

English 105X Creative Writing for Non-Majors Across the Genres

Fall 2019

Section 32820R

Meeting Time: Mondays 2-4:20

Professor Susan McCabe

Email: mccabe@usc.edu

Location: Taper Hall 109

Office Hours: W 2-3 and by appointment

“the unexamined life is not worth living”—Plato

“We are all haunted houses.”—H.D. (20th century poet)

Description

In this class we will read poetry, dramatic works, and a short novella. These works will act as inspiration and guide for your own writing. The aim is to explore your “writer’s voice” in different arenas and various challenges, but ultimately to discover, to explore, to play with several “forms” of writing that will accommodate various themes of identity, voice, culture, ecology, ancestry. Most importantly, you will workshop each other’s writing, providing supportive criticism and response, and share in the act of creating “art,” and finding how to express yourself with imagination and truth in several mediums.

Required Texts

Poetry:

Bishop, Elizabeth. *Geography III*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux,

Hillman, Brenda. *Cascadia*. Wesleyan Press.

Plays:

Edson, Margaret. *Wit*. Macmillian.

H.D., *Ion*, New Directions.

Ibsen, Henrik. *Four Plays*. Oxford. [we will read together his *Master Builder*]

Novella:

Baldwin, James. *Giovanni’s Room*. Vintage.

Essay:

Knausgaard, Karl Ove. *Inadvertent*. Audio-book. Yale UP.

Optional: Wilson, Sloan. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Da Capo Press.

Requirements & Grade Breakdown

1) We only meet for 14 sessions because of Labor Day. The class expectation is that you miss no other class. All, or most, of the classes will begin with an in-class writing prompts, and include important interaction and discussion you will miss if you are not physically present. There is no way you can make-up a class session. You are expected to actively participate and contribute to class discussions, and come prepared with the **day’s assigned texts**, with responses to it.

2) Please take all notes by hand. You will need a medium to large-sized **journal (not small), at least 4 by 6 inches**, where you will respond to in-class prompts (when we are not workshoping), and record your own pre-class responses to materials, or other free-writing you do towards completing an assignment. **I am asking you not to use a cell phone or laptop in class**, unless we need to watch a video.

Journal: 20% (directly tied to attendance) Please date and time each entry, whether in class or not

3) **Portfolio** of creative works completed (revised and in draft) **60% (six assignments on time 10% each) with responses from your classmates**: you should receive writing assignments from your peers on scheduled dates; you are to print the work, and respond to it with ink, with a half paragraph response, with specific comments and suggestions: **20 %, these should be included in your portfolio (i.e. as author of comments keep when you have written)**

(The secret to class success is to attend all sessions, complete all assignments with as much care as you can, and keep up with the reading and responding, and be willing to play with language, to investigate interiority and cultural as well as philosophical questions with sensitivity, insight and engagement, with respect to the class as a whole.)

Schedule of Readings & Assignments

Week One

August 26 What does writing require of one? Why write? Play excerpt of Kanausgard.

Free-writing: “*Who am I?*” “*What is the most important thing about me?*”

Reading **excerpt** from Sloan Wilson, *The Man in Gray Flannel Suit* (See Film version 1956 with Gregory Peck)

Assign first workshop piece, a “**mini-autobiography**” due to workshop members by September 7 by midnight

Week Two

HOLIDAY LABOR DAY

Week Three September 9

Read or have listened to “Inadvertent” (come with responses to this—could be woven into your assignment); see <http://LITHUB.COM/KARL-OVE-VIDEO/0>

“**Mini-Autobiography**” and “Job Application”—Reading Sloan, write your own “superficial” letter of application, followed up by what more truly estimates the most important aspects of yourself (these aspects could be abstract or very particular). Throughout the class we will meditate upon “what” makes us creative individuals as well as interconnected with each other and with our ancestral pasts.

1-2 pages double-spaced 12 font [all assignments]

Week Four September 16

Introduction to Poetry: Bishop, *Geography III* ; select one poem to discuss from your notes in class; “In the Waiting Room,” “One Art,” “Poem”; “Crusoe in England” will be featured in my discussion, though please select one of these if you choose. **Assignment #2 for workshops**:

Using “In the Waiting Room” as a prompt try to construct a poem based on a pivotal childhood experience, when you felt “I am an I, I am an Elizabeth” as it were; **or follow the form of the villanelle** “One Art” to *reveal* by concealing

Week Five September 23
WORKSHOP POEM (Assignment 2)

Week Six September 30

Reading for Drama, Corporate Corruption, Intergenerational Conflicts, Transformation
Ibsen, *Master Builder*

[come prepared to read aloud an Act and in-class character sketches; dialogue]

Week Seven October 7
Reading for Discovery, Process, Coping
Edson, *Wit* (handout of John Donne “Sermon”)
[come prepared to read aloud]

Week Eight October 14
WORKSHOP MONOLOGUE (Assignment 3)

Week Nine October 21
H.D.’s translation of *ION* Euripides: Reading for Unlocking Secrets
Aristotle’s “Unities” and their breakdown

Week Ten October 28
WORKSHOP SCENE (Assignment 4) up to 5 to 7 pages

Week Eleven November 4
Short fiction: the personal meets the cultural
Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*

Week Twelve November 11
Workshop SHORT STORY (Assignment 5) 5-7 pages

Week Thirteen November 18
Continued Workshop for (Assignment 5)

Week Fourteen November 25
Hillman’s *Cascadia*: Experimental Poetry; Playing with words, lineation, shape. . .

Week Fifteen December 2
Workshop POEM responding to one of Hillman’s poems as starting point for (Assignment 6)

Workshop Guidelines

Dexter Booth cites the poet Ross Gay writes: “If critique does not emerge from love, than I’m probably not interested in it. Meaning the critique has a kind of vision for transformation that emerges because we love one another. Let’s just figure out how to celebrate and make.”

Take up this spirit in your responses to others in the workshop: your responses should be substantive (not just “good” or “bad”), and pivot upon particular lines that are striking for beauty, difficulty, as well as commenting on your intuited sense of the writer’s aim in the whole.

One paragraph is sufficient; bring typed comments to class for each of your peers. We will all work to make the class a safe space for our feelings and thoughts, a space of play, intelligence and creativity.

Here are the emails of your peers (with mine added):

emmabrad@usc.edu; gecahill@usc.edu; alejanac@usc.edu; mayadesa@usc.edu; souryade@usc.edu; hfusaro@usc.edu; kginley@usc.edu; carriewh@usc.edu; lloza@usc.edu; jnarciss@usc.edu; alysona@usc.edu; maryowen@usc.edu; mccabe@usc.edu

By Saturday midnight submit the assignment to all your peers. **Please be prepared with printed copies, marked before class; no reading off phones or internet. AGAIN the most central part of your grade is showing up with printed material, responded to.**

Pleas submit on time your work with your NAME, DATE AND ASSIGNMENT TITLE, Page numbers, and send to all email addresses by SATURDAY MIDNIGHT before Monday WORKSHOPS (half of the class meetings are structured as workshops)

Remember to print all submissions, and all your short responses to peers. Check ink for printer well before our 2 p.m meeting.

FINAL PORTFOLIO (6 workshopped pieces, 2 revised, all comments for your peers, and JOURNAL DUE no later than December 10.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255 Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit

I guess the laws about cruel and unusual punishment don't apply to personnel men. He tried to think of something to write, but all he could remember was Betsy and the drab little house and the need to buy a new washing machine, and the time he had thrown a vase that cost forty dollars against the wall. "The most significant fact about me is that I once threw a vase costing forty dollars against a wall." That would be as sensible as anything else he could think of, but he doubted whether it would get him the job. He thought of Janey saying, "It isn't fair!" and the worn linoleum on the kitchen floor. "The most significant fact about me is . . ." It was a stupid sentence to ask a man to finish.

I have children, he thought—that's probably the most significant fact about me, the only one that will have much importance for long. Anything about a man can be summed up in numbers. Thomas R. Rath, thirty-three years old, making seven thousand dollars a year, owner of a 1939 Ford, a six-room house, and ten thousand dollars' worth of G.I. Life Insurance which, in case of his death, would pay his widow about forty dollars a month. Six feet one and a half inches tall; weight, 198 pounds. He served four and a half years in the Army, most of it in Europe and the rest in the South Pacific.

Another statistical fact came to him then, a fact which he knew would be ridiculously melodramatic to put into an application for a job at the United Broadcasting Corporation, or to think about at all. He hadn't thought about this for a long while. It wasn't a thing he had deliberately tried to forget—he simply hadn't thought about it for quite a few years. It was the unreal-sounding, probably irrelevant, but quite accurate fact that he had killed seventeen men.

It had been during the war, of course. He had been a paratrooper. Lots of other people had killed more men than he had. Lots of bomber crews and artillerymen had, but, of course, they never really knew it. Lots of infantrymen and lots of paratroopers had, and most of them knew it. Plenty of men had been dropped behind the enemy lines, as Tom had been on five different occasions, and they had had to do some of their killing silently, with blackjacks and knives. They had known what they were doing, and most of them were healthy enough not to be morbid about it, and not to be proud of it, and not to be ashamed of it. Such things were merely part of the war, the war before the Korean one. It was no longer fashionable to talk about the war, and certainly it had never been fashionable to talk about the

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number of men one had killed. Tom couldn't forget the number, "seventeen," but it didn't seem real any more; it was just a small, isolated statistic that nobody wanted. His mind went blank. Suddenly the word "Maria" flashed into it.

"The most significant fact about me is that I . . ."

Nonsense, he thought, and brought himself back to the present with a jerk. Only masochists can get along without editing their own memories. Maria was a girl he had known in Italy during the war, a long time ago, and he never thought about her any more, just as he never thought about the seventeen men he had killed. It wasn't always easy to forget, but it was certainly necessary to try.

"The most significant fact about me is that for four and a half years my profession was jumping out of airplanes with a gun, and now I want to go into public relations."

That probably wouldn't get him the job, Tom thought. "The most significant fact about me is that I detest the United Broadcasting Corporation, with all its soap operas, commercials, and yammering studio audiences, and the only reason I'm willing to spend my life in such a ridiculous enterprise is that I want to buy a more expensive house and a better brand of gin."

That certainly wouldn't get him the job.

"The most significant fact about me is that I've become a cheap cynic."

That would not be apt to get him the job.

"The most significant fact about me is that as a young man in college, I played the mandolin incessantly. I, champion mandolin player, am applying to you for a position in the public-relations department!"

That would not be likely to get him far. Impatiently he sat down at the typewriter and glanced at his wrist watch. It was a big loud-ticking wrist watch with a black face, luminous figures, and a red sweep hand that rapidly ticked off the seconds. He had bought it years ago at an Army post exchange and had worn it all through the war. The watch was the closest thing to a good-luck charm he had ever had, although he never thought of it as such. Now it was more reassuring to look at than the big impersonal clock on the wall, though both said it was almost twelve-thirty. So far he had written nothing. What the hell, he thought. I was a damn fool to think I wanted to work here anyway. Then he thought of Betsy asking, as

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she would be sure to, "Did you get the job? How did it go?" And he decided to try.

"Anybody's life can be summed up in a paragraph," he wrote. "I was born on November 20, 1920, in my grandmother's house in South Bay, Connecticut. I was graduated from Covington Academy in 1937, and from Harvard College in 1941. I spent four and a half years in the Army, reaching the rank of captain. Since 1946, I have been employed as an assistant to the director of the Schanenhauser Foundation. I live in Westport, Connecticut, with my wife and three children. From the point of view of the United Broadcasting Corporation, the most significant fact about me is that I am applying for a position in its public-relations department, and after an initial period of learning, I probably would do a good job. I will be glad to answer any questions which seem relevant, but after considerable thought, I have decided that I do not wish to attempt an autobiography as part of an application for a job."

He typed this paragraph neatly in the precise center of a clean piece of paper, added his name and address, and carried it into Walker's office. It was only quarter to one, and Walker was obviously surprised to see him. "You've still got fifteen minutes!" he said.

"I've written all I think is necessary," Tom replied, and handed him the almost empty page.

Walker read it slowly, his big pale face expressionless. When he had finished it, he dropped it into a drawer. "We'll let you know our decision in a week or so," he said.

