

Cynthia Vialle-Giancotti
Fictional Reconfigurations of the Family

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Quarter:
Instructor: Cynthia Laura Vialle-Giancotti
Pronouns: She, her, hers
Room: TBD
Day and Time:
Office Hours:

Course Description

Happy families are all alike. Unhappy families are unhappy all in different ways.

Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Tolstoy's famous opening of *Anna Karenina* relies on an implied and shared definition of the family. But what is the family? How do we define it and how do we think about it? Even though in recent years this term has shown a certain fluidity and a potential for embracing monoparental, same-sex and recomposed families, along the traditional mother-father-children scenario, the family as a heteronormative structure still holds fast in our imaginary. And yet, across the centuries literature has helped re-think and reshape imaginatively and ideologically the family, both as a concept and as a social structure, helping society become more open to change. In this class we'll explore literary texts playing and negotiating the idea of family in fiction.

I am interested in adding texts/cinematic works to the syllabus if you have a suggestion and a preference for works I hadn't considered!

Calendar

Week 1-Introduction

Section 1 Introduction

Section 2 Families and Fairy Tales

Madame d'Aulnoy (1605-1705), *Fairy-Tales* (1690)

Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* [Selections]

Week 2-Queering the Enlightenment Family

Section 1 Voltaire (1694-1778), *Candide* (1759) [Selections]

Tracy Rutler, *Queering the Enlightenment* (2022)

Section 2 Henry Fielding (1707-1754), *The Female Husband* (1746)

Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer* (1995) [Selections]

Week 3-Monstruous Families

Section 1 Mary Shelley (1797-1851), *Frankenstein* (1818) [first half]

Andeweg, Sloznik, *Gothic Kinship* (2013) [second half]

Section 1 Victor Hugo (1802-1885), *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1833) [Selections]

A history of private Life, vol. IV, ed. by Michelle Perrot (ch. 4)

Week 4-Evil Families

Section 1 Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) [Selections]

Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations* (2004) [Selections]

Section 2 Jane Austen (1775-1817), *Northanger Abbey* (1796) [Selections]

Sharon Marcus, *Between Women* (2007)

Week 5-The Bourgeois Family and its Discontents

Section 1 Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), *Madame Bovary* (1856)

Tony Williams, "Champfleury, Flaubert and the Novel of Adultery" (1991)

Section 2 Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), *Anna Karenina* (1878)

Ani Kokobobo, "Sexual Citizenship and the Legacy of the Novel of Adultery in Twenty-First Century Adaptation of Anna Karenina" (2016)

Week 6-The Bourgeois Family and its Discontents (Continued)

Section 1 Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), *A Doll's House* (1879)

Section 2 Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), *The Years* (1939) [Selections]

Week 7- Siblings and Twins

Section 1 Henry James (1843-1916), *The Turn of the Screw*

Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (1913)

Section 2 Arundhati Roy (1961-), *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Dora-Laskey, Reid, "No Each, No Other": Narrative Hybridity and Collective Action in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* [2014]

Week 8-Post-Modern "Families"

Section 1 Hanya Yanagihara (1975-), *A Little Life* (2015) [Selections]

Herring, Wallace, "Never Better: Queer Commitment Phobia in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*" (2021)

Section 2 "Friends" Tv Series [Selections]

Jillian Sandell, "I'll Be There For You: Friends and the Fantasy of Alternative Families" (1998)

Wachowskis, *Sense8* (2015-2018) [Selections]

Week 9-Post-Modern "Families" (Continued)

Section 1 Bong Joon-Ho, *Parasites* (2019)

Section 2 Chloé Zhao, *Nomadland* (2020)

Week 10-Posters and Written Assignments Presentations

Section 1 Poster+Written Assignments Presentations

Section 2 Poster+Written Assignments Presentations

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

By the end of this course, you will:

- learn to identify fictional representations of the family;
- learn to analyse both fictional and critical texts in their social and historical contexts;
- become more comfortable using the vocabulary pertaining gender, identity and intersectionality on the one hand, and of literary analysis on the other hand;
- learn to research a social and historical phenomenon, using a variety of resources from different fields;

Credits, Assignments and Grades

You may take the credit for 3, 4 or 5 units, letter grade or credit/no credit. Please note that the credit/no credit option requires per university policy a grade of "C-" or above to pass.

Details on the Evaluation format

3 Units

- **Class Participation (20% of the Grade)**
- **Short Oral Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, on assigned topic to kick off discussion.
- **Journaling (40% of the Grade)**, six in total.
- **Poster Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, in groups of 2, 3 or 4

4 Units

- **Class Participation (10% of the Grade)**
- **Short Oral Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, on assigned topic to kick off discussion.
- **Journaling (20% of the Grade)**, six in total.
- **Poster Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, in groups of 2, 3 or 4.
- **Final Paper or Final Quiz (30% of the Grade)**, 7-8 pages // 5 essay questions to be prepared over a week.

5 Units

- **Class Participation (10% of the Grade)**
- **Short Oral Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, on assigned topic to kick off discussion.
- **Journaling (20% of the Grade)**, four in total.
- **Poster Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, in groups of 2, 3 or 4.
- **Final Paper or Final Quiz (30% of the Grade)**, 10-12 pages //6 essay questions to be prepared over a week.

Preparation and Participation both are essential parts of the class. They entail you arriving on time in class, having read the material beforehand, being present and attentive, participating respectfully in the

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discussion, submitting the assignments on time. All of the above contribute to thriving and enriching discussions, and ultimately foster a sense of community in the class.

Journaling: You will write journal entries to reflect on how the family as a concept is represented in the given text, on what you are learning, what surprised you in the readings. Each journal entry should be of about 2-300 words (it is more about reflecting with your reading than a writing assignment). The shared nature of the journal entry (it will be on a google folder) will help class preparation and discussion. **They should be inserted in the google doc at least ten minutes prior to each section, starting from section 2 of week 1.**

Short Oral presentation: 15min max presentation on an assigned topic, decided together with the instructor, to kick off class discussion. Presentations Suggestions:

- 1) Paraphrase the text (summarize it and describe its logical sequence/narrative structure). Or present an overview of the issue at hand, when the presentation is about background information.
- 2) Present the two or three passages you find most relevant and analyze them. If you are not presenting about readings on the syllabus, bring mini excerpts from relevant written material.
- 3) Suggest insightful questions for our class discussion.

Make your presentation a lively one, with or without props such as Powerpoint, handouts, transparencies, etc. You have anywhere from 8 to 12 minutes, even more if you engage the class (it is ideal to combine your role as presenter with that of discussion moderator). Throughout

Poster Presentation: Students get together in groups of 2, 3 or 4 and present one theme or object priorly agreed with the instructor. Prepare a poster presentation (Paper format / / digital format) and be prepared to walk your classmates and instructors through your poster. The poster should explain the object and how it relates to one of the themes discussed in class. Feel free to be as creative as you want. Visual prompts are strongly encouraged. If you have in mind an ageistic representation of old people in movies, you could present and/or analyse scenes in light of the concepts learnt in class.

Final Research Paper: Length of the paper will depend on the number of Units. You will expand on a theme or a work explored in class, analyse it critically by using the appropriate concepts and vocabulary learnt in class. The topic is to be discussed in advance with the instructor.

OR Final Quiz: You will pick 5/6 essay questions out of the 10 proposed and answer with 4-600 words to each one of them. The questions will be announced on the last day of class and you will have one week of time to submit them. Spelling accuracy, good grammar, good structure and syntax are fundamental, considering the allotted time.

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Late Submissions Policy

All assignment due dates will be posted on Canvas to help you plan. If you take the class for 3 or 4 units, you may choose which assignments to submit (respecting, however their due date).

If, for whatever reasons, you are having difficulties in submitting the assignments on time, you have up to one week (=7 days) of delay allowed, distributable throughout the assignments, i.e. you wouldn't be penalized if you submitted one of the assignments one day late, or three assignments two days late. After that bonus week, your grade will be affected in this manner:

- 1 day late: -25% of the total grade;
- 2 days late: -50% of the total grade;
- 3+ days late: -75% of the total grade;

Affordability, Sensibility and Inclusion

Since I believe in the importance of free education, I am committed to making this class financially accessible to all students, therefore: **all of the material for the class will be available on Canvas, you are not expected to buy anything.**

The works we are reading are almost all of autobiographical works. Being narrations of real-life experiences, some of them may (but not necessarily) trigger uncomfortable and/or disturbing thoughts. I will not warn students about particular topics, because sensitivity to different topics varies from person to person, and because topics may arise unexpectedly in class discussion. If you anticipate or experience acute distress as a result of encountering a particular topic, please talk to me so I can arrange an alternate assignment. As you may know, there is a difference between feeling personal distress and feeling uncomfortable. Feeling uncomfortable (and sometimes even angry or offended) is part of intellectual growth. Feeling distress is not. I encourage you to take care of yourselves and each other, and to let me know how we can help, within the scope of my role as educator.

Given the fact that we will discuss sensitive issues, such as ideas and concepts about identity, gender, race, ethnicity, it is imperative that there be an atmosphere of trust and safety in the classroom. We will work on fostering an environment in which everyone feels safe to speak and is open to listening to what the other has to say. The act of self-representation is an act which exposes the core of the identity and thus renders the person vulnerable to attack. However, this act of acknowledging one's own essence is also a profoundly empowering moment and that's why we will be working on it.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE's web address is the following: <http://oae.stanford.edu>.

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The Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. Examples of conduct that have been regarded as being in violation of the Honor Code (and are most relevant for this course) include copying from another student's exam paper or allowing another student to copy from one's own paper; unpermitted collaboration; plagiarism*; revising and resubmitting a quiz or exam for regrading, without the instructor's knowledge and consent; representing as one's own work the work of another; using another student's clicker or mastering physics account; and giving or receiving aid on an academic assignment under circumstances in which a reasonable person should have known that such aid was not permitted.

See <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/communitystandards/policy/honor-code>