ENGL 335: Creative Writing 1
Fall 2013
Thursdays, 6:00 – 8:50 p.m., RCH room 206
Course Outline

Instructor: Carrie Snyder
Contact: ca2snyde@uwaterloo.ca
Office hours: 5-6 pm, Thursdays, or by appointment

Course description: Aimed at encouraging students to develop their creative and critical potentials, the course consists of supervised practice, tutorials, and seminar discussions, with units on poetry, short fiction, and creative non-fiction. Students will finish the term with a fat, messy folder of first drafts, and a portfolio of professionally polished work.

Required materials: Courseware material. Pen and paper, or notebook computer, on which to write during in-class exercises. Come prepared to read your work out loud during class, and to take notes on the work others are sharing.

Attendance and participation: You will be expected to contribute in class both verbally, during workshops, and in writing, by completing in-class exercises and peer reviews. Attendance is mandatory (see UW’s policy on doctor’s notes). Attendance (5%) and participation (20%) comprise a total of 25% of your final mark. Participation will be assessed based on your work in class: completing and sharing writing exercises, listening and taking notes on your peers’ work, sharing your critiques in positive and helpful ways, and completing assignments on time.

Week 1, Sept. 12: Introductions
What is creative writing? Why do you write? What are your goals for this session?
Discussion of course structure.
In-class exercises: Poems. Subject: getting to know you.
To hand in: Questionnaire on your relationship with creative writing.

Week 2, Sept. 19: Workshopping the workshop
How to workshop. Giving and receiving critique. An inside view of the professional editor/writer relationship. Intro to poetry: getting beyond “I like that.” Why read poems?
Today’s reading: poems from Courseware (Babstock, Collins, Noteboom, Oliver)
In-class exercises: Poems. Rants; reflections; singular moments captured.
Practicing peer review: Critiquing poems together, and writing “peer” reviews on poems read in class.

Week 3, Sept. 26: Poetry
Shaping a poem: line breaks, formal structure, rhythm.
Today’s reading: “The Swan,” by Mary Oliver, from Courseware
Guest speaker! Poet and novelist Erin Bow on line breaks.
Due: Bring THREE original poems (i.e. written by you) for Erin Bow’s workshop.
We will end with a tutorial on how to prepare for readings.
Week 4, Oct. 3: Readings
Shortened class tonight. I will be reading at a book-launch event at The Clay and Glass Gallery, to which the class is welcome and invited to attend (ie. not mandatory!). We will turn tonight’s class into a “poetry slam.”
In-class exercise (if time allows): Poem(s).
Due: Prepare a short reading of ONE original poem. (Think of this as a workshopping opportunity. Your poem is a work-in-progress to be presented orally, not a finished draft.)

Week 5, Oct. 10: Drafts and editing
What is a draft? What is a finished manuscript? What is a published manuscript? The stages of editing: structural editing, line editing, copy editing, proofreading.
Today’s reading: Writing advice from Courseware.
In-class exercises: Poems. Large group speed-review workshop.
Discussion and practice: Creating revised drafts.

Week 6, Oct. 17: Short story
What is a short story? What is fiction? Discussion of POV, limiting action, building characters, illuminating a particular idea. Begin at the beginning—or not?
Today’s reading: stories from Courseware: Douglas Coupland and Andrew Hood
In-class exercises: Who is telling the story and why? Exercise on perspective. Large group workshop and discussion.
Due: One finished poem with 2 drafts, ie. THREE different versions of your poem, with an explanatory paragraph on why and how you made your changes (20%).

Week 7, Oct. 24: Short story
Inspiration, the muse, where do ideas come from? Grace + work. Digging inside the story. Writing a formal outline—or finding the story as we go?
Today’s reading: opening of novel from Courseware: Julian Barnes
In-class exercises: Sense of place. Beginnings.
Self-evaluation: editing our own work. What to look for?

Week 8, Oct. 31: Short story
Short story continued: Discussion of formal and informal structure. Surprise, juxtaposition, humour, use of dialogue. Editing and drafts. Also: writing query letters.
Today’s reading: story from Courseware: Mavis Gallant
In class exercises: Structure. Group exercise on when to tell what we know.
Due: Bring SIX copies of your chosen story to be distributed to your workshop group for next week’s intensive.
Discussion of query letters: What are they? What works? Why do you need to know?
Week 9, Nov. 7: Creative non-fiction
What is creative non-fiction? Examples. Practical issues related to writing about real life. Boundaries? What’s true / what’s real? Who do our stories belong to?
Today’s reading: Courseware excerpts: Aleksandar Hemon and Jeannette Walls
In-class exercises: Telling your own story.
Final hour and a half: Small group short story workshops.

Week 10, Nov. 14: “Radical Empathy”
Creative non-fiction continued: Telling other people’s stories.
Today’s reading: link on “radical empathy”
In-class exercise: Colum McCann’s exercise in “radical empathy.” Writing a version of the story you’ve been told.
Due: Query letter (7.5%).

Week 11, Nov. 21: Literary magazines
What gets published and why? What is contemporary Canadian literature? Where can we find it? Do we like it? Why or why not? What do you read?
Today’s reading: excerpts from Courseware: Leanne Shapton and Lorna Crozier
In-class exercises: Creative non-fiction based on today’s readings.
Due: three pages of your choice from a current Canadian literary magazine to share with the class, plus a short (250 words) written reflection on why you made this choice, to be handed in (7.5%).
Guest speaker! Pamela Mulloy, editor of The New Quarterly.

Week 12, Nov. 28, Final reflections
What helped when writing a new draft of a work? What didn’t help? What are your writing goals going forward? Have your goals changed?
Today’s reading: comic stories from Courseware
In-class exercise: Imagined monologues.
Due: Final portfolio, which will include ONE finished short story with drafts (20%), and ONE in-class exercise with drafts (20%), both with a paragraph explaining your editing process. (Note: although part of your final portfolio, the finished poem with drafts (20%) is due at mid-term, as noted.)

Mark breakdown: Attendance and participation (25%); query letter (7.5%); literary magazine assignment (7.5%); portfolio work: ONE poem plus drafts, and explanatory reflection (20%), ONE story plus drafts, and explanatory reflection (20%), and ONE in-class exercise plus drafts, and explanatory reflection (20%).

Grading rubric: Portfolio work will be assessed on the following criteria: Grammar, syntax, and style: 25%; Structure, organization: 25%; Content and creativity: 25%; Use of drafts: 25%. Other written and graded assignments will be assessed as follows: Grammar, syntax, and style: 33.3%; Structure and organization: 33.3%; Content and creativity: 33.3%.
Notes on assignments and important due dates:

Sept. 26: Bring to class three original poems for Erin Bow’s line break workshop. First drafts are welcome. You may bring poems written outside of class, or use poems written for in-class exercises. These will not be handed in, but are necessary for participation in the workshop.

Oct. 3: Bring to class an original poem, written by you, to read out loud. First drafts are welcome—and expected. This will not be handed in.

Oct. 17: Portfolio work due for poetry unit. Please hand in one poem with two drafts, plus explanatory paragraph (250-500 words). The first draft should be your rough original draft. The second draft should show evidence of work-in-progress. The third draft is your finished, polished, as-marvellous-as-you-can-make-it poem. The explanatory paragraph is your opportunity to reflect on the editing experience: note helpful advice given, any frustrations or difficulties, what you hoped to achieve, and whether your final draft meets your expectations. Remember that process is as important to this assignment as outcome. I am equally interested in your disappointments and failures as in your happy discoveries and good fortune. This assignment is worth 20% of your final mark.

Oct. 31: Bring to class six copies of an original short story, written by you (1500 words or less). These will be distributed to your small group, and to the instructor, in preparation for next week’s short story intensive workshop. Your story should be one you plan to use for your final portfolio. You will be using the feedback you receive from next week’s workshop to get from a first draft to a second draft, or from a second draft to a final draft. You will not be graded directly on this short story draft: it is part of the larger process of preparing your final portfolio.

Nov. 7: Bring your peers’ short stories to class, prepared to discuss them in-depth, with an assessment rubric already filled out for each. We will break up into small groups for the final hour and a half of today’s class, and each group will spend roughly 15 minutes discussing each story. In preparation for today’s class, you are encouraged to write editorial notes directly onto your peers’ work. All copies will be returned to the writer, along with the completed rubrics.

Nov. 14: Query letter due. Write a query letter to a publishing professional of your choice: agent, publisher, editor, literary magazine. The letter should be no longer than one single-spaced page (250-500 words). The letter may be real or imaginary. Pitch yourself, or pitch your work, or both. This assignment is worth 7.5% of your final mark. Also this week! Please come to class prepared to share a story about yourself. You don’t need to plan this out elaborately in advance. This is a story you tell orally. Do not write it down! Choose a personal story you are willing to share to another writer, who will craft your telling into a written story. If you’re stumped for topics, please see me.
Nov. 21: **Literary magazine assignment due.** Bring to class three pages of your choice from a current Canadian literary magazine to share with the class, plus a short (250 words) written reflection on why you made this choice, to be handed in. We will discuss your discoveries in class. This assignment is worth 7.5% of your final mark.

Nov. 28: **Final portfolio due.** Please hand in one short story (1500 words) with two drafts, plus explanatory paragraph (250-500 words). Please also hand in one in-class exercise of your choice (poem, short story, or creative non-fiction, of a length no longer than 1500 words) with two drafts, plus explanatory paragraph (250-500 words). In both cases, the first draft should be your rough original draft. The second draft should show evidence of work-in-progress. The third draft is your finished, polished work. Again, the explanatory paragraph is your opportunity to reflect on the editing experience: note helpful advice given, any frustrations of difficulties, what you hoped to achieve, and whether your final draft meets your expectations. **Remember that process is as important to this assignment as outcome.** This assignment is worth 40% of your final mark, and breaks down as 20% for the finished short story, and 20% for the finished in-class exercise. Please speak to me at least a week in advance if you require an extension. Last minute extensions will not be granted.

**A note on rubrics:** I will be providing the class with rubrics appropriate for different assignments and workshops. Rubrics are tools of assessment that offer a guideline or structure for editorial commentary. They are not meant to replace independent critical thinking. If you have your own ideas to add that don’t fit a particular rubric, please do so.