Course Description:

Postwar and contemporary women’s fiction in Britain and in the United States is usually read as a critique of gender, sexuality, race and class, and women’s responses to these issues. Academic discussion of these writers tends to assume a coherent set of social diagnoses and political remedies. But if we consider literature outside the realist tradition – the gothic, the grotesque, the comic, the satiric – we find writers whose perspective on moral clarity and political redress is at best opaque. Muriel Spark, Hilary Mantel, Flannery O’Connor, Shirley Jackson, Lorrie Moore, Lionel Shriver, Mary Gaitskill: all of these women present us with a range of negative affects and pathological behaviors that gesture to social conditions, but that refuse the redemptive or reparative impulses of feminist intervention. We shall read these writers in order to explore the narrative emplotment of psychopathologies that are at once the most obscure and the most quotidian: schadenfreude, projection and transference, irritability, cruel optimism, violence, bad parenting, trauma and its afterlife – all those things that constitute the Freudian death drive. Be prepared to encounter some very unpleasant characters.

Literary Texts:

We shall read the following fictions – a mixture of novels and short stories -- in the following order. Please try to obtain the editions prescribed here. Sufficient copies will be ordered in the Université de Montréal bookstore.

Muriel Spark, “The Twins” (short story—posted on StudiUM)
Flannery O’Connor, A Good Man is Hard to Find. Harcourt.
Shirley Jackson, We Have Always Lived in the Castle. Penguin.
Patricia Highsmith, Little Tales of Misogyny. Penguin.
Hilary Mantel, The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher. Fourth Estate.
Lionel Shriver, We Need to Talk about Kevin. Harper/Perennial.

Critical Reading:
From time to time, short critical essays or excerpts from longer works will be made available on StudiUM. Such readings will be drawn from contemporary feminist and queer theory and from psychoanalytic theory.

**Evaluation:**

- Oral Presentation (20 minutes) and short essay (5-6 pages) 50%
- Final Essay 50%

A schedule of readings will be posted on StudiUM prior to the beginning of the Winter semester.