

POLS 316, Spring 2014

Asma Abbas

**The Feminine and the Political;
or, How I Learnt to Stop Worrying & Love the Man**

202 Liebowitz

Informal Lounge, SU; T 8:30-11:30 am

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Office Hours: W, 1:30-3:30 pm & Th, 8-9 am

This course approaches the politics of marginal subjects through the vehicle of women thinkers, writers, characters, actors, and artists, who confront the logics of colonialism, capitalism, racism, fascism, and patriarchy by thwarting the voices, fates, destinies, narratives—and loves—conferred to them within these systems as well as within those discourses that seek to liberate them. A key goal is to show that considering political experience & judgment cannot merely involve aggregating different perspectives from discrete lenses of race, class and gender; the substance these various forms of subjections share needs to be addressed. The subject that tries to speak but cannot, the subject that refuses to answer questions everyone defaults to, the subject that evades political programmes designed for its liberation, and still asks for something—more, better—is the existential locus of this course's journey. In this way, notions of speech, disorder, pathology, trauma, romance, desire, repulsion, faith, et al., become central to approaching the trenchant critiques and rearticulations of state, society, and politics—indeed, of being—as we know them, that emerge in the works featured in this course. We will work with multiple manifestations (theory, novels, film, etc.) in a space of close reading and intimate intellectual consideration. We will *not* presume the site of womanhood or the woman's body to be an a priori, already known or knowable "object" of political work; instead, we will follow these texts into the lifeworlds of capitalism, colonialism, liberalism, and imperialism inscribed on *all* our bodies and subjectivities—some more than others, to be sure—and to the politics this asks of us. In pursuing threads of inquiry begun in the course on the subjects of war (Politics by Other Means II: Citizens, Soldiers, Revolutionaries), we will continue examining the reliance of war and politics on the feminine, not as an object, but as a premise, or at least a category in collusion. Perhaps, in our search, the Feminine will become something to which the Political must confess itself, in a departure from what usually happens.

Texts to Procure (available for purchase at the online bookstore; please defer to the details I emailed over break)

Other reading materials, marked with an asterisk in the schedule, will be available on the course Moodle page.

Arendt, Hannah, Liliane Weissberg, and Richard Winston. *Rahel Varnhagen*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

Bachmann, Ingeborg. *The Book of Franza & Requiem for Fanny Goldmann*. First English language edition. Northwestern University Press, 1999.

Bachmann, Ingeborg, Mark Anderson, and Philip Boehm. *Malina: A Novel*. 1st ed. Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1999.

Berlant, Lauren. *The Female Complaint : The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Duke UP, 2008

Brown, Louise. *Dancing Girls of Lahore*. HarperCollins, 2005.

Cixous, Helene. *Love, Itself*. Polity, 2008.

Cixous, Helene. *Rootprints: Memory and Life-Writing*. Routledge, 1997.
 Djebbar, Assia. *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories*. Seven Stories Press, 2006.
 Duras, Marguerite. *Wartime Writings: 1943-1949*. New Press, 2008.
 Honig, Bonnie, *Antigone, Interrupted*. Cambridge UP, 2013.
 Khanna, Ranjana. *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Duke, 2003.
 Malabou, Catherine. *Changing Difference*. Polity, 2011.
 Tatar, Maria. *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*. Princeton, 1995.
 Weil, Simone. *Simone Weil: An Anthology*. Grove Press, 2000.
 Wright, Melissa. *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*. Routledge, 2006.

Attendance and Participation

These requirements are mentioned on every syllabus, but they carry special weight here, largely because anything that the class will be able to do is going to be able to rely on you even more than it has in any other course where you are likely someone who has carried the weight and made that possible! I wish for you true companionships and sharings of burden this term, so that we can together work through a lot of things that have been on our minds even in the short times some of us have been together. Nothing in the class will be possible without the project of trust and intimacy, which will require giving of yourself in order to earn the right to critique and to complain. And, in this course, above any else, I have the expectation that we build a space where, without disrupting the necessary asymmetries between the professor and the student, we try our best to trust each other, myself included, in ways that the group tries its hardest to solve its issues or even just bring them to consciousness together, by talking to each other, and not through me. Hold me to this, please! Because I want to hold you to it. You are because I can rely on your ability to honour complexities, and to see another, in a remarkable way. If it must be tormenting and painful at moments, it cannot be allowed to be disheartening—at least not without the requisite affirmation of a broader spectrum of emotions with and for each other!

Reading the texts and working patiently and regularly with them in writing and speech in a timely and productive fashion is imperative. There can be no exceptions in this class. I will not be able to tolerate any late work, and I will not hesitate to ask you to leave the class if you haven't put in your share of the hours to read and write, not only for yourself, but for others. Please think strong and hard about this *now*.

Basis for Evaluation

Letters & Notebook (details in class)	45%
Final Project, Proposal and Execution	25%
Paper & Presentation	30%

Reading Schedule

All readings marked with an asterisk will be accessible via the course Moodle page.
All readings are required unless identified as “Recommended” in brackets.

Week 1, Jan 28:

Helene Cixous, *Love Itself: In the Letter Box* (Chapters I, III, V, VI, VII, VIII)
Helene Cixous, *Rootprints: Memory and Life-Writing* (pp. 1-117) [Recommended]

Week 2, Feb 4:

*J.J. Rousseau, “The Levite of Ephraim”
Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference* (read all)

Week 3, Feb 11:

Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: Life of a Jewess* (reading most of pp. 77-283)
*Selection from Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law* {Recommended}

Week 4, Feb 18:

Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina*

Week 5, Feb 25:

Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Book of Franza* from *The Book of Franza & Requiem for Fanny Goldman*
Marguerite Duras, *Wartime Writings* (selections TBA)

Week 6, Mar 4:

* Penny Gay, *As She Likes it: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (selection)
* “Shakespeare's Unruly Women” (short internet article on Moodle)
* Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the “Demonic Ground” of Caliban's Woman”
Omkara (Film, Vishal Bharadwaj, 2006)
* Marianne Novy, *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (selection) {Recommended}

Week 7, Mar 11:

Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (all of Part I, selected cases from Part II)
(probably Film TBA)

SPRING BREAK

Week 8, Apr 1:

Elissa Marder, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (selection TBA)

Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint* (selection TBA)

*MacKinnon, Catharine. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, Part II

Week 9, Apr 8:

Simone Weil, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, (pp. 85-120, 127-161 or 195, 201-238, 257-276)

*Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (selection)

Week 10, Apr 15:

Louise Brown, *The Dancing Girls of Lahore: Selling Love and Saving Dreams in Pakistan's Pleasure District* (selection TBA)

Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (selection TBA)

Week 11, Apr 22:

Assia Djebar, *The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories* (selection TBA)

*"Rudaali" (story by Mahashweta Devi or its film version)

Week 12, Apr 29:

Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* {to purchase}

Antigone {Recommended} <http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/antigone.html>

Week 13, May 6:

Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (selection TBA)

*Parama Roy, "At Home in the World? The Gendered Cartographies of Globality"

*Ania Spyra, "Is Cosmopolitanism Not for Women?: Migration in Qurratulain Hyder's *Sita Betrayed* and Amitav Ghosh's *the Shadow Lines*"

Week 14, May 13:

Review, Presentations, etc.