

# EN2E2-30 English Literature & Feminisms 1790-1899

**26/27**

**Department**

English and Comparative Literary Studies

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 2

**Module leader**

Emma Francis

**Credit value**

30

**Module duration**

19 weeks

**Assessment**

50% coursework, 50% exam

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

---

## Description

### Introductory description

This module explores aspects of the political and intellectual provenance of a range of 19th century feminisms and their impact upon English literary culture in the period.

[Module web page](#)

### Module aims

We move from a starting point of the feminisms produced by the battle between conservative and radical political thought at the turn of the 19th century through the feminisms of the mid-century, which looked to liberalism and related positions to legitimate their arguments, to the diversification of feminist debates through the lenses of Darwinism, socialism, new discourses about sexuality and discussions around the significance of the city at the end of the 19th century. The module constructs a dialogue between 19th century literary texts and 19th century feminist and anti-feminist discourses, and the way in which these relationships have been understood in the late 20th and 21st centuries by historians, historiographers and literary criticism.

Revolutionary and counter-revolutionary feminisms and their literatures, 1790-1830

Women's poetry and woman's mission: the woman writer's 'proper sphere', 1802-65

Liberalism, Unitarianism and feminism: the limits of the novel, 1840-69

Sensation, socialism, science and sexual deviance, 1862-89

The 'New Woman', 1890-99

## Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1 - Module aims and introduction: planning your year's work

Revolutionary and counter-revolutionary feminisms and their literatures, 1790-1830

At the turn of the 19th century debates about the status and role of women gained inspiration and inflection by the split created in British political culture by the French Revolution. Radical and revolutionary thinkers advocated the overthrow of social hierarchy, the equitable redistribution of wealth and other kinds of far-reaching social change; conservative, counterrevolutionary thinkers advocated the maintenance of hierarchical and paternalistic social structures which, they argued, would provide protection for the vulnerable in return for acceptance of social and economic inequality. The two factions represented, respectively, 'rights' and 'duties' as the crucial means to maintain a just and healthy society. Our first two sessions examine the work of writers who took up positions on either side of the argument. Mary Wollstonecraft inserted her polemic into the radical concept of the 'rights of man', arguing that women constituted a specific group whose rights deserved particular delineation. Hannah More used the novel to explicate the conservative thesis that women had specific duties within society and that a certain kind of femininity was essential to the maintenance of social stability. We will ask the question: in spite of their opposing political provenance, are their positions and poetics as distinct as each would have liked? It took only a generation for the sureties of each position to begin to unravel. Both the inevitability of familial and social cohesion (dominant in More, present in Wollstonecraft) and faith in reason (dominant in Wollstonecraft, present in More) are excoriated in Mary Shelley's novel. We complete this section with Austen's early novel, written in the wake of the emergence of reason as the chief category of legitimation for both radical and conservative feminisms. Does Austen, ostensibly working with the most traditional models of female and family life, manage to create a more comfortable accommodation with passion for her rational heroine?

Week 2 - Rights and duties 1: feminism and radicalism

Text: Mary Wollstonecraft - Vindication of the Rights of Woman

- Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman

Week 3 - Rights and duties 2: feminism and conservatism

Text: Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*

Week 4 - The limits of Enlightenment

Text: Mary Shelley - *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*

Week 5 - Passion and the rational heroine

Text: Jane Austen *Sense and Sensibility*

Week 6 - READING WEEK

Women's poetry and woman's mission: the woman writer's 'proper sphere', 1802-65

In the first half of the 19th century poets and literary critics developed strong arguments for the importance of women's poetry; both radical and conservative thinkers argued that women poets had a specific social and moral mission. Poems intervened explicitly into a

variety of controversial contemporary issues. In our first session in this section we explore poetry addressing the campaigns for the abolition of slavery and the legislation around factory labour. Other writers concentrated on the development of the concept of the woman poet as intellectual, artist and civic icon. We read the most important inspiration for this, Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, Or Italy* and some of the British poems it inspired. The figure of the woman poet was an important cultural flashpoint for debates around woman's role in the relation between the 'private' and the 'public' spheres.

Week 7 - Women's poetry and woman's mission

Text: Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'Epistle to William Wilberforce'

Hannah More, 'The Sorrows of Yamba, or The Negro Woman's Lamentation'

'The Black Slave Trade'

Amelia Opie, 'The Negro Boy's Tale'

Janet Hamilton, 'Civil War in America'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point'

'The Cry of the Children'

Caroline Bowles, 'Tales of the Factories'

Week 8 - The woman of genius

Text: Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, Or Italy*

Week 9 - Women of genius

Text: Letitia Landon, 'The History of the Lyre'

Felicia Hemans 'Corinne at the Capitol'

Liberalism, Unitarianism and feminism: the limits of the novel, 1840-69

During the mid-19th century feminism in Britain entered a new period of self-definition.

Specific analyses of the economic, social and political causes of women's oppression and demands for their abolition were made. This was the period when women's admission to full civil, political and economic status began to be a seriously and widely debated proposition. Women turned to the classic narrative of bourgeois subjectivity and experience, the novel, to explore the precise dimensions of their inclusion and exclusion. The problems and irresolutions of these texts are crucial indicators of how far the debate had come and of the contradictions it had assumed. Scrutiny of the institution of marriage became intense. Liberal feminist thinkers began to offer explicit economic analysis of marriage, refusing the distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres and demanding legal protection for married women and their property. Marriage was also, scandalously, compared with the exchange of money for sex within prostitution.

Week 10 - Liberalism, Unitarianism, the two nations and the separate spheres

Text: Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*

Week 11 - Gender and genre, the limits of the novel for the woman writer

Text: Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*

Week 12 - Sexual exchanges

Text: John Stuart Mill, 'On the Subjection of Women'

Christina Rossetti, 'Goblin Market'

Socialism, science and sexual deviance, 1862-1889

Earlier in the 19th century feminism was inflected by radical, conservative and liberal positions and rhetoric, by the campaign for the abolition of slavery, concerns about the social effects of industrialization and the question of women's access to bourgeois civic institutions; during later decades new political, cultural and scientific debates come to the fore which give

rise to new kinds of feminist argument. We study the impact of Darwin and his commentators from the 1870s. Social theorists in the period use Darwinian concepts of 'survival of the fittest', 'extinction' and 'instinct' to engage 'The Woman Question' as it develops in the late 19th century. New models of the female body, its needs and instincts emerge which inflect accounts of women's demands for sexual and social autonomy. Feminism at this time becomes implicated with developing discourses of 'race', 'racial purity' and 'racial degeneration'. The strain that the 'marriage plot' had been under since the mid-century becomes acute. Unequivocal and strident criticism of marriage and heterosexuality begin to appear. Alternative sexual identities - celibacy and same-sex - are explored. Socialism begins to have significant impact upon feminism. The political and literary careers of a range of feminists, Annie Besant, Clementina Black, Eleanor Marx, Beatrice Webb and Margaret Harkness, offer important points of divergence. The conflict between the strict scientific socialist analysis with which some attempted to inflect feminism and the utopian emphasis of others is indicative of the problems of the dialogue between socialism and feminism in this period.

Week 13 - the Modern Marriage Market 2

Text: Rhoda Broughton, *Cometh Up As A Flower*

Week 14 - Darwin's plots

Text: Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*

Week 15 - Feminism and semitic discourse

Text: Amy Levy, Reuben Sachs

'Middle-class Jewish Women of To-Day'

Week 16 - READING WEEK

Week 17- Feminism and socialism

Text: Eleanor Marx, 'Review Woman in the Past, Present and Future by August Bebel',  
Supplement to the *Commonweal*, August 1885'

Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, 'The Woman Question'

Margaret Harkness, *Out of Work*

The 'New Woman', 1890-1899

The final section of the module explores the figure of the 'New Woman', the image propagated across a variety of cultural and literary forms at the end of the 19th century. We consider the development of the conservative feminist idea of the single woman's mission in and to society. Whereas Christian evangelicalism was crucial in earlier justifications of middle-class women's activities outside the home, the literature of the 1890s secularises woman's mission, shifting the emphasis from God to society from spiritual salvation to economic salvation of oneself and others through participation in the labour market, often within occupations which utilize exotic new technologies. The conflict between marriage and work for women recurs within the genre of New Woman fiction. We study the impact of the 'New Woman' across literary and 'popular' fiction.

Week 18 - The Single Woman and her Mission

Text: George Gissing, *The Odd Women*

Anon - 'The Glorified Spinster'

Week 19 - The 'New Woman' and the question of marriage

Text: Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did*

Week 20 'They suck us dry': feminism and vampirism

Text: Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- A secure understanding of the range of debates – conservative, radical and liberal – around the ‘Woman Question’ in the period 1790-1899.
- Experience and understanding of the range of genres including novels, poetry and non-fictional prose in which these ideas and debates were promulgated and resisted and the ability to critically analyse the same across genres.
- A secure understanding of how these texts and debates relate to a wider context of political, social and cultural upheaval and challenge in Britain, Europe and across Britain’s imperial interests.

## Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

## Subject specific skills

-Demonstrate a broad understanding of novels, poetry and non-fictional prose produced by British writers that deal with the ‘Woman Question’ in the period 1790-1899; demonstrate understanding of these works and debates in the relevant European context, particularly that of responses to the French Revolution; demonstrate understanding of the evolution of these debates across the period in dialogue with emergent and developing debates around racism and racial difference, imperialism, democratization, Darwinism and eugenics, trade unionism and shifting understandings of maternity.

-Apply their knowledge of historical cultural and political contexts of the period to independent reading and analysis of texts studied on the course.

## Transferable skills

-Use a range of techniques and critical methodologies relevant to poetry, novels and non-fictional prose to analyse literary texts including close reading of primary texts, critical reading of secondary materials, and carry out searches for appropriate scholarly materials relevant to the materials studied on the course.

-Effectively and accurately communicate arguments and analysis in response to year specific examination questions authored by the module convenor and essay question determined by the student independently in consultation with the module convenor.

---

## Study

## Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	19 sessions of 1 hour 30 minutes (9%)
Private study	271 hours 30 minutes (90%)
Total	300 hours

## Private study description

Reading & research.

## Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

---

## Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

### Assessment group C2

Assessment component	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Essay 1 x 3500-word essay – question to be selected by the students from a list devised by the module convenor	50%		Yes (extension)

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Centrally-timetabled examination (On-campus) 2 hour closed examination paper requiring address to 2 questions	50%		No

---

- Answerbook Pink (12 page)

Reassessment component is the same

## Feedback on assessment

Written feedback on essays and individual meetings about same with students if requested. Brief written feedback on exam paper which may be requested for sight by students to be given access under secure conditions.

[Past exam papers for EN2E2](#)

---

## Availability

### Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 2 of UCXA-QQ38 Undergraduate Classics and English (with Intercolated Year)

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-Q300 Undergraduate English Literature
- Year 2 of UENA-QP36 Undergraduate English Literature and Creative Writing
- Year 2 of UCXA-QQ39 Undergraduate English and Classical Civilisation

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-Q300 Undergraduate English Literature
- Year 2 of UENA-QP36 Undergraduate English Literature and Creative Writing
- Year 2 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- Year 2 of UENA-VQ34 Undergraduate English and History (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies
- Year 2 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature
- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 2 of UCXA-QQ37 Undergraduate Classics and English

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature