

---

## English and Women's Studies 480/580: Sylvia Plath

---

Fall 2008  
T 4:00-6:20  
Corbly Hall 465  
Section 101

Dr. Janet Badia  
Phone: 696-2357  
badia@marshall.edu  
Office: Corbly 447

Office Hours: Tuesday 1:15-4:00, Wednesday 3:00-4:00, Thursday 10:00-11:00, and by appointment

This course will study the range of works written by Sylvia Plath, including *The Bell Jar*, *The Collected Poems*, and *Ariel: The Restored Edition*, as well as excerpts from her journals and other prose writings. We will also read a variety of works from Plath's "afterlife"—that is, those literary works recently published about her life, including Ted Hughes' *Birthday Letters*, Kate Moses' *Wintering* (a novel that attempts to imagine the last months of Plath's life), and a selection of poems written about her by writers like Anne Sexton and Richard Wilbur, among others. As we study her work, we will consider the cultural phenomenon that Plath has become, looking, for example, at everything from internet fan sites devoted to Plath to movies in which her works make "cameo appearances." We will also read a variety of theoretical pieces on topics ranging from cultural poetics, to reception studies, to editorial theory, to intertextuality. The purpose of this reading will be to provide a theoretical foundation for thinking through the issues raised by Plath's writings, including their relation to gender and cultural politics, to literary history, and to texts by other writers.

The general objectives of this course, then, are:

- To provide you with an opportunity to study a single author in-depth
- To help you hone your repertoire of close reading and analytical skills
- To help you formulate significant critical questions about the texts you read and to write about these questions effectively, using the conventions of literary criticism and academic writing
- To provide you with the opportunity to read and approach literature through various critical/theoretical lenses
- To provide you with the opportunity through class discussion and formal writing and presentations to experience, appreciate, and produce multiple and multi-layered interpretations of a literary text

### Required Texts:

*The Collected Poems*, by Sylvia Plath (1982)

*Ariel: The Restored Edition*, by Sylvia Plath (2004)

*The Bell Jar*, by Sylvia Plath (1971)

*Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, by Sylvia Plath (2000)

*The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, by Sylvia Plath (2000)

*Collected Poems*, by Ted Hughes (2003)

*Wintering*, Kate Moses (2003)

Various selected poems by Ted Hughes, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, and others (Drinko library reserve and Blackboard)

### Recommended Texts:

*Letters Home*, by Sylvia Plath (1975)

*Ariel*, by Sylvia Plath (original HarperCollins edition) (1966)

*The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*, edited by Jo Gill (2006)

A note on the textbooks: please keep in mind that you should purchase your books immediately. If you opt to order them online, be sure that the method of shipping you choose gets the books to you in time to complete the assigned reading. Not having one of the books is no excuse for missing an assignment given the availability of the books in the MU Bookstore.

### Requirements

**Close Reading Journal and Informal Writings (20%):** Once and sometimes twice a week, you will be expected to complete a close reading assignment. This writing will combine thematic exploration and close reading of a passage I select. Specifically, you will do two tasks: first, you will copy the passage out and annotate it; second, you will write at least two well-developed paragraphs (250 words approximately) that closely analyze how the specific elements of the passage contribute to one of the work's larger thematic or theoretical concerns. The purpose of this writing is three-fold: it provides you with the

opportunity to process the literature you read before coming to class, to generate specific issues for discussion, and to practice your close reading skills. These assignments are due at the start of the class for which they were assigned. In addition, I may ask you in class to share material from your assignments with the rest of the class to begin discussion. See course packet for more on this assignment.

**Short Explication Essay (20%):** You will be expected to complete a short essay, approximately 4-5 pages in length, that demonstrates your close reading skills. More on this later.

**Formal Research Essay (30%):** You will be responsible for writing an 8-9 page research essay. These essays will combine close reading and theoretical inquiry, making use of both the primary and secondary readings for this course. More on this later as well.

**Graduate Students:** You will be responsible for writing a 10-12 page research essay on one or more of the primary texts from the class. To prevent possible pitfalls, each of you will turn in a preliminary abstract of your essay (a well-developed paragraph about the argument you would like to make and how you will make it) no later than three weeks before the essay due date.

**Primary Research Project and Presentation (15%):** Whereas the writing assignments for this course are designed for you to practice your close reading skills—to look intensively at the small picture—the presentation assignment is meant to give you the opportunity to think about the literary and popular culture that informs and shapes Plath's writing—to look at the big picture, in other words. Working in small groups, you will select a topic from a list I have generated, research the topic, and present your findings to the class on an assigned date. More later.

**Participation (Including Quizzes and In-Class Work) (15%):** Because this is an upper-level (seminar-like) course that emphasizes class discussion and collective investigation, your success in this class depends greatly on your willingness to participate, actively, in the study of literature. This means *attending class, doing the reading, coming to class prepared, contributing to class discussion, and participating in small group work*. Everyone will be expected to read—carefully and thoughtfully—the assigned readings and to participate in class discussions in thoughtful and productive ways. The typical “A” participant, then, is someone who never misses classes, contributes thoughtful remarks frequently, and clearly keeps up with her or his work.

## Policies

**Attendance:** Because this course emphasizes active participation in discussion, regular attendance is absolutely essential to your success in this class and to the success of the class in general. Indeed, when you miss class, you also miss the exchange of ideas that is intended to strengthen your skills as a reader and writer. Therefore, excessive absences are simply unacceptable. For each unexcused absence, your participation grade will be lowered by a letter grade (e.g., B+ to a C+, C+ to a D+). Missing half a class will count as half an absence and will be tallied up accordingly. Those students with more than two unexcused absences will automatically fail the course. For definitions of excused absences, see Marshall's policy in the current course catalogue. Also note that if you do miss class, you are responsible for finding out from a classmate any assignments you will have missed.

**Edited Standard Written English:** Prerequisites for this course include two composition courses, English 101 and English 102, so the assumption is that you can compose an essay using Edited Standard Written English (ESWE). Thus, while it is acceptable to have sentence-level errors, misspellings, and punctuation problems in your informal writings and drafts, it is not acceptable to have excessive errors in the final copies of your formal essays. For each of your three formal essays, you can have no more than an average of three ESWE errors per page in the following categories:

- ◆ Spelling and typographical errors
- ◆ Sentence punctuation errors, including run-on sentences, fragments, comma splices, etc.
- ◆ Verb form, tense, and agreement with subject
- ◆ Pronoun form and agreement with antecedent
- ◆ Possessives and plurals

Should you exceed this limit, you will be required to seek assistance at the English department Writing Center (see below) before your next essay is due. If you fail to seek out this assistance, you will receive a failing grade for the essay.

**Late and Missed Assignments:** Late work is not accepted and will be returned to you ungraded. If you foresee a problem with an assignment, see me about it before the day it is due. If you expect to miss class on the day an assignment is due, plan to turn it in early.

**Plagiarism:** Using someone else's words, ideas, or work without proper acknowledgment or documentation is the most serious of academic offenses. This includes everything from turning in someone else's work as your own, to buying a paper and submitting it as your own, to paraphrasing (i.e., putting into

your own words) ideas you got from other sources, whether books or the web, without appropriately documenting and citing your source. Please see the handout in your course packet on plagiarism and how to avoid it. And if you have any questions about plagiarism, speak to me about it, preferably before you turn in your assignment. Let me emphasize the severity of this offense: All cases of plagiarism will result in the failure of this course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs, resulting in possible academic probation or suspension.

**Tolerance and Respect:** Any speech or behavior that shows disrespect or intolerance towards others in the class is not allowed. As college students, you will be expected to participate in class discussions in mature ways that demonstrate an open-mindedness towards diversity, including differences in race, culture, gender, sexuality, religion, and ideas.

**Cell phones:** Remember to either turn your phones off or, if you absolutely must, place them on vibrate for emergencies only. Under no circumstances should you text message in class.

### Resources

**Me:** Don't hesitate to come directly to me with questions or concerns. I have four office hours each week (listed above) and am available by appointment as well.

**The Writing Center:** As a MU student, you are also entitled to individualized, one-on-one assistance from a tutor at The Writing Center in the English Department. They can help you with any step in the writing process, from invention to revision. The service is free, and you can make an appointment online at <http://www.marshall.edu/english/writingcenter/appointments.html> .

### Course Schedule

T Aug. 26	<u>For first hour:</u> Course introduction; review syllabus; discussion of selections by Plath	<u>For second hour:</u> Tour library and discuss course research methods
T Sept. 2	<u>Read for first hour:</u> <i>The Bell Jar</i>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> Selections from <i>Johnny Panic and The Bible of Dreams</i> (R)
T Sept. 9	<u>Read for first hour:</u> <i>The Bell Jar</i>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> Selections from <i>The Journals</i> and <i>Johnny Panic and The Bible of Dreams</i> (R)
T Sept. 16	<u>Read:</u> nothing required, but you're encouraged to read a Plath biography (e.g., Martin's <i>Sylvia Plath: A Biography</i> ; Middlebrook's <i>Her Husband</i> , Alexander's <i>Rough Magic</i> , or Stevenson's <i>Bitter Fame</i> )  Watch and discuss <i>10 Things I Hate About You</i>	
T Sept. 23	<u>First hour:</u> <u>In-class Presentation(s):</u> magazine culture, mental illness, second wave feminism, and/or Cold War politics	<u>Read for second hour:</u> Selections on new historicism/cultural poetics (see Blackboard)
T Sept. 30	<u>Read for first hour:</u> <i>Ariel Restored</i>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> <i>Wintering</i>
T Oct. 7	<u>Read for first hour:</u> <i>Ariel Restored</i>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> <i>Wintering</i> Selections on editorial theory and reception theory (see Blackboard)
T Oct. 14	<u>Read for first hour:</u> <i>Ariel</i> (the 1965 edition)	<u>For second hour:</u>

		<u>In-class Presentation:</u> reception of <i>Ariel</i> (1965 edition)
T Oct. 21	<u>Read for first hour:</u> Selections from <i>The Collected Poems</i>  ➤ <b>Short Essay Due</b>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> Selections from <i>The Collected Poems</i>  <u>In-class Presentation:</u> reception of <i>Winter Trees</i> and <i>Crossing the Water</i> and/or <i>The Colossus</i>
T Oct. 28	<u>Read for first hour:</u> Selections from <i>The Collected Poems</i>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> Selections from <i>Collected Poems</i> by Ted Hughes
T Nov. 4	<u>Read for first hour:</u> Selections from <i>The Collected Poems</i>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> Selections from <i>Collected Poems</i> by Ted Hughes  <u>In-class Presentation:</u> reception of <i>The Collected Poems</i>
T Nov. 11	<u>Read for first hour:</u> Selections from <i>The Collected Poems</i> Selections from <i>Collected Poems</i> by Ted Hughes Selections from <i>The Journals</i>	<u>For second hour:</u>  <u>In-class Presentation:</u> reception of <i>Birthday Letters</i>
T Nov. 18	<u>Read for first hour:</u> Selections from <i>The Collected Poems</i>  ➤ <b>Complete Draft of Research Essay Due</b>	<u>Read for second hour:</u> Writing Workshop Handouts in course packet for peer response for Research Essays
T Nov. 25	Thanksgiving Break—no class	
T Dec. 2	<u>Read for first hour:</u> Selections from other poets writing about Sylvia Plath and Sandra Gilbert's "Confessions of a Plath Addict" (see Blackboard)  ➤ <b>Research Essay Due</b>	<u>For second hour:</u> Student colloquium
T Dec. 9	<u>For second hour:</u> Student colloquium	<u>For second hour:</u> Course conclusions; course evaluations

A final note on the readings: You can expect this syllabus to change and evolve over the course of the quarter. I will, of course, keep you up to date on the changes. For your part, please be patient and attentive to announcements and any assignments you might miss because of absences.