

Scripts and Counter-Scripts of Gender in American Culture

Fall 2016
Tue 11:30-13:00, Rm 356
Instructor: Enikő Bollobás
Office hrs: Thu 12-13:30, Office: 312

Description

This course investigates a central topic in American Cultural Studies, the representations of gender. Accepting the claim that gender behavior is the performance of various scripts, overt and covert, shared by all who live in that culture, we will discuss the normative scripts as well as those counter-scripts that subvert the norms. In the case of women, our primary focus is on beauty, youth, and motherhood, whose subversive performances (performances of counter-scripts) bring about the “ugly girl,” the “old woman,” and the “bad mother.” In the case of men, we will also explore the various normative scripts of manhood (strength, power, resistance to pain), as well as their subversions, in social and media discourse, as well as filmic scripts. During the course we will discuss a variety of genres from fairy tales through films, television series, and literary narratives.

Topics to be covered: manhood and womanhood; the beauty myth and the ugly girl; the American family, the sentimental mother; motherhood and feminism; gender scripts in fairy tales; “bad mothers” and subjectivity; “bad mothers” and abandonment; masculinities in history; masculinities in mainstream American literature; masculinities and television; gender-centered dramas on television

Course requirements

Students are expected to

- (1) read the assigned texts, understand them, have a grasp of their argumentative structure, and be able to give interpretations of the main theses and arguments when called upon; ALWAYS BRING THE ASSIGNED TEXTS TO CLASS;
- (2) 2nd year MA students will give one presentation (students can choose from the presentation topics offered for each class session: you need to sign up at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1F3R-0GDGntM0SL-djJ-iaFe82mpY-N8lc4JKtLQFuv0/edit#gid=0>);
- (3) both 1st year and 2nd year MA students will do the final oral exam that will cover all the assignments and presentations.

TEXTS. Readings have been uploaded on seas3, under my course materials, but only until September 30.

Important: students who choose visual or filmic topics are expected to have the slides or films, bring their own laptops, and set up and operate the projector.

Schedule of classes

- September 13** **Orientation, presentation topics distributed**
(Students who chose hard to find texts & films will locate the texts and films within two weeks)
- September 27** **Cultural studies; Scripts of manhood and womanhood (lecture)**
(Students who chose hard to find texts & films will confirm the availability of their texts & films)
- October 4** **19th & 20th century scripts: family, motherhood, womanhood**

Assignment for all:

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (find text)
Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, chapter 1 ("The Problem That Has No Name"), chapter 2 ("The Happy Housewife Heroine"), chapter 13 ("The Forfeited Self") (pdf)
The Good Housewife Guide (<http://www.littlethings.com/1950s-good-housewife-guide/>)

Presentation topics:

- *Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (book presentation)*
- George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (find the book, present the plot, give critical analysis)
- *Carrie Fisher, *Postcards from the Edge* (1987) (find the book & film, present the plot, give critical analysis, select and play scenes for in-class viewing)
- movie: *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974, dir. Martin Scorsese [presenting student will select and play scenes for in-class viewing & give critical analysis])
- novel + movie: Mary McCarthy, *The Group* novel; *The Group* movie (1966, dir. Sidney Lumet [presenting student will find the novel & film, select and play scenes for in-class viewing & give critical analysis of both novel and film])

Student:

Student:

Student:

October 11 **Scripts from fairy tales (of womanhood, marriage, and motherhood)**

Assignment for all:

fairy tales: *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*

Presentation topics:

* I marked those texts with an asterisk which I can lend to the presenting student.

Recreating classic fairy tales: Dina Goldstein (you will need to use visuals in this presentation)
*Krisztina Szabó's MA Thesis on the wicked stepmother

Student:

Student:

October 18 Motherhood/womanhood and the female self/I

Assignment for all:

Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen" (1978) (pdf)

Presentation topics (presentations of critical texts):

*Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife—Conflicts of Housebound Mothers*

*Ann Dally, *Inventing Motherhood—Consequences of an Ideal*

*Andrea O'Reilly, *From Motherhood to Mothering—The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (pdf)

Student:

Student:

Student:

October 25 Motherhood/womanhood and the female self/II

Assignment for all:

Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (1879) (find text)

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899) (find text)

Presentation topics:

novel + movie: Sue Kaufman, *Diary of a Mad Housewife* novel; *Diary of a Mad Housewife* movie (1970, dir. Frank Perry [find the book & film, present the plot, give critical analysis, select and play scenes for in-class viewing])

novel + movie: Anne Richardson Roiphe, *Up the Sandbox* novel; *Up the Sandbox* movie (1972, dir. Irvin Kershner [find the book & film, present the plot, give critical analysis, select and play scenes for in-class viewing])

novel + movie: Sue Miller, *The Good Mother* novel; *The Good Mother* movie (1988; dir. Leonard Nimoy [find the book & film, present the plot, give critical analysis, select and play scenes for in-class viewing])

television series: *Damages* (2007-2012, dir. Todd A. Kessler et. al [presenting student will select and play scenes for in-class viewing + give critical analysis])

Paris, Texas (1984, Wim Wenders [presenting student will select and play scenes for in-class viewing + give critical analysis])

Student:

Student:

Student:

November 8 Masculinities and history

Assignment for all:

R. W. Connell, “The History of Masculinity” (from *The Masculinity Studies Reader*) (pdf)

Michael S. Kimmel, “The Birth of the Self-Made Man” (from *Manhood in America*) (pdf)

Presentation topics:

*Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello—The Biography of a Builder*

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

*Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None—The Life of Abraham Lincoln*

Student:

Student:

Student:

November 15 Masculinities in mainstream American literature

Assignment for all:

Ernest Hemingway, “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot” (*In Our Time*), “The Sea Change” (*Winner Take Nothing*), *The Sun Also Rises* (find texts)

Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (find text)

Presentation topics: to be scanned:

*John S. Bak, “The Impotence of Being Earnest: Scott and Hemingway’s ‘Gender Trouble’ in Williams’s *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*” (from *Homo Americanus*, 160-207)

*Nancy R. Comley & Richard Scholes, “Decoding Papa” (from *Hemingway’s Genders*, 1-19)

*Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998)

Student:

Student:

Student:

November 22 Masculinities

Assignment for all:

Peter Lehman, “What Have We Done to Deserve This?” (from *Running Scared—Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*) (pdf)

Presentation topics: critical analysis of representations of the male body

Susan Bordo, *The Male Body* (give critical analysis)

movie: *Full Monty* (1997, dir. Peter Cattaneo [presenting student will select and play scenes for in-class viewing + give critical analysis])

movie: *What Have We Done to Deserve This* (1985, dir. Pedro Almodóvar [presenting student will select and play scenes for in-class viewing + give critical analysis])

movie: *American Gigolo* (1980, dir. Paul Schrader [presenting student will select and play scenes for in-class viewing + give critical analysis])

Student:

Student:

November 29 Masculinities and television

Assignment for all:

Amanda Lotz, “Trying to Man Up” (from *Cable Guys*)

Presentation topics: critical analysis of male protagonists in recent television series

Dexter / Student:

Boston Legal/ Student:

The Killing / Student:

December 6 Gender-centered dramas on television

Assignment for all:

Amanda Lotz, “Dynamic Duos” (from *Cable Guys*)

Presentation topics: critical analysis of the dynamics of male and female protagonists in recent television series

Damages/ Student:

Boston Legal/ Student:

The Killing / Student:

Sex and the City / Student:

Scott and Bailey / Student:

December 13 Final oral exam

READINGS

1. **Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*** (find text)
2. **Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique***, chapters 1, 2, 13 (pdf)
3. **fairy tales: *Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty*** (find & bring texts)
4. **Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen"** (pdf)
5. **Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*** (download or find in anthologies)
6. **Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*** (download or find in anthologies)
7. **R. W. Connell, "The History of Masculinity"** (pdf)
8. **Michael S. Kimmel, "The Birth of the Self-Made Man"** (pdf)
9. **Ernest Hemingway, "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot"** (*In Our Time*) (download or find in anthologies)
10. **Ernest Hemingway, "The Sea Change"** (*Winner Take Nothing*) (download or find in anthologies)
11. **Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*** (download or find in anthologies)
12. **Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*** (download or find in anthologies)
13. **Peter Lehman, "What Have We Done to Deserve This?"** (pdf)
14. **Amanda Lotz, "Trying to Man Up"** (pdf)
15. **Amanda Lotz, "Dynamic Duos"** (pdf)