ENGL 285: Writers on Writing

Winter 2021, TTh 12:30-2:20, Remote

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Office Hours: Th 9:30-11:30 AM & by appt. Zoom

The language of literature is not an approximate language. It is the most precise language that human beings have yet developed. The spaces is allows are not formless vistas of subjectivity, they are new territories of imagination.

--Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*

# Overview

Have you ever wondered how your favorite poem, story, or essay came into being? Have you ever wondered how writers balance writing about the world with being in the world? This class may help solve these mysteries.

Lectures by a wide range of writers will introduce you to their creative processes and the various ways they engage with the world and society. You'll have the chance to chat with poets, fiction writers, and nonfiction writers through extensive question-and-answer periods.

In preparation for the lectures, you'll read poems, stories, and essays by our visitors, along with craft essays written by writers.

Through short writing assignments, you will have the chance to try out many of the activities writers engage in (writing poems, short stories, and personal essays; writing book reviews; and critiquing the work of peers).

The class will use a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning. Expect to engage in live Q & A's with the visiting writers and small group discussions in Zoom break-out rooms, as well as online discussion forums and written peer reviews of your classmates' writing. Expect to engage with lectures, readings, and a variety of writing activities on your own time.

**The reader for this class is Jerico Lenk**. Jercico says: "I'm a full time graduate student, sometimes fire spinner, all the time writer. I double majored in English (Creative Writing) and History (emphasis on Western Europe and Russia), with a minor in Classics (the ancient Mediterranean and gender/sexuality in antiquity). Some of my favorite books are The Goldfinch by Donna Tartt, The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller, and (most) of Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles. I write fiction of all types, as well as poetry. Feel free to call me Jerico. My Starbucks order is always under Lenk." Take a look at his [website](https://www.lenkcreative.com/) too.

# Goals

## My goals for the class:

Do not expect this class to provide a single, cohesive view about the goal or purpose of writing creatively, nor a consensus about the best writing practices, nor single idea about the role of the artist in the world. My goal is to present you with the richness and variety of ideas, practices, and goals living American writers have in relation their craft. You may find approaches you agree with and those you disagree with—perhaps even some that make you angry—but I hope that you will encounter at least one writer and at least one piece of writing this quarter that blows your socks off. I hope that you take risks with your own writing and try an approach to form or content that you’ve never considered before. I hope you find authors whose writing you want to return to and a list of writing prompts you’ll want to turn to after this class is over.

## My goals for you (learning goals):

During this quarter, you will:

* Learn what inspires and excites a wide variety of creative writers by watching lectures or talks
* Demonstrate your engagement with visiting writers by participating in Q & A sessions
* Read a wide variety of contemporary poems, short stories, and personal essays, and demonstrate your engagement with these works through discussion posts and live Q & A sessions with writers
* Create poems, stories, creative essays, and writing about writing, using specific prompts to generate this work
* Demonstrate the ability to critique and analyze creative writing produced by your classmates in a constructive, forward-looking way
* Demonstrate the ability to revise your writing based on feedback received from your peers
* Contribute constructively to synchronous small group discussions and Canvas discussion boards

# Class Structure

Although this isn’t a huge class, it is hard to generate discussion over Zoom, even in smaller groups. I will be breaking you into pods of approximately 8 to meet in break-out rooms for discussion and writing exercises, to critique each other’s work, and to participate in discussion boards together.

# Requirements

## ****Required Books**** (in alphabetical order by author; used copies and ebooks are fine)

* Alexander Chee, How to Write an Autobiographical Novel
* Joy Harjo, She Had Some Horses
* Anca Szilágyi, Daughters of the Air
* Other readings will be available through Canvas

## Required Videos

* David Shields, *Marshawn Lynch: A History* (many streaming options)
* Other videos will be available through Canvas

## Other

**An active UW email address and active UW G suite account.** Course assignments will be posted on Canvas, and rough and final drafts of your 4 writing assignments will be submitted to Google Drive folders. You will need to **log on to Google Drive with your UW netID/ UW G suite account** in order to access our Google Drive course material. If you try to log on with a different account you will not gain access. Permissions are set to NOT allow non-UW access for privacy purposes.

It will be easier to do this on a computer than a phone. You can switch between Google accounts on the upper right hand profile pic.

Instructions are here if you haven't activated your UW gmail account yet:  
<https://itconnect.uw.edu/connect/productivity-platforms/google-productivity-platform/>

1. If you're having any trouble, here's how to Connect to Google through UW email:
2. Sign in to your MyUW
3. Go to accounts
4. Under “UW NetID” click “Manage UW NetID Account”
5. Click “UW G Suite”
6. Then it’s pretty self-explanatory: you’ll accept the terms and link the account and then after that, it’ll tell you the next steps to take to access the account.
7. If you are using a phone rather than a computer, it is important that you download the Drive app (the desktop version on the phone is crap).

**Notifications turned ON in Canvas,** at least for Announcement and Conversation Message, as I may communicate with the class through these means. To turn on Notifications in Canvas, click on Account in the upper left corner of your screen, then on Notifications.

# Assignments

### **Syllabus Annotation**

### **Grading Contract**

### **Reading poems, stories, and essays**

3 required books or available through Canvas and due as assigned

### **Watching synchronous or asynchronous lectures**

3 or 4 of our visitors will present their talks “live” over Zoom. In other cases, you will be presented with recorded lectures to watch on your own time.

### **Participating in live Q & A sessions over Zoom**

10 visitors will hold live Q & A sessions over Zoom. These will give you a chance to engage with our visiting writers in real time. You will be required to post a question for each writer through Canvas ahead of time (a total of 10), but will also have the chance to ask questions during their visit.

### **Writing Bingo**

* 16 assignments presented to you in the form of a bingo card
* You can choose any four to complete, or choose to go for a “bingo”
* Variety of fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and slightly more academic prompts (see specific assignments for details)
* Unless the prompt includes instructions related to content, you may write about anything in this class, with just two caveats spelled out below. You may write genre fiction (sci-fi, fantasy, etc.), although some genres (detective, thriller) are very hard to pull off in just a few pages, and some genres (Romance) are very hard to present in new, fresh ways, without relying on cliches. Here are the two caveats: 1) You may not write about me or anyone else in this class without getting their permission first. In order to get their permission, you must share every detail you plan to include with them, in writing, and if they say no, you will have to drop that approach and start another; and 2) You may not use violence simply in order to generate or resolve conflict. It is the easy way out!
* Complete rough and final drafts for each one, due Sundays at midnight

### **Written and Oral Peer Reviews**

Expect to complete about 16 written peer reviews and to meet synchronously in your pods 4 times to provide in-person feedback. I will provide guidelines for providing both written and oral feedback.

### **Group writing exercises**

Meet in your pods 3 times to participate in group writing exercises and discussion. These are designed to be fun!

### **Discussion board posts**

Contribute to discussion boards and respond to posts by others in your pod.

### **Midterm and Final**

There are none!

# Attendance

I will be taking attendance when your pods meet to critique your writing, for general discussion, or for group writing exercises. As the major point of this class is for you to engage with a wide variety of living writers, I hope very much that you will be present for every session. If extreme differences in time zone will make it difficult for you to attend class, please contact me.

# Grading

In this course you will be assessed by a system of evaluation called **“contract grading.”** In a nutshell, that means I specify what you have to do to earn a particular course grade, and you decide what you’re willing and able to do and then sign up for the contract that works best for you. There are no surprises: if you fulfill the obligations of your contract, you get the grade you signed up for.

We are using grade contracts in this class because we would like the final course grade to reflect your ***learning*** and ***work*** rather than just our evaluation of your final drafts. Students enter this class with a HUGE range of previous creative writing experience—some have never written a poem or short story, while some have written a poem a week for the past four years. I want students with less experience to try new things, and for those with lots of writing experience to also take risks and try new things!

This method of evaluation gives you more choice and ownership over your grade, but it also requires special responsibilities: to choose the grade you’re working towards carefully at the beginning of the quarter and to keep careful track of any late or skipped assignments so that you fulfill the obligations of your contract.

### **Here’s how this will work:**

* Take a careful look at the contracts listed and definition of terms below
* Take a careful look at the various assignments referred to in the contracts
* Perhaps compare the due dates and amount of work required to the due dates and work in the other classes you’re taking this quarter
* Decide which of the grading contracts will work best for you
* Submit the grading contract form by its due date
* You may renegotiate this contract if necessary ONCE during the quarter. Renegotiation requires a meeting with me during office hours. If illness or emergency means that you will not be able to fulfill your contractual obligations, email me as soon as possible so that we can address the situation.

### **Notes on fulfilling your contract:**

* After you agree to one of these contracts, I will expect you to fulfill all its requirements.
* You may want to consider using your available late and missing assignments wisely in case a minor illness or other issue arises later in the term.

### **Assignments:**

1. Syllabus Annotation
2. Grading Contract
3. Reading poems, stories, and essays
4. Watching synchronous or asynchronous readings and/or lectures
5. Rough and final drafts of four formal writing assignments
6. Written peer reviews of work by classmates in your pod
7. Four synchronous small group workshops of student writing
8. Four synchronous small group writing exercises (these are designed to be fun!)
9. Ten question posts for our visiting writers
10. Four discussion board posts

### **For a grade of 4.0**

Complete all the requirements, except that:

1. rather than completing any four writing assignments, **you must complete a “bingo”** (4 in a row vertically, horizontally, or diagonally)
2. you may miss one group writing exercise
3. you may turn in one rough draft late
4. you may miss 1 written peer reviews
5. you may miss 1 question post

### **For a grade of 3.7**

Complete all the requirements, except that:

1. you may miss one group critique or one group writing exercise
2. you may turn in one rough draft or one final draft late
3. you may miss 2 written peer reviews
4. you may miss 1 question post and 1 discussion board post

### **For a grade of 3.4**

Complete all the requirements, except that:

1. you may miss one group critique or one group writing exercise
2. you may turn in one rough draft and one final draft late
3. you may miss 3 written peer reviews
4. you may miss 4 question posts and 1 discussion board post
5. You may submit one discussion board post late

### **For a grade of 3.0**

Complete all the requirements, except that:

1. you may miss one group critique and two group writing exercises
2. you may turn in one final draft late
3. you may miss one rough draft
4. you may miss 4 written peer reviews
5. you may miss 5 question posts and 2 discussion board posts
6. You may submit two discussion board posts late

### **For a grade of 2.7**

Complete all the requirements, except that:

1. you may miss one group critique and two group writing exercises
2. you may turn in two rough drafts and one final draft late
3. you may miss two rough drafts
4. you may miss 6 written peer reviews
5. you may miss 6 question posts and 2 discussion board posts
6. You may submit three discussion board posts late

### **For a grade of 2.0**

Complete all the requirements, except that:

1. you may miss two group critiques and two group writing exercises
2. you may turn in two rough drafts and two final drafts late
3. you may miss two rough drafts
4. you may miss one final draft
5. you may miss 6 written peer reviews
6. you may miss 6 question posts and 2 discussion board posts
7. You may submit three discussion board posts late

*NOTE: We reserve the right to award a grade below a 2.0 to anyone who fails to meet a contractual obligation in a systematic way. A 1.0 grade denotes some minimal fulfilling of the contract. A grade of 0.6 is absence of enough satisfactory work, as contracted, to warrant*

*passing of the course. These grades signal a breakdown of the contractual relationship.*

### **Definition of terms:**

#### Complete:

* Meets all requirements described in the assignment. All assignments that count towards your grade will include a statement or list of what “complete” means for that assignment.
* Work that is not complete will be returned ungraded, and you will have one week to complete the assignment as required.
* While we will be grading your work based on completion, not on our interpretation of its quality outside, we may address issues of quality and make suggestions for improvement in our comments.

#### Late:

* Question posts—these will NOT be accepted late
* Discussion board posts—must be submitted by the Monday of finals week at midnight
* Written peer reviews—these will NOT be accepted late, as they will then not be useful to your classmates.
* Rough drafts—must be submitted sometime before the final draft is due. If they are submitted late, classmates may not have time to provide peer reviews.
* Final drafts for Writing Bingo assignments 1-3—must be submitted by the Monday of finals week at midnight
* Final draft for Writing Bingo assignments 4—must be submitted by the Friday of finals week at midnight.
* As long as you are following these guidelines, you do NOT need to ask me for an extension.

#### Participate:

* Attend your synchronous small group break-out room meetings, with your camera on (if that’s possible) and join in the discussion or exercise.

# Formatting for Writing Assignments

* You will submit the rough and final drafts of your formal writing assignments to folders on Google Drive.
* For each one, you will have a choice of prompts. The title of the document you upload **MUST** include your name and the title of the prompt you are responding to. It will be impossible for your peers to review your work or for us to grade it if you fail to do this.
* All formal writing assignments must have a title.
* Assignments must be in a standard font (Times New Roman, Garamond, Helvetica, or Arial), size 12, and left-justified.
* Poems must be single-spaced. Prose assignments must be double-spaced. In prose, the first line of each paragraph should be indented.
* Include page numbers.
* Exercises and papers must be fully punctuated, with standard capitalization, unless the student makes a stylistic choice to do otherwise for a particular reason.
* *These requirements are not meant to stifle creativity, simply to make your work physically easy to read. If alternative formatting will help convey your intentions for your writing, you may deviate from these requirements but we will expect those choices to make sense for the particular piece of writing*.

# ****Academic Integrity:****

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else’s ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people’s thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. While I whole-heartedly agree that great writers “steal” from the work of others, they do NOT do this word for word, line for line.   If I find that you have been using another writer’s (including another student writer’s) words without attribution, we will need to have a serious chat and you run the risk of failing this class. I will also expect that ALL the writing you do for this class will be produced for this class. In other words, please don't "plagiarize" yourself by turning in writing you've done for other classes, either in the past or during this quarter.Please see Student Governance Policy, Chapter 209, Section 7.C for more details about plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.

# Access and Accommodations:

* Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.
* If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or [uwdrs@uw.edu](mailto:uwdrs@uw.edu) or [disability.uw.edu.  (Links to an external site.)](http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/)DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions.  Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS.  It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

# UW Religious Accommodations Policy

* “Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW’s policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at [Religious Accommodations Policy (https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/) (Links to an external site.)](https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form (https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/) (Links to an external site.)](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/).”

**And last but not at all least….**

# Department of English Statement of Values

* The UW English Department aims to help students become more incisive thinkers, effective communicators, and imaginative writers by acknowledging that language and its use is powerful and holds the potential to empower individuals and communities; to provide the means to engage in meaningful conversation and collaboration across differences and with those with whom we disagree; and to offer methods for exploring, understanding, problem solving, and responding to the many pressing collective issues we face in our world—skills that align with and support the University of Washington’s mission to educate “a diverse student body to become responsible global citizens and future leaders through a challenging learning environment informed by cutting-edge scholarship.”
* As a department, we begin with the conviction that language and texts play crucial roles in the constitution of cultures and communities.  Our disciplinary commitments to the study of language, literature, and culture require of us a willingness to engage openly and critically with questions of power and difference. As such, in our teaching, service, and scholarship we frequently initiate and encourage conversations about topics such as race, immigration, gender, sexuality, and class.  These topics are fundamental to the inquiry we pursue.  We are proud of this fact, and we are committed to creating an environment in which our faculty and students can do so confidently and securely, knowing that they have the backing of the department.
* Towards that aim, we value the inherent dignity and uniqueness of individuals and communities. We acknowledge that our university is located on the shared lands and waters of the Coast Salish peoples. We aspire to be a place where human rights are respected and where any of us can seek support. This includes people of all ethnicities, faiths, genders, national origins, political views, and citizenship status; LGBQTIA+; those with disabilities; veterans; and anyone who has been targeted, abused, or disenfranchised.