

# AP/EN 3612 3.0 – Genre Fiction Workshop

**Department of English – Creative Writing Program**  
**Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies**  
**York University**

**Instructor:** Pasha Malla  
**E-mail:** pmalla@yorku.ca  
**Phone:** 416-736-2100 x20347

**Term:** Fall 2019-2020  
**Lecture:** Tuesdays 19:00-22:00, VH 1016  
**Office hours:** Wednesdays 12:00-2:00 (by appointment), 628 Atkinson College

## Course Description

In this course students draft and revise works of writing commonly categorized as “genre fiction,” including but not limited to fantasy, science fiction, the western, horror and thriller, and through discussions of their work and that of established writers, develop critical faculties to improve their own writing and engage with the writing of others.

Classes will be divided between a lecture/discussion of the assigned readings and workshops. Lectures will examine the various modes, tropes and techniques of certain literary genres, using pertinent examples, with weekly assignments for students to apply these techniques to their own writing.

In instructor-guided workshops students will discuss, per each piece’s intentions and the codes of relevant literary genres, the writing of their classmates with respect to its strengths and areas of potential improvement. Each student is responsible for providing at least one workshop piece during the term.

Students are also required to respond in writing to assigned readings; these responses will be handed in for a grade at the end of the term.

Because this is a discussion-based course, students must be active participants in lectures and workshops. Please be prepared to contribute thoughtfully, generously and creatively in conversations about assigned readings and one another’s work. You will be evaluated partly on the quality of your in-class participation every week.

## Course Objectives

This course is designed to develop the practice of writers by:

- providing guidance to actively hone their craft;
- deepening their understanding of literary techniques, forms, and traditions;
- helping them receive and incorporate editorial advice and critiques of their work;
- developing an awareness of and critiquing the definitions of literary categories;
- encouraging refined critical responses to the literary prose of others.

## Required Texts

- James M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*
- Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

(Additional required and supplementary readings will be posted to the course website.)

## Evaluation

The final grade for the course will be based on the following rubric:

- |                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| • Workshop submission | 20% |
| • Reading responses   | 20% |
| • Participation       | 20% |
| • Final portfolio     | 40% |

**Workshop submissions** are to be prose fiction of 8-12 pages (max. 4000 words).

The **participation** grade is based on attendance, punctual workshop submissions and contribution to class discussions.

The **final portfolio** will consist of a revised version of the workshop submission, and **eight writing exercises** chosen from those assigned throughout the year. The portfolio will be 20-30 pages.

The requirements for **reading responses** are detailed below.

## Workshops

Students are responsible for providing one workshop piece during the term. An online schedule for sign-up will be provided after the first class.

Workshop pieces will be emailed to the class at least a week prior to each workshop, and everyone is responsible for bringing hard copies to refer to in class.

Students who miss the workshops of their classmates, and who wish not to be docked participation marks, will be required to provide a written, 300-word response to their classmates' work.

The 10% grade is based on timely submission and the writer's response to the workshop discussion. Please note that polished work is not required; your workshop submission grade is based on your engagement with the principles of the class, not quality. Rough drafts are fine.

## Reading Responses

Students are required to respond to at least one of each week's assigned readings with a **250-word reflection piece**. This can take the form of a critical mini-essay, a casual argument, an engagement with or extrapolation from the central ideas of the reading, or an application of those ideas to a student's own creative work. Please note that these responses are **not to be written as fiction**.

In the final class, students will hand in a mini-portfolio of **six of their reading responses** from that term (minimum 1500 words total). These will be graded for the usual grammatical and formal considerations, as well as their depth of analysis and reflection. Students who fully and critically engage with the assigned readings should expect a full fifteen marks each term.

## Course Policies and Procedures

**Attendance and Participation:** A portion of your participation grade will comprise your attendance, so it's best—and an easy way to score marks—if you show up. Preparation (i.e. reading and engaging critically with assigned readings and your classmates' work) and active participation is key to the success of the class, and your experience as a student. Missed lectures and seminars are the responsibility of students; the Instructor will not be expected to provide material for which you have been absent.

**Respect:** Every student in the course should feel welcome to actively participate in lecture and seminar discussions. In order to ensure that everyone is comfortable voicing opinions or asking questions, a climate of tolerance and respect is essential. Any racist, sexist, heterosexist, vulgar, or otherwise inappropriate or personally insulting comments is unacceptable. Workshop feedback, as well, should be offered in the spirit of constructive criticism; personal attacks will not be tolerated. All students in this course will express their opinions with due consideration for their classmates, respecting everyone's right to a classroom free from hostility, ridicule, or bullying.

**Deadlines:** Proper academic performance depends on students doing their work not only well, but on time. Accordingly, assignments for this course must be received at the beginning of the class on the assigned due date. Unless extensions have been granted before the due date of the assignment, failure to meet deadlines will be penalized one-half letter grade (1 grade point) per day. Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., may be entertained by the Instructor but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor's letter). Students with special considerations who require extra time to hand in assignments should notify the Instructor at the beginning of the course.

**Technology:** Phones, tablets or other such electronic devices should be turned off during class time. Laptops must be used for note-taking purposes only—no social media, no web-surfing, no shopping, etc. Please limit these activities to the times before and after class or during class breaks. Failure to adhere to these policies may result in deductions to participation grades. Students with special considerations who require the use of electronic equipment should inform the Instructor at the beginning of the course.

**Grading:** The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g., A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, C+ = 5, etc.). Assignments will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 90, B+ = 75 to 79, etc.)

(For a full description of York grading system see the Undergraduate Calendar - [http://calendars.registrar.yorku.ca/pdfs/ug2004cal/calug04\\_5\\_acadinfo.pdf](http://calendars.registrar.yorku.ca/pdfs/ug2004cal/calug04_5_acadinfo.pdf))

Students may take a limited number of courses for degree credit on an ungraded (pass/fail) basis. For full information on this option see Alternative Grading Option in the English section of the Undergraduate Calendar.

**Academic Honesty:** Academic misconduct, including but not limited to plagiarism, is a serious offence. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information, available on the Senate Committee on Curriculum & Academic Standards webpage (see Reports, Initiatives, Documents):

[http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate\\_cte\\_main\\_pages/ccas.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate_cte_main_pages/ccas.htm)

This website also includes:

- York's Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures/Academic Integrity Website
- Ethics Review Process for research involving human participants
- Course requirement accommodation for students with disabilities, including physical, medical, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities
- Student Conduct Standards
- Religious Observance Accommodation

## Course Schedule

### FALL TERM

#### Week One (Sept 10)

Lecture: Course Introduction: What is Genre?

Reading (in-class): Atwood – “Time Capsule Found on a Dead Planet;” Machado – “Horror Story;” Martel – “We Ate the Children Last”

**Exercise: Genre**

#### Week Two (Sept 17)

Lecture: Worldbuilding

Reading: Wendig – “25 Things You Should Know About Worldbuilding;” Michel – “Against Worldbuilding;” De Mille – “Chapter 16. The Kosekin” (from *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*)

**Exercise: Worldbuilding**

#### Week Three (Sept 24)

Lecture: What happens next?

Reading: Percy – “Urgency;” from *Hitchcock/Truffaut*; Dahl – “Lamb to the Slaughter”

**Exercise: Suspense**

Workshop #1

#### Week Four (Oct 1)

Lecture: SF & Fantasy

Reading: Atwood, from *In Other Worlds*; Link – “The Specialist’s Hat;” Butler – “Bloodchild”

**Exercise: Speculation**

Workshop #2

#### Week Five (Oct 8)

Lecture: Thriller

Screening: *The Silence of the Lambs*

Reading: *The Silence of the Lambs* screenplay; Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure...”

**Exercise: Fictionalization**

Workshop #3

**Reading Week (Oct 15):** No class.

#### Week Seven (Oct 22):

Lecture: Hardboiled Crime Fiction

Reading: *The Postman Always Rings Twice*

**Exercise: Opening**

Workshop #4

#### Week Eight (Oct 29)

Lecture: Horror

Reading: Poe – “Berenice;” King – “Graveyard Shift;” Ligotti – “Professor Nobody’s Little Lectures on Supernatural Horror”

**Exercise: Fear**

Workshop #5

**Week Nine (Nov 5)**

Lecture: Hybrid forms

Reading: Samatar – “How to Get Back to the Forest;” Bolaño – “The Colonel’s Son;” Heti – “Mermaid in the Jar”

**Exercise: Mash-Ups**

Workshop #6

**Week Ten (Nov 12)**

Lecture: Structure and Space

Reading: Borges – “The Garden of Forking Paths;” China Melville – “Reports of Certain Incidents in London;” Keret – “Parallel Universes”

**Exercise: Rooms**

Workshop #7

**Week Eleven (Nov 19)**

Lecture: Futurisms

Reading: *Brown Girl in the Ring*; Dery – “Black to the Future: Afro-Futurism 1.0”

**Exercise: The Future**

Class reading #1

**Week Twelve (Nov 26)**

Lecture: Dystopias and Utopias

Reading: Thomas More, from *Utopia*; LeGuin – “The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas;” Hossain – “Sultana’s Dream”

**Exercise: Dystopia/Utopia**

Class reading #2

**Week Thirteen (Dec 3)**

LAST CLASS

Screening: TBA

**Reading responses and portfolios due**