

# **AP/EN 4610 6.0 – Senior Prose Workshop: Fiction**

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

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**Term:** Fall/Winter 2019-2020  
**Lecture:** Wednesdays 2:30-5:30, BC 325  
**Office hours:** Wednesdays 12:00-2:00 (by appointment), 628 Atkinson College

## **Course Description**

In this course students draft and revise works of fiction and, through discussions of their work and that of established writers, develop critical faculties to help situate and contextualize their writing within both a literary framework and the culture at large.

Classes will be divided between a lecture/discussion of the assigned readings and workshops. Lectures will examine the roles of language and storytelling in the creation of geographical, cultural, ideological and virtual communities, how the structures of power are reified through dominant popular narratives, and how alternatives to those narratives can be fostered through writing and literature.

Students are encouraged to consider how these practices might apply to their own writing, and are required to respond in writing to assigned readings; these responses will be handed in for a grade at the end of each term.

In workshops, students discuss, per each piece's intentions, 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 per 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 student-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;
- situating fiction (written and studied) in social, historical and cultural contexts;
- encouraging refined critical responses to the literary prose of others.

## Required Texts

- Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*
- Mary Robison, *Why Did I Ever*

(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:

- First term workshop submission      10%
- First term reading responses          15%
- Second term workshop submission    10%
- Second term reading responses       15%
- Participation                                20%
- Final portfolio                             30%

**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 revised versions of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> term workshop pieces, and **four short 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 at least one workshop piece each 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 for each piece 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 grades are 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 of each term, 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 4)**

Lecture: Course Introduction

Reading (in-class): Rules for Writers; F. Barthelme – “The 39 Steps”

**Exercise #1: Rules for Writers**

#### **Week Two (Sept 11)**

Lecture: The Short Story How-To

Reading: O’Connor – “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

#### **Week Three (Sept 18)**

Lecture: The Creative Writing Workshop

Reading: Batuman – “New American Fiction;” Diaz – “MFA vs. POC;” Nguyen – “How Writers’ Workshops Can Be Hostile;” Poddar – “Postcolonial Relic”

Workshop #1

#### **Week Four (Sept 25)**

Lecture: The Truth About Stories

Reading: *The Truth About Stories*

**Exercise #2: A True Story**

Workshop #2

#### **Week Five (Oct 2)**

Lecture: Appropriation, Abrogation and Voice

Reading: Spivak – “Can the Subaltern Speak;” Marche – “CanLit’s Colonial Habit;”

Friedan, from *The Feminine Mystique*; Cixous – “The Laugh of the Medusa”

Workshop #3

#### **Week Six (Oct 9)**

Lecture: Why are things the way they are?

Reading: Cortázar – from *Literature Class*; Ruiz – “Central Conflict Theory;” Saroyan – “Seventy Thousand Assyrians;” Aira – “The Dog”

Workshop #4

#### **Reading Week (Oct 16)**

No class.

#### **Week Eight (Oct 23)**

Lecture: Pastiche vs. Parody

Reading: Williams, selected stories; Jameson, from *Postcolonialism*

**Exercise #3: A parody**

Workshop #5

#### **Week Nine (Oct 30)**

Lecture: Convention vs. Unconvention

Reading: Franzen – “Mr. Difficult;” Lerner – “Life as We Know It;” Dragland, from *Difficult Books*; McCormack, from *The Well Dressed Wound*

Workshop #6

**Week Ten (Nov 6)**

Lecture: Counternarratives

Reading: Keene – “Rivers;” Simpson, from *Islands of Decolonial Love*; Belcourt – “ndn homopoetics” and “What Do We Mean by Queer Indigenous Ethics?”

Workshop #7

**Week Eleven (Nov 13)**

Lecture: What is Writing For?

Reading: Kaufman – “Screenwriting Lecture;” Mar & Oatley, “The Function of Fiction;” A. Smith – “True Short Story;” Hempel – “Al Jolson;”

Workshop #8

**Week Twelve (Nov 20)**

Lecture: The Manifesto!

Reading: Marinetti – “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism;” Breton – “Surrealist Manifesto;” McCarthy – “Manifesto of the International Necronautical Society;”

**Exercise #4: A Manifesto**

Workshop #9

**Week Thirteen (Nov 27)**

Lecture: The Interview

Reading: Selected interviews from *The Paris Review*; The Proust Questionnaire

Workshop #10

**FIRST TERM READING RESPONSES DUE****WINTER TERM****Week One (Jan 8)**

Lecture: The Sentence

Reading: Lutz – “The Sentence is a Lonely Place;” Glover – “The Power of a Good Sentence;” Zsuzsi Gartner – “We Be Naked;” Annie Dillard – “Living Like Weasels.”

Workshop #1b

**Week Two (Jan 15)**

Lecture: Novel openings

Reading: Mariás, from *A Heart So White*; Blais, from *These Festive Nights*; Ballard, from *High Rise*; Naipaul, from *A Bend in the River*

**Exercise #5: An opening**

Workshop #2b

**Week Three (Jan 22)**

Lecture: The Long Short Story

Reading: Tolstoy – “The Death of Ivan Ilyich;” Beard – “Facing Death with Tolstoy;” Kierkegaard – “The Dynamics of Despair”

Workshop #3b

**Week Four (Jan 29)**

Lecture: Flash Fiction

Reading: Davis, Kafka, Kincaid, Kawabata, Borges – selected stories

Workshop #4b

**Week Five (Feb 5)**

Lecture: Stories Made from Pieces

Reading: Alexis – “Despair;” Carey – “Famous Mime;” Machado – “Inventory;” Segal – “Other People’s Deaths”

**Exercise #6: A story in vignettes**

Workshop #5b

**Week Six (Feb 12)**

Lecture: Why Did I Ever

Reading: Robison - *Why Did I Ever*

Workshop #6b

**Reading Week (Feb 19)**

No class.

**Week Eight (Feb 26)**

Lecture: The absurd

Reading: Kharms, selected stories; Kafka – “A Little Fable; Beckett – “Echo’s Bones”

**Exercise #7: The Absurd**

Workshop #7b

**Week Nine (Mar 4)**

Lecture: Other forms

Reading: D. Barthelme – “The Explanation;” Sacks – “Whoops;” Cole – “Hafiz;” Egan, from *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Workshop #8b

**Week Ten (Mar 11)**

Lecture: Influence vs. Plagiarism

Reading: Lethem – “The Ecstasy of Influence;” Gallant – “The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street;” Shepard – “Foreign-Returned”

Workshop #9b

**Week Eleven (Mar 18)**

Lecture: Metaphor and representation

Reading: Krasznahorkai – “Something is Burning Outside;” Lispector – “The Egg and the Chicken;” Borges, from *This Craft of Verse*

Workshop #10b

**Exercise #8: Who are you?****Week Twelve (Mar 25)**

Lecture: Mythologies of the Self

Reading: Maggie Nelson, from *The Argonauts*; Trillin – “Living Well;” Bolaño, from *Savage Detectives*

Spillover workshop

**Week Thirteen (Apr 1)**

Class reading

**SECOND TERM READING RESPONSES AND PORTFOLIOS DUE**