ENGL210C Genres of Creative Writing

Prof. S. Tolmie

Fall Term 2020 (Remote Teaching)

Contact:

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Virtual Office Hours on Webex Wednesdays 2:00-3:30 PM

or by appointment

NOTE: THIS IS A LONG AND DISCURSIVE DOCUMENT. PLEASE READ IT ALL. IT IS THE ONLY PLACE IN WHICH ALL THIS INFORMATION IS GATHERED TOGETHER.

Course Description: This course introduces students to both contemporary and historical forms of creative writing. Students will explore genres of poetry, prose fiction and drama through their own writing. Students will also investigate the culture of publishing, learn key revision strategies, and critique the writing of their peers.

Course Objectives or Learning Outcomes: There are three main goals for this course. First is to improve students’ overall confidence, to allow them to take risks and experiment freely in multiple genres of creative writing. Second is to impart a series of technical skills in both poetry and prose. Third is to acclimatize students to the necessary process of giving and taking practical criticism, crucial to any writing career.

Readings: There is no textbook for this class. Occasional short readings and links will be posted on LEARN. Some will be chosen by the students themselves and some by the instructor. These will form the basis for exercises or responses. For the most part we will be writing and editing original material.
Assignments and Practical Processes:

Self-Introduction due September 11: 5%

Participation: 25%

Critique Group Project due October 21: 15% (a group grade)

Midterm Portfolio due October 9: 20%

Final Portfolio due December 7: 35%

What Do These Mean?

Self-Introduction: Wham. 5% of your grade for maximum 350 words or 3 minutes of audio/video. If you submit a written document (Word, PDF, RTF), include a word count. If you submit other media, it must no more than 3 minutes and be in an accessible format that does not require membership or use of any non-university platforms. This work must be completed and submitted in THREE PLACES on the site by Friday September 11 at midnight. First, it must go in the Introduce Yourself (For A Grade) Dropbox (all these specs are repeated there FYI) which has a deadline of 11:59 PM on Sept. 11. Secondly, post it in the Discussion Area of your Critique Group, which you will find under the Connect Menu. Thirdly, post it to the whole class in the General Discussion Forum, also under Connect. Then it reaches all constituencies. I advise people to familiarize themselves with as many of these as possible immediately — at minimum those of your own critique group. This self-introduction should contain five specific things, followed by any general remarks that you think will be useful in telling us what kind of reader and writer you are likely to be.

These required elements are:

1. your name, your major/concentration/program, your year and term of study
2. why you are taking creative writing
3. any previous creative writing experience you have and your preferred forms (and if you don’t have any previous experience, say that, too)
4. if you speak or read any languages in addition to English
5. your favourite book in any language (it can be manga or a comic but not a movie)

This is the only time in the course that I am assigning a grade to a single post. **Do all the things, get your 5%** (on time, precise word count or time, posted in three places, all questions). **Miss any, it is zero.** Simple. It is imperative that we all get to know each other in this class, and that you demonstrate your commitment to exactness and active participation right from the start.

*Participation:* this is an interactive class in which participation is crucial. It will involve a lot of game-like exercises and prompts for generating writing material. In the at-home writing context, many of these will work best if they are self-timed. Time constraints will be suggested (e.g., “Write for 7 minutes”) as actually being useful to get over hesitations and help people get used to the idea of rough work. However, these limits cannot be enforced. They are recommended as practical tips to help you manage your time. Whenever possible, try to keep track of how much time you spend on each exercise and note it at the end. This can be helpful for everybody.

**Twice a week new prompts or exercises will be posted.** (These will not occur in Critique Week when we are doing our group projects, or in the weeks in which the Midterm Portfolio and Final Portfolio are due.) Some exercises may spread over a week or more, or consist of multiple, accumulating elements. It is therefore important to do as many of them as you can, and to consistently post your results for other people to read and critique. At a minimum you will need to have five polished pieces of work for the two portfolios, plus multiple sets of critiques, both outgoing and incoming, to submit with them. You will get the most out of the course if you have a wide variety of experiments to choose from and develop. It can be hard to predict which ones will end up working for you, so it is best to try them all. It is also crucial to read the works of your peers, both in your group and on the general forum, and to comment helpfully on them, as you expect them to do the same for you. If people do not do this regularly we will have no class.

**A person who posts new writing in response to prompts at least once per week, and comments helpfully on the works of three or four other people per week is likely to get the full 25%.** Anything less than this and you won’t. It is important to contribute consistently throughout the course. Do not try to cram all the portfolio work into a few weeks. Experiment with a wide variety of genres or
forms, even those outside of your comfort zone. A person who provides critiques for a variety of peers, not just the same two or three all the time, will also do better. **At the end of the course I will review each person’s overall contributions and assign a holistic grade.** If you fall silent as soon as you finish your own portfolio(s), your participation grade will suffer. Other people may still need crits, or have useful ones to offer about your posted drafts. The ideal participant in this class is one who commits fully to completing new writing and to fostering the writing of others.

**Critique Group Project:** Week 6 of this course, right after Reading Week, will be devoted to online presentation of co-operative projects made by the six critique groups. As these projects are open in format (they can really be anything you can think of, agree on, and feasibly put together), it is imperative to begin brainstorming for them right away. They are meant to be entirely student-driven; their purpose is to demonstrate how well you work as a creative collective. All group members must participate in order to get the grade; those who participate minimally will receive a grade 10% lower than their peers: anyone who contributes nothing earns zero.

Given the constraints of working at home, a few **equity ground rules** need to be established. We cannot assume that synchronous learning (everybody meeting online at the same time) is an option for everybody, and nobody can be penalized for not being able to do this. If all members of your group are consistently able to do this easily (with no-one having to get up at 5 a.m. or pay for extra childcare or any other challenge) you are welcome to do so, as part of your preparation or presentation. If, as is likely, it is not an option for all, you will have to work around it. This is part of the challenge of this project at this particular time. Please treat everyone humanely. All group members are free to get in touch with me if they are stressing out about logistics.

Other practical constraints: **if you produce a group-written document, it must be a maximum of 2000 words**, and include statement at the end indicating who was responsible for what work, signed by all (this is not included in the word count). If you produce **a work in audio/video it cannot be over 10 minutes** and an account of who did what must likewise be included in some form. No-one who is uncomfortable working in audio/video can be forced to do so — a multi-media approach including text will have to be taken if this is the case. Given how
complex all this is going to be, you are advised to start work on this collaboration immediately. Further instructions will be provided about how and where to post the final works, and how class members will be expected to read/view and critique them. Mutual reading or viewing of the presentations will count toward the participation grade.

**Midterm Portfolio:** This is a **two-part portfolio**, with the parts weighted equally. It must be submitted as a **single document** in PDF, Word or RTF. Under the heading **Creative Work**, you will hand in ONE polished piece of writing, in whatever format or genre. Under the heading **Editorial Process** you will submit ONE crit that you made of another student’s work (you may include the work for reference if wanted), and ONE crit that you received on any of your own works from another student, plus your response to it (i.e., replies, conversations, or edits). It must be in the designated Dropbox (specs are repeated there, FYI) by the **deadline of October 9 at 11:59 PM**.

**Final Portfolio:** by the **deadline of December 7 at 11:59 PM**, you will hand in — as a **single, paginated document** — a **three-part final portfolio** that contains your FOUR best pieces of work, in whatever format or genre, under the heading **Creative Work**. (This may include your midterm portfolio piece if it has undergone additional editing). Under the heading **Artist’s Statement** you will submit a personal essay/artist’s statement explaining your creative process in creating the portfolio: how and why you chose these pieces, challenges and rewards of creating them, and any comments on the process of editing them in class (in essay format, maximum 2000 words). Finally, under **Critiques** you will submit the best THREE crits you made of other students’ work. The grade will reflect the creative pieces (50%), the personal essay/artist’s statement (30%) and the crits (20%).

**Lateness Policy**

Given how much more work remote learning is going to be for everyone, portfolio and presentation deadlines are strict. Presentations must be posted and portfolios put in the appropriate dropbox by the deadlines. If they are late, they lose 2% per
day (cumulatively) to a maximum of 10% (five days, excluding weekends). Thereafter they will not be accepted and earn zero. If you are having time management problems, contact me at least two weeks in advance of these deadlines.

Schedule of Classes (Tentative)

Prompts and links and all other information for each class will appear on the Announcements page. It is crucial to keep up with these. They will be numbered for convenience. Dates below are informal and indicate when new topics and prompts will be posted.

Week 1: Wed Sept 9
1. Introduction to the course; the English language; words and things

Week 2: Mon Sept 14 and Wed Sept 16
1. Parts of speech and their uses; form and experience
2. Poetry: fixed forms, the sonnet

Week 3: Mon Sept 20 and Wed Sept 23
1. Sonnets and the news, occasional poetry
2. Sonnets and processes, didactic poetry

Week 4: Mon Sept 26 and Wed Sept 30
1. Fixed forms: the limerick
2. Fixed forms: terza rima

Week 5: Mon Oct 5 and Wed Oct 7
1. Fixed forms: pantoum

2. Fixed verse: ghazal  MIDTERM PORTFOLIO DUE

READING WEEK OCT 12-16

Week 6: Mon Oct 19 and Wed Oct 21
CRITIQUE WEEK

Week 7: Mon Oct 26 and Wed Oct 28
1. Free verse: what’s free about it?
2. Micro fictions; 6-word stories, 150-word drabbles

Week 8: Mon Nov 2 and Wed Nov 4
1. Flash fiction: 350 words
2. First, second and third person narration

Week 9: Mon Nov 9 and Wed Nov 11
1. Dialogue
2. Direct and indirect speech

Week 10: Mon Nov 16 and Wed Nov 18
1. Reliable and unreliable narrators
2. Free indirect discourse
Week 11: Mon Nov 23 and Wed Nov 25

1. Chekhov’s gun
2. Interventions and retellings

Week 12: Mon Nov 30 and Wed Dec 2

1. Genre
2. World Building

FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE MONDAY DEC. 7 at 11:59 PM

Policies and Resources

COVID-19 Conditions

These are weird and stressful times and information about policies and resources is widely scattered. Two central places at which to find information about COVID-19 protocols are the general UW COVID-19 Information page at https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/ and the English department COVID-19 information page at https://uwaterloo.ca/english/covid-related-information.

Academic Integrity

The UWaterloo Academic Integritiy webpage and the Arts Academic Integrity webpage provide crucial information about university policies on academic integrity.

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has
been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties.

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72, Student Appeals.

Accessibility

The AccessAbility Services office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (NH 1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

The Writing Centre

The Writing and Communication Centre works across all faculties to help students clarify their ideas, develop their voices, and write in the style appropriate to their disciplines. Their online support page is here: https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre/.