UCL SUMMER SCHOOL

The Birth of Feminism: UCL, Bloomsbury and Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism

Key Information

Module code            ISSU0074
Taught during          Session One: Monday 1st July - Friday 19th August 2019
Module workload         45 teaching hours plus approximately 100 study hours
Module leaders          Dr Maria-Novella Mercuri
Department              School of European Languages, Culture and Society
Credit                  15 UCL credits, 7.5 ECTS, 4 US
Level                   Level 1, first year undergraduate
Pre-requisites          Standard entry requirements
Assessment              Presentation (30%), Essay (70%)

Module Overview

This module explores the rise of feminism in England from the publication of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman to World War I, when London was a hot house of radical thinking and the temporary or definitive home of a variety of brilliant cosmopolitan thinkers and writers who converged here attracted by the infinite opportunities for debate on the most varied ‘isms’: positivism, liberalism, socialism, trade-unionism, Ibsenism, Freudianism, vegetarianism, pacifism, secularism and, last but not least, evolutionism. Darwin’s theories of natural and sexual selection and his views of the place of woman in the evolution of the human species had a wide and deep impact on the debate on the Woman Question. They were received and appropriated in different ways by New Woman writers, but none of them escaped their influence. UCL had a prominent place in these exciting debates also because of its deep connection to Darwinism through figures such as Francis Galton, Edward Grant, Edwin Ray Lankester and Karl Pearson, so this is the right place to explore Darwinism’s fundamental ontological implications for the cultural and literary discourse of the fin-de-siècle.

Week One

- Feminism in the Age of Reform: Mary Wollstonecraft to John Stuart Mill
- The fight for women’s civil rights in Britain and the U.S.
- The battle for female suffrage

Week Two

- Radicalism in fin de siècle London
- UCL and Bloomsbury as the heart of radical London
- Ibsen and the London scene

Week Three

- Survey of New Woman literature and its recurrent themes
- The newspaper marriage controversy and the development of journalism

Please note that this module description is indicative and may be subject to change.
• New Woman novels and short fiction and their contribution to literary Modernism

Module Aims
• To familiarise students with the major ideas, movements and protagonists of the history of British feminism from the French Revolution to WWI
• To give students an overview of radical ideas and movements in fin de siècle London, highlighting the importance of Bloomsbury as a hub of social and political innovation
• To make students aware of the way the ontological implications of evolutionism and psychoanalysis impacted on the cultural discourse of the fin-de-siècle
• To make students aware of the civil rights movements which had their origin in Victorian England and of the importance they still have in our modern life

Teaching Methods
• Two-hour lecture-seminars
• Visits to UCL collections and other places of interest in relation to the course, such as the Grant Museum of Zoology, the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital and the British Museum
• Walks in the Bloomsbury area to see monuments and sites. The UCL Bloomsbury Project website mentions many of the radical, charitable, educational and religious groups and societies which had their headquarters in Bloomsbury in the 19th and 20th century, with their locations, and some of these are mentioned in the course. The site can be a source of suggestions both for topics for individual or group presentations and for visits.

Learning Outcomes
Upon successful completion of this module, students will have gained:
• Broad knowledge of the historical development of feminism and of the movement for civil rights in Britain
• Knowledge of the literature produced by a group of feminist authors who have been generally overlooked by traditional academic curricula, and of their contribution to literary Modernism
• Understanding of a culturally intense moment in the history of London and of a period of dramatic social and political changes in Britain
• Understanding of the ontological impact that the theory of evolution and psychoanalysis had on Victorians
• Understanding of the impact that Ibsen’s theatre had not only on the London stage but also on radical literary and philosophical debates

Assessment Methods
• 10-minute oral presentation (30%)
• 2,500-word essay (70%)

Key Texts
• Grant Allen, The Woman Who Did
• Mona Caird, The Daughters of Danaus (selected chapters)
• George Gissing, The Odd Women
• Sarah Grand, The Heavenly Twins (selected chapters)
• Henrik Ibsen, A Doll’s House, Ghost

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• John Stuart Mill and Helen Taylor, *The Subjection of Women* (selected chapters)
• Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (selected chapters)
• GB Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession*
• HG Wells, *Ann Veronica*
• Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*
• Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (selected chapters)

**Module Leaders**
Dr Maria-Novella Mercuri is a Teaching Fellow in Italian and European Cultural Studies and has been teaching for more than two decades, the last of which on undergraduate courses at UCL. She obtained an MA in Philosophy and a PhD in Comparative Literature at UCL, and an MA in Renaissance Studies at Birkbeck. Her current writing project is a study of German influences on the work of the American writer Edith Wharton. Her other interests are: German 19th century History of Culture, English and American 19th century women writers, history of British feminism, Shakespeare and Italian Renaissance.