English 335: Creative Writing 1

Spring, 1995
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30-1:00; HH 139

Randy Harris
Hagey Hall 247, x5362
Home phone (Milton): (905) 876-3972
E-mail: RAHA@WATARTS
3
Hours: Tuesday, 2:00-4:00, Wednesday, 9:00-10:30; whenever you can catch me.

Course epitome
The course title is redundant: all writing, by definition, is creative; some more, some less. Consequently, we will be trying out several genres of (creative) nonfiction as well as the more conventional mix of fiction and poetry. This is not a course in therapeutic writing, or "self expression". It is a course in writing which explores linguistic and imaginative ways to make it more, rather than less, creative.

I don't know how to teach writing beyond principles of grammar. I don't think anyone does. I don't think it can be taught. I do think, however, think it can be learned, in two ways: by reading a lot, and by writing a lot. This course puts a grade-loaded gun to your forehead and forces you to do both. Whether you learn is up to you.

And one more thing: we'll be following the ancient rhetorical technique of imitation. You will be writing most of your assignments in other 'voices'.

Required texts
Atwood, Wilderness tips
cumings, Selected poems
Marquez, Strange pilgrims
McPhee, Basin and Range
Thompson, Generation of swine

Recommended
The Canadian writer's guide

Requirements
Participation 15%
Assignments 20% (weekly)
Fill-in-the-blank analysis 15% (30 May - 6 June)
Voice journal 15% (25 July)
Peer review memo 15% (25 July)
Feature work 20% (25 July)

Rules
No late assignments will be accepted, no extensions will be granted, and no incompletes will be awarded, without very strong reasons.

Always prepare two copies of every assignment: one for me, and one for your peer reviewer.
ASSIGNMENTS

GENERAL READING ASSIGNMENT
Read and skim liberally among the mass of writing you see everyday, being particularly alert to issues of voice. The Globe and Mail is a good place to start, particularly since we will be discussing, and meeting, two of its writers (Pevere and Renzetti), but any venue is fine: The New Yorker is great, Wired is style-rich, various Toronto Sun columnists (Fisher, Amiel) are good grist. Bring your thoughts on these materials to class for general discussion.

ASSIGNMENT 1
Short fiction, in your own voice, but magic-realized. Bring in a piece of fiction (either one you’ve already written, altered to partake of Marquez’ voice, or a brand-spanking-new story, written to partake of Marquez’ voice)

ASSIGNMENT 2
A Pop Culture story in the manner of Hunter S. Thompson. (1000 words)

ASSIGNMENT 3
A Pop Culture story in the manner of Liz Renzetti (800 words)

ASSIGNMENT 4
A movie review of any current movie in the manner of Pevere. (800 words)

ASSIGNMENT 5
A movie review of Spanking the monkey in your ‘own’ voice. (800 words)

In class, you will rewrite this story in Johnston’s style.

ASSIGNMENT 6
A poem (or a few poems) in the manner of e. e. cummings (length is your own concern)

ASSIGNMENT 7
A poem (or a few poems) in the manner of Kaszuba. (length is your own concern)

ASSIGNMENT 8
A poem (or a few poems) in your own voice. (length is your own concern)

ASSIGNMENT 9
A sports story in the manner of Brunt. (800 words)

ASSIGNMENT 10
Short fiction in the manner of Burnett. (1000 words)

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANALYSIS
This will be a primarily stylistic/voice/persona analysis, of an author of your choice. You will need to tell the class a bit about context, but your main job is to epitomize and evaluate the distinctive features that make up the author’s voice. Any author, in any genre, will be fine. But you should focus on at least one book, or a series of essays, stories, poems, etc. (i.e., don’t base your whole analysis on a couple of short stories or poems or magazine features.)

(The presentation time will depend on enrollment, but will not exceed 20 minutes.)

VOICE JOURNAL
Keep a journal about the authors we read, and any other authors you read who catch your eye/ear. You should have an entry for each of authors in our reading list, along with 2 or 3 more. Be concise (4-5 sentences per entry may be enough), but be precise.

FEATURE WORK
This is the main assignment of the term,—a feature story, essay, suite of poems, etc., intended for publication in a popular or literary journal. Word count is pretty free here, depending on the genre and medium of intended publication. But I am serious about the publication intention. Include a memo outlining where you intend this piece to appear, and what characteristics it has that such an outlet might be interested in.
## Schedule

Please have all readings done BEFORE class, and be prepared to DISCUSS them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 May</td>
<td>Hello; how are you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May</td>
<td>Hello; who are you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>Short fiction; magic realism</td>
<td>1: short fiction, Marquez</td>
<td>Marquez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 May</td>
<td>Pop culture; Gonzoism</td>
<td>2: pop culture gonzoed</td>
<td>Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 May</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 May</td>
<td>Liz Renzetti</td>
<td>3: pop culture Renzetti</td>
<td>Renzetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 May</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>Your favourite voices</td>
<td>fill-in-the-blank analysis</td>
<td>fill in the blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 June</td>
<td>Favourite voices/Movie reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 June</td>
<td><em>Spanking the monkey, or not</em></td>
<td>4: movie review à la Pevere</td>
<td>Pevere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 June</td>
<td>Geoff Pevere</td>
<td>5: movie review à la tu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 June</td>
<td>Johnston analysis</td>
<td>In-class rewrite à la Johnston</td>
<td>Johnston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 June</td>
<td>Poetry; cummings</td>
<td>6: poem/try à la cummings</td>
<td>cummings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 June</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 June</td>
<td>Sophia Kaszuba</td>
<td>7: poem/try 2</td>
<td>Kaszuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 June</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July</td>
<td>Open session on poetry</td>
<td>8: poem/try 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 July</td>
<td>Open session on poetry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 July</td>
<td>Sports Writing; Brunt</td>
<td>9: sports story</td>
<td>Brunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 July</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 July</td>
<td>Virgil Burnett</td>
<td>10: short fiction 2: à la Burnett</td>
<td>Burnett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 July</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 July</td>
<td>So long; thanks for all the fish</td>
<td>Peer Review Memo; Feature work; Voice journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GRADING

PARTICIPATION
I will evaluate your participation in class discussions by the familiar criteria: quantity and quality. Several relevant and helpful contributions per class will earn you an A; regular silence and/or absenteeism will earn you an F; contributions falling betwixt the twain will be graded betwixtly.

PEER REVIEW
You will evaluate each other's peer-review contributions, which means you need to submit a memo on the last day of class commenting on and grading the people who have reviewed your work and discussed it with you. You will get a third of this mark (i.e., 5% of your overall course grade) by handing in the memo; the other two thirds (i.e., 10% of your overall course grade) will come from others' evaluation of your reviews.

The memo: Keep a record of everyone who discusses your work with you. Assign everyone a letter grade and write at least two sentences to justify that grade.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
Treat them as a job: do them, and you get paid; not, and not. There will be no grade assigned to any of them individually. If you hand in all of them, you will get twenty unalloyed percentage points toward your final grade. Miss one, and you will get fifteen, alloyed, percentage points. Miss two or more, you get zero for this component of the course. I'm not kidding.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK
I will evaluate your analysis, partially on presentation style, but largely on the breadth and depth of your analysis: in particular, what are the features of this writer that you find distinctive.

VOICE JOURNAL
I will evaluate your journal mostly on accuracy and perceptiveness, but also completeness. The only format issue is legibility (if I can’t read it, I can’t evaluate it): use computer printouts, e-mail, long-hand, whatever, so long as you’re comfortable.

Note: keep this as a journal, with regular, dated, entries. You would be really nuts if you thought you could throw together something the night before it's due.

FEATURE WORK
Write good stuff, get a good mark.

Note: this work will not be marked at all without a covering memo explaining your intention to publish (and, especially, where).