

Women in Western Political Thought: POL303
Summer 2024



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Office Hours: Thursdays 11am-1pm

Monday and Wednesday 3-5pm

Course Description:

Political science tends to focus on the public sphere as political, meanwhile the private sphere is often left to the side. But questions about the most intimate features of our lives lay at the foundation of many canonical thinkers' works within the western history of political thought. In many instances, the boundaries that they prescribe between the public and private and their accounts of sex, love, gender, and intimate relationships establish conditions that justify the subordination of women and limit women's activities to the private sphere. Women, then, should have a lot to say about what goes on in the private sphere, and it turns out they have been saying a lot for quite some time.

In this course we will recover a variety of ways that women writers within the western history of political thought conceived of issues of desire, love, sex, gender, and intimate relationships as they relate to core topics in political theory such as wisdom, knowledge, justice, equality, and freedom. To achieve this, we will broaden our understanding of what a political text is, both in terms of the content of ideas, and in terms of the form that the ideas are presented in. The readings in the course include dialogues, poems, familiar letters, plays, and treatises. Because of the diversity of the types of texts, we will be practicing a number of interpretive strategies in the course.

The course begins in the Ancient Greek tradition, and then jumps to the late medieval period before moving through the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods in the Italian, English, and French contexts. To help us ground our discussions, the course readings have been placed between two philosophies of love, one ancient and one contemporary. Plato's *Symposium* is a sustained investigation into eros, or desire, in the Greek tradition, which challenged the conventional sexual ethics of the day and implicated women in surprising and confounding ways. As we will see, it was a likely source of inspiration for women writers in this course and the themes established within it recur and transform throughout history. By contrast, bell hooks' *All About Love* is a contemporary work that articulates the political nature of love in exceptionally clear terms and helps us think about what has been missed by excluding discussions of love from political theory and our daily lives and practices. As we will see, bell hook's arguments have resonances with some of these women writers in history and discordances with others.

Course Objectives:

1. To explore the themes of love, gender, sex, desire, intimate relationships, and the status of women in society as articulated by a number of women writers throughout the history of political thought.
2. To broaden horizons on what it means for something to be political.
3. To develop reading, interpretive, and writing skills. This includes the ability to follow arguments and analysis within the texts, but also to ask questions of them to draw out deeper meanings and interpretations.
4. To develop the capacity to think comparatively across texts to reveal changes and continuities across thinkers and eras.
5. To develop the ability to listen and engage with lectures in class. This includes the ability to take effective notes and to contribute to class discussions about the texts and the thoughts that they inspire.

Course Requirements:

Participation (20%): Participation will be determined in two ways:

1. Ten percent will be determined by weekly writing responses, which will be graded pass/fail. For a pass, responses must be both *on time* and *complete*. We will negotiate, as a class, the weekly deadline for these responses on the first day. These writing responses are a low-stakes opportunity to develop interpretive skills and your unique authorial voice.
2. Ten percent will be determined by in-class participation. Participation is not attendance, although attendance is required to participate. More information on the participation grading structure will be given in the first lecture and posted on Quercus.

I will provide a midterm assessment of in-class participation so that you can gauge your class engagement. Ten percent of your grade (5% of writing responses, and 5% of in class participation) will be returned to you by the midway in the course (before the drop date) by your participation grade.

Essay Proposal (15%): A series of potential paper topics (not questions) will be provided to help students think about different possibilities for the term paper; however, you will choose your own topic and formulate a specific proposal around a question that you generate. The proposal must include:

1. The question that animates you;
2. The hypothesis you think you will defend;
3. An outline of the arguments/interpretations that you suggest will support that thesis; and
4. A selection of quotes/references that you think might help you in the paper.

Proposals should be submitted *no later than week nine* (precise date TBD); however, students who wish to write on Ninon de l'Enclos or Mary Astell may be granted extensions if they make a very compelling appeal. If you want to write on a writer earlier in the course, it might be in your interest to submit the proposal sooner rather than later.

Term Essay (35%): The final paper should be 2200-2500 words and will be due the last week of classes (precise date TBD). It should reflect the proposal that was submitted as well as the recommendations made in it. If you want to change your essay topic and argument after submitting the essay proposal, you must come to office hours to discuss it with me, get approval, and seek new guidance. More information on essay formatting and citation styles will be provided in class.

Final Exam (30%): The final exam place and time will be determined by the registrar. More details will be given closer to the date.

Course Policies:

Prerequisites: POL200 or an approved equivalent. In the course I will expect some existing knowledge of important thinkers in the western tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Locke), as well as familiarity with exegetical analysis and argumentation.

Electronics in the Classroom: To increase active listening and engagement in the course, and thus to facilitate better learning, this course will be a laptop-free zone. This means that you must come to class prepared with a notebook and pen or pencil to take notes. There are a couple of reasons for this policy:

1. Learning to take notes by hand requires you to listen and synthesize information as you hear it and engages your brain in a way that typed notes do not. Because you can't write by hand as fast as you can type, writing notes by hand requires you to make notes in such a way that you can restate information in shorter, simpler terms. Moreover, the physical nature of handwriting creates new neuropathways in your brain that help you recall information more easily.
2. Laptops contain nearly infinite possibilities for distraction, not only for you, but also for those around you. Writing by hand is a way to be present in the room.

Late work and extension policy: Late work will be subjected to a 3% per day penalty, including weekends. Late penalties will be capped at 30%, meaning that work submitted ten or more days late will not be subjected to rolling late penalties.

However, I would rather not apply any late penalties. Thus, extensions will be granted if they are requested 24 hours before the deadline. You do not need to provide a reason for your extension request—you simply must ask for it. However, extensions requested within the 24-hour window will be denied unless there is an unforeseen emergency within that window. To request an

extension, you only need to ask *and* propose your own new deadline. My goal here is to get you to take responsibility for your own time management and workflow.

Make-up exams: Exam rewrites will only be available under extraordinary circumstances. Students who miss the exam must provide documented evidence to explain why they missed the exam. Legitimate grounds include illness, injury, or some other unforeseen and serious life event. Students who write a make-up exam will not write the same exam as the rest of the class.

Grading Policies: As a student, it is your right to challenge your grades if you feel the grader has made an error or overlooked virtues in your work. If you wish to make a grade appeal, you must wait 24 hours before contacting the grader and you must make the grade appeal within one week of receiving your grade and feedback. Appeals made before 24 hours and after one week will not be considered. When you make a grade appeal, you should be aware that you are reopening the grade for the work, which means that the grade can go up, down, or stay the same. More information on the appeals process will be provided when the first graded assessments are returned.

Academic Integrity Policy: As a student, it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's academic integrity policy. As I hope you know, ignorance of the law is not a legitimate defense. You can find information on the university's policies and best practices [here](#). There are a number of things that are considered academic offenses and it is worth your time to review this material.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

If you object to submitting your work to OURiginal, please contact me to negotiate an alternative form of submission. Please note that OURiginal is only one of the many ways of detecting plagiarism.

In this class, the use of *any generative* AI writing technology (e.g., ChatGPT and other similar platforms) is ***absolutely forbidden***. One of the central goals of the course is for students to practice both reading, interpretive, and writing skills. In my view (and, I will add, in the view of many political theorists) these capacities are among the most valuable human goods, and so to offload that labour to a machine is a gross harm to your unique human capacities as creative and intelligent. In the context of a course on women writers in the history of political thought, avoiding the intellectual and creative work of writing is especially disrespectful to the women before us who fought so that women today could have this right.

Accessibility Policy: It is my goal to accommodate the diversity of learning styles and needs as much as possible. If you have disability or health-related consideration that requires accommodation, please reach out to me as soon as possible so that we can negotiate an appropriate strategy for you. I know that the formal process for accessing Accessibility Services can be slow, and in some cases, students fall through the cracks in institutions. I am also aware

that life is unpredictable and that there may be a variety of other challenges that you might face that make engaging in your courses difficult. If you are struggling in the course *in any way*, please reach out to me as soon as possible and we can find a way forward for you. You do not need to have letter from Accessibility Services to ask me for help.

Course Texts:

You will have to acquire the following two texts for the course:

- hooks, bell. 2001. *All About Love*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Plato. 2001. *Symposium*. Translated by Seth Benardete with commentary by Seth Benardete and Allen Bloom. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

The remaining texts are available through the university library and online for free! That said, I strongly recommend that students avoid reading on screens whenever possible, so you might want to consider purchasing copies of the texts or budgeting to print them out at the university or at home.

Reading Schedule:

Week One: Introduction

Read: bell hooks *All About Love*, as much as you can. Ideally, students will read the text throughout the course and be finished by the last week. bell hooks is a very clear writer, you will find that this makes for fast reading and deep thinking.

Week Two: Plato

Read: *Symposium*, 172a- 199c

Week Three: Plato

Read: *Symposium* 199c-223d

Week Four: Christine de Pizan

Read: *The Letter of the God of Love* (about 20 pages of poetry) and *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers* (about 70 pages of mixed poetry and prose).

Week Five: Moderata Fonte

Read: *The Worth of Women*, “First Day” (pp. 43-117)

Week Six: Tullia d’ Aragona

Read: *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, all (pp. 51-110)

Week Seven: Veronica Franco

Read: *Poems and Selected Letters*, Letters 4, 16, 17, 22, 31, & 47, and Capitulos 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, 22, & 24

Week Eight: Margret Cavendish

Read: *The Convent of Pleasure*

Week Nine: Ninon de l'Enclos

Read: *Life, Letters and Epicurean Philosophy*, "Letters to the Marquis de Sevigne",
Letters I-XXVI

Week Ten: Ninon de l'Enclos

Read: *Life, Letters and Epicurean Philosophy*, "Letters to the Marquis de Sevigne",
Letters XXIX-LV

Week Eleven: Mary Astell

Read: *Reflections on Marriage*, all.

Week Twelve: Bringing it together; bell hooks *All About Love*

Read: Whatever you have left.