

Cedar Crest College

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Office hours: Wed., 11:00 a.m.-noon; Thurs., 11:00 a.m.-noon, and by appointment

Topics in American Literature: Trauma and Survival ENG 223 (3 credits) Spring 2007

Texts:

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*

Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

Lynne Sharon Schwartz, *The Writing on the Wall*

Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 4th ed. (If you already own Kirsznner and Mandell's *Pocket Wadsworth Handbook*, 3rd ed, you do not need to purchase this second handbook)

Handouts

Course Description: This topics course covers significant thematic developments in American literature and film; this semester our subject will be "trauma and survival." We will study contemporary films and works of literature that address a variety of traumatic experiences, including incest, rape, and war--and ways of coping. The subject matter is dark and may be painful; our focus will always be literary analysis.

This course is an elective for the English major and minor; it fulfills the core categories of American Studies and Self-Design. Format: Lecture/Discussion.

Prerequisite: Successful completion of ENG 100: Basic Composition (a grade of "C" or higher)

Course Objectives (the following are in accordance with the educational goals of the Humanities Department, as stated in the "Assessment Framework" document):

- At the completion of the course, students will have an overview of developments in American literature and film.
- Students will have knowledge of individual works and their historical and cultural contexts.
- Students will have mastered strategies for reading a novel or watching a film critically.
- Students will have knowledge of basic film and literary terms.
- Students will be able to write effective literary essays.
- Students will gain an appreciation of literature and film.

Course Outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate their knowledge of American literary works and films.
- Students will demonstrate how individual works fit into larger literary, historical, and cultural contexts.

- Students will demonstrate critical thinking and synthesis in oral and written analyses of films and texts.
- Students will demonstrate competence in reading and writing.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of basic literary and film terms.

Course Requirements:

Your presence and your participation will determine the success of this class.

1) Attendance is required. You are allowed two (2) absences (these include medical and sports excuses, so plan your cuts carefully). More than two absences will affect your final grade; five (5) absences will result in a grade of **F**. Excessive lateness and early departures will count as absences.

2) All class members are expected to participate in discussions.

3) All reading and writing assignments must be completed by the dates specified. Be prepared for occasional quizzes and in-class discovery writing exercises.

4) Three tests. You will be responsible for the following: films viewed in class, content of class lectures and discussions, required reading, and course handouts. The first and third tests will consist of multiple-choice questions and an essay section. The second test will consist of multiple choice and true and false questions.

5) Paper (Analytical or creative: 4 pages minimum, not including "Works Cited" page). You will have a choice of topics.

Please note: There will be a penalty for late work. Late submission of the paper will result in the loss of a letter grade for the assignment (thus, a paper that would have merited a "B" will receive a grade of "C"). Even if you are absent, your paper is still due. See below for additional information on exams and writing essay answers.

Extra-credit option: You may write a response paper (1-2 pages each) on up to two guest authors.

Assessment/Grading:

Relationship of assignments and requirements to outcomes:

--Students will demonstrate their knowledge of course content by their completion of tests and an analytical or creative paper and by their meaningful participation in class discussions.

--Students will demonstrate the ability to engage in critical analysis through class discussions and written assignments.

--Students will demonstrate the ability to write clearly and effectively in essay exams and the paper.

Final Grade: Average of grades for tests, paper, and class grade (attendance; active and meaningful participation in discussions).

Student Responsibilities:

--**Make-Up Policies:** If you miss a class, you are still responsible for the material covered. Quizzes will be made-up by the following class. The only excuse honored for missing an exam will be a note signed by medical personnel; you will have a maximum of seven days to make up the midterm and second test, and two days to make up the final exam.

--The Cedar Crest **Honor Code** and the **Classroom Protocol Code**, as stated in the Customs book, will be in effect at all times.

--**Plagiarism**, which is the appropriation of and/or uncredited use of another's work, is a serious offense. It does not matter if the work is by an established author, your best friend, or a blogger whose writing you find appealing. Plagiarism is theft; it is unethical. It is a waste of your time, integrity, and money and a waste of your classmates' and my time and energy. An act of plagiarism or cheating will result in a grade of **F** for the course.

--**College Policy Regarding Learning Disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Learning Center.

--Before you leave class on the first day, make sure that you have the phone numbers/e-mail addresses of two of your classmates.

--Please turn off your cell phone before the start of class.

Syllabus

All assignments must be completed by the dates specified. Note: If changes seem to be appropriate, we'll revise the syllabus accordingly. Be prepared to participate in discussions.

January 17

Introduction to the Course

Film: *The Prince of Tides* (1991). Dir. by Barbra Streisand; screenplay by Pat Conroy and Becky Johnston, based on the 1986 Conroy novel of the same title. Streisand plays the role of Susan Lowenstein and Nick Nolte plays Tom Wingo.

January 24

For this class, read *The Bell Jar*: Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel, published in England in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas.

January 31

Film: *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1996). Dir. by Angelica Huston; screenplay by Ann Meredith, based on the 1992 novel of the same title by Dorothy Allison. Jena Malone plays Ruth Ann “Bone” Boatwright, and Jennifer Jason Leigh plays Anney Boatwright.

February 7

For this class, read *Cat’s Eye* (1985), Margaret Atwood’s coming-of-age novel about artist Elaine Risley, to p. 244 (end of Part Eight)

February 14

For this class, read *Cat’s Eye* to end

February 21

Midterm Exam

February 28

Film: *Beloved* (1998). Dir. by Jonathan Demme; screenplay by Akusua Busia, Richard LaGvenese, and Adam Brooks, based on Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer-Prize winning 1987 novel of the same title. Oprah Winfrey plays Sethe; Thandie Newton plays the title character.

March 7 No class meeting--Spring Break

March 14

Read *The Things They Carried* (1990), Tim O’Brien’s autobiographical novel about his experiences in Vietnam.

Film: Clips from *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Dir. by Francis Ford Coppala; screenplay by Coppala, John Milius, and John Herr (narration). Loosely based on Joseph Conrad’s 1902 *Heart of Darkness*. Martin Sheen plays Capt. Benjamin Willard.

March 21

Test (on content from Feb. 28 and Mar. 14 classes)

Coming Home (1978). Dir. by Hal Ashby; story idea by Nancy Dowd; and screenplay by Robert C. Jones, Waldo Salt, and Randy Wurlitzer. Jane Fonda plays Sally Hyde; Jon Voight plays Luke Martin.

March 28

Film: *Memento* (2000). Dir. by Christopher Nolan; screenplay by Christopher Nolan, based on Jonathan Nolan’s short story “Memento Mori.” Guy Pearce plays Leonard.

*Paper due

April 4

Read: *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s novel set in the days following Sept. 11, 2001, to p. 164

April 11

Read: *The Writing on the Wall*, to end

April 18

Film: *Everything Is Illuminated* (2005). Screenplay and direction by Liev Schreiber. Based on Jonathan Safran Foer's 2002 novel of the same title. Elijah Wood plays the role of a character named for the author, who travels to Ukraine and meets a most unlikely tour guide.

April 25

"Gum Drops," *CSI*, Season 6 (first air date, 10/20/05). Dir. by Richard J. Lewis; screenplay by Sarah Goldfinger. Nick Stokes (actor George Eads) is the lead investigator for this case.

*Final exam, in class on this date

Last words

Criteria for Essay Exam Questions:

An essay answer must consist of a series of clear, well-developed paragraphs, not a single paragraph. The thesis (main point) should be clearly stated in the introductory paragraph, and your essay should build clearly from one topic to the next..

Support your assertions with examples and specific details. You may find it helpful to include brief direct quotations. If you quote from or paraphrase sources (primary texts or commentary in the anthology), you must acknowledge those sources with parenthetical citations. Sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling all contribute to clarity. If an essay answer displays serious weaknesses in these areas, 10-15 points will be deducted.

Criteria for Paper:

Minimum length: 4 pages, not including your "Works Cited" page. You are not required to use secondary sources; if you do use them, follow MLA format (6th ed.). If you choose to write an analytical paper, you will of necessity have to include quotations from your primary source(s); again, use MLA format, with parenthetical citations and an entry or entries for the "Works (or Work) Cited" page.

For this assignment, you may choose to write a personal narrative or reflective essay; remember that allusions to one or more of the works on our syllabus will make your paper richer.

The criteria will be the universal criteria for effective literary papers and essays: a clear and noteworthy thesis; clear, well-developed content; effective organization; evidence of perceptive and thoughtful reading; correct use of literary terms; a sustained and engaging tone; variety in sentence structure; absence of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling; and proper format (treatment of sources, handling of citations, presentation of quotations).

Writing Rubric:

A Superior/Outstanding

Work which uses an assignment as the occasion for a piece of writing compelling enough to engage readers on its own terms. It presents an insight or viewpoint with enough fullness and support to command readers' respect, if not their assent. The treatment of content is fresh, not hackneyed; the organization is coherent and effective; and the language is clear and vivid, not cliched. Superior work uses sophisticated sentence structure, and needs little or no additional editing in terms of basic details of grammar, punctuation, and format. An "A" literary essay should avoid relying on plot summary and should use literary terms correctly; it should also demonstrate the proper handling of secondary sources.

B Good

Work which meets all of an assignment's expectations with competence. The work may lack the fresh thought or compelling development of "A" work*, but it demonstrates, nevertheless, its author's ability to respond intelligently to an assignment's demands, to structure and focus writing clearly, and to choose words accurately and effectively.

*In contrast to "A" work, a "B" paper may--despite its original thought--require a final editing that takes care of weaknesses in basics that detract from the content.

C Fair

"C" work shows evidence of attempting to meet the assignment's bare specifications, but lacks sharp focus, the full and purposeful development, or the stylistic awareness necessary for a higher grade. "C" work is clearly inadequate in at least one way. Although "C" work may demonstrate competence in one or more facets, one or two pervasive weaknesses will outweigh its strengths. Weaknesses may include failure to engage meaningfully an important aspect of the writing task or to maintain a focus; skimpy or illogical development; repeated significant errors in grammar or idiom.

D Poor

Work which does not respond acceptably to an assignment, "D" work may misunderstand or disregard the assignment's intent, lack any pattern or organization, or make enough errors in Standard English to make it difficult for a reader to follow the author's thought.

F Failure

The following will merit a grade of "F": failure to submit an assignment, incomplete work, work that disregards the assignment's intent, work that displays pervasive weaknesses in both form and content, and, of course, plagiarism.