

**Sylvia Plath and Her Cultural Afterlife**  
(10/2/13)

Professor Marsha Bryant

Time & Place: W Period 6-8 in in TUR 4112 (Department seminar room)

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Office Hours: M F Period 4 and by appointment

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By the time she was named one of *Time* magazine's 100 Artists and Entertainers of the Century in 1998, Sylvia Plath had become a preeminent poet—and literary culture's ultimate commodity. From her photo-shoot in the Cambridge *Varsity* during her Fulbright years to Christine Jeffs's film *Sylvia*, Plath enters the cultural imagination as text and image, writer and celebrity, historical and mythic figure. This course will explore Plath's literary career and her cultural afterlife through close study of her poems, her novel, her journals, and her critical reception in websites and the online journal *Plath Profiles*. We will also study key ways that biographers plot Plath's life and career, as well as her contemporary status in the media. The latter perspective is especially fitting in this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Bell Jar* and Plath's death.

TEXTS:

Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*

Sylvia Plath, *Unabridged Journals*

Sylvia Plath, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Elizabeth Winder, *Pain, Parties, Work* (short version);

Ted Hughes, *Birthday Letters*

1 of these Plath biographies: Linda Wagner-Martin (*Sylvia Plath: A Biography*), Paul Alexander (*Rough Magic*), Carl Roily son (*American Isis*)

GRAD ASSIGNMENTS (instructions below)

- Faithful Attendance and Active participation
- Professional Biography & Archive paragraphs (1 page total)
- Teaching Report (15 minutes + 1-page handout for 12 people)
- Paper Proposal (1.5 pages)
- Seminar Paper (22-25 pages; see \*MFA option below)

SYLLABUS

*Date*                      *Reading/ Viewing/Web Assignment*

1 W 8/21	<p><b>Plath poems:</b> "Second Winter" (1955; see email attachment); <i>Collected Poems</i>. "Soliloquy of the Solipsist" (1956), "The Ghost's Leavetaking" (1958), "Full Fathom Five" (1958), "Metaphors" (1959), "Daddy" (1962); from <i>Plath Profiles</i>, vol. 1 (2008)</p> <p>&lt;<a href="http://www.iun.edu/~nwadmin/plath/">http://www.iun.edu/~nwadmin/plath/</a>&gt; : <b>Editor's Note</b>, these pieces from the <b>Essays</b> section (Mossberg, Decker, Holladay, Ekmekcioglu, Dillon, Ciobanu, Ferretter), all of the <b>Poetry</b> section, and Zimbakova's piece in the <b>Art</b> section; Trailer to Christine Jeffs <i>Sylvia</i> (2003): &lt;<a href="http://youtu.be/HUIEGnVlihO">http://youtu.be/HUIEGnVlihO</a>&gt;; Ryan Adams, "Sylvia Plath" &lt;<a href="http://youtu.be/2EK5RluCvCE">http://youtu.be/2EK5RluCvCE</a>&gt;</p>
2 W 8/28	<p>*Meet in Smathers Library (East), Special Collections Research Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor with Rare Books Curator John Ingram; <b>Email Professional Bio &amp; Archive paragraphs</b> to me by <i>Friday, 8/30</i> (see below)</p>

3 W9/4	CP poems from 1956-58; Sherry Lutz Zivley, "Sylvia Plath's Transformations of Modernist Paintings" in <i>College Literature</i> 29.3 (available through library e-journals; <i>Teaching Reports</i> 1 & 2: "Black Rook in Rainy Weather," "All the Dead Dears," "Full Fathom Five"
4W 9/11	CP poems from 1959-61; <i>Teaching Reports</i> 3 & 4: "The Ravaged Face," "Electra on Azalea Path," "The Colossus," "Face Lift," "Morning Song," "The Moon and the Yew Tree"
5 W 9/18	CP poems from 1962-63 + Plath Page on <i>Modern American Poetry Site</i> (see my Links); get through 1/3 of <i>Unabridged Journals'</i> , <i>Teaching Reports</i> 5 & 6: "The Rabbit Catcher," "The Arrival of the Bee Box," "Medusa," "Fever 103°," "Ariel," "Purdah," "Death & Co."; <b>Profession 101: The Professional 3<sup>rd</sup> Person</b>
6 W 9/25	Discuss <i>Unabridged Journals + Plath Profiles</i> 3 Fall Supplement section on <i>UJ</i> + my "IMAX Authorship: Teaching Plath and Her <i>Unabridged Journals</i> " in <i>Pedagogy</i> 4.2
7 W 10/2	Plath's Anniversary Media Image. Explore <i>the Sylvia Plath Info blog</i> (see my Links), and read/listen to everything under the tab "50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Articles"; <b>Profession 101: Conference Papers, Proposals</b>
8 W 10/9	Plath's magazine publications online or on microfilm in the library: <i>Harper's</i> (May 1954, "Doomsday"); <i>Ladies' Home Journal</i> (December 1958, "Second Winter"); <i>New Yorker</i> (9 April 1960, "Man in Black"); + Langdon Hammer, "Plath's Lives: Poetry, Professionalism, and the Culture of the School," in <i>Representations</i> 75 (library e-journals)
9 W 10/16	<i>The Bell Jar</i> ; Garry Leonard, "'The Woman is Perfected; Her Dead Body Wears the Smile of Accomplishment': Sylvia Plath zná <i>Mademoiselle Magazine</i> " in <i>College Literature</i> 19.2 (library e-journals); Andrea Krafft, "'Funny and tender and not a desperate woman'" in <i>Plath Profiles</i> 6. Guest Speaker: Andee Krafft; <i>Teaching Reports</i> 7 & 8: Chapter 1, 1 <sup>st</sup> 9 paragraphs; Chapter 6, Birth Scene with Buddy Willard
10W 10/23	Elizabeth Winder, <i>Pain, Parties, Work</i> ; reviews of Winder on <i>Sylvia Plath Info Blog</i> (50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary tab; scroll down for Reviews); Guest Speaker: Elizabeth Winder
11 W 10/30	<i>Sylvia</i> (Christine Jeffs, 2003); <b>DUE: PROPOSALS</b>
12 W 11/6	<i>Johnny Panic</i> ; <i>Plath Profiles</i> 1 ( <i>McCort essay</i> ); <i>PP</i> 4 (Shewaga & Hayman essays)
13 W 11/13	Hughes, <i>Birthday Letters</i> ; <i>Teaching Reports</i> 9 & 10: "The Tender Place," "St. Botolph's," "A Pink Wool Knitted Dress," "Error," "The Table," "Night-Ride on Ariel"+ <b>Paper Pitches</b>
14 11/20	Plath Biography Day: We'll compare the biographies you read individually. (Reviews TBA)
15 W 11/27	NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING
16 W 12/4	Luncheon at my house with a truly awful film version of <i>The Bell Jar</i>
	<i>Remember to complete your online course evaluations so I can incorporate your suggestions into next year's courses.</i>
	SEMINAR PAPERS DUE:

### Professional Biography & Archive paragraphs (1 page total, by email attachment)

*Paragraph P.* Write a polished paragraph that describes your educational background and academic interests. Before submitting, put your paragraph in Helen Sword's Writer's Diet Test (see my Links).

*Paragraph 2:* Less formally, tell me which Plath item(s) in Special Collections most interested you and why.

### Teaching Report (15 minutes + 1 p. handout)

Basically, you're telling us how you'd teach this poem/chapter excerpt to undergraduates. If you like, you may specify a pedagogical context such as Introduction to Poetry or Fiction, Women's Studies course, Upper-division American Literature Survey, CRW Workshop, Theory or Cultural Studies course. To prepare your report, consult 3-4 secondary sources; 2 must be some form of literary criticism or interpretive theory (journal article, book or book chapter, review essay), and 1 must be A/V (recording, film or television program, website, music, etc). Your 1-page handout must give a short *bibliography* of your sources and 3 *discussion questions*. You may add anything else you like to your page. *Make 12 copies* and bring them to class.

**Conference Paper Proposal** (1.5 d.s. pages, by email attachment)

Find an upcoming conference suitable for your seminar paper topic and address the proposal to the appropriate person. Panel organizers want to know: (1) What is the paper's overall argument & key issues/contexts?; (2) What fresh insights will you bring to the topic? (3) Which critics and/or theorists are most useful/not useful and why?; (4) What's an intriguing example or 2 that illustrates your approach?

*Bottom line*, why should the panel organizer select your paper? Will the implications of your analysis be broad enough to connect with other papers and interest a diverse audience? A good place to find Calls for Papers announcements (CFPs) is the link on my website. You can also find them through professional organizations such as the MLA, SCMS, AWP, ASA, and C SA.

**Paper Pitch** (3 minute talk, without notes -or- with a single page of notes)

Those in academic careers must master the art of the "3-minute" dissertation (or thesis) description. This informal exercise offers an opportunity (and a supportive environment) to get started. During the last part of class, we'll go around the table and have each person: (1) give their paper pitch; (2) field 2 audience questions. You'll be surprised at how this exercise helps you clarify your big picture and larger aims for the seminar paper.

**Seminar Paper** (22-25 pages, hard copy)

Formulate a focused and lively argument that engages any of the texts, contexts, and/or issues in our course. While my feedback on your paper proposal will provide some guidelines, *you should also discuss your topic with me* before beginning extensive work on the paper. You should cite relevant criticism and/or theory on your materials since 2000 (a more authoritative paper would be informed by a wider range of secondary sources). You may also find useful some of the materials on course reserve in Library West. Please use MLA documentation style, and pitch your argument so that it interests a diverse academic audience who may not be familiar with your primary materials. Think of this as a *project* that will yield future work (a conference paper, academic or creative thesis, dissertation chapter, article) rather than merely an end in and of itself that fulfills a course requirement. In short, this is graduate rather than undergraduate work. I look forward to reading it.

*Note* MFA students have the option of submitting a 10-12 page conference paper and a 10-12 page creative response. No exceptions.