

English 4378: Women Writers: Willa Cather
Dr. Patricia Lee Yongue
Spring 2015 T-Th, 2:30-4
Office: 221C Phone: 713-743-2944
Emergency Email: plyongue@uh.edu

Course Description

We will take a rare opportunity to study exclusively the work of a female author, modernist American writer Willa Cather, who has generated a great deal of discussion since the 1990s over the appearance vs. the reality of her feminist positioning. The texts and subtexts of Cather's fiction, particularly the portrayal of her female characters and their circumstances, respond to her insights into woman's being in the world—as the object of the male gaze--and to her desire/need to sell books to as many readers as possible while still maintaining the integrity of her artistic and intellectual perspectives.

In our study of Cather, we will read and discuss seven of her novels and consider the complexities of her portrayal/construction of the female character. We will also integrate into our study specific feminist theoretical approaches and we will consider how Freud's theories, however incomplete and outrageous with respect to female psychological development, were nonetheless important to Cather as well as to modernist writers in general. We will also consider the post-Freudian/Lacanian theories of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Cather's biography, from her Southern heritage through her Midwestern and Eastern residencies, and her long and successful career as a journalist, will play a significant part in our study.

Note: English 4378 satisfies three advanced credit hours of elective for the English major and minor and is also applicable to the Women's Studies Minor.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students participating responsibly will experience more intensely than in a multi-author course the genesis of a writer, and, in this case, of a female writer.
2. Students participating responsibly will learn aspects of feminist, cultural, and biographical criticism and methodology.
3. Students participating responsibly will gain experience in critical thinking and writing critically and, if the schedule permits, in oral presentation.

Required Texts

Alexander's Bridge
O Pioneers!
The Song of the Lark
My Antonia
One of Ours
The Professor's House
Sapphira and the Slave Girl

Assignments

Students will be responsible (1) for reading the texts by the first date indicated on the schedule, (2) for informed, engaging class discussion, and (3) for a project comprised of research, an oral/group presentation (if class size and schedule permit), and an essay. The project will combine library and internet research with close reading of text. Details for the topic, essay format, and submission requirements are provided in **Guidelines**. All essays must be properly documented (MLA, Chicago, or, for Social Science majors, APA style); that is, information, ideas, and text solicited, purchased, or otherwise procured from outside sources/benefactors must be acknowledged and acknowledged in the proper professional format. Failure to comply with documentation policy will result in failure of the project and, if plagiarism is detected, may result in more serious penalty, such as a formal hearing and/or failure in the class. Please consult the UH Academic Honesty Policy. **Students are required to turn essays into turnitin.com as well as to submit them in hard copy (See Guidelines). Students will receive a “0” for failure to submit the essay in both formats.**

Quizzes may be administered to check reading. There will be a midterm (date and format to be announced) and, tentatively, a comprehensive final examination (format to be announced) on the date and at the time scheduled by the university. Students must complete the essay portion of the final in blue books.

The Blackboard Learn component of this course is an important repository of the technical requirements for this course and also of some, but not necessarily all, lecture/study/discussion topics and background information. Please consult Blackboard regularly for announcements, particularly if weather and other environmental conditions might hamper our attendance and interfere with testing and assignment submission. If I am not able to foretell an absence from class on my part, I shall put a notice up on Blackboard as soon as possible.

Attendance

Attendance—full participation in the class—is mandatory. Students with three recorded absences before midterm and/or who do not take the midterm will be dropped on the midterm rolls with a WP or WF depending on any evaluated work. Students who are discovered not paying attention or not having read the assignment should expect a loss of one point in the averaging of the final grade (see Grading). Students who have submitted work and who accumulate three recorded absences before the last day to drop scheduled by the university will be dropped, the grade of WP or WF depending on the grade of evaluated work. Students who accumulate four absences in the course will lose the 5 % participation grade and incur the loss of a partial course grade (e.g., B+ to B, etc.) for each day of recorded absences after three absences. Students who enroll in the class late and/or begin attendance after the first day of class will have the missed days counted toward absences. Lateness and early departures—these constitute disruptions for the lecturer and for the audience—will be recorded: two moderately late arrivals and/or early departures will count as one absence. Arrival 15 minutes after class has begun is an

absence. Departure from class earlier than 15 minutes before class officially ends is an absence.

Students who know in advance that their schedules will require at least three absences or that they will habitually be late for class should probably not take this class. Students who for medical reasons must regularly leave class must provide a medical excuse and sit as close to the door as possible to limit the distraction to others. *Nota bene:* Students who plan to drop the course at any time during the semester **must file the paperwork themselves** to insure they meet university deadlines for withdrawal without penalties. Even if by your calculations your absences exceed the limit, I might not take attendance on given days and therefore might not have the data I need to drop you according to my and the university policy. Do not risk an F grade.

If you miss class, please ask a colleague for the material you missed.

Emergency situations (personal or public) will be handled on an individual basis and as the occasion arises—heavy rains and flood potential on Houston streets, for example,

Exams and quizzes must be taken in class on the scheduled dates. Essays must be submitted in hard copy and to turnitin on the due date. Presentations (if required) must be made on the scheduled date.

Department

Mature adult behavior and courtesy are expected, in fact required. This requirement is part of the professionalism and humanity towards which all components of university class participation and performance are directed. We are a team as well as individuals. Prospective employers and graduate schools have become most interested in the development of mature behavior and courtesy.

Again, students **must not migrate in and out of class**. Such practice is distracting and discourteous to your instructor and your colleagues. Certainly do not walk in front of the instructor while she is lecturing. Take care of personal matters ahead of time. If medical reasons require you to leave class periodically, please advise me and try to sit close to the exit to avoid distracting others. Don't slam the door on your way in or out!

During class, turn off all telephones, pagers, texting and twittering devices, etc. Put away non-class materials.

Emergency situations will of course be recognized and handled as they turn up.