

ENGL 695 - Topics in Creative Writing: Creative Non-Fiction

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Course description:

This Graduate Creative Writing course seeks to enable students to work from interest, experience, and research toward the writing of an effective and compelling narrative. Creative Non-fiction's impetus is to use the techniques of literary craft within a factual or research-based framework to write in a compelling, dramatic, and aesthetically interesting manner. While the focus is on post-academic writing (unhampered by references or theoretical framing, although not exclusive of that background and influence), the research and revision required contributes to writerly acumen and eloquence.

This work can comprise a long essay, a journal article, a research paper, a memoir, or a prose-poem. The subject can be personal, but it need not necessarily be so, and I do not recommend the writing of a “memoir” at this stage. The mixture of public and private, historical and contemporary matter contributes to the power of this writing: there are no limits to subject matter as long as that topic is explored in an in-depth, exploratory, and knowledgeable narrative. The writing should seek to translate to the reader a particular subject, place, or personality, vividly and unusually. Topics (NOT themes) might range from barber shops to grain elevators, from elixirs to eyeglasses, from shoes to revolving doors, from the phrase *esprit de l'escalier* to “no one expects the Spanish inquisition.” This class provides an opportunity to engage intellectually with an object, neighbourhood, or locution.

This form enables the investigation of unusual questions in contemporary times. Although focused on narrative, creative non-fiction is less a genre in and of itself than a text instigated by voice and research, strong description, evocative images, and powerful revelations. While it relies on the author’s ability to recount or to springboard from experience or investigation, it relies also on imagination and craft to relay important ideas: stories of event, coincidence, and accident. Most of all, the successful work of non-fiction incites reflection on a crucial epiphany or moment of recognition that the writer can offer the reader.

We will discuss contemporary works of creative non-fiction, including examples of autobiography, memoir, travel narrative, literary journalism and ficto-criticism. The aim of the course is to enable students to research and develop a powerful piece of writing that is both creative and critical, whether a long lyric essay, a meditation, or a well-researched dive into an historical or place-based subject.

This is NOT a course in writing critical essays, but a course beneficial to both critical and creative writing students. It will seek to inspire students to stretch their notions of writing as a persuasive or informative incentive in order to create a narrative that informs and persuades and pleases. **Constraints: NO violence, NO fantasy.**

Text: Lee Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction*

The class will function as a workshop. As we will likely be working virtually, students should expect to be active and present via ZOOM.

Students' writing will be workshopped at least twice in the term.

Grade breakdown:

Final project of 100 pages of a well-crafted work of Creative Non-fiction: 50%

Presentation on one challenging aspect of research and practice: 10%

Workshopped writing: 20%

Participation: 20%

(workshopping, contributions to class discussion, contributions to bibliography)

Various works as examples

Andre Aciman, editor. *The Proust Project*

Laura Buzzard, Don LePan, Nora Ruddock, Alexandria Stuart, editors. *The Broadview Anthology of Expository Prose – Third Canadian Edition*

Paul Auster, *The Red Notebook*

Julian Barnes, *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*

Nicole Brossard, *She Would be the Sentence of my Next Novel*

Kyle Buckley, *The Laundromat Essay*

Aldo Buzzi, *The Perfect Egg, and Other Secrets*

Alain de Botton, *A Week at the Airport*

Kit Dobson, *Malled*

Helen Humphries, *The Frozen Thames*

Chelene Knight, *Dear Current Occupant*

Robert Kroetsch, *A Likely Story*

Alberto Manguel, *The City of Words*

Jan Morris, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*

Patti Smith, *Woolgathering*

Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*

Jesse Thistle, *From the Ashes*

Kim Thuy, *Ru*

Any book from *The Writer and the City* series

Application Requirements:

In order to be considered for a place in this course, potential students must submit the following via e-mail by August 10, 2020 to vanderk@ucalgary.ca

- 1) a completed application form (next page)
- 2) a 250-word proposal outlining the creative non-fiction project you propose to work on during the course
- 3) a sample of 10 pages of writing

Students will be selected on the basis of this initial submission and will be notified via e-mail by August 20, 2020.

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Application form

Name:

Student ID#:

Phone:

Email:

List previous English courses that may relate, and Course instructor:

List all previous Creative Writing courses (including non-credit), grades, and instructor:

Your reasons for wishing to enroll in this course: