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Women And The Everyday In Contemporary World Literature And Feminist Theory

Title: Women and the Everyday in Contemporary World Literature and Feminist Theory

Submitter Email: melanie.heydari@gmail.com

Format: Panel

Type: Special Sessions

Session Options: I prefer that this session be held in person.

Rationale: We have missed the warm, generative environment of in-person conferences and are keen to reconnect with colleagues.

Room Setup Request: Classroom Style

Expected Attendance: 20

AV Equipment: Projector and Speakers

Keywords: world literature, the everyday, women's literature, feminist theory

Review Category: This session is on a comparative or general topic that would be of interest to scholars from across languages and fields or is on a topic not tied to a particular nationality, language, or cultural tradition.

Scheduling Request: 01/05 or 01/06

Scheduling Request Rationale: One of the panelists will be traveling from France; since winter break ends on January 3rd in Paris, she will need to return to France as soon as possible.

Subject: Comparative Literature: Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Session Description:

Everybody has an everyday; no one escapes the reach of the mundane. Despite the shared reality of cyclical practices of everyday life, women have been regarded as the essential representatives and victims of an alienating everyday. Indeed, a dualistic tradition has defined masculinity and heroism against the domestic sphere of allegedly inactive women cut off from the dynamic of history. Women's sphere, then, has been perceived as the realm of monotony and insignificance.

A key concept in cultural studies and feminism today, the everyday is marked by a rich history. In Lefebvre's and de Certeau's writings from the 1960s to the early 1980s, the investigation of the everyday brought about the paradoxical question of a creative life. Some critics such as Rita Felski have proposed a feminist rethinking of the everyday that construes women's daily experiences in ways that do not simply treat them as negative or residual.

This panel scrutinizes women's world literature and feminist theory through the lens of the everyday, a concept that is at once self-evident for the subject and strangely resistant to critical scrutiny. We have selected three panelists who will be limited to 15-minute papers in order to promote open discussion.

In the first paper, "I wanted to do something that I wanted to do": The Alienating Cycle of the Everyday in Zoya Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid*," Mélanie Heydari discusses the notion of the everyday in Iranian women's literature. At the core of this literature lies the issue of space, notably the confinement of women in the domestic, apolitical sphere and their subjection to the oppressive repetition of daily routines. In *Cheraghha ra man khamoosh mikonam* (translated as *Things We Left Unsaid* [2001]), a novel by Iranian Armenian author Zoya Pirzad, the internal narrative of Iranian-Armenian housewife Clarice exposes the circular nature of her everyday routine, as well as the emotional and mental toll it has taken upon her. Clarice's oppression is deeply tied to the home; in fact much of the story is concentrated on her kitchen, situated against the backdrop of the city of Abadan in the 1960s. Through

this novel, M. Heydari sheds light on the fraught politics of the everyday in contemporary feminist Middle Eastern literature.

In the second paper, “Ethnography of the Body in Everyday War: From Home to Frontline,” Susanna Weygandt analyzes the documentary prose of Nobel Laureate Svetlana Aleksievich, specifically *War’s Unwomanly Face* (1983). For this book, Aleksievich interviewed two hundred women who fought on the Frontline, editing and assembling the recordings into a conceptualization of the real. The book operates at the intersection of a number of experimental approaches: oral history, graphic narrative, and the everyday experience of the subaltern. This paper demonstrates that this document-in-fiction style relies on an ethnography of everyday life. It explores the articulation of a feminist discourse in Aleksievich’s books, in particular in the accounts of everyday life in the war and the desire to uphold a sense of femininity expressed by the female soldiers. Against the usual association of war and heroism with men in Soviet literature, Aleksievich highlights the female veterans’ feeling of shame about body wounds.

We will end with “The Good Life: the Invention of the Everyday in Contemporary Feminist Theory” by Cécile Mahiou. This paper reinscribes the feminist contribution into a broader history of everyday life studies. In the autobiographical essay *Living a feminist life* (2017), Sara Ahmed offers a new way of thinking about the articulation between theoretical work and the everyday in the intersections of race, gender and sexuality. Recollecting her experience as a woman in the form of everyday anecdotes, Ahmed argues that feminist theory has to stay closer to the everyday, going against the grain of the claim that women have to escape the oppressive routines of everyday life. Drawing on the writings of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Donna Haraway and Monique Wittig – all central to Ahmed’s reflections – C. Mahiou argues that the everyday is not just a given, but can also be reinvented by a political commitment to “bringing feminist theory home” (Ahmed), a commitment that manifests itself in innovative literary forms.

This panel explores women’s representations of everyday practices and their social, aesthetic and ethical dimensions through a variety of fictional and non-fictional forms. A central question we will address in the open discussion will be: given the significant variations in human lives across cultural contexts, in what sense is it meaningful to examine the category of the everyday in women’s world literature and feminist theory?

Presentations

Presentation ID# 21692: Ethnography of the Body in Everyday War: From Home to Frontline

Susanna Weygandt (suzi.weygandt@gmail.com)
Sewanee: University of the South

MLA Member

Central Standard Time, GMT-6:00

Expertise and Scholarship: Susanna Weygandt received her PhD from Princeton’s Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. In three of her peer-reviewed articles and in her 2019 anthology (Columbia University Press) she has analyzed indigenous Russian performance theories that have not yet been documented. Her soon-to-be published book is titled *From Metaphor to Direct Speech: Drama and Performance Theory after 1991*. This research shaped her into a scholar of visual language, the body, affect, and gender. At Sewanee: The University of the South she teaches courses in post-Soviet studies that spin off from her book and she also teaches in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Program.

Presentation ID# 21704: The Good Life: the Invention of the Everyday in Contemporary Feminist Theory

Cecile Mahiou (cmahiou@gmail.com)
Université de Nantes

MLA Member

European Central Time, GMT+1:00

Expertise and Scholarship: Cécile Mahiou is an associate researcher and adjunct professor in Comparative Literature at Nantes University, France. She received her Ph.D. in Aesthetics from Paris 1 Sorbonne University. In her forthcoming book *Poétiques du quotidien* (Editions de la Sorbonne, 2022), she addresses the construct of the everyday and argues that the investigation of the everyday in the 1960s and 1980s was conducted at the crossroads of

social sciences and art. In a recent peer-reviewed article (forthcoming, *La Licorne* review, 2022), C. Mahiou looks back at the theoretical foundations of the two distinct notions of “the everyday” and “the ordinary”.

Presentation ID# 21705: ‘I wanted to do something that I wanted to do’: The Alienating Cycle of the Everyday in Zoya Pirzad

Mélanie Heydari (melanie.heydari@gmail.com)
Barnard College

MLA Member

Eastern Standard Time, GMT-5:00

Expertise and Scholarship: Mélanie Heydari received her PhD in postcolonial literature from the Sorbonne, Paris, in 2012. She has lectured on her research at international conferences and has published multiple papers in peer-reviewed journals. Her areas of research include women’s and feminist literature and postcolonial literature. She currently teaches French language and literature at Barnard College and world literature at Gallatin, NYU.

Organizer

Mélanie Heydari (melanie.heydari@gmail.com)
Barnard College

MLA Member

Eastern Standard Time, GMT-5:00

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