Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Reading (6AAEC055)

Level: 6, Credits: 15
Teaching Method: Two-hour seminar
Convenor: Professor Anna Snaith, Room VWB 7.39, ext. 2174, anna.snaith@kcl.ac.uk
Semester Two
Assessment: 4000 word essay (topics to be devised by students in consultation with course leader): 90%
Oral Seminar Presentation and written summary: 10%

Course Description: Virginia Woolf is one of the most iconic writers of the twentieth century. Her image continues to circulate in contemporary culture, a ready signifier of experimental modernism, bohemian London, 1970s feminism, pacifism, madness, and the drive to suicide. She is a writer who has generated an enormous amount of critical and popular attention, her oft-controversial status a result of her interest in culturally troubling questions, those that still preoccupy us in the twenty-first century. This course will treat a range of Woolf’s work via a focus on reading: both the ways in which she has been read and her own politics of reading. Woolf’s investment in the ‘common reader’ and her related concern with reading publics, public libraries, education and the politics of language make her uniquely situated in the context of the modernist avant garde. We will study a selection of her work across a range of genres, always paying close attention to the historical and political contexts out of which her writing emerged. Her engagement with the politics of difference – class, gender, race, sexuality – will form another thread throughout the course. We will explore the ways in which her experiments in aesthetics intersect with her political concerns. New ways of living and new ways of writing go hand in hand for Woolf.

NB The key primary texts will be supplemented by primary and secondary material provided on KEATS (King’s elearning service).

Week One: Introduction: Reading Woolf and Woolf Reading [material in handout on KEATS]
Week Two: Empire: The Voyage Out (1915)
Week Three: Education: Jacob’s Room (1922)
Week Four: Urban Spaces: Mrs Dalloway (1925)
Week Five: Feminism: A Room Of One’s Own (1929)
Week Six: Reading Week
Week Seven: Biography: Flush (1933)
Week Eight: The Common Reader: selected essays
Week Nine: History: The Years (1937)
Week Ten: Fascism: Three Guineas (1938)
Bibliography

Primary Texts:

See also The Diary of Virginia Woolf (5 vols); The Letters of Virginia Woolf (6 vols), The Essays of Virginia Woolf (5 vols).

Weekly Supplementary Reading (available via KEATS or online):
Week One (Introduction):
- ‘Introduction’, Brenda Silver, Virginia Woolf: Icon (pp. 4-12)
- Virginia Woolf, ‘How Should One Read a Book?’ (1926)
- Two letters to Woolf from readers of A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas

Week Two (The Voyage Out):
- Jed Esty, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Colony and the Adolescence of Modernist Fiction’ in Modernism and Colonialism ed Begam and Valdez Moses

Week Three (Jacob’s Room):
- Woolf, ‘Why?’ in Selected Essays

Week Four (Mrs Dalloway):

Week Five (A Room of One’s Own):

Week Seven (Flush):
- Pamela Caughie, Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism, Chapter 5.

Week Eight (The Common Reader):
- Extracts from Melba Cuddy-Keane, Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere (2003).

Week Nine (The Years)
- Extracts from the manuscript drafts (The Pargiters)

Week Ten (Three Guineas)
Merry Pawlowski, 'Exposing Masculine Spectacle: Virginia Woolf’s Newspaper Clippings for Three Guineas as Contemporary Cultural History (online)

Reference Works:

Secondary Reading:
----- “Virginia Woolf Teaching/Virginia Woolf Learning: Morley College and the Common Reader.” In New Essays on Virginia Woolf, edited by Helen
------. *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,
1983.

Useful websites:
International Virginia Woolf Society: http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS/

Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain: http://www.virginiawoolfsoociety.co.uk/