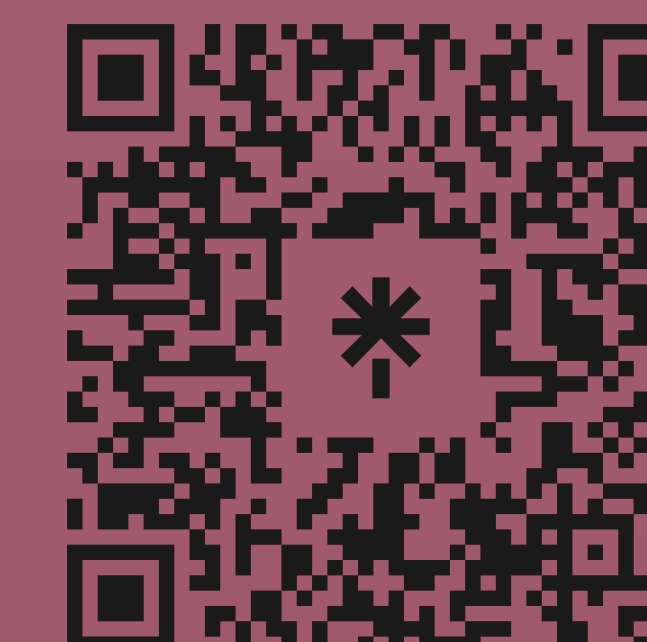




Radical Women in Literature: Advancing Progressive Aims or Reinforcing Harmful Beliefs?

Olivia Kersten



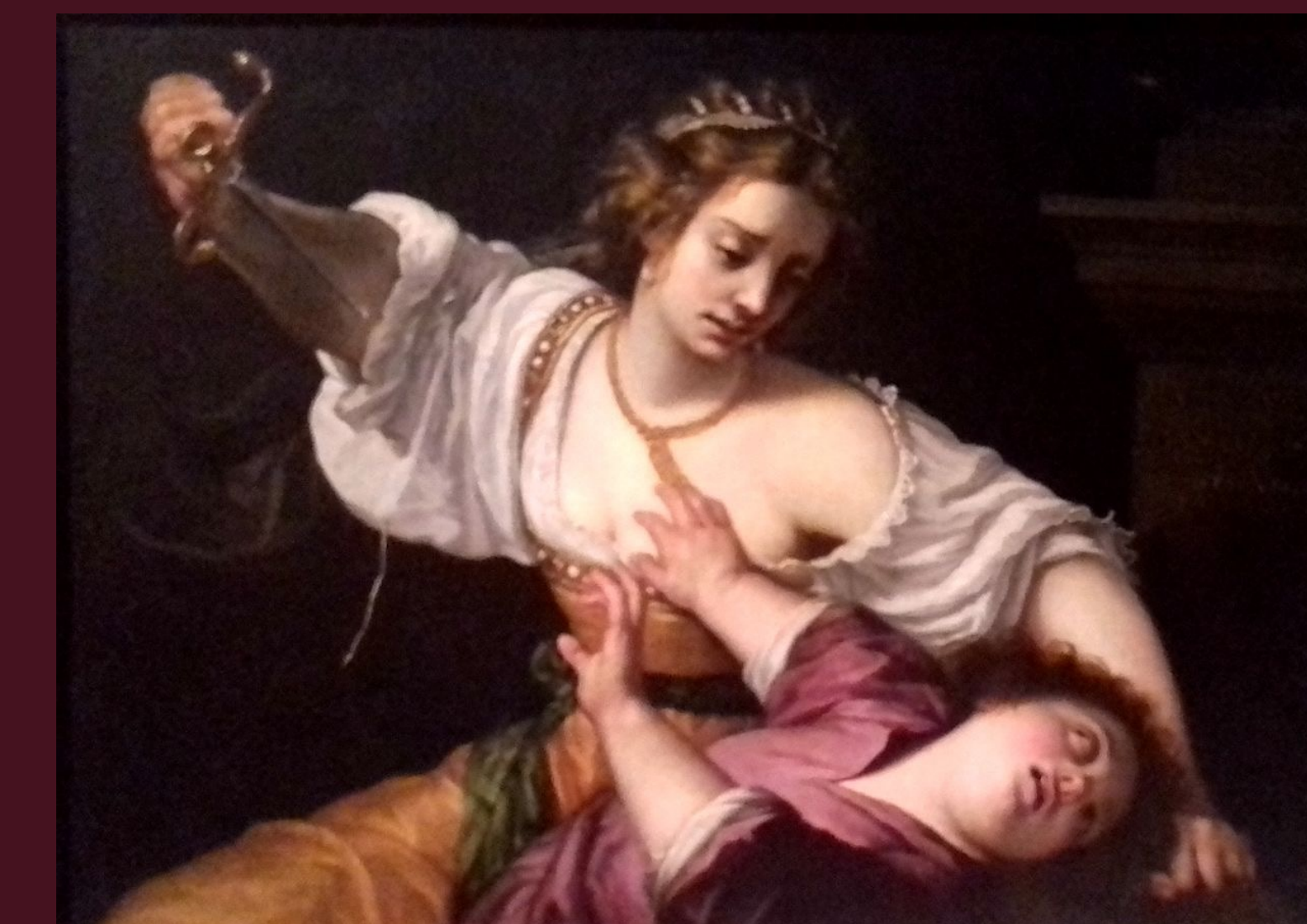
QR Code for Contact Information
Email: okersten@unc.edu

Introduction: What Are Radical Women in Literature?

Definition of Radical Women: Dissidents from prevailing gender norms in response to oppression, particularly patriarchal oppression

Prominent Literary Radical Women: Amy Dunne (*Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn), Yeong-hye (*The Vegetarian* by Han Kang), Medea (*Medea* by Euripides)

Sexual and domestic violence are widespread epidemics in the United States, especially for women. In response to the violence they face, some women begin to act or think radically against oppressive systems. *The Vegetarian* (2016) by Han Kang and *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn both have radical women who respond to patriarchal oppression, sometimes even in violent ways.



Artemisia Gentileschi, *Medea*, 1620s, unknown dimensions.

Yeong-hye

Oppression

- Subjected to sexual violence by husband and father
- Force fed meat by father, husband, and brother
- Physically abused by father during childhood

Radical Actions

- Believes she is becoming a plant
- Self-harms
- Refuses to sleep or eat
- Awakens sister to oppression



Amy Dunne

Oppression

- Husband moved her from New York to Missouri
 - Does not consider her opinions/feelings
- Cheated on with a younger woman
- Husband despises “Real Amy”

Radical Actions

- Frames husband for kidnapping and domestic abuse
- Self harms
- Murders lover
- Frames two old lovers for sexual violence
- Accuses high school friend of violence/stalking



Connections to the #MeToo Movement

Yeong-hye

- Sequestered to psychiatric hospital
 - Intersectional identity
- Awakens sister to oppression
 - Could do the same for readers
- Silenced like #MeToo survivors
 - But her silence may be a radical act

Amy Dunne

- Welcomed back into society
- *Gone Girl* may not have had the same reception/success if Amy was not white and wealthy
- False claims reinforce harmful mentality that survivors should be doubted
 - Advances “witch hunt” mentality

Conclusions

- Amy’s misogynistic tendencies limit her progressive capabilities
 - Reinforce harmful assumptions about survivors
 - Embody harmful beliefs about liberated women
 - Amy’s risks outweigh her progressive benefits
- If Yeong-hye can raise reader’s awareness about oppression, she can also raise support for feminist movements
 - Capability to uncover global oppression
- Radical women do not endorse violence and self-harm
 - Represent those deprived of all other options
 - Extreme oppression = radical retaliations
- Radical women can make us uncomfortable, but the oppression they face should unsettle us more

#MeToo Movement Background

- Started by Tarana Burke in 2006 to focus on women of color
 - Only became viral because of white female celebrities
- Fails to include intersectional identities like women of color, working-class women, and transgender people

