



אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
הפקולטה למדעי הרוח והחברה

המחלקה לספרויות זרות ובלשנות, תש"פ 2019-20

Name of the course: “Cisters: How Gender and Kinship Make Up Literary Sisterhood”

Lecturer name: Yael Segalovitz

Course number: 132.1.0370+132.1.0380

Office hours: Tuesday, 14:00-16:00

Short course description (5-10 lines) with key words at the end of the paragraph

Literary history is replete with depictions and discussions of elder-younger brother relationships, focusing for the most part on their rivalry. In this course we will turn our gaze instead to literary sisters in order to think with and through them about sibling kinship, and whether it can be defined by a dynamic other to competition. As the course's title suggests, “cisters” will bring into this conversation the English proposition “cis,” which literally means “on this side of” or “adjunct to,” but has come to carry a gender-related meaning in contemporary culture, denoting a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. In a broader sense, then, “cis” is understood today to be the opposite of “trans,” it signifies a similarity between sex and gender. By reading about sisters of all kinds we will investigate and question the binary of same-different. We will ask: Do sisters born one “on the side of” the other can only be understood as either identical or different? Does their own gender as women play a part in their undoing of this dichotomy? In unpacking these questions, we will move from the Hebrew Bible and Greek Mythology, through the 19th century novel, all the way to modernism and confessional poetry. With us in class will be, among other sisters, Rachel, Leah, Antigone, Ismene, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy; come join them.

Key words: Sisterhood, Alternative Kinship, Cis and Trans Gender, Genre and Gender, The Politics of Form.

Course requirements:

Attendance required **yes**

1. Participation 10% (active participation in class)
2. Midterm Essay (2-3 pages) 40%
3. Final Exam 50%

סילבוס מפורט של הקורס (נושאים, לוח זמנים, ספרות חובה/בחירה וכדומה)

Cisters: How Gender and Kinship Make Up Literary Sisterhood

Dr. Yael Segalovitz
Department of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Fall+Spring 2019

Course 132.1.0370+132.1.0380
Monday, 14:15-15:45, Room TBA

Office hours: Tuesday 14:00-16:00
Building 74, Room 521, email: yaelsega@bgu.ac.il, office phone: 08-6461125

Course description

Literary history is replete with depictions and discussions of elder-younger brother relationships, focusing for the most part on their rivalry. In this course we will turn our gaze instead to literary sisters in order to think with and through them about sibling kinship, and whether it can be defined by a dynamic other to competition. As the course's title suggests, "cisters" will bring into this conversation the English proposition "cis," which literally means "on this side of" or "adjunct to," but has come to carry a gender-related meaning in contemporary culture, denoting a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. In a broader sense, then, "cis" is understood today to be the opposite of "trans," it signifies a *similarity* between sex and gender. By reading about sisters of all kinds we will investigate and question the binary of same-different. We will ask: Do sisters born one "on the side of" the other can only be understood as either identical or different? Does their own gender as women play a part in their undoing of this dichotomy? In unpacking these questions, we will move from the Hebrew Bible and Greek Mythology, through the 19th century novel, all the way to modernism and confessional poetry. With us in class will be, among other sisters, Rachel, Leah, Antigone, Ismene, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy; come join them.

Texts

- The majority of reading materials will be available on Moodle (<https://moodle2.bgu.ac.il/moodle/>)
- Sophocles, *Antigone*, to be found at the library or Tzomet Sfarim
- Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, to be found at the library or Tzomet Sfarim
- José Eduardo Agualusa, *A General Theory of Oblivion*, to be found at Tzomet Sfarim

Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed up to three unexcused absences during the semester, including *Tkufat Hashinuyim*. **Any additional absence will affect your grade.** If you need to be absent for more than three classes due to a medical or family emergency, please get in touch with me in advance about possible arrangements. **You are responsible for material you miss during an absence.** Please consult another student in the course about the material you missed or come to see me in office hours rather than emailing.

Read the assigned text(s) prior to each class meeting. I will send out 1-2 discussion questions prior to each class, they are meant to guide you in your reading.

Participate productively in class discussions. **Please come prepared to answer the discussion questions I will send out prior to each class.** Participation is an incredibly important aspect of this course, which will frequently involve class discussions. **If you are nervous about participating and/or public speaking in general, please come talk with me in office hours as soon as possible** – we can brainstorm ways to make you feel more comfortable in class and consider alternative methods of participation.

Write one midterm essay (2-3 pages); one final exam. For your paper, you will be requested to submit a draft, and then consult my comments to revise your paper into its final form. You will be graded on both the draft and the revision.

Sources: Your written work will be based on close readings of the primary texts. I recommend using a good dictionary, preferably the unabridged *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oed.com>. You must document each and every source you consult as **I do not tolerate plagiarism.** You will find a number of resources on Moodle; use them to understand the issues we discuss, and ask questions whenever anything is not entirely clear to you.

Grade distribution

Participation 10% (discussion questions; participation in class)

Midterm Essay (2-3 pages) 40%

- Draft 10%
- Final version 30%

Final Exam 50%

Course Schedule

17/3 Introduction

Section One: MYTH

24/3 Rachel and Leah Story (Genesis 29:17)

31/3 Sophocles, *Antigone*

7/4, 14/4 **PASSOVER, NO CLASSES**

21/4 Sophocles, *Antigone*

Section Two: THE SHORT STORY

28/4 Memorial Day (Yom HaZikaron), NO CLASS

4/5 Ariane Thornton-Mason, "There Was No Grieving, I Did Not Miss My Brother" – What It's Like to Have a Trans Sister (2018)

12/5 James Joyce, "The Sisters" (1914)

19/5 James Joyce, "The Sisters" (1914)

26/5 Theory (TBA)

Section Two: POETRY

2/6 Carmen Maria Machado, "Help Me Follow My Sister into the Land of the Dead" (2016)

9/6 Carmen Maria Machado, "Help Me Follow My Sister into the Land of the Dead" (2016)

16/6 Theory (TBA)

Date and Time TBA Midterm Paper Due

SPRING SEMESTER

Section Three: THE NOVEL & POETRY

17/3 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868-9), pp. 1-100

24/3 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868-9), pp. 101-200

31/3 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868-9), pp. 200-280

7/4, 14/4 PASSOVER, NO CLASSES

21/4 Screening of *Little Women* (feature film directed by Gillian Armstrong)

28/4 Memorial Day (Yom HaZikaron), NO CLASS

4/5 Sylvia Plath, "Two Sisters of Persephone" (1957)

12/5 José Eduardo Agualusa, *A General Theory of Oblivion*, 1-80

19/5 José Eduardo Agualusa, *A General Theory of Oblivion*, 80-160

26/5 José Eduardo Agualusa, *A General Theory of Oblivion*, 160-250

2/6 Shimon Adaf, poem 1, *Aviva-No* (2009) + James Baldwin, "Some days"

9/6 Lucille Clifton, "Sisters"

16/6 Students' Presentations

Date TBA Final Exam