

# GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: ENGL250: Creative Writing  
3 Credits  
Instructor: Dr. Baret Magarian



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**Florence, Fall 2011**  
**Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays 10.40-11.40 am**

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*The course is intended to act as a springboard for the students' own creativity. Creativity is of course a notoriously vexed issue: where do its roots lie? Is it consistent or fleeting? Of all the arts writing is perhaps the one which is most slippery and challenging given that language is itself a construction, often a highly imperfect one. But within language's imperfections the writer is free to find his or her own stylistic universe. By exploring and studying literary texts and coming to grips with narrative techniques of fiction the course will delineate the tools of the creative writer. Writing is a craft and the aim will be to analyse techniques and pass them on to the student so that his or her work will gain in power, originality and accomplishment. There will also be an emphasis on reading work aloud and actively and constructively criticising students' work. It should be stressed that this course will be challenging in many ways. In point of fact the student will often be required to look deep within his or her own self in order to fully utilise their creativity. This can be a uniquely enriching and profound experience. But above all to take a creative writing course is to embark on a journey into self and to probe into the secrets and techniques of great writing. It should also perhaps be stressed that the course is ultimately about the production of art, not entertainment.*

## **Purpose:**

To encourage students' ideas and writing skills and stimulate the writer's inner voice through class discussions, positive feedback and constructive criticism from instructor and classmates. The aim is for every student to discover his/her writing potentials and to complete and edit a personal choice of writing by the end of the course.

## **Requirements:**

A certain level of dexterity with writing is essential as this is not an introductory course. At least one lower level college writing course would be an advantage. Many of the assignments are based on class discussions, therefore maturity and openness of character are important.

-This course may be taken by students of English as a second language with advanced writing skills. Since the course is based on inspiration and ideas, contents of work will receive more attention, although grammar, style and syntax will be taken into consideration.

## **Method:**

In-depth reading of classic texts, analysis of these, reading aloud of students' own writing and consequent comment, in-class exercises such as the formation of a character whose personality is perceived by others in conflicting ways, imaginative role play, study of genre, use of music and art as inspirational tools, re-writing different stories in different ways, learning how to convey atmosphere through dialogue alone, observation and description, re-drafting.

***Important: students will be expected to take extensive notes during lessons.***

## **Tests and assignments and mid term:**

You will keep a journal throughout the semester.

Suggested weekly assignments will be based on the syllabus and class discussions. These assignments will be shared aloud in class, or you may hand them in to the instructor for more intimate feedback. If you are working on a novel or short story, you may use the class (to everyone's advantage) to share your progress and receive encouragement and suggestions.

Freedom of thought for topic choices is given, though in the early stages assignments will be quite specific in their requirements. Responsibility to take your writing seriously will be evident in class, and of course your responsibility towards classmates' work is essential in order to partake in the

constructive suggestions for their literature. Students will be expected to contribute to class discussions in an interesting and dynamic way.

Midterm project to consist of:  
one story, one piece of travel writing.

In addition, a critical piece will be required which analyses a piece of writing that particularly impressed the student, with some commentary on style, theme, method, etc.

### **Readings:**

Students should read as widely as possible throughout the course. A basic book list is included below and it should be stressed that literature itself is always the best instructor and the close reading of texts with a view to unlocking their secrets is invaluable in becoming a serious writer. Other media are of course inspirational aids, particularly film, music, art.

**Textbook** for purchase. The Wind up Bird Chronicle by Haruki Murakami (Vintage UK) available from Feltrinelli International at a discounted price. To be bought when students arrive in Florence.

### Readings

Charles Bukowski, The Most Beautiful Girl in Town  
William Gaddis, The Recognitions  
Franz Kafka, Collected Stories

Isak Dinesen, Anecdotes of Destiny  
John Fowles, The Magus  
Jonathan Coe, What a Carve Up!  
Robert Menasse, Wings of Stone  
TS Eliot, Collected Poems  
Shelley, Poetry and Prose  
Milan Kundera, Testaments Betrayed  
Anthony Storr, The Dynamics of Creation  
Stephen King, On Writing

students are welcome to recommend titles that have impressed them to the class.

### **Final Project**

A complete short story or a selection of the students' best work to be handed in on the day of the final. The work will have been revised, re-drafted and typed. There will also be a final test during the last meeting. This will take the form of a personal response to a substantial piece of writing, and the student will be required to analyse the techniques employed by the writer and judge their effectiveness.

### **Provisional Schedule (numbers refer to the week's three lessons as one bloc)**

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| Week 1. | Introduction to the class and members. Why write? The inner voice and how to find it. Exercises in characterisation.   |
| Week 2. | The discovery of the perspective from which to tell the tale. Transmutation of the body (Readings: Dante, Kafka, Philip Roth)  |
| Week 3. | Exposition/Narrative tricks to keep the pages turning. In-class exercises: suspense, delayed information, sympathy. Make the hero suffer. 1st story: 5-6 pages long. |
| Week 4. | Poetry and density in prose. Atmosphere. Readings: Katherine Mansfield. Murakami,  |
| Week 5. | Characterisation, How to build a personality, different responses to the same individual. Readings: Gaddis, The Recognitions.  |

- Week 6. Landscape, symbolism, description. The room, what's in it, the shopping list.  
Readings: Menasse, Wings of stone
- Week 7. Mid-term
- Week 8. Crisis and conflict, Readings: Fowles, The Magus
- Week 9. metaphors Readings: TSEliot
- Week 10. writing about pain :Readings: Cormac Mccarthy Drafting the final story
- Week 11. The transformation of the protagonist, the end Readings: Vaporetto 13
- Week 12. magical realism, how to make unreality real.
- Week 13. Endings, journey of the writer. Final drafts of final story.
- Week 14. Final Project and Exam - series of creative prompts in class.