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 Jeff’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 50th 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 Rollyson (*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**

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<http://www.iun.edu/~nwadmin/plath/>: **Editor’s Note**, these pieces from the *Essays* section (Mossberg, Decker, Holladay, Ekmeckioglu, Dillon, Ciobanu, Ferretter), all of the *Poetry* section, and Zimbakova’s piece in the *Art* section; Trailer to Christine Jeff’s *Sylvia* (2003):  
<http://youtu.be/HU1EGnVlih0>; Ryan Adams, “Sylvia Plath”  
<http://youtu.be/2EK5RluCvCE> |
| 2 W 8/28 | *Meet in Smathers Library (East), Special Collections Research Room, 2nd floor with Rare Books Curator John Ingram; Email Professional Bio & Archive paragraphs to me by Friday, 8/30 (see below) |

Paragraph 1: 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 CSA.

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.*