

English 297Y0
Special Topics
Creative Writing in Italy

Professor: Richard Greene

Email: richard.greene@utoronto.ca

This course will be modeled on the workshops in which most successful writers participate, but with the added opportunity of inspiration from Italian culture. It will provide a structured environment for poets and prose writers to undertake new projects and to engage in a constructive critical exchange with one another on the technical points of their craft. It will also seek to energize student writing by engagement with Italian art, architecture, and culture, especially as experienced in field trips to sites of international importance. For poets, the course will emphasize the practice of ekphrasis, poetry that responds to specific works of art and seeks by that engagement to create literary work that is both beyond the self and expressive of it. For prose writers we will bear in mind the famous adage, "There are only two plots in all of literature: you go on a journey, or the stranger comes to town." A huge proportion of the world's great narratives are based on a journey motif – this can be seen in the works of Homer through to the most contemporary novels. The prose writers in this course will explore the connections between travel writing and fiction or memoir.

Goals: To improve the skills of students as writers of poetry or prose; to improve reading and editorial skills; and to give students a rich experience of creative writing in the context of an ancient and vibrant culture.

Texts:

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (1992).

William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (4th ed., 1999).

These will be available at the university bookshop on College Street.

Grading Scheme:

In-class essay on <i>The English Patient</i>	10%
Editorial test on Strunk and White	10%
Class Participation	20%
Journal	20%
Final portfolio of revised work	40%

	100%

Pedagogy: The course will be conducted as a workshop, which means relatively little lecturing and an immersion in discussion and group work. Students will be expected to present their own writing on more than one occasion to the whole class (or to a group if the numbers are large) and receive criticism on it, with the professor providing additional commentary.

Portfolio: A collection of revised creative work should be submitted via Quercus at the end of the course. It should be approximately 30 typed pages if you concentrate on prose or 20 if on poetry or a proportional length if you work in both prose and poetry.

Journal: Most successful writers keep detailed journals or notes from which they draw material for their published writings. In this course, students will be expected to keep a journal, in which they should write not less than 1000 words per week. The entries should include observations made on field trips. They may also record personal experiences or reflections and ideas for future writing. By the end of the course, you should be making extensive use of these notes in your more formal compositions. You will submit your journals to the professor via Quercus at the end of the course. Please bear in mind that he is not a suitable reader for material of a very private nature.

Short Assignments: The first in-class assignment will be an interpretive essay responding to Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. The second will consist of ten sentences which you must re-write according to the editorial principles contained in Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*.

Class Participation: The process of the course is collaborative and requires your active involvement. You will have the opportunity to have sympathetic readers comment on your work in detail on more than one occasion. In turn, you will give thoughtful responses to the work of others. When it is your turn to present your work, you should email it to the instructor two days in advance and it will then be forwarded to the whole class for discussion. Having received another student's work, you should add marginal notes or comments and return it to the other student immediately after the discussion.

Academic Integrity: It is essential that students submit only original work and so must avoid plagiarism of print or internet sources, the submission of work they have not written themselves, or cheating in any manner on tests conducted in class. Everyone must read carefully the university's policy on this, which may be found at:

<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>

It is understood that in a workshop course students will take advice from one another on the revision of their work; however, you must not seek assistance from anyone not in the workshop. This includes ChatGPT and similar resources. If in doubt you must consult with the professor.

Missed tests: Please contact the professor as soon as possible if you miss a test. If you have a legitimate reason for absence, we will organize a make-up.

Contacting the professor: Before departure for Siena, I will be very happy to answer questions by email, and once the course starts, I am at your disposal for whatever meetings are necessary.

Schedule

(Subject to revision)

August 4: Academic Orientation (9:00) followed by introductory class 10:00 – 1:30

August 5: *The English Patient*

August 6: Field trip to Florence

August 7: *The English Patient*

August 8: In-class essay on *The English Patient* / Issues in Ekphrastic writing

August 11: Field trip to Assisi and Perugia (chocolate factory)

August 12: Issues in travel writing and journey narratives

August 13: Professor shares some of his poetry

August 14: Discussion of Strunk and White

August 16: Palio (mandatory)

August 18: Editorial test / Use of poetic forms

August 19: Student presentations

August 20: Student presentations

August 21: Field trip to Venice

August 22: Field trip to Venice

August 25: Student presentations

August 26: Field trip to Volterra

August 27: Student presentations

August 28: Student presentations

August 29: Submit portfolio and journal.