**The Female Sociopath**

English 115 Section 2 Instructor: Margaret Deli  
Spring 2017 Email: [margaret.deli@yale.edu](mailto:margaret.deli@yale.edu)  
Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30-3:45 pm Office: LC 402   
Location: TBD Office Hours: Wednesday, 9-11am

**Course Description**

This course will challenge us to consider why “bad bitches” and “nasty women” have moved to the center of our cultural imaginary. We are entranced by Lisbeth Salander (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*) and fascinated by Amy Dunne (*Gone Girl*). We cheer when Arya Stark gets her man and watch, captivated, as Daenerys Targaryen burns cities to the ground (*Game of Thrones*). Popular opinion might call some or all of these women mad, bad, and dangerous to know—but are they also victims of the power structures they undermine? And how do they fit into a broader tradition of western storytelling? Beginning in ancient Greece and ending in the present day, we will follow the paths of vengeful mothers and crazy spinsters, husband-hunters, *femme fatales* and corporate harpies to ask: What is the relationship between femininity and physical or mental deviance? Do stories about powerful women uphold the status quo? And what exactly is a female sociopath—if she exists at all? Texts and screenings will include Euripides’ *Medea*, William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Edith Wharton’s *The Custom of the Country,* Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, *Gone Girl* (David Fincher’s film and Gillian Flynn’s novel), and the recent HBO series *Game of Thrones.*

**Course Objectives**

The purpose of this class is to analyze and write about literary texts. Why rhyme or not rhyme? Why write a character as “flat” or “round,” as empathic or dislikable? Why use a really long sentence or a really short sentence? The object of our investigation will be to figure out what these and similar choices *do.* But we will also work on strategies for pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing, so you can improve your writing to the fullest extent possible in a thirteen week semester. These are skills that will serve you well for the kinds of sophisticated writing and thinking you will be asked to do here at Yale and beyond.

**Required Texts** (available at the Yale Bookstore or on Amazon)

Euripides, *Medea*William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, *A Pocket Manual of Style*Wayne C. Booth, *The Craft of Research*

**Films and television shows:** *Fatal Attraction,* dir. Adrian Lyne; *Gone Girl,* dir. David Fincher; *Game of Thrones,* “The Winds of Winter,” season 6 episode 10, dir. Miguel Sapochnik

**SEMINAR CALENDAR AND DRAFT DUE DATES**

**How to Read the Class Schedule:**

**Week #**

Date **Time and date due of written assignments**  
Topics, readings, assignments and activities addressed in class

* Readings, writing exercises, and other assignments to be completed in preparation for and in advance of this class

**UNIT ONE: Defining the Female Sociopath**

**Week 1**Tuesday, January 17 Course Introduction: What is a female sociopath?

Thursday, January 19

* Roxane Gay, “Not Here to Make Friends”
* “Would You Want to be Friends with Humbert Humbert?: A Forum on ‘Likeability’”
* Jennifer Weiner, “I Like Likeable Characters”
* Read over the syllabus

**Week 2**

**Monday, January 23 Film screening: *Game of Thrones,* “Winds of Winter”**

Tuesday, January 24 Paper #1 assigned

* *Medea*, pp. TBD

Thursday, January 26

* *Medea*, pp. TBD

**Week 3**

**Monday, January 30 Rough Draft of Paper #1 due via Canvas on or before midnight**

Tuesday, January 31 Peer workshop of paper #1 essays

*Medea*: the critics take

Thursday February 2

* TBD

**Sunday, February 5 Final Draft of Paper #1 due via canvas on or before midnight**

**UNIT TWO: Living with the Female Sociopath**

**Week 4**

Tuesday, February 7

* *Macbeth,* acts 1+2 plus reading response

Thursday, February 9 Paper 2 assigned

* *Macbeth,* acts 3, 4 and 5

**Week 5**

Tuesday, February 14 *Macbeth*

* *Macbeth,* critical essay plus reading response

Thursday, February 16 Femme Fatale Fun!

* John Keats, “La Belle Dam Sans Merci” and “Lamia”; Walter Pater, excerpts from *The Renaissance*

**Friday, February 17 Rough draft of paper #2 due via Canvas on or before midnight**

* Weekend coffee date assignment

**UNIT THREE: Fighting with the Female Sociopath**

**Week 6**Tuesday, February 21 Peer workshop of paper #2 essays

Victorian Domesticity: the Angel in the House?

* Coventry Patmore, “The Angel in the House,” Tennyson, selected poems

Thursday, February 23 Introduction to the New Woman

* *The Custom of the Country*, pp.3-50

**Sunday, February 26 Final Draft of Paper #2 due via Canvas on or before midnight**

**Week 7**

Tuesday, February 28

* *The Custom of the Country,* pp. 50-120 plus reading response

Thursday, March 2

* *The Custom of the Country,* pp. 120-200

**Week 8**

Tuesday, March 7

* *The Custom of the Country,* pp. 200-300

Thursday, March 10

* *The Custom of the Country,* pp. 300-end

*Spring Recess: Friday, March 10-Monday, March 27*

**Week 9**Tuesday, March 28 Paper #3 assigned

* *Beloved*, pp. 3-75 plus reading response

Thursday, March 30

* *Beloved*, pp. 76-156

**Week 10**Tuesday, April 4

* *Beloved*, pp. 157-235, plus reading response

Thursday, April 6

* *Beloved*, pp. 236-end

**Friday, April 7 First Draft of Paper #3 due via Canvas on or before midnight**

**Week 11**

Tuesday, April 11 Peer workshop of paper #3 essays

Thursday, April 13

* Sadiya Hartman, from *Lose Your Mother*, pp. 136-157

**Sunday, April 16 Final Draft of Paper #3 due via Canvas on or before midnight**

**UNIT FOUR: Exploiting the Female Sociopath (or, Contemporary Approaches to Female Sociopathy)**

**Week 12**

Tuesday, April 18 Paper #4 assigned

Sociopathy and True Crime

* Choose an episode from *Deadly Women* and provide a reading response

**Wednesday, April 10 Film Viewing: *Gone Girl***

Thursday, April 20 *Gone Girl* discussion: film v. novel and more

* Excerpts from *Gone Girl*

**Week 13**

Tuesday, April 25 Conference: The Female Sociopath: Day One

* Prepare conference presentations

Thursday, April 27 Conference: The Female Sociopath: Day Two

* Prepare conference presentations

*Reading Week: Friday, April 28-Friday, May 5*

**Tuesday, May 2 Final Draft of Paper #4 due via Canvas on or before midnight**

***More information about required texts:***

Poetry, critical essays, and short stories will be made available through the Canvas @ Yale portal; a printed course packet is also available for purchase at TYCO Printing on Broadway.

Optional screenings of all films and television showswill take place in LC 317; these films are also available for streaming.

**THE NUTS AND BOLTS**

**Grades**

Paper 1 15%  
Paper 2 20%  
Paper 3 30%  
Paper 4 15%  
Participation 10%

Reading Responses 10%

**Paper Assignments**

**Essay 1: Close Analysis (3-4 pages)**

The foundational skill of literary analysis—and most other academic writing—is the ability to derive larger meanings from the smallest parts of a text. The goal of this assignment is to have you engage a literary work at the level of its language: locating a meaningful problem, articulating a claim that takes a stance on a problem, and analyzing relevant textual details in order to defend that stance.

**Essay 2: Analysis using a Critical, Theoretical, or Historical Lens (5-6 pages)**

In this essay you will bring a critical, theoretical, or historical text to bear on a work of literature in order to produce new knowledge at the intersection of two interrelated texts. You will adopt the analytical framework of a single outside source to uncover new meaning(s) in a work of literature that could not have been discovered through close reading alone. By giving you practice reading literary works in light of outside sources, this essay will help you develop skills used in the final research essay.

**Essay 3: Researched Argument (7-9 pages)**

The skills required by the research essay will complete your introduction to literary analysis. Researched arguments can take several forms. You can write an essay in which you place your readings of a literary work in conversation with the accounts of a few other scholars. Or you might choose to write a “text in context” style essay in which you develop an account that relates a literary work to the culture that produced it or to larger philosophies about one of its themes. Text in context style essays can be a good way to explore an aspect of our course theme in which you feel especially invested.

**Essay 4: Creative, Reflective, or Cultural Argument Essay (4-5 pages)**

The final assignment of the term will allow you to practice the analytical techniques you have developed during the term in a new way. The precise contours of this assignment will respond to the drift of our conversations over the course of the semester, particularly as it takes shape during the latter weeks.

**Participation**

Your participation grade depends on your vocal involvement in class. Although I don’t expect you to walk into seminar with a fully formed argument, I do expect you to arrive with a few thoughts about the reading. These might include (but are not limited to): asking questions; pointing out a passage you really like or disliked; or acknowledging that you didn’t understand something. It really helps me to hear your reactions, so that I can lead the class in a direction that is helpful for everyone.

Come to class with something to write with and something to write on. It’s not a bad idea to purchase a notebook solely devoted to ENGL 115 notes and assignments. Also, keep in mind that you will occasionally be asked to hand in your in-class writing; for that reason, please make sure your handwriting is *legible*, and that you can tear pages neatly from said notebook.

I do not allow laptops, tablets, or cellphones in class. (Unless they pertain to our in class discussion.)

Finally, none of us should forget that the purpose of the seminar format is to examine and critique *comments*, not *people*. Discussion, debate, and even disagreement are strongly encouraged, but it is vital that our seminar room constitutes a space where everyone’s opinion is respected and heard.

**Attendance**  
Regular attendance and participation are essential to your own and to your classmates’ learning. More than two absences will result in a lowering of your grade and more than four absences will result in your failure of the course. If you have special circumstances that will make it difficult for you to adhere to the above policy (athletic obligations, religious observances etc.), you should notify me at the beginning of the semester.

**Tardiness**  
Class begins promptly at 2:30 pm—be there! You may be late for class *two* times without penalty, but a third late arrival will count as a day of absence.

**Assignments**

**Reading Responses**

I will occasionally ask you to write short (100-200 word) reading response about what we have read thus far in class. Think of this as an informal reading journal in conversation with your peers. These responses are intended to help us structure our classroom discussion, as I expect you to be prepared to talk in class about what you wrote in your responses. Responses should be posted on Canvas @ Yale the night before class. Late responses will not be accepted.

**Websites**  
Canvas @ Yale will be used for signing up for office hours, retrieving homework assignments and course readings, and posting reading responses.

**Workshops**  
Most drafts and many exercises will be discussed in class. This means that select essays may be discussed by the class as a whole, or individual essays may be considered by small groups of 2 to 3 students. Workshops will provide you with valuable feedback from your peers and instructor as to how you can revise your essay drafts.

**Essay Format and Submission**

Final essays and drafts should be submitted to me on or before the day they are due via the Canvas @ Yale portal. Please make sure that all essays follow these specifications:

Typed, generic size 12, Times New Roman font

Double-spaced

One-inch margins (top, bottom, and sides)

Numbered pages

Stapled (if submitted in hard copy)

Citations in MLA format

Note: if you ever have technical difficulties with Canvas @ Yale, send me a copy of your assignment at margaret.deli@yale.edu.

**Late and Missed Assignments**

Unless you have made other arrangements with me in advance, rough drafts and final essays will be penalized **by one-third of a letter grade** for each day (class day or otherwise) that they are late. Extensions must be requested at least 48 hours in advance of the assignment due date. Please also keep in mind that assignments are due on time via Canvas even if you are not present in class. If you miss a class, you are expected to find out the homework for the following class from a classmate.

**Getting in Touch**

If you would like to meet outside office hours, you should email me at least one day in advance. Also: please don’t email me as if you were sending a tweet or posting on Instagram! Start your messages with “Dear…” and remember to sign-off with your name. Treat emails like short letters, and our exchanges will run smoothly.

**Outside Help**

I’m here to help, and especially love to work with students on their writing. That said, the Writing Center is another resource at your disposal: located in Sterling Memorial Library, Yale’s Writing Center offers drop-in service six days a week, from 3-5 pm and 7-9 pm on Sunday-Thursday and Friday from 3-5 pm. (The Writing Center is located in the Yale Center for Teaching and Learning, in the mezzanine of SML.) If you decide to take advantage of this service, don’t forget to bring a copy of the assignment prompt and a printed copy of your paper. (Writing Partners cannot work from laptop or iPad, although printing is available at the center for students with a Blue Print account.) Even if you haven’t started writing, Writing Partners can help with brainstorming and outlining. <https://www.yalewco.com/>.

If you’re interested in longer term, one-on-one help, Residential College Writing Tutors are another option. Based in the residential colleges, writing tutors are professional writers and writings teachers who offer appointment-based tutorials. You can schedule an appointment here: <https://www.yalewco.com/>.

**Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is the basis on which this class and our university functions: we share and discuss our research with each other in the understanding that we will give credit where credit is due and present as our own only our own ideas. I expect you to show integrity and care as participants in our academic community. Any instance of plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty may result in a failure on the particular assignment involved or of the course. I urge you to consult Yale’s policies on this matter, which can be found at <http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/undergraduate-regulations>, or to talk to me if you have any questions.