

Cedar Crest College

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Office Hours: Tues., 11:00 a.m.-noon, Thurs., 2:30-3:30 p.m., and by appointment

**ENGLISH SEMINAR:
Writing Women's Lives
ENG 352 (3 credits) Spring 2009**

In this book, I want to examine how women's lives
have been contrived, and how they may be written.

Carolyn G. Heilbrun
Writing a Woman's Life

A story like a vice, future reader, innocent reader. . . . You who feign
suspense or harbor closet wishes for redemption, salvation--or at the
very least a little flourish of transcendence . . . All right then, take my
hand. *There, there now*. Let the rhetorical celebration begin!

Carole Maso
Defiance

Texts:

See novels listed on syllabus below

An up-to-date handbook

Course Description: This is the English capstone course, in which, even if we do not find all the answers, we may at least begin to frame the proper questions. To help us, we'll be reading six novels written by women in the 20th and 21st centuries. Topics for discussion that should emerge: women's themes and gender issues, historical and cultural contexts, the metaphor of storytelling/writing, other postmodern strategies and theme. I expect that you will bring the weight of previous reading/courses to bear on our discussions.

Course Objectives (These are in accordance with the objectives of the Humanities Dept.):

--Students will have an overview of the development of modern and contemporary literature.

--Students will have knowledge of significant works of modern and contemporary literature and their historical and cultural contexts.

--Students will be able to analyze a work of literature.

--Students will be able to write effective literary essays.

--Students will have gained an appreciation of literature, an appreciation of the connections among literary works, and an appreciation of the value of reading.

--Students will have a final (capstone) opportunity to synthesize their literary studies and their understanding of the role of literature.

Course Outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate their understanding of significant literary works.
- Students will demonstrate how individual works fit into larger literary, historical, and cultural contexts.
- Students will demonstrate reading and analytical/critical thinking skills with oral practice in the seminar portion of the class and with writing.
- Students will demonstrate mastery of writing skills.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of literary terms.
- Students will demonstrate the synthesis of their studies in English.

Course Requirements:

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

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

2) All reading and writing assignments must be completed by the dates specified.

3) All class members are expected to participate in weekly roundtable discussions.

4) Each class member will be responsible for leading a discussion of a particular work or significant portions of a particular work.

5) Three essays: a literary autobiography and two analytical papers:

- Your literary autobiography (3 pages minimum). How did you end up as an English major (or co-major or minor) at Cedar Crest? What led you to this capstone course? What do you read? Why do you read? What do you want from your reading? Do you have a theory or philosophy in regard to reading? What is your earliest memory of reading? of books? Do you see reading (and writing) as central to your life--once upon a time? now? later? These questions do not constitute an outline; they are simply intended as starting points for your reflections.

Due at beginning of second class, January 26. This paper will give me an early sample of your writing--and will provide you with an example of my commentary. Note: Use MLA format for all papers.

- Mid-semester paper, on a topic derived from your reading and discussions. To get started on finding a topic: respond to the premise of a text or to a point in a class discussion. Explicate a passage, showing its relation to the rest of the text. Ask questions of texts and attempt to answer those questions. (Better yet--what question[s] does a particular text ask of you?)

Due March 2. Minimum length: 5 pages, not including "Works Cited" page.

- Final critical paper (8 pages minimum, not including "Works Cited" page): Compare and contrast any two protagonists of the six novels covered in the

course. What are the similarities and differences in the characters' experiences and approaches as they attempt to create (to remember and to create) meaningful lives--and how do these characters "speak" to us?

Due April 20.

The semester will proceed more smoothly for all, if you

- Never wait until just before class to print out your work.
- Have all written work prepared on time (late work will automatically lose credit—in the amount of one full grade).
- Attend class on a regular basis.
- Bring your texts and participate in discussions in a meaningful manner.

Assessment/Grading:

Relationship of assignments and requirements to outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate their knowledge of course content by their completion of two critical papers and by their meaningful participation in seminar 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 three essays.

Final Grade: Average of grades for literary autobiography, mid-semester paper, final paper, and class grade (includes attendance, leading a seminar discussion, meaningful participation in roundtable discussions).

Additional Student Responsibilities:

- Make-up Policies:** If you miss a class, you are still responsible for the material covered. A **late** paper will have the grade reduced by one letter grade.
- 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 uncredited use of another's work in whole or part, is a serious offense. A reminder of the statement on plagiarism distributed to all students in WRI 100: It is dishonest to present oral or written work that is not entirely the student's own. Students must follow the requirements of the instructor regarding when and how much collaboration with other students is permitted. Any language taken from another source, whether individual words or entire paragraphs, must be placed in quotation marks and attributed to the source, following the citation format specified. Paraphrased material from an outside source must also be attributed. In addition, if the student is indebted to another source for a specific perspective or line of argument--regardless of whether the student has directly quoted the source or not--that debt must be acknowledged. It does not matter if the work is by an established author, a term-paper writer who sold his work to a plagiarism site for \$5.00, 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 intentional 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 evening, make sure that you have the phone numbers/e-mail addresses of two of your classmates.
Please put your cell phone on vibrate for class.

SYLLABUS

I looked in this notebook, thinking that if I
could write in it Anna would come back.

Doris Lessing
The Golden Notebook

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

January 19
Introduction to the Course

January 26
Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, Book One
* Your literary autobiography is due

February 2
The House of Mirth, Book Two
Seminar leader _____

February 9
Excerpt from Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* and Plath's "Daddy" (handouts)
Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*
Seminar leader _____

February 16
Read: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Part One
Seminar leader _____

February 23
Beloved, to end
Seminar leader _____

March 2

* Mid-semester paper is due

Film: *The House of Mirth* (2000). Directed by Terence Davies; screenplay by Davies. Gillian Anderson plays Lily Bart. This is the third adaptation of Wharton's novel: the dates of the earlier two are 1918 and 1981.

March 9 No Class Meeting—Spring Break

March 16

Read: Carole Maso, *Ghost Dance*, pp. 1-133

Seminar leader _____

March 23

Ghost Dance, to end

Seminar leader _____

March 30

Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*, through Section VII

Seminar leader _____

April 6

3 poems by Atwood (handout)

Alias Grace, Section VIII to end

Seminar leader _____

April 13 No Class Meeting—Break

April 20

*Final paper due

Paper presentations in mock conference

April 27

Jill Ciment, *The Tattoo Artist*, to end of Chapter 12

May 4

The Tattoo Artist, to end

Last words

Bring a published poem or passage from a work of fiction/nonfiction to present to the rest of the group.

Additional Information:

On Leading a Seminar:

Present and direct our attention to significant points about the literary work and raise questions for discussion.

Blow-by-blow biographies and plot summaries do not constitute effective presentations. If biographical details about your author seem important, present them concisely. Synthesize plot details concisely. Do provide the year of publication. Then direct us to ideas, values, clusters of images, uses of language and other matters of style and structure, uses of history, and connections with other works.

If you use secondary sources, you must acknowledge those sources in your presentation: incorporate them directly and explicitly into your comments (“As _____ explains in her essay titled ‘ _____,’ . . .”).

On Secondary Sources:

Dictionaries and encyclopedias are not appropriate for college-level research. You may start with an encyclopedic entry for basic information, but then you must build from there. Wikipedia and term-paper-sale sites are not acceptable sources. Use discretion in treating blogs as sources. Always double-check web-based information. An effective critical study uses a combination of online and print sources. One excellent index to start with: MLA First Search.

Criteria for Analytical Papers:

Each analytical paper should incorporate at least two secondary critical sources; follow MLA format.

The criteria will be the universal criteria for effective literary papers: A clear and noteworthy thesis; clear, well-developed content; effective organization; evidence of close, perceptive 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).

Double-space the body of your paper and use one side of the page only.

Note: the first paper—your literary autobiography—falls somewhere on the line between analysis and creative nonfiction and should incorporate several modes: personal narrative, reflection, exposition/information. .

Writing Rubric:

A Superior/Outstanding

Work that 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 clichéd. 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" essay should avoid relying on plot summary and should use literary and film terms correctly; it should also demonstrate the proper handling of secondary sources.

B Good

Work that 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; and/or 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.

