



## ***Abrahams-Curiel Department of Foreign Literatures & Linguistics***

Academic year 2022-23 (תשפ"ג)

**Course title(English):** Cisters: How Gender and Kinship Make Up Literary Sisterhood

**Course title (Hebrew):** אחיות לצרה מגדר ואחוזה בייצוגי אחיות בספרות האמריקאית

**Course number:** 132.1.0370

**Course slot (semester/s, weekday/s, hours):** Tuesday, 10:15-11:45, Room TBA

**Lecturer:** Dr. Yael Segalovitz

Office hours: TBA

Building 74, Room 521, email: [yaelsega@bgu.ac.il](mailto: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 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, all the way to modernism and trans fiction. With us in class will be, among other sisters, Rachel, Leah, Antigone, Ismene, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy; come join them.

### **Texts**

- All reading materials will be available on Moodle

## Grade distribution

- Participation 10% (class discussions)
- Discussion Questions 10%
- Midterm Essay (2-3 pages) 30%
- Final Exam 50%

## 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 and Respond** to the assigned text(s) prior to each class meeting. I will send out 1-2 discussion questions prior to each class. During the semester, you are expected to upload to Moodle a 3-5 sentences answer to one of these questions at least 6 times during the semester.

**Participate** productively in class discussions. 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).

**Sources:** Your written work will be based on close readings of the primary texts. 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.

**Exam:** Please be aware that, according to BGU regulations, you cannot pass the course if you have failed the final exam.

## Course Schedule

7/3      **No class – Purim**

14/3      Introduction: the familial, political, and sexual connotations of “sisterhood”

### Section One: MYTH

21/3      Rachel and Leah Story (Genesis 29:17)

- 28/3 Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 3-33
- 4/4 Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 33-60
- 11/4 No class – Passover**
- 18/4 Bonnie Honig, “Ismene's Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority in Sophocles' *Antigone*”, *Arethusa* 44:1, 2011, pp. 29-68 (Article)

## **Section Two: THE SHORT STORY**

- 25/4** Carmen Maria Machado, “Help Me Follow My Sister into the Land of the Dead” (2016)
- 2/5** Edith Wharton, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” (1904)

## **Section Three: THE NOVEL**

- 2/5** Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868-9), pp. 1-100; **Midterm Paper Due**
- 9/5** Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868-9), pp. 101-200
- 16/5** Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868-9), pp. 200-280
- 23/5** Screening of *Little Women* (feature film directed by Gillian Armstrong)
- 30/5** Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, 1-100
- 6/6** Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, 101-200
- 13/6** Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, 201-320

- 20/6 Students’ Presentations**

**Date TBA Final Exam**