

WOMEN AND LITERATURE

SPRING 2015

MW 2-3:15

EN 3513

Dr. Catherine Pierce

"It is not a healthy book."

--review from the *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*

What sort of shocking book might prompt such a review? Not a graphic war story, or a lurid potboiler of murder and mayhem, or even a racy dime store paperback chock-full of appalling language, but, rather, Kate Chopin's 1899 novel *The Awakening*, a quiet study of a Louisiana woman "awakening" from the monotony of her traditional life. In this class, we will ask why the works we'll be reading, with their sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatic breaches of literary and societal expectations, so affected (and alarmed) the reading public. We'll consider issues of influence—how did these authors' subversions of the key literary trends and cultural standards of their time impact, inspire, and even anger other writers? We will look at how these writers addressed crucial issues of gender, age, race, and sexuality. And, importantly, we will interrogate the role of language itself as a means toward power—how is the written word a tool for creating and changing reality, and what does it mean for a writer to use language in a groundbreaking way? Throughout the semester, we will consider both history and technique, and will ask how, and why, we as modern readers might reconsider the label of "woman writer" as we move further into the 21st century.

Requirements for this course will include: reading quizzes; two papers; midterm and final exam.

Texts:

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Poems of Sylvia Plath

Selected short stories of Flannery O'Connor and Joyce Carol Oates

Beth Henley, *Crimes of the Heart*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Dorothy Allison, selected essays

A selection of contemporary short story writers and poets (still to be decided)



Questions? Email cpierce@english.msstate.edu.