** a very short summary of the plot of today's section. 2 sentence maximum.
- **Remarks:** Discuss at least two points in the reading that stood out to you, that you would be willing to bring up in class discussion. Use a short quote from the text as a jumping-off point, and cite it by page number (or line number if from a poem). Your "R" section can also involve questions for further discussion, or potential paper ideas that came to mind while reading. Since this class focuses on gender and the way it is constructed in and by literature, you should focus your remarks in this direction when possible.
- **Parallels:** Draw parallels between today's reading and some aspect of a previous day's. For the first week of class, you may draw parallels between today's reading and anything – another book, a movie, etc. After the first week, you should draw a parallel between today's reading and a previous reading for this class.

A successful SRP can be quite brief; a few thoughtful sentences or bulleted points per category (S,R,P) can receive full credit. Keep your completed SRPs in a thin three-prong folder (NOT BINDER), and bring it with you to every class. They will be collected and graded at random points during the semester. Pickup dates cannot be made up unless you have emailed me the SRP for the day you missed before class time. (See website for more details.) These will make up a large part of your Participation grade for the course. An informative page on SRPs, including an example of one that would receive full credit, is on our course website: please read it before our next class and come to me with any questions.

A Note on Conferences/Collaboration:

Successful writers generally collaborate with others to generate ideas, outline papers, proofread, etc. Since this is a literature survey, and not a writing class, we do not have class time allotted for in-class workshopping of your papers. However, I am always willing to meet individually to discuss your writing. I encourage you to meet with me during my office hours or at other times by appointment with any issue or assignment related to the course. Don't hesitate to email me with ideas for potential paper topics, or just to kick around ideas for the class. In fact, this often helps. I am here to help you succeed.

As you probably know, most colleges and universities have a writing center, a place for students to talk about their writing with trained peer consultants. For information on the many free resources available to you in the University Writing Center, see <http://www.jmu.edu/uwc/>

Plagiarism:

Cheating in any form will not be tolerated. This includes falsifying word counts on papers. Plagiarism is an honor code violation at JMU, punishable by receiving an F in the course and either suspension or expulsion from JMU. For more information on what plagiarism means and how to avoid it, see <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/gold/mod7ethics.htm> The issue of digital plagiarism has raised concerns about ethics, student writing experiences, and academic integrity. A digital plagiarism detection program may be used to check papers submitted in this course. You will always be asked to submit your papers in digital format (email attachment, etc.) so that your paper can be checked against the web pages and existing papers. Although you may never have engaged in intentional plagiarism, many students do incorporate sources without citations; this program can alert me to your academic needs.

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

Any student in this course who has a disability that prevents the fullest expression of his or her abilities should contact me as soon as possible so that we can discuss class requirements and recommendations necessary to ensure full participation.

Official Cluster Two learning objectives:

1. Generate increasingly nuanced questions (interpretations, ideas) about literature and explain why those questions matter.
2. Use appropriate vocabulary and tactics to analyze specific literary expressions of culture and the relationship between the reader, the author, and text.
3. Define ways that texts serve as arguments and identify rhetorical and formal elements that inform these arguments.
4. Recognize appropriate contexts (such as genres, political perspectives, textual juxtapositions) and understand that readers may interpret literature from a variety of perspectives.
5. Articulate a variety of examples of the ways in which literature gives us access to the human experience that reveals what differentiates it from, and connects it to, the other disciplines that make up the arc of human learning.

General Education Cluster Two, Group Three: The courses in Group 3 are designated as 'writing-infused.' Students will write regularly throughout the semester (a minimum of 5000 words, or about 15 pages double-spaced in a standard font) in assignments that may include both informal and formal, ungraded and graded forms. The extensive opportunity to produce and receive feedback on various genres of academic writing will help students sharpen their responses to interesting and thought-provoking texts and promote more engaged and sophisticated reading strategies.

For everything else see our course website:

<http://sites.google.com/site/sorgewayjmu/geng221>

GENG 221: Unit I Reading Assignments

UNIT ONE: Understanding and Practicing Feminist Literary Theory

Week 1	MON 8/29: Introduction to the course
	WED 8/31: Read and annotate before class: Parker Ch. 6 (handout), Grimm (handout). Write & bring to class: First SRP. See explanation in the syllabus for instructions for regular (non-Guided) SRPs.
	FRI 9/2: Read and annotate: Gilbert & Gubar (handout you print from course website), Grimm (again) Write Guided SRP: Compare the patterns in Grimm that you noticed with those in the Gilbert & Gubar article. What does this fairy tale show us about the stories we tell children? Why might any of this matter?
Week 2	MON 9/5: No class meeting
	WED 9/7: Read and annotate: <i>Lysistrata</i> (read through break at top of p.31) Write: SRP
	FRI 9/9: Read and annotate: <i>Lysistrata</i> (finish, p. 31-54) and Margery Kempe (handout you print from course website) Write Guided SRP: What ways do both Lysistrata and Margery Kempe seek to control their environments? Is this remarkable, given their historical moments? Does it matter that we are hearing their stories through a male writer? What, if anything, is there to admire in these women's choices? What, if anything can contemporary women take away from these stories?
Week 3	MON 9/12: Read and annotate: Woolf handout (print from course website) – Bradstreet poems from <i>Great Poems by American Women</i> , Chopin Short Story “The Story of an Hour” from <i>Women and Fiction</i> Write: SRP
	WED 9/14: Read and annotate: <i>The Awakening</i> (p.1-68, Ch. 1-20) Write: SRP
	FRI 9/16: Read and annotate: <i>The Awakening</i> – finish book (p. 68-128, Ch. 21-39) Write Guided SRP: How does the end of the novel work for you? How does it compare to her short story? How might this novel be different if it were written for today's audience?

This information is also available (and updated) on the course webpage:

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GENG 221: Unit 2 Reading Assignments

UNIT TWO: Early American Women's Voices

Week 4	<p>MON 9/19: Phillis Wheatley, Sarah Helen Whitman, Frances Sargent Osgood, and Phoebe Cary poems from <i>Great Poems by American Women</i> Write: SRP (as always, choose any 3 poems – check the SRP FAQ webpage with questions)</p> <p>WED 9/21: Dickinson – “26” (It’s all I have to bring today), “32” (When Roses cease to bloom, Sir), “47” (Heart! We will forget him!), “49” (I never lost as much but twice), “67” (Success is counted sweetest) Write: SRP</p> <p>FRI 9/23: Dickinson – “77” (I never heard the word escape), “79” (Going to Heaven), “88” (As by the dead we love to sit), “136” (Have you got a Brook), “148” (All overgrown by cunning moss), “167” (To learn the Transport by the Pain) Write Guided SRP: Compare one of the poems from 9/19 to one of Dickinson’s so far – what do you notice about them? Pick a pair that speak to each other in some way (e.g. have a topic or image in common) if you can.</p>
Week 5	<p>MON 9/26: Dickinson – “185” (Faith is a fine invention), “199” (I’m “wife – I’ve finished that), “211” (Come slowly – Eden!), “214” (I taste a liquor never brewed), “219” (She sweeps with many-colored Brooms), “239” (“Heaven” – is what I cannot reach) Write: SRP</p> <p>WED 9/28: Dickinson – “241” (I like a look of Agony), “243” (I’ve know a Heaven, like a Tent), “249” (Wild Nights – Wild Nights!), “254” (“Hope” is the thing with feathers), 258 (There’s a certain Slant of light), 280 (I felt a Funeral in my Brain) Write: SRP</p> <p>FRI 9/30: Dickinson – Choose any two of the following poems: 301, 303, 305, 315, 318, 324, 328, 335, 341, 351, 353, 356, 360, 377, 389, 410, 419, 421, 435, 441, 448, 449, 465, 494, 498, 501, 510, 511, 524, 536, 547, 561, 569, 572, 579, 585, 613, 624, 632, 640, 654, 657, 680, 701, 709, 712, 729, 754, 764, 812, 813, 823, 827, 836, 861, 887, 912, 917, 919, 926, 929, 967, 980, 986, 1052, 1066, 1078, 1263, 1732 Write Guided SRP: Discuss your poems in terms of gender, power, expectations, or society.</p>
Week 6	<p>MON 10/3: Edith Wharton - “The Other Two” from <i>Women and Fiction</i> Write: SRP</p> <p>WED 10/5: Willa Cather – “A Wagner Matinee” from <i>Women and Fiction</i> Write: SRP</p> <p>FRI 10/7: Critical Paper 1 Due. No SRP required.</p>

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GENG 221: Unit 3 Reading Assignments

UNIT THREE: The evolution of women's fiction

Week 7	<p>MON 10/10: Group Day – No classroom meeting of this class. Instead, meet with your novel groups for the project/presentation on your own time or during what would be our class time.</p> <p>WED 10/12: Eudora Welty - “A Worn Path” from <i>Women and Fiction</i> Write: SRP</p> <p>FRI 10/14: Katherine Anne Porter - “Rope” from <i>Women and Fiction</i> Write SRP</p>
Week 8	<p>MON 10/17: Midterm Exam in class – No SRP is due.</p> <p>WED 10/19: Katherine Mansfield- “The Garden Party” from <i>Women and Fiction</i> Write: SRP</p> <p>FRI 10/21: Virginia Woolf - “The New Dress” from <i>Women and Fiction</i> and “An Unwritten Novel” (printout) from the course website Write SRP</p>
Week 9	<p>MON 10/24: Virginia Woolf – 2 essays (on single printout) from course website: “Modern Fiction” and “How it Strikes a Contemporary” Write: SRP</p> <p>WED 10/26: Virginia Woolf – <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> 3-31 (stop at “Like a nun...”) Write: SRP</p> <p>FRI 10/28: Virginia Woolf – <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> 31-64 (stop at break on page, “It was awful”) Write Guided SRP: Which ideas from her essays on Fiction can you see in Woolf’s novel so far? Be specific and illustrate your point with quotations/citations from the text.</p>
Week 10	<p>MON 10/24: Virginia Woolf – <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> 64-122 (stop at “The door opened.”) Write: SRP</p> <p>WED 10/26: Virginia Woolf – <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> 122-151 (stop at break on page, “One of the triumphs...”) Write: SRP</p> <p>FRI 10/28: Virginia Woolf – <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> 151-end Write Guided SRP: This novel is markedly different in style from Woolf’s first two novels. Can you point to any places where her experimental prose style is part of her point in a way that linear narrative couldn’t be (e.g. where <i>form</i> becomes part of her content)?</p>

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GENG 221: Unit 4 Reading Assignments

UNIT FOUR: Contemporary Women's Voices

Week 11	MON 11/7: Tillie Olsen "I Stand Here Ironing" from <i>Women and Fiction</i> p. 207-218 Write: SRP
	WED 11/9: Shirley Jackson – <i>We Have Always Lived in the Castle</i> p. 1-105 Write: SRP
	FRI 11/11: Shirley Jackson – <i>We Have Always Lived in the Castle</i> p. 107-214 Write SRP
Week 12	MON 11/14: Alice Walker – <i>The Color Purple</i> p. 1-176 Paper Two Due. No SRP is due.
	WED 11/16: Alice Walker – <i>The Color Purple</i> p. 177-288 Write: SRP
	FRI 11/18: Group Day – No classroom meeting of this class. Instead, meet with your novel groups for the project/presentation on your own time or during what would be our class time. No SRP due.
Week 13	Thanksgiving Break – No classes at JMU
Week 14	MON 11/28: Allison Bechdel – <i>Fun Home</i> p. 1-120 Write: SRP
	WED 11/30: Allison Bechdel – <i>Fun Home</i> p. 121-232 Write: SRP
	FRI 12/2: <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> – group presentation
Week 15	MON 12/5: <i>Jane Eyre</i> – group presentation
	WED 12/7: <i>Middlemarch</i> – group presentation
	FRI 12/9: Last things, discussion of the final
Final	Exam time: Wednesday, Dec 14 th , 1:00pm-3:00pm, in our regular classroom (Burruss 34)

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Sample “SRP”

Student Name
Mansfield SRP
Date of class discussion

“The Garden Party”

SUMMARY:

The free thinking main character, Laura, wants to cancel her family’s party after she is informed of the death of a working-class man who lived down the hill. Mansfield describes Laura’s conflicting ideas of listening to her mother, and her desire to resist class relations and society.

REMARKS:

- ”Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn’t she have workmen for her friends rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper? She would get on much better with men like these” (Mansfield 2348) - This shows that Laura is aware of social classes, but she seems really naïve. Are we supposed to like for thinking this, or laugh at her?
- ”You won’t bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental” (Mansfield 2352) - This is what Jose, Laura’s sister said about her requesting to cancel the afternoon party. Her mother shared her sisters view on the matter and told her to stop asking for sympathy and raining on the party. She later brings a basket full of sandwiches to the house where he lived and there was not a mourning, but a joyous occasion. And this is where Laura has her epiphany, which is a trait of modernism as we discussed it in class.
- It was also an interesting mundane fact that Laura and her family’s house was at the top of the hill, and the Scott’s at the bottom. This shows how far “above” them they are - the distinct class separation as Laura and her family are very wealthy and in the upper class, and the Scotts are on a lower working class status.

PARALLELS:

Both in this story as well as T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” the authors use the characters’ stream of consciousness to describe the situation and further depict social status and rankings and through the view of one person.

“Gender Questions” (Handout)

To get you started when approaching texts in this course, ask yourself:

- How are male and female characters represented in this text? conventionally, unconventionally?
- What do characters do? What roles do they perform?
- Are they depicted in active or passive roles?
- What kinds of character traits, plot structures and settings are associated with femininity and with masculinity in this text?
- What qualities are attributed to being male or female?
- How do characters engage with other characters of the opposite sex? The same sex?
- Do characters demonstrate the schemata of their gender? What happens when characters move outside of this?
- How are gender assumptions being made in the text? Decide whose assumptions these are; society's, the author's or the reader's.
- How is the reader positioned by the text? Are views relating to gender imposed on us by the author? Are these male or female views?
- How is gender represented/ constructed in this text?
- What are the text's assumptions regarding gender?
- What are the images of women/ men in the text (especially images of women in texts by men)?
- How is woman identified as "Other" (merely the negative object) to man, who is then seen as the defining and dominating "Subject"?
- Look for the covert ways in which power is manipulated in the text so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of men and subordination of women.
- What are the female points of view, concerns, and values presented in the text? if they are absent, how so and why?

Some more in-depth questions, to dig even deeper:

- Do the images of women and men in the text seem to function as stereotypes, warnings, models, exceptions?
- In what systems of evaluation do they seem to be embedded? In your thinking about gender, remember to include characters who may not be invested in the novel's heterosexual plots. Remember that class, gender, sexuality, nationality, race can each be used to offer allegorical representation of arguments about the others. And vice versa.
- What are the thematics associated with women/men; with characters of different ages, classes, nationalities, regions, races? Look for distinctive places, distinctive words, distinctive images, objects, grammars. What are their implications? Do they change? Are they differentiated along more than one of these axes?
- What gender and sexual values are implied in the focus and coverage of the work? What/who is included, excluded?
- What audience is implied for the work?
- What reader expectations and assumptions about each of these dimensions seem to be embodied in it? What possibilities of different reading relations does the work suggest for differently positioned readers? Is it an easy or a hard book to read "against the grain"? How does it invite, repel, coopt, amplify, or otherwise deal with obliquely positioned readings?
- What expectations about gender and sexuality/ about age/ about class/ about nation, race, region are already embodied in the work's genre(s) or subgenre(s)? What is the relation of the work to its genre(s)/subgenre(s), and to the expectations so entailed?

- What is the usefulness of the text for analyzing and describing gender and sexual/ class/ national/ racial, etc. ideology? What are the relations of this text to the ideologies sketched?
- What relationships between/among women are presented? Between/among men? What are the bases of these relationships? What are their dynamics and rules of circulation? Are they differentiated along other axes (class, age, etc.?) How do they support, and how are they in tension with, any heterosexual presumptions that may be structuring the novel?
- Where is one to look for the historical specificity of the treatment of gender and sexuality in the work?
- What models of same-sex and other-sex attachment and desire are in play? What is their history?
- Does the novel present an implicit or explicit definition of "the sexual"? How and what? What seems to be at stake in the answer to this question? To what is "the sexual" opposed, definitionally? How stable are the oppositions? How, and how fully, is "the sexual" defined in terms of gender? In terms of procreation or its absence? In terms of class? In terms of age or generation? In terms of nationality? Of race?
- How does the term "family" play out in this text? What families are in evidence? What counts as a family-- and to whom? When several characters reside together, what links them? Blood relations (and if so, what)? Legal relations? Economic relations? How many different kinds of household can you find; how are they organized, and how related to each other? To what is "family" opposed, definitionally? How stable are the oppositions? How, how fully, and how stably is "family" defined in terms of gender and sexuality?
- What are the novel's explicit or implicit claims to present ahistorical truths of gender and/or sexuality? How do they function?
- What relations between narrator and characters are generated? Between reader and characters? Between narrator and reader? What sexual and gender dimensions characterize these relations? Do they change?
- What are the sex/ gender/ power implications of the novel's stylistic and formal choices?
- It's always worth trying to look at a given novel as—not just an example of a single genre—but a kind of anthology of generic choices, often in dialogue or even at war with one another. Think about how the terms "novel," "romance," "history," for example, might intertwine and intersect as generic markers for a given text. It's also worth putting such descriptions back into the historical context, eg. with the "rise of the novel": What is consolidated, what subsumed, what marginalized, with the "rise of the novel"? How may such narratives also be treated (in the novels themselves) as allegories of other relations (e.g. of gender, sexuality, class)?
- What images of the human body are presented? How concrete or abstract are they? To what senses do they appeal? What are their presumptions? How much and what kinds of narrative energy are attached to them? How are these bodies--as bodies--gendered, sexed, classed, and raced?

Adapted from <https://sites.google.com/site/sorgewayjmu/Home/english236/gender-questions>